Social Identity in Young New Zealand Children

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The present research compared the ethnic identity and preferences of young Maori children who attended either a bilingual unit within a state school or a state school without a bilingual unit. In addition, ingroup favouritism was investigated through the attribution of positive and negative behaviours to dark and light skinned targets. Results demonstrated stronger ingroup identity, but also stronger outgroup preference, amongst Maori children at the school without a bilingual unit than amongst Maori children at the bilingual unit. Outgroup favouritism in the attribution of positive behaviours was seen at both schools. Results are discussed in terms of social identity.

Categorisation of individuals on the basis of distinguishing features, such as skin colour, is a fundamental stage of social perception (Brewer, 1988; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Stangor, Lynch, Duan & Glass, 1992; Tajfel, 1981). By age three, almost seventy percent of children can differentiate people by the colour of their skin and the use of skin colour in categorisation is dominant (Aboud, 1988; Davey, 1983; Brown, 1995; Milner, 1983; Stangor et al., 1992).

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) argues that such categorisation is a precursor of in-group bias and favouritism and the development of negative beliefs about members of groups to which one does not belong. Underlying this ingroup bias, it is argued, is the desire of people to have a positive self esteem, or social identity. Part of one's esteem or identity is derived from the groups one is a member of and so the more positively these groups are perceived, the greater the positive esteem individuals can draw from their membership of such groups (Turner, 1981). Favourable comparisons with other groups (ingroup bias or favouritism), therefore enhance one's social identity (Cialdini & Richardson, 1980; Lemyre & Smith, 1985; Oakes & Turner, 1980). There are numerous examples in the literature of ingroup favouritism based on racial categorisations (Brewer, 1988; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Stangor et al., 1992; Tajfel & Wilkes, 1963; Vaughan, 1988), even from children (Aboud, 1983; Brown, 1995; Davey, 1983; Milner, 1983). Davey (1983), for example, showed young children to demonstrate marked ethnocentrism in their distribution of sweets amongst unknown children of the same and different ethnicity to themselves.

Ingroup bias is, however, moderated by the relative status of the comparison groups. Whilst majority group members display ingroup bias (Wagner, Lampen, & Syllwasschy, 1986), there are many examples of minority group members being more egalitarian or even displaying an outgroup bias; that is showing favouritism toward the majority group of which they are not a member (Brown & Abrams, 1986; Espinoza & Garza, 1985; Ng, 1985; Sachdev & Bourhis, 1991; van Knippenberg, 1984). Aboud (1983), for example, showed both majority and minority group children, aged 5-7 years, to display greater assignment of positive traits to members of the majority ethnic group and negative traits to members of the minority ethnic group. Similarly, Davey (1983) noted that a number of minority group children in her study displayed outgroup preferences.

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It is important to remember that membership of a minority group has less to do with number than with social status and who has access to power, including better education and health (Sachdev & Bourhis, 1991; Tajfel, 1981; Wagley & Harris, 1958). Members of majority groups may, therefore, find it easier to make positive intergroup comparisons than members of minority groups. In turn, members of minority groups may attempt to identify with the majority group, in order to achieve higher status and esteem. Such identification with an outgroup is only feasible as a means of bolstering self esteem if group boundaries are permeable and it is possible to move from membership of one group to another (van Knippenberg & Ellemers, 1993). Although some people can 'pass' as members of more than one ethnic group (e.g., about 12-15% of New Zealanders can claim to belong to more than one ethnic group), for most individuals ethnic group boundaries are impermeable.

When group boundaries are impermeable and joining the higher status group impossible, minority group members can enhance their self esteem through the elevation or development of positive in-group characteristics. Such a strategy both maintains the distinctiveness of the minority group and enhances their social identity (Lemaine, 1974; Turner, 1975). Attempts to raise the identity of minority groups has been seen in Wales, Canada and Europe through the increased use of minority group languages and increased attention to minority group culture (Brown, 1995; Giles, Bourhis, & Taylor, 1977). Similarly, there has been an assertive push by the minority indigenous population in New Zealand, the Maori, for the Maori language and culture to be taught in New Zealand schools. To this end a number of bilingual units have been established within primary state schools. The main aim of the present study was to investigate whether Maori children attending a bilingual unit at school showed a different pattern of intergroup evaluations than those attending a school without a bilingual unit. Bilingual units take a number of forms throughout the country, ranging from the teaching of specific Maori words in primarily English language classrooms ("token bilingualism") through to Maori immersion classrooms. The bilingual unit from which participants in the reported study were recruited fell in between these end-points. Classes were predominantly, although not exclusively, taught in Maori and there was a focus on cultural identity and diversity.

A pre-cursor to ingroup favouritism is, of course, ingroup identity. Stronger ingroup identification is reflected in greater ingroup favouritism and outgroup derogation (Brown & Abrams, 1986, van Knippenberg, 1984). It is possible that minority group members fail to show ingroup favouritism, or even show outgroup favouritism, as a consequence of not strongly identifying with the minority ingroup or of attempting to identify with the majority outgroup. This may be especially likely for young children whose sense of self-identity is not yet fully developed (Davey, 1983; Vaughan, 1978; Williams & Morland, 1976). Studies that have used dolls, photographs or drawings which represent different ethnic groups and from which children have been asked to choose the one which most resembles them, and the one they would prefer to be like, have shown an asymmetry between minority and majority group children. Majority group children identify with, and show a preference for, the object which matches their own ethnic group whilst minority group children, especially at around 5-6 years of age, both identify with and prefer the majority group object (Aboud, 1983; Davey, 1983; Vaughan, 1978; Williams & Morland, 1976). It is not surprisingly, then, that minority group children show an outgroup bias; this is in fact an ingroup bias toward the (majority) group with which they identify and prefer to be like, regardless of ethnicity. Attendance at a bilingual unit where the minority Maori culture and language is emphasized will likely lead to increased ingroup identity for Maori children. Accordingly, Maori children at a bilingual unit should show greater ingroup identity and ingroup favouritism than those attending a school without a bilingual unit (Lynskey, Ward, & Fletcher, 1991; Vaughan, 1987).

In summary, the present research compared the identity and preferences of young Maori children attending either a bilingual unit within a state school or a state school without a bilingual unit. It should be noted, however, that although a large majority of children attending the bilingual unit were Maori, no differentiation between children of Maori and of Pacific Island descent was made in this study[1]. Ethnic and cultural differences between Maori and Pacific Island individuals are acknowledged, but the decision not to differentiate between them in this study was made for two reasons. First, the responses to all the questions in this study were made by choosing between pictures of two faces identical in all features except skin colour (see below) rather than by choosing between specifically named ethnic or racial groups. That is, decisions were based on skin colour rather than on specific ethnicity which minimized differences between children of Maori and Pacific Island descent. The assumption that the choice of dark and light skinned target represent choices for "Maori" and "Pakeha" respectively is not addressed in the present research. In addition, the researchers did not want to

draw the attention of the children participating in the study to differences between them which may have become salient if detailed questions about descent were asked. It should be noted, however, that the teachers at the schools involved in this study noted only a very few of the children were of Pacific Island descent (n=3 across the two schools). Second, the socio-economic status, education and health levels of Maori and Pacific Islanders in New Zealand is similar, especially in contrast to those of Pakeha[2], leading to the prediction of a similar pattern of ingroup identity and favoritism in these two groups. The impact of attendance at a bilingual unit on Pacific Island children is, however, hard to predict.

It was hypothesized that Maori/Pacific Island children attending the bilingual unit would show greater ingroup identity and preference (choosing the dark skinned target) than those attending the school without a bilingual unit. Similarly, it is predicted that the Maori/Pacific Island children attending the bilingual unit would show greater ingroup favouritism on the attribution of positive and negative behaviours to dark and light-skinned targets than those attending the school without a bilingual unit.

Method

Participants

Thirty-four Maori and Pacific Island children, aged 5-6 years, at Christchurch primary schools took part in the study. Twenty-four of the children attended a bilingual unit and 10 attended a school without a bilingual unit. All children came from a similar socio-economic background. In addition 18 Pakeha children attending the school without a bilingual unit completed the identity part of the study for comparison purposes.

Materials

Eight traits (four positive/four negative) were selected from Oliver and Vaughan (1988) for use in this study. Two of the positive (kind, friendly) and two of the negative (aggressive, gets into trouble) traits were stereotypic of Maori and the other two positive (clever, rich) and two negative (conceited, selfish) traits were stereotypic of Pakeha. For each of these eight traits, a question was developed which asked the respondent to select which individual was the most likely to perform a behaviour indicative of that trait. Examples of the sentences used are: "Which girl do you think would not share her sweets?" (selfish); "Which man do you think gets into fights?" (aggressive). In addition four filler questions in which respondents selected the appropriate objects were included. Questions were pilot tested with children of similar age to those who took part in the main study, to ensure comprehension.

Four cards, each showing a pair of identical head and shoulders drawings were prepared. In order to ensure the faces were identical in shape and features, the cards were prepared by drawing one of the faces and then photocopying it to produce the second face. The faces were then coloured in; one of each pair was coloured to represent light skin and one to represent dark skin, with appropriate hair and eye colours in each case. Two of the cards had pairs of male faces and two cards had pairs of female faces, in each case one card was of adult faces and one of children's faces. One card was used for each of the questions above. For example, with the question, "Which girl do you think would not share her sweets?" the card with the two children's female faces was used and for the question, "Which man do you think gets into fights?" the card with the two adult male faces was used. In addition, four cards with objects for the filler questions (e.g., a cat and a dog) were prepared. Each drawing had either a triangle or a circle above it to correspond with the response sheets. The response sheet for each question had a circle and a triangle on it. Respondents ticked the symbol which matched the drawing on the card which they thought was the correct one. Two extra cards, with adolescent faces on were prepared for the preference question (see below).

Procedure

Informed consent was obtained from the school principals and from the children's parents/guardians, who were made fully aware of the nature and purpose of the study. In addition, the children were free to stop participating in the study at any time if they so wished. Identical procedures were followed at the two schools involved in the study.

The first part of the study was conducted as a class exercise. The task was presented to the children as a choosing game. All children indicated that they knew what a circle and a triangle were. They were given a trial question in order to be certain that they understood the instructions and knew how to give their answer on the response sheets. After the trial question, the children were given the twelve questions detailed above. Each question was read aloud by one of the experimenters whilst the other experimenter held up the appropriate picture card. The children were asked to tick either the circle or the triangle for each question. Although they were permitted to tick 'both' or 'neither', the children were encouraged once, before the first question was presented, to choose either the circle or triangle if they could do so. However, it was explained that it was quite alright to tick the 'neither'

or 'both' responses if they wanted to do so. There was no coercion of the children to choose either the circle or triangle during the study and on a number of occasions children did tick the 'both' or 'neither' box[3].

After the questions were completed, each child was tested individually by one of the experimenters. They were first shown the card with the same sex children's faces as themselves and asked "Which one of these pictures do you think looks most like you". This was called the identity question. The children were then shown another card with adolescent faces on, again the same sex as themselves, and asked "Which one of these pictures would you most like to look like when you are older?". This was the preference question. Again the children had the opportunity to indicate 'both' or 'neither' in response to the identity and preference questions[4].

After both tasks were completed, the children were thanked for their participation and given a small gift.

Results

Identity and Preference Questions

The number of choices of the light and dark skinned target for the identity and preference questions were calculated for each school. Results are in Table 1.

Using t-test comparisons between two percentages for independent samples[5], comparisons of the proportion of Maori/Pacific Island children at each school who identified themselves with the dark-skinned target (.625 vs. .417 for the school without a bilingual unit and the bilingual unit respectively) and who expressed a preference to be like the dark-skinned target (.375 vs. .417) revealed no significant differences.

Correct identification of and preference for their own skin colour would have resulted in the Maori/ Pacific Island children all endorsing the dark skinned target for both the identity and preference questions. The observed number of endorsements were compared to those expected separately for each school. For the identity question, fewer children at the bilingual unit identified themselves with the dark skinned target than expected (10 vs. 24, $X^2(1)=8.17$, $p<.01$) but at the school without a bilingual unit, there was no difference between the observed and expected number of children who selected the dark skinned target (5 vs. 8). For the preference question, fewer children at the school without a bilingual unit again choose the dark skinned target than expected (10 vs. 24, $X^2(1) =8.17$, $p<.01$) and the trend was in the same direction for children at the bilingual unit (3 vs. 8, $X^2(1) =3.13$, $p<.08$).

It is also interesting to consider the consistency of the responses of the individual participants across the identity and preference questions. Of those children attending the bilingual unit who identified themselves with the dark-skinned target (n=10), 6 also said they would prefer to be like the dark-skinned target. Of those who identified themselves with the light-skinned target (n=14), only 4 said they would prefer to be like the dark-skinned target. Of the children attending the school without a bilingual unit who identified themselves with the dark-skinned target (n=5), only 2 also said that they would also prefer to be like the dark-skinned target. Of those who identified themselves with the light-skinned target (n=3), 1 said they would prefer to be like the dark-skinned target.

For comparison purposes, a group of 18 Pakeha children at the school without a bilingual unit were given the identity and preference questions. For both questions, the number of children who chose the light

Table 1. Number of Endorsements of the Dark and Light Skinned Target as a Function of Question Type, School and Ethnicity of Respondents.

	No Bilingual Unit (n=10)		Bilingual Unit (n=24)	
Target:	**Dark Skinned**	**Light Skinned**	**Dark Skinned**	**Light Skinned**
Maori Children				
Identity Question	5	3	10	14
Preference Question	3	5	10	14
Pakeha Children (n=18)				
Identity Question	3	15		
Preference Question	2	16		

Note: Responses of 'both' or 'neither' are excluded.

Table 2. Number of Attributions of Positive and Negative Behaviours to the Dark and Light Skinned Target as a Function of School.

	No Bilingual Unit (n=10)		Bilingual Unit (n=24)	
Target:	**Dark Skinned**	**Light Skinned**	**Dark Skinned**	**Light Skinned**
Positive Behaviours (4 items):	13	22	30	55
Negative Behaviours (4 items):	11	23	50	39

Note: Responses of 'both' or 'neither' are excluded.

skinned target was very high and did not differ from that expected (identity: 15 vs. 18; preference: 16 vs.18). All those children who identified themselves with the light-skinned target also expressed a preference for that target, as did one of the children who had identified themselves with the dark-skinned target.

Trait Questions

Responses were summed across the four positive and the four negative behaviours and the number of attributions to the dark and the light skinned targets was calculated in each of the schools. Responses are shown in Table 2.

Comparisons of the proportion of positive behaviours attributed to the dark-skinned target across the schools revealed no significant difference (.371 vs. .353 for the school without a bilingual unit and the bilingual unit respectively). For the negative behaviours, however, there was a greater attribution to the dark-skinned target by children at the bilingual unit than those at a school without a bilingual unit (.324 vs. .562; $p<.05$).

At both schools there was a greater number of attributions of the positive behaviours to the light than the dark-skinned target (bilingual unit: 55 vs. 30, $X^2(1)=7.35$, $p<.01$; no bilingual unit: 22 vs. 13, $X^2(1)=2.89$, $p=.08$). At the bilingual unit there was no difference in the number of attributions of the negative behaviours to the dark and light-skinned targets (50 vs. 39). At the school without a bilingual unit, however, there was a greater number of attributions of the negative behaviours to the light-skinned than to the dark-skinned targets (23 vs. 11, $X^2(1)=4.24$, $p<.05$).

Discussion

The results obtained offered little support for our experimental hypotheses. We predicted that Maori/ Pacific Island children who attended a bilingual unit would have a stronger ingroup identity and preference, based on skin-colour, than Maori/Pacific Island children who attended a school without a bilingual unit. Our results indicated no difference in either identity or preference between the schools. However, a smaller proportion of the children at the bilingual unit identified themselves with the dark skinned target than expected whereas at the school without a bilingual unit there was no difference between the observed and expected frequency of identification with the dark skinned target. Ingroup identity may, then, have been stronger at the school without a bilingual unit, in contrast to our predictions. It is interesting to note, however, that children at both schools showed a bias toward the light-skinned target in response to the preference question.

Although Maori/Pacific Island children at the school without a bilingual unit were likely to identify themselves with the dark skinned target, the responses on the preference question suggested that this was not a positive ingroup identification. The majority of the children at this school indicated that they would prefer to be like the light skinned target when they are older. This preference for the light-skinned target was seen even amongst those children who identified themselves with the dark-skinned target. It is possible that the Maori/Pacific Island children at the school without a bilingual unit identified themselves with the dark skinned target because ethnic differences were salient at that school. In a school where Pakeha children dominate in both number and culture it is possible that attention is drawn to children who are visibly distinctive through having a different coloured skin and that this distinction is treated as indicative of inferiority, especially through playground teasing and the like. These children may then develop a very strong awareness of their ingroup identity, but not a positive identity. Support for this is seen in the responses to the preference question. In the bilingual unit an individual child's ethnicity may not be salient as it is not indicative of status within that school. Accordingly, children at the bilingual unit may show less strong ingroup identity awareness than children at the school without a bilingual unit, and show a less strong bias toward the light skinned target on the preference task, as was seen in the present results. Note that the responses of the Pakeha children of the same age at the school without a bilingual unit showed a very strong

identity with and preference for the light-skinned target. It is unlikely, therefore, that the responses of the Maori/Pacific Island children were due to chance responding or any confusion or lack of clarity with the task.

Bias toward the light skinned target on the preference question need not indicate a dissatisfaction with being Maori or a Pacific Islander or with the cultural values of their ethnicity, but may simply reflect an acknowledgment by the children of the higher status of light skinned individuals in many aspects of New Zealand society (e.g., in occupational and educational settings). The bias toward the light skinned target may, then, indicate a striving toward high social status when older. Future research needs to include more detailed questioning of the motivations underlying responses to the identity and preference questions in order to disentangle issues of positive ingroup identity and social status.

We also predicted that Maori/Pacific Island children attending a bilingual unit would show more ingroup favouritism than children attending a school without a bilingual unit, although this was predicated on support for our first hypothesis that children at the bilingual unit would show stronger ingroup identification than children at the school without a bilingual unit. Children attending both schools displayed outgroup favouritism on the positive behaviours, attributing more of the positive behaviours to the light-skinned than to the dark-skinned targets. This finding is consistent with past research in which minority group children attributed more positive behaviours to outgroup targets than to ingroup targets (Aboud, 1983; Brown & Abrams, 1986; Davey, 1983; Espinoza & Garza, 1985; Ng, 1985; Sachdev & Bourhis, 1991; van Knippenberg, 1984). These results again indicated that attending a bilingual unit did not reduce the tendency for minority group children to demonstrate outgroup favouritism. Indeed, given the results for the negative behaviours where children at the school without a bilingual unit showed ingroup favouritism (attributing more of the negative behaviours to the light than the dark-skinned target), attendance at the bilingual unit may actually have increased the overall tendency of the children toward outgroup favouritism.

Taken together our results offered little support for our hypotheses that attendance a bilingual unit would increase the ingroup identity of Maori children and reduce their outgroup favouritism. Although, a positive ingroup identity is valuable for self esteem (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), reducing the use of racial/ethnic cues as a means of categorizing individuals may also have positive benefits for society. The results from our identity question are consistent with the idea that racial cues may be less salient and less strongly associated with social status in the bilingual unit than in the school without a bilingual unit, but this conclusion awaits further research.

A number of limitations of the present research which caution against overgeneralization of the findings must also be acknowledged. Only a small number of participants, especially at the school without a bilingual unit, were used in the present research. The low number of Maori/Pacific Island children attending the school without a bilingual unit (which was situated in an area of the city with a high Maori/Pacific Island population) may indicate a preference of parents/guardians to send their Maori/Pacific island children to bilingual units, indicating that parents do value the additional cultural education that such a unit provides. The present research only recruited participants from one bilingual unit so caution must be taken at generalizing the findings to other bilingual units, given the variation in the nature of these units. The present study also used a single measure of identity in which children were asked to select a light or dark shaded face, choosing that which they thought looked most like them. It is possible that this measure is not a good measure of identity, merely of physical appearance. Providing only two faces also prevented children indicating any mixture of identity with both Maori and Pakeha. Future research should, therefore, include additional measures of identity which are not dependent solely on visual, physical features. Finally, it must also be acknowledged that the research was designed and conducted by Pakeha experimenters and it is possible that cultural differences between the experimenters and the children tested led to the particular pattern of responses seen. Replication of this study using Maori experimenters would be especially beneficial.

Notes

[1] Children from other ethnic groups (e.g., Chinese, Indian) were excluded from the reported analyses (n=2) although they did complete the study (so as not to distinguish them from the other children in the class who were completing the study).

[2] Pakeha is the Maori term for Anglos, the majority population in New Zealand.

[3] A total of 29 (10.7%) 'both' or 'neither' responses were received on this task. The frequency of these responses did not differ across schools (11 in the school without a bilingual unit and 18 in the bilingual unit). These responses were omitted from the analyses reported.

[4] A total of 2 (5.9%) 'both' or 'neither' responses were received on this task. These responses were omitted from the analyses reported.

[5] |t|=Sqrt[(N1*N2)/(N1+N2)]*|p1-p2|/Sqrt(p*q) where p=(p1*N1+p2* N2)/(N1+N2) and q=1-p

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