Social Judgments about Ethnic Exclusion in Latin American Immigrant Children Living in the United States

Lila Gómez
Autonomous University of Madrid (Spain)

Introduction

Many countries in the world have experienced major demographic shifts that have transformed the way their citizens live and relate to each other. Massive migration movements have modified economy, politics, education and social interaction affecting people's daily life. Leaving one's own country to live in a different one, involves a wide range of changes and it is important to stress the fact that immigrants themselves need to mourn for all the things they left behind, and this is especially true for children. (Hernandez, D. 2007)

In spite of the development of social policies in many of these target migration countries, people hold negative stereotypes, discriminatory attitudes, and prejudices towards other social groups. Activities like these generate social exclusion. According to the philosopher Axel Honneth (1993), to be socially excluded is to be deprived from social recognition and social value. To explain the origin and nature of the processes that lead to the acquisition of beliefs and prejudiced attitudes, researchers on the area of developmental psychology have carried out diverse studies with children mainly from two different perspectives.

On the one hand, the socio-cognitive approach developed by Frances Aboud (1988) is possibly the one that better explains the development of intergroup attitudes in the early years (for a complete review see Aboud, 1988, 2005; Aboud and Amato, 2001). Contrary to the traditional approaches, Aboud ascribes a more active role on the part of the infant regarding prejudice. According to her, prejudice in the early years is the result of the children's errors in processing information due to their reduced cognitive skills which induce the perception of people belonging to different ethnic groups as interchangeable individuals. From this point of view, many researchers have proposed that young children, who are cognitively immature, show a tendency to prejudice since they don't have yet the capacity to process, in a simultaneous way, multiple classifications. At the same time, they can't be aware of two or more different perspectives: they are not able to become less self-centered. (Aboud & Doyle, 1993; Bigler & Liben, 1993; Enesco, I., Navarro, A., Gimenez, M. & Del Olmo, C., 1999).

Closely related to the socio-cognitive perspective, there are some other proposals such as the levels of development in children's understanding of ethnicity model proposed by Quintana (1998). This model, based on Selman's (1980) theory of social perspective-taking ability, describes four stages of children's understanding of ethnicity: level 0) the integration of affective and perceptual understanding of ethnicity, level 1) literal understanding of ethnicity, level 2) social perspective of ethnicity, and level 3) ethnic-group consciousness and ethnic identity (1998, p. 29).

In contrast, some approaches closer to social psychology such as the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), affirm that prejudices are the result of affective and motivational factors related to social differentiation processes. On the basis of Social Identity Theory, Nesdale (2004) developed his Social Identity Development theory that accentuates the importance of social identification and social context on the intergroup processes. Furthermore, this model distinguishes between bias for one's in-group (preference), and derogation for the out-groups (prejudice). According to this view, young children are unaware of ethnic differences among people. Later on, they start to become aware of ethnic categories (around 4-5 years of age) and show certain tendency to favour their own group.

This paper reports on a study focused on three principal aims. The first one was centred on how Latin American children judge and justify a social exclusion situation towards their own ethnic group. The second explored the participants' perceptions regarding their experiences of ethnic discrimination in the time they have lived in the United States. And the third was to gather information about the possible causes of exclusion

experiences and the solutions offered by participants in order to solve them[i]. The following assumptions guided this work:
- All participants will recognize the exclusion situation when they see it.
- Developmental differences will appeared on children's spontaneous arguments to justify the exclusion.
- Younger children's justifications will be more related to personal reasons than to social ones.
- Most participants or other immigrant had gone through a situation of exclusion during the time they
  had lived in the United States.
- Older participants will provide social solutions to the exclusion situation.

Method

Participants
This study was conducted in six public elementary schools in the Austin, Texas, area with 6-11 years old children belonging to ethnic minority groups of Latin-American background. They came from Mexico (73.1%), Guatemala (11%); El Salvador (2.2%); Colombia (2.2%); Argentina (2.2%); Puerto Rico (2.2%); Honduras (2.2%) and Cuba (2.2%). The total sample was composed by 80 children (an equal number of female and male). The sample was divided into five age groups: 6-7; 7-8; 8-9; 9-10 and 10-11 ($n = 16$), (which corresponded with 1st to 5th.Grade at elementary school level). The mean number of months they had been living in United States was 22.76. Because this work is in progress, only 37.5% of the data is presented here. All students were informed that the interviews were confidential, voluntary and anonymous. In order to include the participants in our study, parental permission forms were signed.

Measures

A semi-structured interview was administered to all the participants. This interview was divided into three sections, but only some parts of sections 2 and 3 are analyzed in this paper:

Section 1: Adaptation and adjustment process.
Each participant observed a picture of a Latin American child (same age and gender), used as a prompt, and answered questions like "Do you think Juan / Maria likes to live in Austin? Why? Where do you think Juan/Maria is happier, in her country or in Austin?

Section 2: Evaluation and justification of a social exclusion situation.
A drawing (210 x 297 mm) representing a situation that described a specific social exclusion situation of a Latino American child (an invitation to a birthday party) was used as visual prompt. The objective was to explore children's spontaneous evaluations and judgments about ethnic exclusion. Participants were asked to describe what was occurring on the picture, and justify their answers. If the participant did not mention the social exclusion situation, it was read the following story:

> "Being in school, Luis/Sofia (immigrant child) found out that Jenny/Mark, a classmate from
> United States, who is in his /her class, wants to celebrate her birthday. She/ he is inviting almost
> every student in her /his class except for Luis/Sofia"
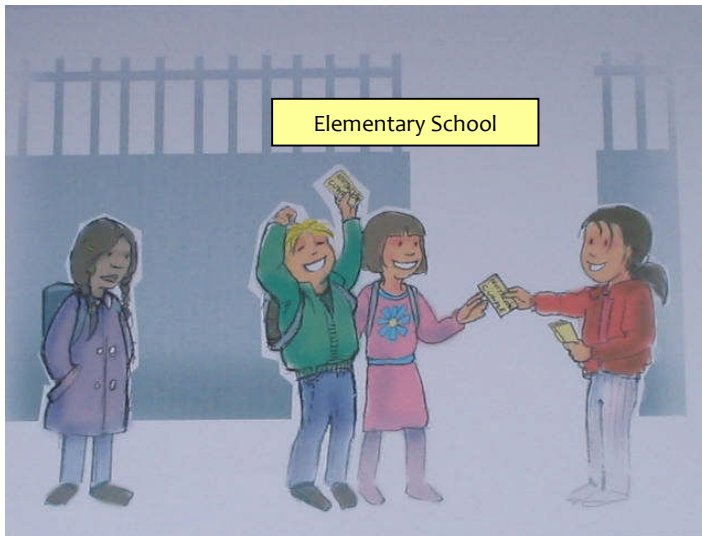> Then, the following question was asked: "Why did Jenny not invite Sofia?

Figure A-1. Social exclusion drawing presented to girls. An identical drawing depicting boys was presented to them.

Section 3: Personal experiences about exclusion

The goal of this section was to know about personal experiences of exclusion ("Have you or anyone you know gone through a situation like the one shown on the picture?") and its possible causes and solutions to avoid this kind of exclusion.

Procedure

All the children were interviewed by two same-ethnicity researchers. The interview was conducted in a quiet room within the school property. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed into verbal protocols. Each interview was analyzed and discussed by three members of the research team in order to determine categories of analysis in a 'bottom-up' fashion. The same researchers who conducted the interviews scored the data according to these categories using SPSSPC + statistical software.

Preliminary results

Initially, qualitative analyses were made based on the verbal protocols. After that, the percentage and frequency of the participants' responses by age group, category, and justifications were calculated through descriptive procedures.

Evaluations and judgments about exclusion

Almost the total sample (97%) recognized spontaneously the situation of exclusion depicted on the picture. The justifications for the exclusion changed in two different moments of the interview. For the spontaneous exclusion there were only four categories (Ethnicity, Absence of interpersonal relations, Interpersonal conflicts, and Negative attitudes towards the excluded). For the second justification of exclusion, two more categories appeared (Language and Deny exclusion). See Table 1.

Table 1.

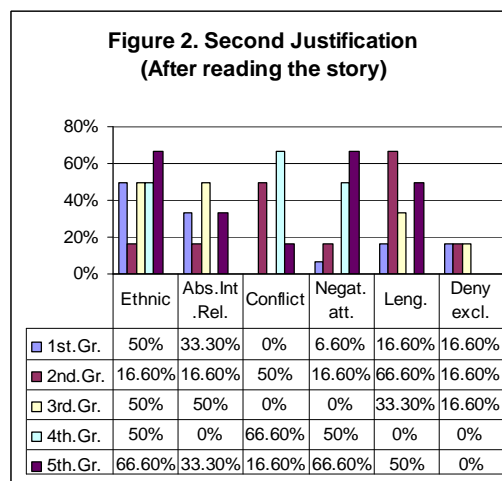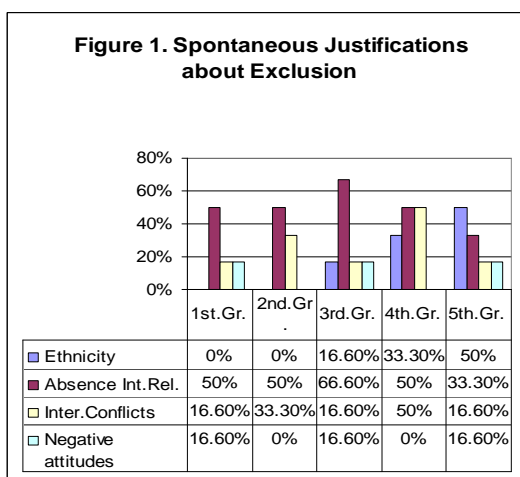Descriptions of judgments about exclusion

Issue	Categories	Description
Judgments	Ethnicity	It refers to all those answers in which the cause of exclusion was attributed to physical or ethnic traits, appearance, national origin,

3

and cultural characteristics (i.e. *because she is from another country, because she is kind of brownish).*

Absence of interpersonal relations	Shows absence of any relationship between the birthday child and the child being excluded (*because he is new, he doesn't know him*).
Interpersonal conflicts	It refers conflicts or a poor relationship between the characters on the picture. (i.e. *they have fought in the past*).
Negative attitudes towards the excluded	The excluded child is held responsible for his own exclusion due to his personal characteristics or previous actions (i.e*., because he bothered the other kid first, she is mean*).
Language	Exclusion is attributed to the lack of ability to speak English (*because he doesn't speak English).*
Deny exclusion	Participants denied the exclusion situation; they argued exclusion did not happen. (i.e. *he is going to get an invitation, he is next).*

Figures 1 and 2 show the differences between those two moments in the interview. The Ethnicity justification on Figure 1 was only the 20% of the total sample. It clearly shows a progressive increase with age; while on Figure 2 this justification maintains its pattern, the number of responses increased after reading the story (46.6%).
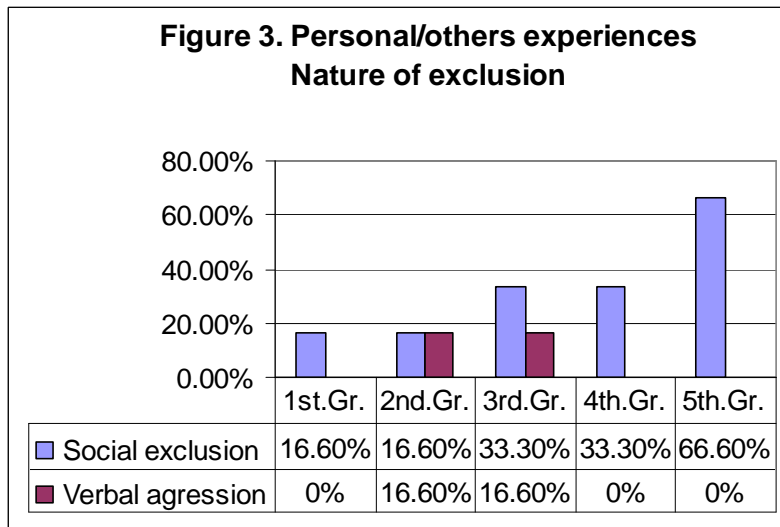
Figure 1. Spontaneous Justifications about Exclusion

	1st.Gr.	2nd.Gr.	3rd.Gr.	4th.Gr.	5th.Gr.
Ethnicity	0%	0%	16.60%	33.30%	50%
Absence Int.Rel.	50%	50%	66.60%	50%	33.30%
Inter.Conflicts	16.60%	33.30%	16.60%	50%	16.60%
Negative attitudes	16.60%	0%	16.60%	0%	16.60%

Figure 2. Second Justification (After reading the story)

	Ethnic	Abs.Int.Rel.	Conflict	Negat. att.	Leng.	Deny excl.
1st.Gr.	50%	33.30%	0%	6.60%	16.60%	16.60%
2nd.Gr.	16.60%	16.60%	50%	16.60%	66.60%	16.60%
3rd.Gr.	50%	50%	0%	0%	33.30%	16.60%
4th.Gr.	50%	0%	66.60%	50%	0%	0%
5th.Gr.	66.60%	33.30%	16.60%	66.60%	50%	0%

On the spontaneous justification of exclusion, the "Absence of interpersonal relations" (50.0%) was the most mentioned one in all grade levels, followed by the "Interpersonal conflicts" (26.6%), and a "negative attitude" towards the excluded child (10.0%) of the total sample (See Figure 1).

Once the participants had listen to the story of exclusion, "negative attitude" towards the boy or girl subject of exclusion increased (33.3 %). Also, two new categories appeared, "Language" (33.3%), and "Deny exclusion" (10.0%) of the total sample. It was observed that the arguments that refer "language" tend to decrease progressively with age. Arguments that denied exclusion had more responses among younger participants and tended to disappear with age.

Personal/others experiences of exclusion and nature of exclusion

40% of the total sample expressed that they or another immigrant had gone through a situation of exclusion similar to that represented on the picture. The exclusion "social" cause presented an increment with age. Also, minimal "verbal aggression" causes were mentioned in the study (6.6%)

**Figure 3. Personal/others experiences
Nature of exclusion**

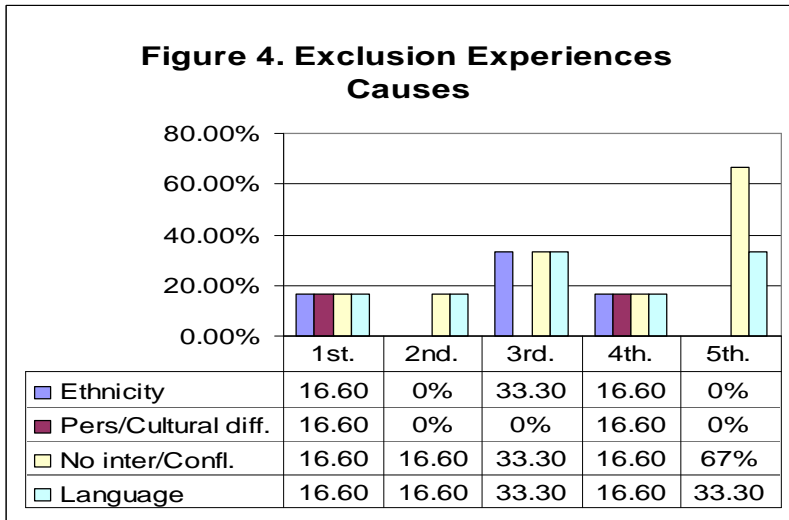|	1st.Gr.	2nd.Gr.	3rd.Gr.	4th.Gr.	5th.Gr.
■ Social exclusion	16.60%	16.60%	33.30%	33.30%	66.60%
■ Verbal agression	0%	16.60%	16.60%	0%	0%

It is interesting to examine some examples provided by children of diverse ages.

Table 2. Descriptions of causes of exclusion (personal/other experiences)

Issue	Categories	Description
Causes	Ethnicity	It is related to negative stereotypes that the majority group holds towards immigrants. (i.e. *they blame him about everything because he is from Mexico*).
	Personal and cultural differentiations	Exclusion is originated by personal and cultural differences between majority and minority groups based on appearance, dress style, and behaviour (i.e. *we make to much noise, and the cloths we wear are different*)
	No interaction or conflict	It refers to the absence of interaction between the children (*every time she approached them, they run away, don't know each other*) and/or conflicts related to their age
	Language	It refers to communication problems due to the incapacity of the immigrant children to speak English. *(because I didn't speak English, they didn't wanted to play with me)*

Figure 4 shows the presumed nature of the exclusion experiences. Four categories appeared: "No contact or Conflicts" was the most mentioned one for the total sample (30.0%), followed by "Language" (23.3%). It was observed that the category "no contact or conflicts" increased with age, the same as "language", which was consistently present in all ages.
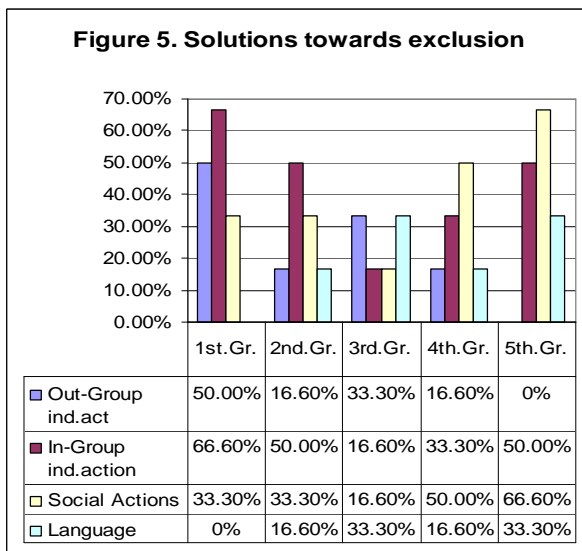
Figure 4. Exclusion Experiences Causes

	1st.	2nd.	3rd.	4th.	5th.
Ethnicity	16.60	0%	33.30	16.60	0%
Pers/Cultural diff.	16.60	0%	0%	16.60	0%
No inter/Confl.	16.60	16.60	33.30	16.60	67%
Language	16.60	16.60	33.30	16.60	33.30

Solutions about exclusion

Latin American children offered different types of solutions in order to solve exclusion situations: the need to involve the majority group (23.3%), the own group mobilization (56.6%), the intervention of the community (40%) and the need to learn to speak English (see Table 3).

Table 3   Descriptions of solutions to exclusion

Issue	Categories	Description
Solutions	Out-group individual actions	These responses allude the active participation of the majority group so a positive change towards the minority group will take place (i.e. *they should try to stay with him and make him feel good, they need to be more friendly*)
	In-group individual actions	It refers specific actions on the part of the minority group so the majority group would change its stereotypes and negative prejudices towards the former (i.e. *we have to be nice and play with them, I can give her a present*)
	Social actions	Includes community interventions in social change processes based on principles of equality (i.e. *the principal should talk to the teachers and give them information about new students, their countries and their culture*).
	Language	It also refers individual actions on the part of the minority group so the majority group will modify their perceptions about immigrants *(I need to learn more English)*

Figure 5 shows that the most mentioned category was "In-group individual actions" (56.6%), followed by "Social actions" (40%) of the total data, while both "Out-group individual actions" and "Language" had the same percentage (23.3%). The "Social actions" category showed a consistent increase with age. The category "Language" was absent in younger participants, but the need to learn English was present in the rest of the sample.

Figure 5. Solutions towards exclusion

	1st.Gr.	2nd.Gr.	3rd.Gr.	4th.Gr.	5th.Gr.
Out-Group ind.act	50.00%	16.60%	33.30%	16.60%	0%
In-Group ind.action	66.60%	50.00%	16.60%	33.30%	50.00%
Social Actions	33.30%	33.30%	16.60%	50.00%	66.60%
Language	0%	16.60%	33.30%	16.60%	33.30%

Discussion

The general purpose of the present study was to examine the development of minority children's judgments and justifications about social exclusion and discrimination. This work is related to a preliminary study entitled "Social Judgments about ethnic exclusion with Latin American children living in Spain", conducted in Madrid. Even though United States and Spain are very different countries in many ways, they have something in common: they receive a great number of Latin American immigrants and this population represents one of the largest minority groups in both countries. Considering this, the study offers the possibility to analyze, and in some way, to contrast both results.

As the results have demonstrated, almost all the participants have been capable to spontaneously recognize the exclusion situation depicted on the picture. These results support the studies that have shown how young minority group children are competent to differentiate their ethnic attitudes (Vaughan, 1987; Gomez, 2005).

Furthermore, there were developmental differences on children's spontaneous arguments to justify the exclusion. None of the 1st and 2nd Grade children indicated ethnic characteristics of the person being excluded as the main reason for such exclusion. At this stage, the judgments are focused around interpersonal situations. According to this perspective, exclusion is either the result of the absence of interpersonal relations or the result of an interpersonal conflict between the characters. Some very interesting types of judgments were those that we have called "negative attitudes toward the excluded". On these judgments Latin American children tended to blame the excluded child for his own exclusion. That is, the excluded must have done something wrong that justifies why he is not being invited to the party. Some children even made up a story saying something like *"She is going to give her an invitation"*. These responses coincide with Helm's findings (1995) on which it seems that children are passively developing stereotypes as well as negative thoughts and attitudes towards their own minority group.

Only 40% of the total sample mentioned that either they or someone they knew had been victims of exclusion. The results obtained here were contrary to the results in Spain (100%). This is extremely interesting because, as Brown and Bigler (2005) have recently indicated, there are no developmental studies that explore how and when children perceive themselves and the others as targets of discrimination. Additionally, when participants had to justify their experiences of exclusion, the "No interactions or Conflicts argument" (30%) was mentioned in first place, followed by "Language" (23.3%). These two arguments are strongly related. On one side, it is a fact that a great number of the participants (95%) are in the process of learning English (actually most of them are classified by the school district as NES –Non English Speaker- or LEP –Limited English Proficient) and, consequently, not been able to communicate in English may have ended in exclusion.

Solutions to exclusion provided by younger participants were focused on individual actions but generally on the part of the minority group members. However, as children grow up, the responsibility to solve the discrimination problem is attributed to the out-group.

Finally, integrating research, theory, and practice on inter-group relations is a collaborative task that should allow us to promote social inclusion as a mean to better understand and reduce inter-group prejudice.

References

Aboud, F. E. (1988) *Children and Prejudice.* New York: Basil Blackwell.

Aboud, F. E. (2005) The development of prejudice in childhood and adolescence. In J. Dovidio, P

Glick, & L. Rudman (Eds.) *On the Nature of prejudice: Fifty years after Allport*, pp. 318-322. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Aboud, F. E., & Amato, M. (2001) Developmental and socialization influences on intergroup bias. In R.

Brown, & S. Gaertner (Eds.) *Blackwell Handbook in Social Psychology, Vol 4. Intergroup Processes* pp. 68-95. Oxford: Blackwell.

Aboud, F. E., & Doyle, A. (1993) The early development of ethnic identity and attitudes. In M.E. Bernal, & G.P. Knight (Eds.), *Ethnic Identity: Formation and Transmission among Hispanics and Other Minorities.* pp. 47-59. New York: State University of New York Press.

Bigler, R. S., & Liben, L. S. (1993). A cognitive-developmental approach to racial stereotyping and reconstructive memory in Euro-American children. *Child Development, 64*, 1507-1518.

Brown, C.S., & Bigler, R.S. (2005). Children's perceptions of discrimination: a developmental model. *Child Development, 76(3)*, 533-553.

Enesco, I., Navarro, A., Giménez, M., & Del Olmo, C. (1999, June). Developmental processes In children's racial awareness. Poster presented to the 29th Annual Meeting of the Jean Piaget Society, México, D. F.

Etnia Comunicación (2007). II Anuario de la Comunicación del Inmigrante en España.www.etniacomunicacion.com/pdf/ndanuario

Gómez, M. A. (2005). *El desarrollo de la conciencia étnico-racial en niños pertenecientes a grupos minoritarios de origen latinoamericano que residen en España: Un estudio exploratorio.* Unpublished pre
doctoral dissertation. Madrid: Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

González, L. (2005). *Juicios sociales sobre la exclusión étnico-racial en niños Latinoamericanos que viven en España.* Unpublished pre-doctoral dissertation. Madrid: Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

Helms, J. E. (1995). An update on Helm's White and people of color racial identity models. In J.

Pontterotto, J.M. Casas, L.A.Suzuki & C.M. Alexander (Eds.), *Handbook of multicultural counseling.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hernandez, D. (2000). Demographic change and life circumstances of immigrant families. In the future of children, vol.14, 2

Honneth, A.(1993). The struggle for recognition: Moral grammar of social conflicts. (MIT Press)

Quintana, S. M. (1998). Children's developmental understanding of ethnicity and race. *Applied & Preventive Psychology, 7,* 27-45.

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. (1979). *A*n integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. Austin, & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 57-78). Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Vaughan, G. (1987). A social psychological model of ethic identity development. In: Phinney, J. and

Rotheram, M. (Eds.), *Children's ethnic socialization: Pluralism and development.* London: Sage.