

Summary

Children's Social Inclusion Judgments in the Context of Gender

Buse Gönül

Middle East Technical University

Başak Şahin Acar

Middle East Technical University

For children, understanding that relationships require different social evaluations stands as an essential developmental accomplishment. Social inclusion and exclusion judgments can be made by using complex systems of social knowledge (Smetana, 1999). Due to the nature of the socialization process, social inclusion-exclusion judgments are frequent, both in daily encounters and in group relationships (Killen, Lee-Kim, McGlothlin, Stangor, & Helwig, 2002). Based on this premise, the current study investigated how gender-related social norms would govern Turkish children's judgments regarding the social inclusion.

Definitions and Criteria of Social Inclusion and Exclusion

Any behavior that makes one feel like their social ties are being impaired against one's own will or choice, is referred to as social exclusion (Riva & Eck, 2016). One criteria which either causes individuals to feel excluded, or causes them to exclude someone else, is the group membership (e.g., gender, ethnicity). Humans have a tendency to categorize individuals based on certain aspects and traits. Related to this phenomenon, how group membership and related dynamics would lead to stereotyping and prejudice are popular research topics on adult samples (Abrams, Hogg, & Marques, 2005; Dovidio, Glick, & Rudman, 2005). However, established attitudes are resistant to change during adulthood years (Eagly & Wood, 2013). Consequently, it is important to examine how children evaluate intergroup inclusion and exclusion to be able to shed light on the developmental processes of these dynamics.

Social Exclusion Judgments Based on Social Domain Theory

Social Domain Theory is one of the branches of Social-Cognitive Domain Theory, examining the content of the social evaluations (Rutland, Killen & Abrams,

2010). According to the theory, as in many social evaluations, social inclusion judgments are based on a balance between individual values and choices, and social norms and conventions. In many occasions, trying to preserve group cohesion and functioning lead to the violation of moral values (Brenick & Killen, 2014). According to the theory, individuals use moral, social-conventional and psychological domains when they make social exclusion judgments (Rutland et al., 2010; Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 1983, 2006). While moral domain relates to the values such as equality, fairness and equity; social-conventional domain refers to the issues of social norms, authority, group cohesion and functioning. Psychological domain, on the other hand, deals with the personal choices and decisions. Previous studies revealed that children can evaluate these three domains simultaneously when they need to make social judgments (Smetana, 1999). Previous literature examined whether children use group membership criteria for social exclusion, such as gender (Møller & Tenenbaum, 2011; Mulvey & Killen, 2015; Susskind & Hodges, 2007) and ethnic/national/cultural identities (Brenick & Killen, 2014; Gieling, Thijs & Verkuyten, 2010; Nesdale, 2000). In the current study, we focused on the context of gender-related social norms to examine children's social inclusion and exclusion judgments regarding this social construct.

Social inclusion and exclusion judgments in the context of gender. Gender inequality is a problem evident in most cultures to varying degrees. According to the global reports, Turkish women are in a disadvantaged position in terms of their access to fundamental human rights, such as education, health, economic and political participation (World Economic Forum, 2016). While these inequalities lead to the prevalence of more traditional gender roles in society (Sakallı, 2001), they influence children's perceptions and internalization of gender roles in return (Stangor & Ruble, 1987). Gender

is one of the first social categories learned in the early years of life (Martin & Ruble, 2004). From the beginning of preschool years, children perceive and internalize dominant gender roles and related social norms of the societies they live in (Liben & Signorella, 1993). Studies examining whether children use gender associated social norms as a legitimate exclusion criterion, revealed the importance of social context presented to them. When children were asked to evaluate gender exclusion, they mostly reported that it was wrong to exclude someone (Killen & Stangor, 2001; Park et al., 2012). However, when there was a threat to the group functioning, especially for the children in middle childhood and adolescence years, it was more acceptable to exclude someone from their groups based on gender.

Social-cognitive developmental processes. As children gain more experience in their social relationships, and as with the help of the further development of their prefrontal cortex, their abilities to weigh competing social concerns tend to increase (Nucci, 2001; Steinberg, Vandel & Bornstein, 2012). Concerning moral understanding, between the ages of 10 and 12, children begin to realize that strict equal treatment might not always be the ideal solution, and in some occasions, exceptions may apply to promote equity. With the transition to adolescence, children experience significant changes in inferring and applying moral concepts, and they begin to make more comprehensive assessments about the groups they belong to and those do not. How children make sense of social conventions also changes as a factor of chronological age. Through the childhood, children tend to perceive social norms as more stable and functional. However, as they become early adolescents, their awareness regarding the underlying mechanisms of social norms and values increases. While the increased ability of evaluating group concerns leads to more tolerant attitudes towards diversity, it also leads to more frequent use of stereotypes and social norms on some occasions (Horn, 2003).

Considering the findings of the previous literature, the most influential factors affecting children's social exclusion judgments stand out as chronological age of the participants and the complexity of the social situations presented to them. In the current study, we recruited 10- and 13-year old children and presented them vignettes regarding a ballet activity and two candidates, a boy and a girl, who both wanted to be a member of the ballet group. Additionally, the roles of situational complexity and participants' sex on children's social inclusion judgments were examined. Expectations in the current study were twofold; children would a) choose the girl in the vignette more frequently and make more stereotyping justifications in the equal qualifications condition, and b)

choose the boy in the vignette more frequently and make more group functioning justifications in the unequal qualifications condition. The influence of age and participants' sex were investigated as exploratory factors.

Method

Participants

Forty-one female and 34 male 4th graders ($N = 75$, $M = 10$ years, $SD_{month} = 4.17$), and 43 female and 32 male 7th graders ($N = 75$, $M = 13.06$ years, $SD_{month} = 0.31$) from middle and upper-middle SES families participated in the current study.

Procedure

All necessary permissions were obtained from the Human Subjects Ethical Review Board at Middle East Technical University, and the Ankara Çankaya District Directorate of National Education. Once volunteering children were recruited with signed parental consent forms, they were taken from their classrooms during class hours to a pre-scheduled classroom. Before handling in the vignettes, a warm-up activity (a neutral story about a tree planting activity taking place at school) was practiced in the classroom. Later, the paper-and-pen formatted questionnaire, including the group activities vignettes was administered. It took approximately 30-35 minutes for the children to complete.

Measures

Group activity vignettes. Based on a previous study conducted by Killen and Stangor (2001), two vignettes were adopted. With group activity vignettes, it was aimed to examine whether children would use their gender roles and related stereotypes when they needed to make group-level social inclusion judgments. We presented children with two different sets of situational complexities under two different conditions, as equal and unequal qualifications. In the equal qualifications condition, there were two candidates with equal qualifications, a boy and a girl, both of whom intended to be a part of a ballet group. In the unequal qualifications condition, the boy in the vignette had better qualifications in ballet compared to the girl. Considering the dominant tendency to perceive ballet as a more feminine activity (Killen & Stangor, Mulvey & Killen, 2015; Møller & Tenenbaum, 2011), the girl in the vignettes signified as the stereotypical candidate, whereas the boy was the non-stereotypical candidate. All participants read the stories in the same order, equal and unequal qualifications, respectively. Initially, the children were asked about their decisions regarding social inclusion. Later, they were also asked

to report the specific justification for their choices in an open-ended fashion. Justifications for each decision were coded under four categories, based on the coding scheme used by Killen and Stangor (2001). When children mentioned values, such as fairness and equal access to the opportunities, their justifications were coded under the category of *moral justifications*. When children referred to social norms and gender stereotypes, their responses were coded as *stereotyping justifications*, whereas when they rationalized based on group functioning and cohesiveness, their responses were coded as *group functioning justifications*. Finally, when they mentioned their individual choices and preferences, their responses were coded as *psychological justifications*.

Results

For the analyses, answers for the inclusion decisions (preferring either the girl or the boy) were added and summed up, and the proportion of each decision was calculated for equal and unequal vignette conditions, separately. Justifications (moral, stereotyping, group functioning, psychological) were also added and summed up across both vignette conditions by using the same methodology. Mixed ANOVAs were conducted for the main statistical analyses.

Social Inclusion Decisions

In order to examine whether children's inclusion decisions differ depending on their sex, age and condition, a 2 (participant's sex: girl, boy) \times 2 (age: 10, 13) \times 2 (condition: equal qualifications, unequal qualifications) ANOVA with repeated measures on the last factor was conducted. According to the results, participant's sex had a significant main effect on children's decisions, $F(1,146) = 6.31, p = .013, \eta_p^2 = .04$. Post-hoc analyses showed that, overall, boys decided to include the girl ($M = 1.01, SD = .69$) in the vignettes more frequently ($M = .76, SD = .70, 95\% \text{ CI } [.08, .41], p = .004$). The participant's sex was found as only a main effect and it didn't interact with the other main variables. The main effect of participant's age was not significant, $F(1,146) = 3.06, p = .08$. However, the study condition had a significant effect on children's decisions, $F(1,146) = 57.75, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .28$. Compared to the unequal qualifications condition ($M = .36, SD = .48$), children decided to include the girl more frequently in the equal qualifications condition ($M = .73, SD = .45, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [.27, .46]$). In the unequal qualifications condition, they decided to include the boy, who was more qualified in ballet, ($M = .63, SD = .48$) more frequently as compared to the girl ($M = .26, SD = .44, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [.28, .47]$). There was also a three-way interaction between participants' age, study condition and inclusion decisions, $F(1,146) = 6.83, p =$

.01, $\eta_p^2 = .05$. According to the post-hoc analyses, in the equal qualifications condition, 10-year-olds ($M = .83, SD = .38$) chose to include the girl more frequently compared to 13-year-olds ($M = .60, SD = .49, p = .002, 95\% \text{ CI } [.08, .36]$). On the other hand, 13-year-olds ($M = .40, SD = .49$) chose to include the boy more frequently compared to 10-year-olds ($M = .13, SD = .34, 95\% \text{ CI } [.13, .34]$).

Social Inclusion Justifications

In order to examine children's inclusion justifications, a 2 (participant's sex: girl, boy) \times 2 (age: 10, 13) \times 2 (condition: equal qualifications, unequal qualifications) ANOVA with repeated measures on the last factor was conducted. Parallel to the decision analyses, participant's sex also had a significant main effect on children's justifications, $F(3,438) = 6.93, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .05$. Overall, girls ($M = .46, SD = .68$) made more moral justifications compared to boys ($M = .24, SD = .47, 95\% \text{ CI } [.04, .41], p = .02$). On the other hand, boys made more ($M = 1.12, SD = .68$) stereotyping justifications compared to girls ($M = .74, SD = .64, 95\% \text{ CI } [.15, .58], p = .001$). Study condition also had a significant effect on children's justifications, $F(3,438) = 129.63, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .47$. Compared to the unequal qualifications condition ($M = .19, SD = .39$), children made more stereotyping justifications in the equal qualifications condition ($M = .71, SD = .45, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [.45, .61]$). On the other hand, they made more group functioning justifications ($M = .61, SD = .49$) in the unequal qualifications condition compared to the equal qualifications, ($M = .00, SD = .00, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [.61, .49]$). Analyses also revealed an interaction effect of age, condition and justification, $F(3,438) = 2.60, p = .05, \eta_p^2 = .02$. The interaction effect was evident only in the equal qualifications condition. According to the post-hoc comparisons, 13-year-olds made significantly more frequent moral justifications ($M = .32, SD = .47$) compared to 10-year-olds ($M = .09, SD = .29, p = .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [.10, .35]$). On the other hand, 10-year-olds made significantly more frequent stereotyping justifications ($M = .80, SD = .40$) compared to 13-year-olds ($M = .03, SD = .32, p = .02, 95\% \text{ CI } [.03, .32]$).

Discussion

In the current study, children's social inclusion judgments were examined in the context of gender. To the best of our knowledge, in Turkey, this has been the first study investigating how children use their gender roles and related stereotypes when they need to make group level judgments. Results showed that children's social inclusion decisions depended on the complexity of the situations in the vignettes presented to them. When the girl and the boy in the vignette were equally quali-

fied in ballet, children predominantly chose to include the stereotypical candidate, who was the girl. However, when the boy in the vignette had better qualifications in ballet compared to the girl, children decided to include the boy more frequently. This set of findings is in agreement with the previous results. When social situations become more complex, and there is no other information, individuals are more likely to use stereotypes and social norms when making moral judgments (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2006; Killen et al., 2002). Likewise, in the present study, the two characters that children needed to judge had equal qualities, and children turned to the social norms to decide between two candidates. On the other hand, when the boy, the candidate who did not fit into the stereotype was better at ballet, children tended to ignore social norms, and decided based on merit. These findings provide evidence that children are not strictly bound to stereotypes, rather they evaluate the necessities of the circumstances.

The justification analyses also showed the importance of the social complexities presented to children. In the equal qualifications condition, children made moral and stereotyping justifications more frequently. According to the previous research, children and adolescents tended to use the most accessible information in their evaluation systems (Turiel, Hildebrandt, & Wainryb, 1991). In terms of our results, almost all children were aware of the stereotypes commonly used in society. However, while some children perceived this issue from a moral viewpoint by focusing on equality and equal opportunities, others referred to the stereotypes and social norms. In the unequal qualifications condition, on the other hand, children made group functioning justifications more frequently. When differences in merit were involved, children mostly ignored gender roles and made their evaluations by considering group success.

Compared to the 10-year-olds, 13-year-old children chose to include the boy in the vignette more frequently, and explained their decisions based on moral justifications more frequently. On the other hand, 10-year-olds preferred to include the girl in the vignette more frequently, and made more stereotype-based justifications. Previous studies showed that the influence of age on social judgments changes markedly from one context to another. Some studies have found that adolescents accepted excluding a peer, who did not fit into the group more frequently, compared to younger children (Killen et al., 2001; Killen, Kelly, Richardson, Crystal, & Ruck, 2010; Malti et al., 2012). At the same time, increased age was also shown to play a role in the internalization of egalitarian values. As children get older, they realize their own role as active agents who may or may not follow social norms (Nucci, 2001). The findings of

the present study also support this view. While 10-year-olds adhered to social norms and made their judgments accordingly, the 13-year-old group preferred to include the boy in the vignette more often by referring to fairness and equal opportunity. Importantly, age differences in moral judgments were absent in the equal qualifications condition, and most of the children made group functioning justifications. This finding supported the notion that even younger children were able to consider the necessities of the social situation and their evaluations were not completely under the dominance of social norms.

Conclusion

Group interactions are critical constituents of socialization, and judgments of whom to include or exclude from groups are made frequently, starting from the early years of life. These judgments are influenced by social norms and values. In the current study, we investigated how Turkish children assess social inclusion, in the context of gender. We found that, even though children were clearly aware of the dominant gender roles, social norms were not the only factors affecting their judgment. While younger children referred to social norms more frequently, older children showed more egalitarian attitudes and, if necessary, acted against social norms. Children also evaluated different requirements simultaneously and modified their judgments. Parallel to the previous findings, the current study provides evidence that children could learn to be more tolerant to deviation from social norms with the help of cognitive and social development throughout adolescence and acculturation. Future studies should examine the role of experience and acculturation in more detail.