

Chapter 1

Introduction: Exclusion and Inclusion in Children's Lives

Acquiring morality, identifying with groups, and developing autonomy provide the foundation for social development in childhood and continue throughout adulthood. Understanding these foundational aspects of development helps to explain why children exclude and include peers, and how it is related to a larger part of becoming a member of a society and culture. When is exclusion legitimate and when it is wrong? What is involved when children exclude other peers and how is this related to exclusion as it happens in the adult world?

While children begin to understand the importance of including peers in their social exchanges, excluding other children from friendships and social groups is complicated. What is complicated is that inclusion is not always desirable, even from an adult perspective, and exclusion is not always wrong. Sports teams, music clubs, and social events often require abilities and talents that are necessary to join, and social events are often arranged in such a way that some type of decision rule about exclusion is used to make it work well. In fact, there are times when it would be viewed as negative to include someone in a group when the individual does not meet the expectations for the group goals (a slow runner will be excluded from a track team). In addition to meeting the criteria for inclusion there are other factors that are considered, which include what makes the group work well. For example, an overly aggressive individual or someone who has unhealthy intentions towards others might be excluded. This type of exclusion is more complicated because it refers to psychological traits which may be inferred by behavior that belies the actual talents of the individual. Moreover, psychological

traits are often attributed to individuals based on their group membership (e.g., girls are not competitive) and not their behavior, which then makes an exclusion decision wrong or unfair. Nonetheless, there are clearly times when it is legitimate to exclude others from social groups when the criteria for exclusion are viewed as reasonable to make groups work well.

Children have to figure out the conditions and criteria for inclusion and exclusion, and this is not easy. In fact, it is a life-long challenge, changing as the scope, nature, and definition of the social group evolves. Figuring this out involves determining a set of fair criteria for inclusion, which involves understanding and anticipating the consequences of exclusion for both the excluder and the excluded.

What makes it more complicated in childhood is that children get many mixed messages from peers and adults about exclusion and inclusion. In early childhood adults typically communicate messages to children to convey the idea that everyone should be included in all activities regardless of merit, shared interests, or group goals for achievement. For example, in early childhood adults often express the view that “we’re all friends.” With age, however, adults recognize that children’s friendships are a matter of personal choice and a result of psychological compatibility as opposed to a general expectation for pervasive inclusion. In fact, as children develop skills, interests, and talents, adults modify their expectations by condoning exclusion criteria for groups, such as competitive ones, as well as for achievement groups, such as tracking in schools based on academic skill, and even for friendship expectations.

To reinforce this pattern, most social groups in early childhood are mandated and created by adults. As children get older and form their own groups, however, they begin to establish their own boundaries, regulations, and norms, and adults often relinquish their role as “group norm creators.” Children begin to set group norms that are often associated with their group identity. Given that there will be disagreements about norms, these aspects of groups become foci for exclusion. Thus, expectations for inclusion and exclusion evolve rapidly for children, often without clear or explicit guidelines from adults. And yet, children evolve ways of conceptualizing their groups, along with establishing the criteria for inclusion and exclusion, and the norms associated with group identity.

Together, these factors make it clear that exclusion and inclusion are complex decisions, with significant consequences for child development, as well as for becoming an adult and a member of society. Some forms of exclusion are viewed as relatively minor, such as not inviting someone to join a lunch table, but other forms of exclusion are fairly major, such as

excluding someone from a group based on race or ethnicity. A central distinction between different forms of exclusion has to do with the reasons and motivations, such as excluding someone when there is no more room for someone to join or excluding someone because of their race, ethnicity, or religion. A fair amount of evidence suggests that the forms of exclusion that are negative in childhood are related to the types of bias, prejudice, and discrimination in adulthood that is reflected in exclusion decisions. When exclusion becomes extreme and turns into prejudice or victimization then the outcomes are negative for both the excluded and the excluder. By studying childhood exclusion we can learn about the roots of exclusion in the adult world.

Several major theories of development have been used to examine and explain exclusion and inclusion in childhood. These theories have focused on peer rejection in the context of children's friendships, groups, social interactions, and social relationships. In general, these theories describe how children learn to get along with others, when and why they reject each other, with implications for charting the developmental pathway for how children become members of societies and cultures.

Theories of Social Cognition, Social Relationships, and Exclusion

Social Domain theory (Turiel, 2006), which stems from Piagetian approaches to moral development, has shown that children's judgments about fairness emerges early in development, by 3.5 years of age, and that children distinguish rules about fairness from rules that make groups work well, referred to as societal understanding, or knowledge about the regulations that make groups function smoothly. This approach is important for understanding the basis for children's inclusion orientations in which they believe that it is important to treat others fairly and equally. Holding such views enables children to challenge exclusionary judgments from peers, as well as prejudicial attitudes. This model has also demonstrated the types of group norms, rules, and regulations that children develop and apply to social interactions which reflect their knowledge about society and group functioning.

The Social Domain approach provides a way for determining when children evaluate an act as wrong for moral reasons, such as concerns about fairness and equality, and when they view an act as wrong for societal reasons, such as consensus about group norms, traditions, customs, and regulations. Children also evaluate acts and rules as a matter of

personal choice, in some contexts, which reflects a different domain of judgments and evaluations. Thus, this approach provides a way for understanding children's reasons for exclusion and inclusion decisions, and when children view exclusion as wrong and unfair, as legitimate and necessary for groups to work well, or as a personal choice.

A second theory that provides a guide to understanding exclusion is Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which focuses on relationships between ingroups and outgroups, or intergroup attitudes and relationships. Intergroup attitudes refers to attitudes about social groups that focus on either the ingroup (the group that a person belongs to and identifies with) or the outgroup (a group that is different from one's own group and often varies in status from one's own group). In intergroup contexts individuals often do what they can to preserve their ingroup identity, which often means derogating or disliking the outgroup (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Validizic, 1998). Children and adults often exclude individuals from the outgroup to maintain a strong ingroup identity. This approach has demonstrated that intergroup attitudes often reflect stereotypic and prejudicial attitudes that underlie exclusionary decisions.

Children identify with different groups, some that are chosen, such as sports teams, and others that are not chosen, such as gender and race/ethnicity. When group identity becomes very salient and important to the child then there is a greater expectation that exclusion will happen and that children will condone it or justify it. Children have expectations about group norms that members of groups need to adhere to, and they will often exclude someone who does not conform to the group norms. Unfortunately, some norms have to do with how others should be treated and reflect prejudicial attitudes. Children often struggle with decisions about exclusion of peers from their own group who do not meet the expectations of their group as well as exclusion of others from different groups. This makes social interactions and relationships very complex.

A third theory that is relevant for understanding exclusion and inclusion is from the field of peer relationships and friendships. Hinde's multilevel theory of social interactions, groups, and relationships has been used to understand individual differences in patterns of peer rejection (Hinde, Titmus, Easton, & Tamplin, 1985; Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2006). Children who reject others often display aggressive behaviors, whereas children who are rejected are often extremely shy, fearful, and wary. It is also often the case that children who reject others have also been rejected by their peers. Personality differences also contribute to the patterns of peer rejection, and individual differences

in personality bear on the types of individual–group interactions that occur when a child is rejected by others.

For example, when children are asked to nominate who they like and who they dislike in a classroom context, some children are perceived as having a lot of friends and some are perceived as having no friends. This categorization system has shown that children who have no friends and are rejected by their peers are often the same children who bully others and are therefore rejected by their peers. Yet, sometimes children are rejected for reasons based on group membership (such as gender, race, and ethnicity) and which may have little to do with personality traits. Instead, it may have to do with group functioning, and who is perceived to “fit the group.” This means that exclusion has to be understood by considering a number of factors, including personality traits as well as group membership and group dynamics.

Finally, theories about how children process information and interpret social cues in children’s expressions, affect, and behavior have been useful for understanding exclusion and inclusion. Social Information Processing models (Crick & Dodge, 1994) focus on how children think about each step of a social encounter, particularly encounters that create conflict, such as exclusion and rejection. The first step involves interpretations of the intentions and social cues in the interaction, followed by decisions on how to act and what to accomplish. This work has been important for understanding exclusion because many situations in which children are excluded are the result of different interpretations (and misinterpretations) of the intentions of other children. For example, one child may be excluded from a game because the other children may think that he will be aggressive, that is, they expect the child to act like a bully, when, in fact, the expectations are based on stereotypes and not actual prior behavior. In this case, children’s interpretations of the intentions of another child lead to the exclusion and create social conflict.

Different interpretations of others’ actions are particularly related to exclusion when the intentions of the peer situation are ambiguous. One child may exclude another child from joining a lunch table because they think that the child does not want to join them due to being part of another group when, in fact, the child is shy and wants to join but does not know how to express it. This type of situation occurs often and contributes to exclusion. Thus, children’s “reading of the social expectations” of others has important relevance for understanding exclusion. When children have different expectations of what others might do then this often leads to exclusion of others, creating negative consequences for children who are excluded.

What these different theories tell us is that exclusion is not the same as bullying. While some types of exclusion turn into bullying there are many instances of exclusion in which the exclusion is legitimate because it is done to make groups work well, or in which the exclusion has negative outcomes but is the result of different interpretations of the same situation. In general terms, exclusion, unlike bullying or victimization, is not always negative because sometimes excluding others has to do with group inclusion criteria that are viewed as fair and legitimate.

Types of Exclusion

As we have indicated, figuring out and understanding decision-making about exclusion is a social-cognitive challenge that emerges in childhood and continues through adulthood. Exclusion occurs among friends, in social groups, and by institutions. Exclusion decisions are sometimes explicit, based on the motivation to make a group function well (“Everyone in this group has to be good at drawing so if you’re not good then you can’t join”), or the personal desire to choose a friend or partner (“I don’t want to play with her because we don’t like the same things”). Being the recipient of exclusion often involves recognition of the importance of group functioning and social desires, but sometimes this also means an awareness that the decision was unfair or wrong (“They didn’t let her in the club but that’s not right because they think she’s mean but she’s not;” “That group doesn’t let girls in and that’s unfair because they have all of the toys”).

How children develop morality and moral judgments, form group identities, and an understanding of groups, contribute to exclusionary decisions that have negative outcomes for social relationships as well as social development. In fact, our central thesis is that the basic conflict between moral orientations and prejudicial attitudes and biases that emerge in childhood are realized in situations involving inclusion and exclusion. Thus, studying why children include or exclude friends provides a window into their application of moral or prejudicial attitudes in *actual* social decision-making and exchanges. A child’s first experiences of exclusion from social groups occurs in early peer interactions in the home or school context and then extends to larger groups, particularly for groups in which group identity and group membership becomes salient. Exclusion occurs at many levels, from the dyadic to groups, from interpersonal to intergroup, and reflecting different levels of intentions and goals (Abrams, Hogg, & Marques, 2005).

Goals of the Book

A central goal of this book, then, is to discuss the emergence and origins of morality as well as bias and prejudice in order to understand why individuals exclude others, and how this emerges in childhood. How do children and adolescents approach situations that involve exclusion? When do children view exclusion as a matter of right or wrong? When does implicit and explicit prejudice factor into exclusion decisions and how do group norms bear on this process? Prejudice typically refers to negative evaluations of individuals because of the social groups they belong to (see Brewer, 1999; Brown, 1995), and is often contrasted with bias in favor of one's own group (i.e., ingroup) over others' groups (i.e., outgroups), commonly known as ingroup bias, which does not necessarily involve the expression of negative attitudes towards other groups.

The consequences for children's peer relationships and interactions are that the experience of social exclusion creates negative consequences whether the exclusion was motivated by direct prejudice or by ingroup favoritism. For example, if an African-American boy has no one to play with during recess because all the European-American children in his class prefer to play with children from their own racial group then the child's experience is social exclusion even if no prejudiced attitudes were explicitly expressed. Further, the potential negative outcomes for social development exist for this child whether the exclusion was direct or indirect. What makes this issue so timely is that these types of exchanges are occurring around the world, with the increased mobility of ethnic groups and regional transitions of migration. Latino children in the United States, Muslim children in the Netherlands, Salvadoran children in Spain, and Serbian children in Switzerland are often in the situation of feeling left out of a group at school, and bringing the conditions that create this form of exclusion in childhood to light is an important first step towards creating more inclusive environments for all individuals.

Summary

Exclusion and inclusion from social groups is pervasive in social life. There are many reasons that exclusion occurs, and understanding explicit motivations as well as implicit biases that contribute to exclusion sheds light on the development of exclusion in children's lives. This book is divided into eight chapters. We begin in Chapter 2, with an examination of the emergence of morality in childhood to demonstrate when and how

children's inclusive orientation manifests. We then turn to the emergence of categorization and prejudice in Chapter 3, in which we explain how biases and stereotyping gets expressed in childhood and adolescence. Next, in Chapter 4, we examine how group identity and prejudice develops, and demonstrate ways in which prejudice may be a function of group goals rather than "selfish" desires or psychopathology. Then, in Chapter 5 we describe exclusion in the context of peer relations. In Chapter 6, we discuss an integrative approach to examining peer exclusion from social domain and social identity theoretical perspectives, describing a set of studies on how children evaluate intragroup exclusion (when a group excludes a member of its own group) and intergroup exclusion (when a group excludes someone from a different group). Understanding the relationships between intragroup and intergroup exclusion reveals children's ideas about group dynamics, which contributes to decision-making about group identity, peer exclusion, and morality.

In Chapter 7, we review recent research on exclusion based on culture, nationality, and immigrant status given that most research reviewed focuses on gender, race, and ethnicity. In Chapter 8, we describe interventions designed to promote positive social inclusion amongst children in the form of intergroup contact, media exposure, and programs designed to facilitate cross-group friendships as well as a sense of shared identity among children from different social groups. In Chapter 9, we provide our integrative perspective on exclusion, prejudice, and morality, and contend that new theories are needed to help us understand how these constructs are interconnected and interrelated. We conclude with our overall reflection of the topic of this book as well as new directions for research on exclusion and inclusion in children's lives.