Stereotypes and beliefs about different ethnic groups in Spain. A study with Spanish and Latin American children living in Madrid

Ileana Enesco a,*, Alejandra Navarro b, Isabel Paradela a, Silvia Guerrero a

a Departamento de Psicología Evolutiva y de la Educación, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain
b Módulo II / Despacho 304, Departamento de Psicología Evolutiva y de la Educación, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Ctra. de Colmenar, km. 15, 28049 Madrid, Spain

Available online 13 September 2005

Abstract

96 Spanish and Latin American children from 3 grades in Madrid reported their knowledge of positive and negative stereotypes regarding Spaniards, Gypsies, Latin American and Chinese people. Their personal beliefs about these four ethnic groups were also assessed. Stereotypes about Spaniards were perceived as overwhelmingly positive and least negatively while stereotypes about Gypsies were rarely positive and often negative. Spanish children attributed more positive and fewer negative stereotypes to Chinese immigrants than Latin American children did. Older children reported more positive stereotypes about Gypsies than younger children and older Spanish children reported fewer positive stereotypes for their own group than their younger counterparts. Older children’s personal beliefs about Gypsies were less consistent with negative stereotypes than younger children’s. Older children also showed greater discrepancy of their personal beliefs with positive stereotypes of Spaniards than younger children did. Findings are discussed within the context of socio-cognitive approaches.

© 2005 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Inter-group relationships; Positive and negative stereotypes; Ethnic groups; Spanish and Latin American children; Personal beliefs; Prejudice
1. Introduction

Traditionally, Spain has been for the most part an emigrants’ nation and it is just in the last 15 years that has begun to host immigrants from diverse places around the world (North and Central Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Eastern Europe). Economic, political, and social improvements, as well as demographic changes, have transformed Spain into a “new” developed country and, consequently, a new immigration target. Nowadays, the political and social discourse in Spain depicts immigration as one of the three problems that most worries the Spanish people, besides unemployment and terrorism (Agrela, 2002). We do not attempt to analyze the reasons behind this concern regarding immigration, but perhaps one factor is the lack of readiness in our country, at institutional level, to integrate an immigration flow that has been growing at a fast pace in recent years. Over the last five years the immigrant population in Spain has quadrupled, transforming the social configuration of several geographical areas in the big cities.

The purpose of the present research was to study the development of ethnic stereotypes among both Spanish and Latin American children living in Madrid. Latin Americans represent the largest immigrant population in Madrid. We studied two aspects of ethnic stereotypes: The knowledge children have about the stereotypes linked to different groups that have a remarkable presence in Spain, and the beliefs they personally hold about these groups, including beliefs about their own groups. Besides the Spanish and Latin American target ethnic groups, we selected two other ethnic groups for study: Asians, a minority immigrant group in Spain, and Gypsies, a Spanish minority settled in Spain since the 15th century. To our knowledge, there is neither previous research in Spain that has analyzed children’s knowledge of such stereotypes and their beliefs about these groups, nor have studies approached these issues with immigrant children themselves regarding the above mentioned target groups. In a country such as Spain, where there is an increasing need of social policies addressing ethnic integration, information of this kind is of great interest.

As societies become more complex and heterogeneous, the promotion of intergroup relationships that are based on tolerance towards cultural differences is critical. Prejudice and negative attitudes towards other groups have existed throughout history, but it was in the first decades of the 20th century when these attitudes began to be considered as a social problem (Duckitt, 1992). In the last 80 years, a deep transformation has taken place in the mentality of social scientists and lay people alike. In the second part of the 20th century, social policies seeking the integration of diverse communities as well as equality of opportunities were developed in diverse places of the Western world. In spite of this, prejudices have not disappeared. People continue to hold negative stereotypes towards other groups and frequently act according to these stereotypes when interacting with members of out-groups defined by nationality, race, culture, language, sex and gender. However, the current manifestations of prejudice may be subtler than in past years. Direct forms of prejudice have decreased but now are expressed in concealed or implicit ways because of social pressures against its open manifestation (Devine, Plant, & Blair, 2001; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986). Indeed, under social conditions with little or no conflict, people usually do not express their prejudices towards other ethnic groups openly and, on the contrary, they usually declare egalitarian ideas about them. Nevertheless, it is not clear if these egalitarian ideas or “nonprejudiced”

---

1 Madrid has become one of the most multicultural cities in Spain; this explains the interest of studying the ethnic stereotypes in children living in the city.
responses actually reveal internal values of equality or if they are just the mere expression of what is considered to be politically correct.

Opinions differ according to the theoretical perspective of the researcher. For instance, Crosby, Bromley, and Saxe (1980), stated that people who provide responses showing a low level of prejudice are guided by social desirability but in reality continue to hold as many prejudices as those who score at a higher level. Crosby et al. (1980) maintained that since people hide their prejudiced beliefs, the techniques that elicit automatic or unconscious responses are more reliable than those that elicit responses that can be consciously controlled. According to these authors, social and political changes have promoted inhibition of the expression of prejudices such that people have learned to provide socially desirable responses. This makes it difficult to measure such prejudices accurately. This explains why in the last few decades efforts have focused on the development of indirect or subtle ways to assess prejudice, although these measures have rarely been used with children (McGlothlin, Killen, & Edmonds, 2005; Nesdale, 2001, 2004; Powlishta, Serbin, Doyle, & White, 1994).

Devine’s (1989) perspective differs from the position of Crosby et al. (1980). Devine disagrees with the assumption of Crosby et al. that change has occurred only in people’s overt responses but not in the deep attitudes. On the contrary, Devine asserts that prejudice is a “bad habit” that may be controlled from a deep personal decision that is not necessarily a response due to social desirability.

Concerning these problems, several authors (Devine et al., 2001; Dovidio & Fazio, 1992) have insisted that there is a need to determine the source of motivation, personal as well as social, which prompts an individual to provide nonprejudiced responses. In developmental research, the problem about the meaning of the responses given by children has been set out in a very similar way. It is well known that at about eight years old, after having reached the peak of explicit prejudice towards other ethnic groups, prejudiced responses begin to diminish slowly as children approach adolescence. Thus, the open expression of prejudices seems to decrease from a certain age on, and/or the counter-biases increase (Aboud, 1988; Aboud & Amato, 2001; Asher & Allen, 1969; Doyle & Aboud, 1995; Enesco, Navarro, Giménez, & del Olmo, 1999). This situation has provoked the debate among developmental psychologists apropos of the meaning of such developmental trend. The question here is whether children come to exhibit less prejudiced responses than previously, perhaps motivated by a new set of values, or is it simply the case that more sociably acceptable behaviors have emerged as a result of the children’s higher cognitive capacity, a capacity that enables older children to understand what is expected from them, and to hide undesirable beliefs and feelings, which they recognize that prejudice as socially unacceptable.

To summarize briefly, a fundamental concern is to determine if behaviors people (whether children or adults) manifest towards others is a function of personal beliefs or not. Concerning this problem, Devine (1989) has differentiated two levels of functioning or two types of information storage regarding prejudice: Stereotypes and personal beliefs. According to her, stereotypes are steady and widely shared structures of knowledge that are acquired in the early years through socialization processes. Frequent and continuous exposure to stereotypes in childhood turns them into a series of well-learned associations that are activated in an automatic way. In addition, stereotypes are stored in memory before children are able to evaluate them in a critical manner or to question their validity. Conversely, personal beliefs are structures that develop later in childhood and more slowly than stereotypes since they depend on developmentally more complex processes of control. In other words, personal beliefs depend to a good extent on cognitive capacity as they are under the conscious control of individuals. Other authors have
established a similar distinction between the awareness of social stereotypes and that of personal ones (Stangor & Schaller, 1996).

Devine’s model predicts that individuals with high and low levels of prejudice may not differ about their knowledge of social stereotypes while they may differ from one another in their personal beliefs. Thus, according to Devine, less prejudiced people have learned to inhibit responses based on social stereotypes, which they replace by responses grounded on beliefs of egalitarian values. Those with a low level of prejudice hold personal beliefs that are discrepant with such stereotypes. On the other hand, people with a high level of prejudice hold beliefs that are congruent with social stereotypes.

From a developmental perspective, Devine’s thesis is related to what we know about human development in diverse domains. For example, it is consistent with observations of gaps in the development of various capacities and in children’s awareness. Children acquire social categories (ethnic traits, gender, etc), by capturing the characteristics that define them, but it is later in development that most children comprehend that these are social constructions that do not necessarily reflect reality. The fact that young children are able to identify stereotypes related to diverse social groups does not necessarily imply that they personally endorse such generalizations. On the contrary, their attributions may be based more on their social knowledge than on their personal beliefs (Augoustinos & Walker, 1995).

To analyze the relationship between knowledge of stereotypes and personal beliefs during childhood, Augoustinos and Rosewarne (2001) conducted a study with Australian children from the majority group (aged 5–6 and 8–9 years). Using diverse techniques (e.g., graphic stimuli, flashcards with adjectives), they found that children from both age groups showed a positive inclination towards photos that depicted White children: The children attributed more positive traits to White children than to Black children, and conversely, more negative traits to Black children than to White children. That is, they discovered a pro-White, anti-Black pattern of responding. They did not detect a significant decrease of this bias at 8–9 years of age. However, when they assessed knowledge of stereotypes and personal beliefs they did observe age differences. Knowledge of stereotypes and personal beliefs were not differentiated from one another in the 5–6 year-old children. But they found that 8–9 year-old children were more inclined to endorse positive adjectives as “personal beliefs” and negative adjectives as “stereotypes held by the Australians” when evaluating members of a minority group. In other words, older children expressed personal beliefs that contradicted the cultural representations or stereotypes about ethnic groups more than younger children did (Augoustinos & Rosewarne, 2001). It would be of great interest to assess the same problems with children belonging to the Australian minority. How would they view stereotypes linked to their in-group, and to what extent would they assume or reject them as personal beliefs? One of the purposes of our work has been to study how children from majority and minority ethnic groups perceive each other group as well as their views of their own group.

Knowledge of stereotypes related to diverse groups may have an important influence in children’s comprehension of the world and the way they relate to people from other groups. For example, knowing that Gypsies are seen as “dirty” and “nonreliable” people on the part of most of the Spanish population is likely to have an impact on children’s behavior when they deal with a member of that ethnic group. This, in turn, is likely to affect the self-esteem and behavior of the Gypsies children themselves.

---

2 In our knowledge, this is the only developmental study taking into account this differentiation. Other studies have been conducted with adults (e.g., Augoustinos, Ahrens, & Innes, 1994; Devine, 1989; Lepore & Brown, 1997).
Recently, researchers have conducted studies on how children’s implicit knowledge of stereotypes influences their behavior. One aim of these studies has been to determine the extent to which awareness of stereotypes linked to the in-group may affect children at different levels (Ambady, Shih, Kim, & Pittinsky, 2001; McKown & Weinstein, 2003; Steele, 1997). Ambady et al. (2001) studied the influence of a subtle activation of gender or ethnic group social identities associated with negative or positive stereotypes on the performance of academic tasks. They observed that from 5 years children were susceptible to stereotypes. Overall, performance improved when gender or ethnic identities associated with positive stereotypes were activated. The opposite effect on academic task performance occurred when negative stereotypes about their gender or ethnicity were activated. The remarkable aspect about their findings was that most children did not explicitly assume negative social stereotypes. That is, when children were asked directly about differences between genders or ethnic groups in academic areas, they denied such differences existed. But simply knowing these stereotypes had an implicit influence on the children’s behavior, affecting their performance in the same way that has been observed in previous studies with adults (Shih, Richeson, Ambady, & Pittinsky, 2000).

These findings are relevant to the purposes of the present research, which focuses on the development of ethnic stereotypes regarding different ethnic groups living in Spain. The study distinguished between the knowledge of stereotypes and the personal beliefs as two different components of prejudices according to Devine’s (1989) proposal. The development of both of these aspects of prejudice was studied in two ethnic groups: Spanish children from the majority group and minority Latin American immigrant children residing in Madrid. The citizens of Central and South America (Ecuador, Colombia, Perú, and Dominican Republic) are the most numerous immigrants in Spain. Thus, Latin Americans, who have a significant presence in Spain as the largest minority, are also much closer to the Spaniards in terms of their cultural background (language, religion, traditions) than other immigrant groups living in Spain (Northern Africans, Chinese).

We selected Gypsies and Chinese immigrants in addition to Latin Americans and Spaniards as targets of study. Gypsies are a large Spanish minority (there are nearly 600,000 Spanish Gypsies) with whom there have been interethnic conflicts along the 500 years of their settlement in Spain. A recent report about how Gypsies are perceived both by the majority group and the immigrants has confirmed that the prejudice towards this community is still extremely lively in Spain: Among eleven groups (including Latin Americans, Muslims, Sub Saharan Africans, Chinese) the Gypsies were repeatedly evaluated in the last position in different items (Diez & Ramirez, 2001).

Chinese people were selected as a target because they represent a migrant community that has grown significantly during the recent years in Spain. Moreover, Chinese people represent a different type of community in Spain in terms of their way of life and types of jobs held, as compared to the Spanish Gypsies and other groups of immigrants. Chinese immigrants have benefit of extremely favorable stereotypes from the 16th and 17th centuries. However, throughout the 19th century, negative images of China increased and were disseminated to a wide audience (Major, 1996). In Spain, as in other Western countries, the image of Chinese people is complex and ambivalent. Major (1996) refers to admiration for the East, stating that “We believe the East offers a deep, ancient, penetrating wisdom that, tapped into, will rid us of our shocking and disgusting materialism” p. 7) that is coupled with hostility towards this

3 Nowadays in Spain, the Chinese community ranks fourth among the migrant groups from the non-European Union (EU) countries, and its presence in daily urban life is increasingly visible (Nieto, 2003, p. 215).
‘somehow sinister culture’. There are few studies about Spanish adults’ stereotypes towards the Chinese, and virtually none with children, thus increasing the relevance of including this group.

Finally, the selection of Spanish and Latin American people as targets was a response to the current lack of knowledge about stereotypes in Spain. To date, no study carried out in Spain has compared the stereotypes held by children from the majority group (Spaniards) with those held by a migrant minority group (Latin Americans) that shares much cultural background.

We addressed the following questions: What do children know about the stereotypes that circulate in their society about diverse ethnic groups (Gypsies, Latin Americans, Spanish, and Chinese people), including their own in-group (for Spanish and Latin American children)? To what extent do children personally agree with these stereotypes? What developmental changes take place during childhood concerning the knowledge of these stereotypes and the child’s own beliefs? Do Spanish and Latin American children differ from one another in their knowledge of stereotypes linked to the different groups? We were particularly interested in learning what Spanish children know about the stereotypes usually related to Gypsies, and if such cultural stereotypes are also known by Latin American children who have resided in Spain a relatively short period of time. Although in Latin American countries there is also a stereotyped social image of Gypsies, their presence is minimal compared to Spain (Gómez, 2005).4 The few studies carried out in Spain about children’s prejudices towards Gypsies have shown that during childhood most children from the Spanish majority group hold negative stereotypes about them (Gamella & Sánchez Muros, 1998; Gómez Berrocal & Navas, 2000; Gómez Berrocal & Ruiz, 2001; Martínez, 1996). Nevertheless, many Spanish adolescents seem able to adopt a certain distance from the stereotypes, and think about them critically despite the persistence of this negative view of Gypsies. We investigated whether this pattern exists for other groups that have recently immigrated to Spain, such as Latin Americans.

Our predictions were based on Devine’s (1989) claim that stereotypes and personal beliefs are distinct components of prejudice, and on previous developmental findings (Augoustinos & Rosewarne, 2001). First, it was predicted that Spanish and Latin American participants would differ in the following ways:

a) Spanish participants were expected to demonstrate more knowledge of cultural stereotypes associated to the Gypsies than the Latin American participants. In particular, Spaniards were expected to show a stronger bias against Gypsies than Latin Americans.

b) Our second prediction was related to the way Spanish and Latin American participants perceive each other and themselves. In particular, it was expected that both groups of participants would think that people hold a more positive perspective (stereotypes) of the majority group (Spaniards) than of the minority group (Latin Americans). Also, it was predicted that Spaniards would think that people would make more positive attributions about Spaniards than the Latin Americans would; the converse was also expected, that is, Latin Americans were expected to think that people would have a more positive view of Latin Americans than the Spaniards’ views of Latin Americans.

Second, we predicted age differences in level of agreement with social stereotypes. That is, older children were expected to disagree with social stereotypes more than younger children.

4 It is remarkable the virtual inexistence of reliable data about the number of Gypsies in diverse Latin American countries.
2. Method

2.1. Participant recruitment and characteristics

Prior to the implementation of the study, we asked the administration of two Madrid public schools to participate in the project, which was approved by the School Council. The schools had a heterogeneous ethnic structure but it should be noted that the Gypsy population was virtually absent in both schools although there was a numerous Gypsy population in the neighborhoods where we collected the data. The schools sent a letter to 170 parents and/or guardians of the prospective participants in order to inform them about the study and to ask for their permission for the students’ participation. All the participants were informed about the confidentiality of their responses. Also, they were asked for their voluntary participation and permission to record the interview.

Ninety-six children (an equal number of female and male children in each grade) from second (n = 32), fourth (n = 32), and sixth (n = 32) grades participated in the study. Half were Spanish and half were Latin American. The mean (and SD) ages were 90.16 (3.85), 114.50 (4.31) and 137.25 (4.77) months for the three grades, respectively. Families of the children belonged to lower and middle–lower SES. In order to define social class we mainly considered two indices: Each parent’s occupation and the school the children attended. The participants were chosen at random from those 120 who met the requirements regarding grade level and age correspondence, as well as ethnic origin. That is, only Spaniards and Latin Americans were chosen as participants. The Latin American participants came from diverse countries, including Ecuador, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Dominican Republic, and El Salvador. The mean (and SD) number of months they had been living in Spain was 23.7 (12.69).

2.2. Pilot testing

In order to determine the ethnic groups that people recognize to be living in Spain—and the label they use to name them—as well as traits used to describe them, a group of 50 college students and a group of 90 children from 6 to 15 years old were asked to indicate the predominant ethnic groups in Spain and their characteristics. This pilot research established that Gypsies, Chinese, Spaniards, and Latin Americans were familiar to them and yielded the positive and negative adjectives that served as materials for the present study. Both adults and children spontaneously generated considerably more negative than positive stereotypes in reference to the diverse ethnic groups. From all the adjectives used to describe the four groups, only eight of the positive traits surpassed the criterion of being mentioned by 30% or more of the students, in contrast to 12 negative adjectives. We decided to maintain this inequality in order to respect the tendency of a greater number of negative traits that was found to be quite stable.

2.3. Measures

A semi-structured interview consisting of two components was administered. Questions about the child’s knowledge of stereotypic traits and questions about the child’s personal agreement with stereotypes comprised the interview. The two components of the interview were presented in this order to all children.
2.3.1. Assessment of stereotype knowledge

This first task was administrated after the children were introduced to four boxes that explicitly presented each of the names of the target groups (Gypsies, Chinese, Spaniards, and Latin Americans). The children were told they were going be asked questions about these groups and were asked to name each target group. They were then presented a series of flash cards with 12 trait negative adjectives on it (violent, drug dealer, lazy, dirty, thief, poor, evil, bad-mannered, ragged, envious, cheater, drunk), and eight trait positive adjectives (hard-working, nice, pacific, smart, good-natured, good dancer, friendly, joyful). The flash cards were read out to the children. The order of presentation of the cards was randomized.

The instructions were:

Do you see these four boxes? Each one of them belongs to a group: Chinese, Latin Americans, Gypsies, and Spaniards. Now, I’m going to show you some cards with words on them that describe people. I want you to look at these cards one by one and tell me to which group people think they refer to (whatever the card shows). You have to place it in the box corresponding to each group, the words that match people’s beliefs about them. It’s not about what you think but what people in general think. You could agree or disagree with what people say. It could be about one group, more than one group or none of them. Do you understand? Let see, for instance, who do people think are... (First card, e.g., hard-working)? Is there any other group that people think are... (e.g., hard-working)? (The interviewer repeats the term and offers the child the possibility of allocating another card with the same adjective in a different box).

Children were allowed to select as many or as few flash cards as they wished. For this reason, there were 4 cards available for every adjective.

One point was assigned to each positive trait chosen for each ethnic group, yielding a summative positive score that could range from 0–8 for each ethnic group. The same scoring procedure was followed for the negative traits chosen for each ethnic group, yielding a possible score of 0–12 for knowledge of negative stereotypes of each ethnic group.

2.3.2. Assessment of personal agreement with the stereotype

To investigate the children’s personal beliefs and to find out if the child agreed with what others think about the different groups, the following instruction was used:

Now, I want you to tell me how you think that (Gypsies, Chinese, Spaniards, Latin Americans; each group was presented separately to the child in a randomized order) are. You told me before that people think that Gypsies are... (interviewer presented one of the traits that the child had previously assigned to the group, e.g., violent). Do you also think that Gypsies are... (e.g., violent)?

The experimenter recalled to the child as often as necessary the differences between what he or she knew about other people’s beliefs; what he or she personally believed and whether she agreed or not with people’s beliefs. At all times, we made sure that the child was able to understand these differences.

One point was assigned when the child was in agreement with the stereotype previously mentioned. Thus, each child could potentially be assigned as score of 0–8 for personal beliefs in positive traits and 0–12 for personal beliefs in negative traits for each ethnic group. Moreover, for each participant three

---

5 In our study, the personal beliefs were assessed by two means: a) through open questions about their personal opinions regarding the different ethnic groups and b) by a measure of agreement with the social stereotypes previously mentioned by the child in the first task (stereotype knowledge). The data presented in the current study refer to the measure of agreement.

6 Since the whole interview was rather long (it lasted around 45 min), the Chinese target group was excluded in this second task in order to deepen the interview on the personal beliefs of the children regarding the other groups, more interesting for the purposes of our study.
indexes of agreement were obtained: General agreement with negative stereotypes, general agreement with positive stereotypes and global agreement with all the stereotypes earlier ascribed to each target.

2.4. Procedure

A female who was familiar with both the Spanish and Latin American culture individually interviewed each of the children. The interview was conducted in a quiet room within the school context. Each interview, recorded on micro-cassette, lasted approximately 45 min and was transcribed into a verbal protocol. The interview transcriptions did not contain information that revealed the children’s identity, including ethnicity.

The same person who conducted the interviews scored the data, assisted by a research assistant who was familiar with this type of research.

3. Results

All hypotheses were tested using repeated measures analyses of variance (ANOVAs) and multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs). The follow-up tests to analyze the interaction effects consisted of multiple comparisons and t-tests.

3.1. Stereotype knowledge: What other people think about Gypsies, Latin Americans, Chinese, and Spaniards

First, we considered the Spanish and the Latin American children’s overall evaluations of positive and negative stereotypes of each of the four target ethnic groups (as well as the overall evaluations for the sample as a whole). Table 1 reports the mean number of positive and negative stereotypes (trait adjectives) that the children assigned to each of the four ethnic groups.

Table 1
Mean (and SD) number of positive (maximum possible = 8) and negative (maximum possible = 12) stereotypes assigned to each ethnic group by Spanish and Latin American participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of stereotype and target ethnic group</th>
<th>Participant ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spaniard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive stereotypes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanishian</td>
<td>4.52 (1.70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>2.33 (1.55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin American</td>
<td>1.02 (1.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gypsy</td>
<td>.73 (1.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative stereotypes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanishian</td>
<td>.92 (1.24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>1.58 (1.27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin American</td>
<td>3.33 (2.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gypsy</td>
<td>6.38 (2.08)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Two 2 (Child ethnicity: Spaniard, Latin American) × 3 (Grade: 2nd, 4th, 6th) × 4 (Target ethnic group: Gypsies, Chinese, Latin Americans, Spanish) ANOVAs with repeated measures on the last factor were conducted, one on the stereotype knowledge scores for the positive traits and one on the stereotype knowledge scores for the negatives trait adjectives. Analyses indicated overall main effects for ethnic target groups both for positive $F(3, 270) = 124.22, p < .001$, and negative adjectives, $F(3, 270) = 133.58, p < .001$. Mean comparisons showed that participants thought that most other people considered the Spaniards most positively while most people saw the Gypsies as the worst group. That is, participants attributed the greatest number of positive stereotypes (top row of upper half of Table 1) and the least number of negative attributes (top row of lower half of Table 1) to the Spaniards. In the opposite extreme, the Gypsies were scored the lowest in terms of positive stereotypes (bottom row in upper half of Table 1) and were scored with the highest number of negative stereotypes (bottom row of lower half of Table 1). The Chinese and the Latin American targets were situated between these two extremes and scores for positive and negative stereotypes assigned to them did not differ from one another.

It was hypothesized that Spanish children would show a sharp bias against Gypsies; in particular, they would report that most people would ascribe fewer positive traits and more negative traits to Gypsies than Latin American immigrant children would report. Contrary to our expectations, there were no differences in the knowledge displayed by Spaniards versus Latin American children of negative stereotypes regarding Gypsies or any other ethnic target group ($p > .15$). However, providing partial support for hypotheses regarding Spaniard versus Latin American children, analyses revealed a significant Ethnic target group × Child ethnicity interaction for positive trait stereotypes, $F(3, 270) = 6.43, p < .001$. This interaction effect was due to a greater number of Spanish than Latin American children attributing positive traits to Chinese people, $t(94) = 3.06, p < .003$ (see means in the lower portion of Table 1). Spanish children also attributed fewer negative stereotypes to Chinese people than Latin American participants did, but this difference did not reach statistical significance, $p = .07$.

A second prediction was that Spanish and Latin American participants would differ from one another in their self-perceptions and in their expectations of how the other ethnic group would view them. On the one hand, stereotypes of the Spaniard target group were perceived most positively by the Latin Americans as well as by the Spaniards themselves (see top row of Table 1). On the other hand, the Spanish participants had a perspective of the Latin Americans that was not as positive as the Latin Americans’ view of themselves (see third row of Table 1). Indeed, the Latin American ethnic target group was assigned fewer positive adjectives from Spaniards than from Latin American participants [third row of upper portion of Table 1, $t(94) = −3.55, p < .001$], as well as more negative attributes from Spanish than from Latin American children [third row of lower portion of Table 1, $t(94) = 2.11, p < .05$]. However, with respect to the Spanish target ethnic group, the results did not confirm predictions completely since Spanish and Latin American participants did not differ from one another in either their positive or negative attributions of Spaniards ($p > .50$).

In sum, the pattern of responses of Latin American and Spanish children were similar in that Spaniards were the group perceived most positively by others and the Gypsies were perceived most negatively—and least positively—by others; however, the Spaniard and Latin American children’s perceptions of the relative position of Chinese and Latin Americans did appear to vary with ethnicity of the child. The Spaniard children attributed more positive stereotypes and fewer negative stereotypes to Chinese immigrants than the Latin American children did and the opposite pattern was observed for stereotypes about Latin Americans. That is, Latin American children reported more positive stereotypes and fewer negative stereotypes for the Latin American ethnic group than the Spaniard children did.
Although there were no specific predictions about age differences in stereotype knowledge, the analysis revealed an ethnic target group × grade interaction effect for positive stereotypes, \( F(6, 270) = 2.62, p < .017 \). Multiple comparisons revealed an age incremental increase of the positive traits attributed to Gypsies, with 6th graders (\( M = 1.09, SD = 1.27 \)) assigning more positive traits than 2nd graders (\( M = .47, SD = .71 \)), \( p < .029 \). The difference between 4th (\( M = .53, SD = .67 \)) and 6th graders almost reached significance, \( p = .058 \). Grade differences were not found with regard to the negative traits attributed to Gypsies.

A target ethnic group × participant ethnicity × grade interaction was also significant, \( F(6, 270) = 2.71, p < .014 \). Multiple comparisons indicated that fourth grade Spanish children tended to make fewer positive attributions to their in-group than younger children [\( M_s (and SD_s) = 5.63 (1.14) \) and \( 3.94 (1.52) \) for 4th and 2nd graders, respectively, \( p's < .011 \)]. The difference between sixth graders and second graders approached significance (\( M = 4.25, 1.91 \)), \( p < .052 \).

### 3.2. Stereotype content: What specific stereotypes children ascribed to each group

Next we examined the specific content of the positive and negative stereotypes that children attributed to the different ethnic target groups. For each stereotype in every target group, we conducted one-factor (Participant ethnicity: Latin American, Spaniard) ANOVAs to test for between-participants effects.

#### 3.2.1. Stereotypes about Spaniards

The Spanish ethnic group obtained the greatest number of positive adjectives and the lowest number of negative adjectives from both the Spaniard and Latin American participants. Regarding the negative stereotypes, none of the adjectives was mentioned by more than 20% of the participants except “Drunk”, which was assigned to Spaniards by fewer than 21% of the Latin Americans and 19% of the Spaniards themselves, respectively (See lower right panel of Fig. 1). Each of the 12 positive adjectives was assigned to Spaniards by at least 40% of the participants, the most frequent ones being “Good-natured” (61.5% over all participants), “Joyful” (67.7%), “Hard-working” (61.5%), “Friendly” (58.3%), and “Smart” (56.3%), which were each assigned to Spaniards by the majority of the children (see lower right panel of Fig. 2). There were no significant differences between the Latin Americans’ and Spaniards’ assignment of any of the positive or negative stereotypes to Spaniards.

#### 3.2.2. Stereotypes about Latin Americans

With respect to negative stereotypes, Latin Americans were most frequently described as “Poor” (34.4% over all participants), “Drug dealer” (34.4%), “Lazy” (33.3%), and “Drunk” (31.3%). Although both Spaniard and Latin American children tended to report negative stereotypes of Latin Americans with equal frequency (see rates for “Poor”, “Lazy”, and “Drunk” for example in the lower left portion of Fig. 1), there were some differences between the two ethnic groups for some of the stereotypes. Spanish children were more likely than Latin Americans to report that other people viewed Latin Americans as “Evil” (See lower left portion of Fig. 1, \( F(1, 94) = 6.87, p < .01 \)). Although Spanish children reported that people saw Latin American people as “Drug dealers”, “Violent,” “Thieves”, and “Bad mannered” more often than Latin Americans did, these differences did not reach the level of significance. The Latin American ethnic group was not assigned any positive stereotypes by more than 30% of the children, although the quality of being “Pacific” approached this percentage (see lower left panel of Fig. 2). As can be seen in Fig. 2, all of the positive stereotypes were assigned to Latin Americans more frequently by
Latin American children than by Spanish children. However, the differences were significant only for two stereotypes (“Joyful” $F(1, 94) = 5.50, p < .021$ and “Friendly” $F(1, 94) = 5.09, p < .026$).

### 3.2.3. Stereotypes about Chinese people

Only one negative trait, “Envious” (33.3%), was mentioned for Chinese people by over 30% of the children. Two other negative attributes were mentioned somewhat often, “Cheaters (27.1%)” and “Violent (18.8%).” There were two significant differences between the Spanish and Latin American
children. Latin American children attributed the stereotypes of “Bad-mannered” \[ F(1, 94) = 5.55, p < .021 \] and “Poor” \[ F(1, 94) = 5.19, p < .025 \] to Chinese people significantly more often than Spanish children did (see upper right panel of Fig. 1). The most frequent positive traits attributed to Chinese people were “Smart” (37.5%), “Pacific” (32.3%), and “Hard-working” (28.1%). There were significant differences between the participants in the ascription of two positive traits: “Joyful” \[ F(1, 94) = 3.95, p < .05, \] and “Good-natured” \[ F(1, 94) = 4.49, p < .037 \] (see upper right panel of Fig. 2).

### 3.2.4. Stereotypes about Gypsies

Virtually all the negative adjectives were mentioned in relation to Gypsies by at least 30% of the children. The most frequently assigned traits were “Thieves” (74%), “Dirty” (68.8%), “Ragged” (63.5%), “Evil” (58.3%), “Bad-mannered” (57.3%), “Poor” (56.3%), “Cheater” (52.1%), and “Violent” (52.1%), (see upper left panel of Fig. 1). There were no significant differences between Spanish and Latin American children in the ascription of these negative stereotypes to Gypsies. This group was the one that received the lowest number of positive stereotypes and the greatest number of negative stereotypes compared to the rest of the ethnic target groups. The only remarkable positive attribution was “Good dancers” (33.3%). Fewer than 10% of the children attributed any of the other positive traits to Gypsies (see upper left panel of Fig. 2). Spanish and Latin American participants did not differ in their positive stereotypes of Gypsies.
3.3. Personal agreement with the social stereotypes

To test the hypothesis that older children would manifest more disagreement with the stereotypes than younger children we conducted three 2 (Child ethnicity: Spanish, Latin American) × 3 (Grade: 2nd, 4th, 6th) × 3 (Target ethnic group: Gypsies, Latin Americans, Spanish) ANOVAs with repeated measures on the last factor on the global agreement scores and positive and negative agreement scores. As predicted, the analysis of global agreement scores detected an effect for grade, $F(2, 89) = 4.24, p < .017$. The DHS Tukey post hoc analyses revealed a difference between 2nd graders ($M = .80, SD = .23$) and 6th graders ($M = .68, SD = .29$), $p < .014$.

This effect was qualified by target ethnic group × grade interaction, $F(4, 178) = 2.78, p < .028$. Multiple comparisons showed an age decrement in global agreement with the stereotypes for the Gypsies. Second graders ($M = .87, SD = .17$) agreed with the stereotypes more than fourth graders ($M = .71, SD = .33; p < .051$) and sixth graders ($M = .58, SD = .29; p < .001$).

Despite the absence of significant 3-way interactions, multiple comparisons revealed developmental differences in both groups of participants regarding the target of Gypsies. Specifically, Spanish 2nd graders were more likely to agree with the stereotypes ($M = .95, SD = .14$) than were 4th graders ($M = .65, SD = .30$), $p < .009$, and 6th graders ($M = .63, SD = .29$), $p < .004$. Latin American children showed a similar tendency, with 2nd graders ($M = .80, SD = .17$) more likely to agree with stereotypes than 6th graders ($M = .53, SD = .30$), $p < .016$.

With respect to the partial indexes of agreement with the positive and the negative stereotypes, there were no significant interactions involving target ethnic groups and grade. Nevertheless, some differences in partial indices of agreement associated with grade level were observed. First, sixth graders ($M = .83, SD = .26$) were less likely to agree with the positive stereotypes ascribed to Spaniards than fourth graders ($M = .97, SD = .13$), $p < .001$, and second graders ($M = .91, SD = .22$), $p < .011$. In addition, younger children were more likely to personally ascribe to negative stereotypes concerning Gypsies, with second graders expressing personal beliefs in the stereotypes to a greater degree ($M = .89, SD = .22$) than sixth graders ($M = .43, SD = .35$), $p < .006$.

To analyze grade level differences in the level of agreement with each stereotype for each of the four target ethnic groups we conducted 23 one-factor (Grade: 2nd, 4th, 6th) ANOVAs. Relevant means (and SDs) are presented in Table 2. Given the number of analyses conducted, results with a $p$-value greater than .0025 should be considered merely suggestive.

3.3.1. Gypsies

While many (approximately 58–100%; see column 2 in Table 2) of the children showed personal agreement with the stereotypes they had attributed on other people’s behalf to Gypsies, the greatest age differences in disagreement with the stereotypes were observed in connection with Gypsies. In particular, older children were more likely than younger children to personally disagree with negative stereotypes of Gypsies as “Thieves”, “Dirty”, “Ragged”, “Drunk”, “Evil”, and “Lazy” (see $F$’s and $p$’s < .001 from comparisons of grades 2, 4, and 6 in the last two columns of Table 2). The percentage of children in each grade who disagreed with a previously assigned stereotype of Gypsies is presented in Fig. 3 for these stereotypes. As the black lines representing second graders show, nearly every second grader personally believed in the stereotypes while fewer than 50% of the sixth graders agreed with most of them, and fewer than 25% agreed with stereotypes about Gypsies being “Lazy”, “Badly dressed”, and “Drunk”.

3.3.2. Latin Americans

There were many negative stereotypes that children ascribed to Latin Americans when they were asked to assign stereotyped traits to the four ethnic groups (e.g., “Poor”, “Drug dealers”, “Drunk”, “Lazy”, and “Violent” among others). However, children did disagree with some stereotypes held by other people for this ethnic group. For example, approximately half of the participants who had reported that most people thought Latin Americans were lazy (see the number of participants who ascribed this stereotype to Latin Americans in column 1 of Table 2) expressed their personal disagreement and did not personally perceive Latin Americans as “Lazy” (in column 2 of Table 2). There were no differences between Spanish and Latin American participants on the level of agreement with stereotypes for the Latin American ethnic group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stereotype</th>
<th>Stereotype knowledge</th>
<th>Personal agreement</th>
<th>Developmental differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>df</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gypsies</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thief</td>
<td>71 (74)</td>
<td>51 (72.9)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dirty</td>
<td>66 (68.8)</td>
<td>47 (71.2)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ragged</td>
<td>61 (63.5)</td>
<td>36 (59)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad-mannered</td>
<td>55 (57.3)</td>
<td>40 (74.1)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evil</td>
<td>56 (58.3)</td>
<td>40 (71.4)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>54 (56.3)</td>
<td>36 (66.7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheat</td>
<td>50 (52.1)</td>
<td>37 (75.5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drunk</td>
<td>45 (46.9)</td>
<td>26 (57.8)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug dealer</td>
<td>47 (49)</td>
<td>34 (72.3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lazy</td>
<td>37 (38.5)</td>
<td>25 (67.6)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good dancer</td>
<td>32 (33.3)</td>
<td>32 (100)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Latin Americans</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>33 (34.4)</td>
<td>21 (65.6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug dealer</td>
<td>33 (34.4)</td>
<td>23 (71.9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lazy</td>
<td>32 (33.3)</td>
<td>15 (46.9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drunk</td>
<td>30 (31.3)</td>
<td>16 (53.3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chinese</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good natured</td>
<td>68 (70.8)</td>
<td>58 (87.9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spaniards</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joyful</td>
<td>65 (67.7)</td>
<td>62 (95.4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly</td>
<td>56 (58.3)</td>
<td>48 (87.3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard working</td>
<td>59 (61.5)</td>
<td>57 (96.6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smart</td>
<td>54 (56.3)</td>
<td>51 (94.4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nice</td>
<td>52 (54.2)</td>
<td>49 (98)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good dancer</td>
<td>42 (43.8)</td>
<td>39 (92.9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td>39 (40.6)</td>
<td>32 (82.1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The values of the first column represent the number (%) of children who assigned each stereotype to a particular ethnic group. The values of the second column represent the number of subjects that personally agreed with the stereotype previously assigned.

3.3.2. Latin Americans

There were many negative stereotypes that children ascribed to Latin Americans when they were asked to assign stereotyped traits to the four ethnic groups (e.g., “Poor”, “Drug dealers”, “Drunk”, “Lazy”, and “Violent” among others). However, children did disagree with some stereotypes held by other people for this ethnic group. For example, approximately half of the participants who had reported that most people thought Latin Americans were lazy (see the number of participants who ascribed this stereotype to Latin Americans in column 1 of Table 2) expressed their personal disagreement and did not personally perceive Latin Americans as “Lazy” (in column 2 of Table 2). There were no differences between Spanish and Latin American participants on the level of agreement with stereotypes for the Latin American ethnic group.
3.3.3. Chinese people

Children reported few personal disagreements with the stereotypes ascribed to Chinese people when they were asked if they personally agreed with such stereotypes. There were no significant grade level differences in personal agreement with stereotypes about Chinese people and no differences in responses of Spaniard and Latin American children.

3.3.4. Spaniards

In contrast to what was observed regarding the Gypsies, the Spaniards were the target group to which children of all grades showed the greatest level of agreement with the stereotypes, and there were no developmental (grade) differences. Most of the stereotypes ascribed to Spaniards were positive ("Nice", "Joyful", "Hard-working", "Friendly", and "Smart" were the most frequent ones), and the majority of children, regardless of whether they were Spanish or Latin American, supported virtually all of those adjectives. Even though a slight age-related tendency of diminished agreement with age for certain positive stereotypes (such as "Nice") was detected, especially among 6th graders, this decrement did not reach statistically significant levels.

4. Discussion

The children’s reports of stereotypes that apply to the four ethnic groups, i.e., what other people think about each target group, and the analysis of the specific content of the stereotypes applied to each ethnic group showed that both Spanish and Latin American children situated the Spaniards and the Gypsies at the two extreme poles of positivity and negativity, respectively. Traditionally, Gypsies have been described as the people at the margins of the European society, “the European pariahs”, “our Blacks”, according to Marjanovic (2001). We expected that Spanish participants would show greater knowledge of the negative stereotypes ascribed to the Gypsies than Latin American participants would given their greater history in European society. However, the results did not confirm this expectation: The Spanish
sample and the Latin American sample selected analogous terms to describe Gypsy characteristics, stressing the negative view held by others regarding the Gypsies in similar ways. The negative stereotypes associated with this target ethnic group stayed at a very high level for both samples at all three ages.

Considering that the Gypsy culture has less significance and visibility in Latin American countries than in Spain (Gómez, 2005), this was a surprising similarity. These results show the extent to which popular beliefs about the Gypsies, and the stereotyped understanding of their way of life, have expanded and may perhaps be present around the world. Even though the Gypsies in South America do not suffer the execrable discrimination they suffer in Europe, they may be victims of a refined and subtle discrimination manifested either through a false tolerance disguised as indifference from the non-Gypsies, or by attributing the responsibility of the evil in social life to them (Gómez, 2005). Thus, when a robbery or a crime happens, Gypsies appear to be much more likely than non-Gypsies to be blamed. The prejudices traditionally ascribed to this group are far from vanishing. The Gypsies continue to live between indifference and exclusion in different parts of the world.

Indeed, the fact that the Latin American children showed as much prejudice against Gypsies as Spanish children could also be an outcome of their experience in Spain. That is, the similarity in stereotypes might indicate they have acquired more stereotypes and prejudices as a result of living in Spain. However, the analyses did not show a correlation between the amount of time living in Spain and the extent of prejudice against the Gypsies measured by the number of negative attributes assigned to this group. Nevertheless this finding is disquieting.

Our second prediction was that both ethnic groups of children would think that people hold a more positive perspective of the majority group (Spaniards) than of the minority group (Latin Americans). The results confirmed this prediction. Latin American participants conveyed a more positive perception of the Spaniards than of their own in-group of Latin Americans regarding the stereotypes held by others. This finding is consistent with those of previous investigations with minorities or economically subordinated groups (Aboud, 1988; Bagley & Young, 1998; Corenblum & Annis, 1993; Katz & Kofkin, 1997). On the other hand, we also expected Latin Americans to think that people had a better opinion about their group than the Spaniards held about Latin Americans, and the converse. The results confirmed only the first expectation: Latin American participants thought that people had a better opinion of their in-group as compared to what the Spaniard participants thought about Latin Americans. However, there were no differences between these groups of participants in their perception of stereotypes held by others regarding Spaniards. Children from Spain and Latin America each attributed the majority of virtues to Spaniards.

An important difference between the Spanish and Latin American participants was the perception that other people have about their own ethnic group. Spanish children attributed a highly positive perception of their in-group to others, while Latin American children attributed a rather negative perception of their in-group to these others. This finding supports the idea that minority group children develop an acute awareness of the negative image that others hold about their own in-group. Indeed, Latin American children seemed well aware of their lower status, and of differences between their in-group and the majority group in terms of social acceptability (Verkuyten, 2004). Yet, since Spaniards share many linguistic and cultural characteristics with Latin Americans, we did not expect Spanish children to attribute such a negative social perspective of Latin Americans to others. Certainly, this is a surprising finding; opinion polls as well as some studies on immigration in Spain carried out in recent years with
adults (CIS, 2004) show that Latin American groups are regarded more positively than North African or Asian groups.

A feasible explanation is that even if some opinion polls favor Latin Americans over Gypsies and Moors, there is also an increasing stereotyped perception of them as immigrants who create problems. As the European Commission Against Racism (2003) states in its Second Report about Spain, there is an “extensive use of stereotypes, distortions, and sensationalistic images in public statistics and mass media where immigrants are presented as arriving to Spain in ‘waves’ that threaten security and, in some cases, national and local identity. Because of this, Spanish society in general thinks that alien population has reached harmful levels to security and to job availability” (pp. 22–23). This is Spain’s “highly perturbing issue.” Children in Spain are exposed to this information regarding social groups on a daily basis. Judgments and evaluations about the different groups living in Spain are included in this information, and children assimilate it even before they are able to understand it. Thus, social processes combined with developmental cognitive–perceptive ones contribute to form children’s knowledge and attitudes towards their own and other ethnic groups. A further socio-cognitive step will be becoming aware of ethnic prejudices and discrimination as social negative circumstances that impede the well-being of minority groups suffering discrimination.

Our third prediction was related to the developmental trends in the relationship between knowledge of stereotypes and personal agreement with such social stereotypes. We expected that older children would be more likely to personally disagree with the social stereotypes than younger children would. Although there was a general tendency to disagree with the stereotypes with age, there were also differences according to the target ethnic groups.

Regarding the target of Gypsies, the findings showed a relationship between grade and agreement with the stereotypes. In particular, older children increasingly expressed personal disagreement with some of the negative stereotypes attributed to the Gypsies. That is, older children distanced themselves from the socially shared stereotypes about the Gypsies, expressing different personal beliefs. It is remarkable that this developmental trend was noticeable regarding one of the most rejected groups, as are the Gypsies. During the interviews, many older children expressed awareness of the stigmatization of Gypsies. They explicitly mentioned that Gypsies are a target of prejudice and discrimination much more than any other group, and expressed their sensitivity against the extremely negative perception of this group.

Interestingly, there were few age (grade) differences in children’s level of agreement with the stereotypes associated with either Spaniards or Latin Americans. Concerning personal beliefs about Spaniards, the level of agreement with the stereotypes was high, in general, and there was just a slight tendency with age to diminish agreement with the positive stereotypes tied to this target group. With respect to Latin Americans, the level of personal disagreement with the negative stereotypes linked to them was relatively high in all ages (though more pronounced among Latin Americans themselves than among Spaniards). Recall that there was also a tendency with age to increase positive stereotypes associated with Latin Americans in the entire sample.

These results could indicate, as some authors argue (Rutland, 2004), that the decrease of ethnic bias in mid-childhood is not always perceptible as shown in some recent studies (Bennett, Lyons, Sani, & Barrett, 1998; Durkin & Houghton, 2000; Rutland, 1999). However, though our findings did not always show a sustained decline with age in the agreement with the social stereotypes regarding every group, the tendency of the findings were as predicted. In general, older children were more prone to reject the negative stereotypes than younger children were. This trend might have been more pronounced if we had
studied children from 5–6 years of age, as in Augoustinos and Rosewarne’s (2001) research. These authors found congruence between knowledge of stereotypes and personal beliefs among 5–6 years-old children, but not among 8–9 year-olds. Those older children were more likely to express personal beliefs that diverged from their knowledge of stereotypes. In our study, the youngest children were aged 7–8 years, so it is quite possible that they had more awareness of the divergence between opinions and stereotypes than the younger children studied by Augoustinos and Rosewarne. That may explain why we found fewer developmental differences in the level of disagreement with the cultural stereotypes.

Considering the social and cognitive achievements occurring around the age of 7–8 years in different domains, it seems reasonable to propose that children at this age are equipped with the capacity to make distinctions between their own and others’ knowledge. Cognitive flexibility increases in later childhood allowing the children to question the dominant social stereotypes.

Though we cannot directly contrast our results to Devine’s (1989) predictions since in this study we did not report measures of children’s prejudice, some of our findings are consistent with her assumptions. For example, early in life children learn the cultural stereotypes associated with one of the most stigmatized groups in Western societies: Gypsies. On the other hand, there is a developmental trend consisting in a progressive disagreement or distance from the cultural stereotypes, particularly the negative ones. However, the problem of how to disentangle social desirability bias from genuine beliefs remains, as Augoustinos and Rosewarne (2001, p. 153) stressed in their study. Do prejudices actually decrease (Aboud, 1988) as a result of developmentally more complex processes of control (Devine, 1989) or we are simply facing a social desirability effect (Crosby et al., 1980)? Older children may not express their true prejudiced attitudes because they have more capacity than younger ones to hide their personal opinions when these are socially ‘incorrect’, and to express what they suppose the interviewer is expecting to hear.

Since we have used direct measures of both children’s knowledge of stereotypes and personal opinions, it can be argued that the explicitness of the task could have elicited a greater sensitivity towards socially acceptable responses on the part of children. Obviously, we cannot dismiss the possibility that our results, especially those regarding the level of agreement with the stereotypes, could be the effect of this recurring problem in developmental research in this area.

On the other hand, as Augoustinos and Rosewarne (2001) have stated, younger children, in opposition to older ones, could have difficulties in discriminating between their personal beliefs and those of other people. Additionally, in their study as well as in our own, children were asked first about other people’s beliefs and then about their own beliefs. This could have made them think that they needed to change their response from one question to another. Nevertheless, Augoustinos and Rosewarne found that in spite of this, older children differed in their responses (stereotypes and personal beliefs) only in reference to Black, and not White, people. In this study, no differences were observed in connection to any of the groups, except for the Gypsies. It is remarkable, for instance, that significant age differences were only found in the agreement with the negative stereotypes about Gypsies attributed to others.

Therefore, these results can be explained according to the socio-cognitive approach adopted in Devine’s (1989) model. She suggests that older children’s cognitive resources allow them to assess, question, and test the prevalent social representations. Moreover, as children grow older, they are more capable of questioning the predominant stereotypes about ethnic groups in those societies that foster egalitarian values.

Although the findings about ethnic stereotyping could be interpreted as the result of changes in children’s cognitive abilities, we cannot disregard that this theory, by itself, does not provide a
comprehensive explanation of the development of prejudice in childhood. As Nesdale (2004) has stated, interpreting the results solely in this direction is a critical problem in developmental research about prejudice. Changes in cognitive abilities do not determine ethnic attitudes. In order to provide a more complete interpretation we must consider other approaches such as the social identity developmental theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) that takes into account the social identity processes involved in the development of children’s attitudes.

The question of how to measure prejudice has been largely debated in developmental research. Some authors (Margie, Killen, Sinno, & McGlothlin, 2005; McGlothlin et al., 2005; Nesdale, 2001, 2004, among others) propose that it is important to use indirect measures to assess children’s prejudice. That is, those in which the child is not aware of the pursued objective instead of forced choice methods. In future studies, it would be desirable to use implicit racial bias techniques similar to those applied by authors like McGlothlin et al. (2005). These techniques do not approach the problem of prejudice in a direct and explicit way. Instead, they approach it through ambiguous yet familiar situations that are close to the context where the child develops.

However, we must not ignore the role of awareness and controlled processes. Children become increasingly aware of stereotypes, social values and norms, as they develop the ability to adopt a social perspective, and though this ability does not guarantee the reduction of prejudices, it represents the basis for revising them. As Devine et al. (2001) assert, automatic prejudices are more malleable and context-specific than previously believed, and as such they can be altered.

We must keep in mind that our findings cannot be interpreted aside from sociopolitical factors. In Spain, like in other Mediterranean countries (Italy, for instance) where cultural and ethnic heterogeneity is a recent condition, the relationships between the Spaniard majority group and the diverse minority groups are continuously changing as a consequence of the integration of these groups to the social system. Ethnic minority children living in Spain are facing increasing negative attitudes on the part of the majority group, and as Lo Coco, Inguglia, and Pace (2005) indicate, this situation impels minority group children to reject their own ethnic group and to develop positive attitudes towards the majority group, which is perceived as strong and prestigious.

The results of the present study, as well as other studies that we are currently conducting with Latin American children, confirm the appalling increase of hostility towards Latin American minorities in Spain. It is therefore urgent to cope with this problem from diverse social and educational approaches.

Acknowledgements

Our sincere thanks to the teachers and children who participated in this research. The research reported in this article was supported by Grants received from the Spanish Ministry of Science (DGICYT, BSO2002-05130), and from the Autonomous Community of Madrid (CAM, 06/HSE/0016/2004).

References


