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Roma children: the impact of cognitive-emotional variables and of single and multiple identities in acculturation attitudes toward Portuguese society

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Research on inter-group relations

For nearly sixty years researchers have investigated relationships between 'racial'/ethnic groups and the inter-group processes underlying these - stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination (Allport, 1954). Much of the initial research on inter-group relations was undertaken with adult participants, but a growing interest in studying the development of identity and racial attitudes has led to much literature reporting on research with children on the same topics. In 1989 the European Ministers approved a Resolution for schooling Roma children. This political measure had important implications: Portuguese Roma [known as 'gypsies'] make up only 2% of the Portuguese population, but their stigmatisation by dominant national groups in Europe over the last 600 years makes their history and culture an interesting study in inter-group relations. Portugal is today irreversibly multi-racial and school is a privileged context for studying inter-group dynamics.

During pre-school and elementary school years, children begin to absorb and to construct for themselves a description of the world, trying to make sense of it. In a multiracial context Roma children attain a notion of themselves and of their social identity which is central to self-concept and to the psychological functioning of ethnic minorities.

Social identity and self-categorisation

The concept of social identity has been studied in the context of inter-group relations over the last 30 years. Within the general framework of Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel, 1978), a person's social identity is considered as 'that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups), together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership' (p.255).

There is a cognitive mechanism underlying the knowledge of belonging to a group - the process of social categorisation. As a developmental phenomenon, self-categorisation is defined as a process of acquiring a 'label' based on perceptions about belonging to one or more groups and on self-definitions. Individuals categorise not only physical stimuli, analysing differences and similarities between the categories available, but also classify themselves within social categories. Within the general framework of SIT, the simple act of categorisation leads to a differentiation between groups to which one belongs (in-groups) and groups that one does not belong to (out-groups).

Most realistic contexts involve not only one but several categorisations, some of which cut across each other, i.e. some people belong to one group according to one categorisation but also belong to another group according to a second categorisation. For ethnic minority individuals such as Roma, self-categorisation is not a simple process: by cultural tradition they belong to the ethnic minority group, but by nationality and citizenship to the majority group. Recently Ros, Huici and Gómez (2000) proposed the

concept of 'comparative identity', which can be defined as the comparison of degrees of identification with two categories as different levels of inclusion. In their study with Spanish participants they used regional and national categories.

Evaluative dimension

According to the definition of social identity, the value and emotional significance attached to group membership are very important dimensions. The evaluation of social categories seems to be based on a process of comparison between in-groups and out-groups. Children can have a positive social identity if they make a positive evaluation of in-groups, or a negative social identity if they negatively evaluate their in-group. The values that the society gives to the in-group of the individual also play an important role in the evaluation made by the child (Milner, 1983): children from the majority group usually evaluate their in-group positively, and this evaluation is consistent with the evaluation that society makes. Minority group children are usually aware of the negative value that society gives to minority groups, and this can lead to an evaluative conflict because the value that society gives to the group is different from the children's own evaluation. However, being a member of a minority group does not imply that children always negatively evaluate their in-group. Kinket and Verkuyten (1997), found for example that Turkish children (between 10 and 13 years old) who live in the Netherlands and perceive high discrimination levels against Turkish immigrants, choose for self-categorisation the Turkish category and positively evaluate their membership.

A number of studies have examined some of the consequences of a positive evaluation of in-groups (Operario & Fiske, 2001): when membership is salient, an individual's social identities shape cognition, increasing the sensitivity to discrimination by others and a reaction against members of the out-group. A first aim of the study reported here is try to analyse Roma children's social identity, understanding what categories they choose for self-categorisation and the value that is attached to that category or categories.

Identity and acculturation strategies

In a multi-ethnic society inter-cultural exchanges are a common phenomenon and for this reason the concept of acculturation has become more and more important. Acculturation can be defined as the process of change and adaptation that results from continuous contact between different groups.

The body of research on immigrants or national minorities and their adaptation to the culture of the dominant group is very great. Berry and colleagues (1989) proposed a two-dimensional model of acculturation strategies based on two focal questions: 'is my traditional culture of value and to be retained?' and 'are positive relations with the larger society to be sought?'. The response to these questions takes into account four possibilities: (a) maintaining or (b) rejecting the traditional culture or (c) adopting or (d) rejecting the culture of the dominant group. This gives four acculturation options: integration (a-c), assimilation (b-c); separation (a-d), or marginalisation (b-d).

Some findings have suggested a positive relation between Berry's forms of acculturation (particularly separation and integration) and identity. Ros, Huici and Gómez (2000), for example, in a study with Spanish participants, tried to establish a link between Berry's model and the concept of 'comparative identity' and found that the high national/high regional group shows a preference for the integration strategy whereas the low

national/high regional group chooses the separation strategy. There is some evidence that Roma do not want an integrationist strategy if this implies losing their ethnic identity, but in the Portuguese context there are no systematic studies about acculturation strategies of this minority group.

The adoption of acculturation strategies is also context-sensitive. Krishnan and Berry (1992), for example, found that in private domains individuals choose more a separationist strategy. In our study we expected to find that defining oneself on the basis of the ethnic category or on the basis of cross categorisation (more than one category) will differently affect acculturation strategies. We also expected that Roma children may choose different acculturation strategies for different life contexts.

Stereotypes and self-categorisation

As has been described, during the last 60 years of social research there has been a great theoretical work reported on about inter-group processes such as stereotypes and prejudice. Lippman introduced the term 'stereotypes' to behavioural scientists in 1922 and used this term to represent the typical picture that comes to mind when thinking about a particular social group.

It is now well established that inter-group discrimination in both adults and children can develop as a result of the categorisation effect (see Messick & Mackie, 1989). Early research suggested that when category membership becomes salient, there is a tendency to exaggerate differences between and to minimise differences within categories (Tajfel, 1978). A simple labelling of people as 'us' (in-group) and 'them' (out-group) leads to an in-group favouritism. However, when self-categorisation is made according to more than one category, several research studies have shown that this crossed-categorisation can reduce inter-group discrimination (e.g., Deschamps & Doise, 1978; Ros, Huici e Gómez, 2000) and minimise the importance of stereotypic information about the in-group.

Meta-stereotypes and meta-emotions

In the school context, Roma children attain a notion of how others perceive them, that is to say, they have a set of meta-stereotypes. Meta-stereotypes are used to refer to a person's beliefs with regard to the stereotypes that out-group members hold about the group (Vorauer, Main & O'Connell, 1998). The perception of meta-stereotypes and also the perception of discrimination have important implications for inter-group relations. Stereotyping can lead children not only to consider the possibility that they actually possess these traits, but can also have significant consequences for both affective and behavioural reactions to out-group members: derogation of out-group members, avoidance of contact, hostile reactions, and so on (see Vorauer, Main, & O'Connell, 1998).

Although stereotypes are commonly defined in cognitive terms it is obvious that people often experience strong feelings and emotions when certain groups become the focus of attention. According to Smith (1997) prejudice can be defined as a negative emotional reaction toward an out-group which is based on perceptions of the relations between the out-group and the in-group. Smith distinguished five inter-group emotions: fear, disgust, contempt, anger and jealousy. In children the most common negative emotions toward out-groups are fear, sadness and distrust (Aboud & Amato, 2001). Some findings suggest that majority groups feel fear in particular when they interact with Roma (Alcalde, 1997).

We can introduce the *term meta-emotions* to refer to an individual's beliefs regarding the emotions that out-group members feel during inter-group contact.

In considering the relation between these cognitive-emotional variables and acculturation strategies, some findings have shown that individuals who perceive high discrimination and hostility against the in-group will have a low adaptation to majority society and show less preference to adopt an assimilationist strategy (Berry *et al.*, 1989).

One practice in social psychology research is to focus on white majority members as active perceivers, studying their attitudes and behaviours toward their own and minority groups. Little is known about the perceptions of minority group members. The main purpose of this study is to analyse the moderator effect of several cognitive and emotional variables (self-stereotypes, meta-stereotypes, meta-emotions and perception of discrimination) in the relations between Roma children's identity and their acculturation strategies.

Method

An exploratory study was conducted with Roma children to take into account their language, and the attributes they use for self-stereotyping and meta-stereotyping.

Participants

Sixty-one Roma children (30 boys, 31 girls) from eight elementary school participated in this study. The children ranged in age from nine to14 years old (M=10.5, SD= 1.46).

Instruments and procedure

The children were interviewed individually for 15 minutes (the researcher explained that she would ask questions and assured the children that there were no 'right' or 'wrong' answers and that their responses would be treated confidentially).

We construct a questionnaire for measuring our variables: social identity, self-stereotypes, meta-stereotypes, meta-emotions, perception of discrimination, acculturation strategies and emotional and behavioural reactions of Roma children toward majority members. To measure social identity we used eight categories including both ethnic categories and national categories in order to represent accurately children's perceptions of social identity and to give them the opportunity to select the category or categories that they felt best describe them. With this measure children were able to make cross categorisations. Table 1 shows the primary and secondary self-identifications chosen by these children.

Table 1: Primary self-identification and secondary self-identification

	Primary self- identification		Secondary self- identification	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Roma	57	93.4	4	6.6
Portuguese	2	3.3	21	34.4
Other	2	3.3	0	0
None	0	0	0	0
Total	61	100	25	41

93.4% choose the ethnic category 'Gypsy' [Roma] as the first category for self-categorisation; but only 41% of these children also chose a second category for self-categorisation, which for 34.4% the national category ('Portuguese').

Following Tajfel's definition of social identity we also measured the value attached for each category chosen on a three-point scale ('not important'; 'important', 'very important'). Then we combined the self-categorisation information and the information about the value attached for each category to create single and double identity groups (Table 2).

Table 2: Single and double identity

Self-categorisation and value attached to social category	Frequency	%
High single (ethnic) identity	32	52.5
High double identity (ethnic and national)	21	34.4
Low single (ethnic) identity	8	13.1
Sum	61	100

This data show that the majority of respondents valorise the ethnic and national categories. Also, the identities shown in Table 2 are sex independent, that is to say, there were no differences in the self-categorisation process between boys and girls ($\chi2$=.15, *g.l.*=1, *p*<.69).

For measuring self-stereotypes and meta-stereotypes we selected ten attributes (the more frequent ones) following a previous interview with 13 Roma children. The same attributes were used to measure those two variables, but the initial question was different: for self-stereotypes we asked children 'what are Gypsy [Roma] children like?' and for meta-stereotypes the question was 'what do majority children say about Gypsy [Roma] children?'. We measured the variables on a four-point scale (4 = 'very much like this', 3 = 'much like this', 2 = 'a little like this', 1 = 'nothing like this'). The factor analysis conducted for self-stereotypes shows two factors: 'skills' (M=2.45, SD=.54) and 'look' (M=1.82, SD=.46). The factor analysis conducted for meta-stereotypes show the same two factors: 'skills' (M=2.45, SD=.53) and 'look' (M=1.97, SD=.59).

To measure meta-emotions we developed a measure with three emotions on a bipolar scale: very sad (5) - very happy (1); with much fear (5) - without any fear (1); very angry (5) - very calm (1). We asked children 'how do majority group members feel when they are playing with Gypsy [Roma] children?'. Responses were aggregated to form a single index, but we retained only two emotions (happiness and fear) because of the index's internal consistency (M=2.75, SD=1.2). A mean close to 5 means more negative meta-emotions.

For measuring the perception of discrimination we used a single question. We asked children 'in the playground, do majority group members choose Gypsy [Roma] children to play?'. We measured this variable on a four-point scale (1=always, 2=sometimes, 3=a few times, 4= never).

We chose nine items to measure acculturation strategies. These measured only three acculturation strategies: assimilation, integration and separation. The nine items were used for each context: school, home and street. We measured acculturation strategies on a five-point scale (5='I completely agree' to 1='I completely disagree'). In the school

context factor analysis showed three different strategies: integration/assimilation of culture (M=3.24, SD=.87), cultural separation (M=3.07, SD=.94) and relational separation (M=3.30, SD=.93). For the 'home' context the factor analysis showed three different acculturation strategies: assimilation (M=1.98, SD=.86), separation (M=3.87, SD=.87) and integration (M=2.5, SD=.73). For the 'street' context factor analysis showed two factors: assimilation (M=2.49, SD= .74) and integration (M=3.11, SD=.85).

In our statistical analysis we did not consider the third factors of the 'school' and 'home' contexts, or the second factor of street context, because of their internal consistency.

Results

Identity and acculturation strategies

The results show a main effect of identity on 'cultural separation' strategy in 'school' context [$F(1,52)=4.75$, $p=.03$] and on 'separation' strategy in 'home' context [$F(1.52)=3.56$, $p=.06$]. In both contexts children with a single identity showed more preference for these two separationist strategies than children with double identity (Table 3).

Table 3: Effect of identity on 'cultural separation' strategy in 'school' context and on 'separation' strategy in 'home' context (means and standard-deviations)

	'Cultural separation'		'Separation'	
	M	SD	M	SD
Double identity	2.8	0.21	3.59	0.19
Single identity	3.4	0.19	4.11	0.18

(5='I completely agree' to 1='I completely disagree')

The assimilation results show a different situation: this strategy is mainly adopted by children with double identity, especially in the contexts of 'home' and 'street'. Nevertheless, the adoption of this strategy in the 'home' context is moderated by their meta-stereotypes [$F_{change}(1,50)=7.9$, $p=.007$] and in the 'street' context by their perception of discrimination [$F_{change}(1,50)=3.5$, $p=.06$]. Thus, children with double identity more often choose this strategy than children with single identity only when they have a low perception of discrimination ($M_{double\ ident.}=3.0$, SD=.56; $M_{single\ ident.}=2.0$, SD=.45) and only when they perceive that the majority children see them with less meta-stereotypes ($M_{double\ ident.}=2.4$, SD=.97; $M_{single\ ident.}=1.6$, SD=.49).

Conclusions

The main purpose of this study is to show the importance of considering multiple self-categorisation and its impact on the adoption of different acculturation strategies. This study shows that identity has an important role in the adoption of a separation acculturation strategy, especially in the 'school' and 'home' contexts, and suggests the importance of considering several cognitive variables in order to achieve a better understanding of acculturation strategies, specially for 'assimilation' strategy.

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