Symbols and labels: Children's awareness of social categories in a divided society

Document Version:
Peer reviewed version

Symbols and labels: Children's awareness of social categories in a divided society

Laura K. Taylor*[1,2], Jocelyn Dautel[2], and Risa Rylander[2]

[1] University College Dublin

[2] Queen's University Belfast

*Corresponding author information: Laura K. Taylor, School of Psychology, University College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland (e-mail: laura.taylor@ucd.ie).

Abstract:

Aims: How and when children develop an understanding of group boundaries have

implications for conflict resolution. When social divisions are not perceptually distinct,

symbols become particularly important. Framed by Social Identity Development Theory, this

study was designed to assess children's categorization of symbols with conflict-related group

labels.

Method: In Northern Ireland, 218 children (M=8.14, SD = 1.83, range 5-11 years old)

participated in a novel task designed for this study. The sample was evenly split by child

gender and community background.

Results: Children sorted symbols above chance with both the hypothesized national (i.e.,

British/Irish) and ethno-political (i.e., Protestant/Catholic) labels, showing a stronger

association for the former. Sorting was also stronger for ingroup symbols, compared to outgroup symbols, and increased with age.

Conclusion: These findings reflect the potential role that a divided social world has on the development of children's understanding of conflict-related groups. The results also have implications for intergroup relations among children in divided societies.

Symbols and labels: Children's awareness of social categories in a divided society

Childhood is a critical period for the development of social categorization, which shapes intergroup relations. During this period, social cues and motivations, such as political socialization in a setting of protracted conflict (Escuin Checa & Taylor, 2017; Nasie, Diamond, & Bar-Tal, 2015; Reidy et al., 2015), may increase children's awareness of relevant social categories. However, research on children's early social categorization has typically focused on groups that are visibly differentiated (e.g., gender, race; Aboud, 1988; Nesdale, 2001). Less is known about when children attend to ingroup-outgroup distinctions if the important social categories are less perceptually distinct; in these cases, symbols may become particularly important markers of identity (Brewer, 1999; **Moeschberger & Phillips DeZalia, 2014**).

Framed by Social Identity Development Theory (SIDT; Nesdale, Durkin, Maass, & Griffiths, 2005), this study investigates the development of children's awareness about symbols relevant to social divisions rooted in intergroup conflict (Cairns, 1980, 1987; Houston, Crozier, & Walker, 1990; Jahoda & Harrison, 1975). Extending past qualitative work with preschool-aged children in Northern Ireland (NI; Connolly, Smith, & Kelly, 2002), we develop a quantitative measure and test it with primary school children, ages 5 to 11 years old. Given the role of social ecological influences in SIDT these ages are particularly important, as over 90% of children in NI attend educational institutions that are divided along group lines (Hayes, McAllister, & Dowds, 2006). The study's three aims make novel contributions. First, children's awareness of the conflict-related social categories – national (i.e., British/Irish) and ethno-political (i.e., Protestant/Catholic) – in NI (Gallagher, 1989) is explored. Second, differences in awareness of ingroup and outgroup symbols are examined. Third, age differences are tested. Finally, deepening the study of social categorization of non-phenotypically distinct groups, this study advances understanding about which symbols are

salient markers of conflict-related social categories, particularly for the 'post-accord generation' (i.e., children born after the height of conflict).

Children's Social Categorization

More broadly, categorization helps children to organize the world. Social categories may be based on demographic traits, social roles, kinship networks, shared tasks, or other social cues (Bodenhausen, Kang, & Peery, 2012). Being able to distinguish between particular social categories, and their associated features, enables children to navigate daily life. As such, it is important to understand when and how these social categories develop in societies that are "differentiated along a single primary categorization, such as ethnicity or religion, [particularly] if the categorization is dichotomous, dividing the society into two significant subgroups" (Brewer, 1999, p. 439). Drawing from existing research on salient social groups and minimal group studies, this paper introduces SIDT to explore how children may develop a sense of social categories that are not perceptually distinct.

A large base of literature focuses on the development of social categories that are perceptually different. By the age of one, infants can distinguish between social categories such as gender (Ramsey, Langlois, & Marti, 2005; Rennels, Kayl, Langlois, Davis, & Orlewicz, 2016), race (Anzures et al., 2013; Kelly et al., 2005; Ziv & Banaji, 2012), and accent (Kinzler, Dupoux, & Spelke, 2007). Based on this awareness, by the age of four, children display social preferences based on gender, race, ethnicity, age, language, and accent (Aboud, 1988; French, 1987; Kinzler, Shutts, DeJesus, & Spelke, 2009; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1987) and can explicitly identify members of their own ethnic group apart from ethnic out-group members (Nesdale et al., 2005). From the age of five, children are comparable to adults in their ability to distinguish and identify people based on physical traits (Pozzulo & Lindsay, 1998). Moreover, research on minimal groups suggests that even simple distinctions, such as team names or colours are readily recognized by school-aged children (Dunham, Baron, &

Carey, 2011; Nesdale & Flesser, 2001). Yet, this research also shows that group-based preferences are not uniformly found if the outgroup is not physically distinct (e.g., Bigler, Jones, & Lobliner, 1997; Bigler, Spears Brown, & Markell, 2001).

Yet, little is known about when children develop knowledge about less perceptually differentiated group distinctions, such as nationality or religion. As young as five, children have also been found to differentiate others on the basis of non-visible social categories, including religion and nationality (Barrett, Wilson, & Lyons, 2003; Diesendruck & HaLevi, 2006; Jahoda, 1962; Slavtcheva-Petkova, 2013; Reizabal, Valencia, & Barrett, 2004). And in fact, children categorize more readily based on generic category labels than shared perceptual differences (Gelman, Collman, & Maccoby, 1986). Moreover, these studies suggest that understanding and attitudes toward ingroup and outgroup nationalities, for example, may change with age (Barrett, Wilson, & Lyons, 2003).

Complementing the minimal group paradigm, a focus on natural groups deepens understanding of how children develop understanding around the content of social categories (Weisel & Böhm, 2015). In societies where social categories may not be highly visible or perceptually different (e.g., group-based accents), other social cues are accentuated. That is, "*symbols* and behaviours that differentiate the ingroup from local outgroups become particularly important" (Brewer, 1999, p. 433, emphasis added).

Social Identity Development Theory (SIDT)

In such contexts, SIDT may be a particularly helpful framework to explain when and how children develop a sense of social groups. SIDT suggests that differentiation of social categories is not solely based on children's increasing cognitive abilities with age, or familiarity through exposure, but that it is also informed by those around them (Nesdale et al., 2005). More specifically, SIDT outlines how social motivations and the surrounding context or events (i.e., the social ecology; Cummings, Goeke-Morey, Merrilees, Taylor, & Shirlow,

2014) may influence children's ethnic identity development through four (potential) phases of (1) undifferentiated, (2) ethnic awareness, (3) ethnic preferences, and (4) ethnic prejudice (Nesdale et al., 2005). Yet, although ethnic awareness is a foundational step, it does not automatically lead to ethnic preference and prejudice.

This paper focuses on the development of *ethnic awareness*, defined as the ability to distinguish between socially-determined cues representing group distinctiveness and members of different groups (Nesdale, 2001), in a setting of intergroup conflict. Ethnic awareness, or awareness of ingroup vs. outgroup distinctions, increases with age and is shaped by the child's social ecology, such as schools (Connolly et al., 2002; McKeown & Taylor, 2018), families (Taylor & McKeown, 2019), and neighbourhoods (Merrilees et al., 2018). In settings of intergroup conflict, the social ecology is often divided. Children often grow up in relatively homogenous schools and neighbourhoods (Hughes, Campbell, Hewstone, & Cairns, 2007), and families may emphasize group-based holidays and rituals (Taylor & McKeown, 2019). Yet, the presence of the outgroup is salient and intergroup relations remain tense (Knox, 2011). Thus, while children may have greater exposure to ingroup symbols because of segregated social lives, knowledge of outgroup symbols may be particularly salient because of the potential perceived threat (McGrellis, 2010).

Northern Ireland (NI)

The protracted conflict in NI is between two primary groups, those who want to remain part of the United Kingdom, and those who seek independence or unification with the Republic of Ireland (Cairns & Darby, 1998). In this context, while British and Irish refer to *national* affiliations, labels of Catholic and Protestant refer to *ethno-political* groups whose members have a history of conflict over diverging religious, national, and political interests. Although these categories are highly overlapping, they are often investigated in isolation (Gallagher & Cairns, 2011). Moreover, these social categories are not based on physical traits

of the person or accent (Stringer & Cairns, 1983); instead, social cues and symbols demarcate group membership (Brown & Macginty, 2003; Stringer & Cook, 1985).

The most recent period of heightened intergroup violence, the Troubles (1968-1998), was in response to the historic lower status of Catholics in terms of employment, housing, education, and political affairs (Cairns & Darby, 1998). Although direct violence has greatly decreased since the 1998 peace accord, intergroup hostility remains (Taylor, Merrilees, Goeke-Morey, Shirlow, & Cummings, 2016), particularly around Orange Order parades, annual marches by the Protestant community, often through Catholic neighbourhoods (McAuley & Tonge, 2007). Even in the post-accord generation, social divisions are reinforced by the majority of the population living in segregated housing and attending separate schools (Shuttleworth & Lloyd, 2009). Moreover, social life is organized along group boundaries, which are demarcated by 'peace walls,' murals, curb paintings, graffiti, and flags (Leonard & McKnight, 2011), as well as defined psychologically and culturally in terms of social activities or sporting events (Connolly et al., 2002; Sugden & Bairner, 1986). Reflecting national identification divisions, those in NI can choose to have a British, Irish, or both passports. Thus, the post-accord generation is socialized in the shadow of conflict. However, it is not clear when an awareness of these social categories, and their salient features or symbols, emerges for this new generation born into a time of relative peace.

Current Study

Theoretically, the current study investigates the development of ethnic awareness, stage one of SIDT, in two novel ways. First, complementing the development and application of SIDT in multi-ethnic societies, we will explore the shift from undifferentiated to ethnic awareness for non-phenotypically distinct groups. To do so, the importance of contextually relevant group symbols and behaviours becomes paramount (Brown & Macginty, 2003; Brewer, 1999; Stringer & Cook, 1985). Second, /given that the vast majority of previous

research on intergroup relations has been conducted in stable democracies like the US or Australia, we will examine how symbol categorization demonstrates ethnic awareness in a setting of recent intergroup violence (Greenwald & Pettigrew, 2014).

Empirically, the current study also builds on earlier research in NI. Qualitative interviews in the post-accord setting found that some children can identify a limited number of conflict-related social category symbols as young as three years old (Connolly et al., 2002). This finding supports research during the Troubles which found children were sensitised to group symbols and markers, such as colours, occupations, and names (Cairns, 1980, 1987; Houston et al., 1990; Jahoda & Harrison, 1975). Collating the markers across this previous work, as well as publications since the Troubles (McKeown & Taylor, 2017), a wide-range of symbols that primary school-aged children might encounter are tested (Reidy et al., 2015). Symbols represent different levels of the social ecology (Cummings et al., 2014); for example, there are more proximate examples from the child's micro- and mesosystems (e.g., family, school, or neighbourhood), as well as more distal examples from national politics or sports teams which represent social group markers at a macrosystem level. With this approach, we have developed a novel, easily applied and replicable quantitative measure to test how symbols are associated with knowledge of both national (British/Irish) and ethno-political (Protestant/Catholic) social categories.

Aim 1: To examine ethnic awareness, or the ability to differentiate between the socially-determined symbols through the lens of SIDT, the current study first compares children's categorisation of symbols with the two conflict-related social categories (national: British/Irish; ethno-political: Protestant/Catholic). However, as previous research has not directly included both national and ethno-political labels, we do not have an explicit hypothesis about which might be more salient for children.

Aim 2: To further understand these patterns, the categorization of ingroup vs. outgroup symbols is compared. On the one hand, it is possible that based on segregated living and schooling, children may be exposed to ingroup symbols, showing a high awareness of those and not of outgroup symbols. On the other hand, because of the history of tension, children may be sensitized and acutely attentive to outgroup symbols, such as curb painting or flags, which may indicate they are entering the outgroup space. That is, ethnic awareness of outgroup symbols might be very high, as children are socialised to avoid them. Therefore, based on SIDT and the context of NI, we hypothesize there will not be substantial differences in ingroup/outgroup ethnic awareness. That is, we predict children will show awareness of both ingroup/outgroup symbols because of their importance in the social context.

Aim 3: Given the potential socialization during the primary school years, analyses will also be explored by age. SIDT outlines how the social ecology influences the development of ethnic awareness over time until age 10 to 11 (Vaughan, 1964). For example, educational contexts can affect how children think about social categories (Smyth, Feeney, Eidson & Coley, 2017), and attending divided schools should increase awareness of conflict-related social categories with age (Jahoda & Harrison, 1975). Moreover, in the later primary school years, children may have more freedom and mobility (Fyhri & Hjorthol, 2009). Thus, older children may also be exposed to more symbols, including those from the other community. Therefore, we hypothesize that the ability to sort symbols with both national and ethno-political labels will increase with age. As an exploratory analysis, we will also examine potential age-related patterns across sorting symbols by national and ethno-political labels.

Method

Participants

In NI, 94% of children attend either state-controlled (*de facto* Protestant) schools or schools that are maintained by the Catholic church (Hayes et al., 2006). For the current study,

we recruited 246 child participants from two state-controlled *de facto* Protestant and one Catholic-maintained school from November 2017 to January 2018. In one controlled school and the one maintained school, approximately one-third of the pupils received free school meals (FSM), while in the second controlled school, two-thirds of pupils received FSM. Principals provided written consent for data collection in their schools. Across all schools, a total of 690 parental consent letters were sent home with all children in grades primary 2 (ages 5-6) to primary 7 (ages 10-11), giving a 36% return rate, and children provided written assent.

Children with parents who did not identify with one of the two primary communities in NI (i.e., Protestant/Catholic) were removed from current analyses; of those, eight were born outside of the British Isles and seven participants were part of an ethnic minority. Thirteen children were removed due to experimenter error. The final 218 participants ($M =$ 8.14, $SD = 1.83$, range 5-11 years old; 49% female, $n=106$, 51% male, $n=112$) were relatively evenly split between the two community backgrounds (Catholic 59%, $n=128$; Protestant 41%, $n=90$).

Procedure

Children were taken out of class and worked individually with an experimenter for 15 minutes in a quiet area of the school. Experimenters, undergraduate or graduate students of [*Author-Identifying University*], were all trained as part of the *Helping Kids!* lab and followed a written script. If a child was having difficulties with the task, prompts reinforced there were no right or wrong answers. The data presented are part of a larger project; each experimenter, therefore, was not aware of all hypotheses. Preliminary analyses did not identify any significant differences in children's responses across experimenters. Children first participated in a short training in which they were asked to sort five pairs of various salty and sweet foods. After children had completed the testing session, they received a certificate and

a small prize. All procedures were approved by the Ethics Committee at [*Author-Identifying University*] and materials can be found on [*Author Identifying Web Site*].

Materials

The tasks were administered on iPads or laptops via Qualtrics. For the open sorting task, 38 images (19 pairs of symbols: one hypothesized to be from each community background) were utilized. These images were drawn from previous research on symbols in NI, both during and after the Troubles (Cairns, 1980, 1987; Connolly et al., 2002; Houston et al., 1990; Jahoda & Harrison, 1975; Leonard & McKnight, 2011; **Moeschberger & Phillips DeZalia, 2014;** Sugden & Bairner, 1986), and were also selected to represent a wider range of the social ecology (McKeown & Taylor, 2017). Image pairs were organized into three subsections: neighbourhoods and flags (7 pairs; e.g., British flag/Irish flag), sports and activities (6 pairs; e.g., Gaelic football/Rugby ball), and community and religion (6 pairs; e.g., Minister/Priest) (see On-line Appendix at *Author Identifying Website*). Children were asked to drag and drop any of the images from that subsection into one of two boxes with either national (British/Irish) or ethno-political (Protestant/Catholic) labels. The order of the images in each subsection, the subsections, and the labels were all randomized and counterbalanced in a within-subjects design; that is, each child sorted all images for both national and ethno-political labels.

At the beginning of each trial, researchers first pointed to and read each of the two labels on boxes that were side-by-side (i.e., British/Irish or Catholic/Protestant), then went down the subsection of images, pointing to and reading aloud each image name. Finally, researchers asked participants, "Which of these belong in the boxes?" Children were encouraged to sort the images independently and at their own pace. Within each subsection, participants were reminded that they did not need to sort every image; in practice, the children enjoyed the task and chose to sort all of the images.

Children's sorting was coded 1 if the image was categorized with the hypothesized label (e.g., British Flag was sorted as 'British') and 0 if the image was categorized with the alternative label (e.g., British flag was sorted as 'Irish'). If the child did not choose to sort the image with either label, this was coded as missing (5.6% across all children, symbols, and labels). The most common missing images were the Falls and Shankill Road signs, with 10% of children choosing not to sort with either national or ethno-political labels; for national labels only, 11% chose not to sort the mural with the Union Flag, and for ethno-political labels only, 9% chose not to sort the cricket bat. The proportion of images sorted in the hypothesized direction was calculated for each child with a range from 0 to 1, with higher scores indicating more accurate sorting.

Results

A series of one sample t-tests were conducted to examine categorization against chance to understand (Aim 1) which symbols children match to national and ethno-political labels, and if there are any differences in the pattern of findings based on (Aim 2) ingroup vs. outgroup symbols. The significance level was adjusted using a Bonferroni correction ($p < .05$ / 38 images = .0013) for each set of analyses. Age findings (Aim 3) were explored with bivariate correlations and t-tests within each age.

For Aim 1, sorting of images was explored by national (British/Irish) and ethno-political (Protestant/Catholic) labels. Paired samples t-tests showed that children were significantly better at sorting images with national ($M = .67$, $SD = .19$), compared to the ethno-religious ($M = .61$, $SD = .19$; $t(217) = 4.85$, $p < .001$) labels. Overall, children sorted 26 out of 38 images into the hypothesized category above chance for both British/Irish and Protestant/Catholic labels; only five images (i.e., mural of Bobby Sands, NI football badge, rugby ball, and street signs for Shankill Road and Falls Road) did not sort above chance for any label (Table 1; columns 1 and 2). The remaining seven images only sorted into the

hypothesized category above chance for one of the conflict-related social categories. Specifically, children only sorted the Protestant church into the hypothesized category with ethno-political labels, and the mural of William of Orange, Ulster flag, poppy, former Irish president, minister, and priest into the hypothesized category with national labels.

For Aim 2, participants were better able to sort ingroup images ($M = .66$, $SD = .18$) compared to outgroup images ($M = .62$, $SD = .19$; $t(217) = 4.62$, $p < .001$). Moreover, ingroup national scores ($M = .68$, $SD = .20$) were higher than outgroup national scores ($M = .65$, $SD = .22$; $t(217) = 2.80$, $p = .006$), and ethno-political ingroup scores ($M = .64$, $SD = .21$) were higher than ethno-political outgroup scores ($M = .58$, $SD = .22$; $t(217) = 4.46$, $p < .001$). Thus, while children were better able to sort ingroup symbols, they *also* showed an awareness of outgroup symbols.

Results were further explored by children's community background. For both ethno-political and national labels (Table 1; columns 3 and 4), five images (i.e., red/white/blue painted curb, orange/white/green painted curb, British passport, Protestant school, and Catholic school) sorted into the hypothesized category for children from both backgrounds, while 15 images did not sort for participants from either background. The remaining 18 images only sorted into the hypothesized category for participants from one background or the other. Reflecting the mean differences above, of these, the majority (13 images) was sorted into the hypothesized category by *ingroup* participants only. For example, Catholic participants sorted the hurling stick as both Catholic and Irish, while the Protestant participants did not sort this image above chance. At the same time, Protestant participants sorted the Queen as both Protestant and British, while Catholic participants did not. However, the remaining five images were sorted above chance only by *outgroup* participants. Four of these were Protestant/British images (i.e., mural with a Union Flag, Orange Order parade, Rangers jersey, and Protestant church) that participants from a Catholic background sorted

with the hypothesized category, while Protestant participants did not. Finally, participants from a Protestant background sorted the Celtic jersey above chance with both categories, while participants from a Catholic background did not.

For Aim 3, the pattern of findings was also examined by age. First, as a continuous predictor, age was significantly correlated with the number of images sorted into both national (r(216) = .56, p < .001) and ethno-political (r(216) = .43, p < .001) labels. These findings support our hypothesis that, with age, children would be better able to sort symbols with both national and ethno-political labels. Second, as an exploratory analysis, the pattern of children's awareness of both national and ethno-political labels by age was examined (Figure 1). In addition to the Bonferroni-corrected significance level (p< .0013), due to the smaller sample size for each age (e.g., age five, six, etc.), a traditional cut-off value of p<.05 is also reported. Consistent with the correlations, from age five to 11, children were better able to sort both national and ethno-political labels. Figure 2 also depicts these results showing a stronger ability to sort with the national labels, compared to ethno-political labels, as well as an increase in both from seven to nine years old.

Discussion

The current study investigated the development of ethnic awareness of non-phenotypically distinct groups in a setting of protracted conflict. Complementing and extending prior research in a number of important ways, we developed a new empirical tool which tests children's categorization of symbols across levels of the social ecology (i.e., including sports, culture, flags, religion, and neighbourhood life; Cummings et al., 2014). The tool allows for analyses that compare (Aim 1) children's associations with the conflict-related social categories (i.e., national: British/Irish; ethno-political: Protestant/Catholic), (Aim 2) categorization based on ingroup vs. outgroup symbols, and (Aim 3) how awareness of conflict-related symbols changes with age.

First (Aim 1), although children were aware of many symbols, the association with national labels appeared to be stronger than for the ethno-political categories. Second (Aim 2), children showed greater awareness of ingroup symbols overall, despite demonstrating knowledge of outgroup symbols. Finally (Aim 3), children's awareness of *both* conflict-related social categories increased with age. Exploratory findings also suggested that, compared to ethno-political labels, national labels were more easily identifiable with age for certain symbols (e.g., pavement and street, murals and flags, and the national leaders).

The findings also have implications for assessing the ethnic awareness phase of SIDT by demonstrating that some symbols may be more readily categorised than others based on the type of social category. For example, examining the pattern of results by community background, children from both sides of the conflict were able to sort many of the neighbourhood symbols with both national and ethno-political labels. However, one-third of the images only sorted for ingroup members. That is, children from a Catholic background were better able to sort images with Catholic/Irish labels above chance, whereas children from a Protestant background were better able to sort images with Protestant/British labels. This finding suggests that children may have more exposure to ingroup symbols, reflecting the segregated nature of social life in NI.

Yet, some images (e.g., mural with a Union Flag) were sorted by outgroup members (i.e., children from a Catholic background) above chance, but not by ingroup members. It is possible that Catholic children, historically from the lower status group, might be sensitized to outgroup images, in particular to those which might denote potential threat. For example, because of the legacy of the conflict, parents might warn children to avoid entering neighbourhoods flying the Union Jack, particularly during marching season (Taylor et al., 2011; Leonard & McKnight, 2011).

With age, children were better able to sort symbols for both national and ethno-political labels. For example, for both conflict-related social categories, children under eight in this sample were only able to sort 8% of images above chance, while older children sorted 68% of images above chance. These findings suggest that by late childhood, children in NI can readily identify and associate symbols with their hypothesized social categories. Reflecting the importance of contextual factors in SIDT, these age-related patterns could demonstrate how children are socialised into their divided environments. For example, the separate school system, largely homogenous living patterns, peer norms (McKeown & Taylor, 2018) and family socialization (Taylor & McKeown, 2019) may all influence children's awareness of these social categories over time. Thus, taking into account the social ecology of child development in NI may help to understand SIDT in the primary schools years.

The exploratory analyses across age also suggested that awareness of national labels emerges earlier, and stays stronger, than ethno-political labels (Figure 1). For example, 6- and 7-year-olds sorted 5% and 12% of images with ethno-political and national labels, respectively, while 10- and 11-year-olds sorted 70% and 88% of images with ethno-political and national labels, respectively. Although there was not an explicit hypothesis about which category would emerge earlier, it is not until grade 8, ages 11-12, that controversial issues "associated with the past – religion, identity and culture" particular to NI, "such as parades, emblems, flags and commemoration," are introduced into the curriculum (CCEA, 2015, p. 8). It is also not until employment that some youth will have to explicitly identify their Catholic/Protestant background as part of fair employment procedures (Equality Commission, 2019). Therefore, future research should investigate if the saliency of ethno-political labels may increase in later adolescence and emerging adulthood.

Limitations and Future Research

First, complementing previous research, a 'neutral' set of symbols could be included; for example, Gallagher and Cairns (2011) included Scottish and German as neutral social categories to compare to national (British/Irish) identification of children in NI. Jahoda and Harrison (1975) also showed how neutral objects in a typical environment (e.g., milk bottle, parcel) might be perceived as dangerous given the violence-laden environment of Belfast, NI. This finding is supported by broader developmental research which has found in high-risk settings, young people may respond to ambiguous stimuli with hostile cognitions or be more likely to attend to threatening social cues (Crick & Dodge, 1994; Taylor et al., 2016). Future research which incorporates neutral or ambiguous symbols would help to further clarify what is, and what is not, included in the contents of children's conflict-related social categories in NI.

Second, although children did not have to sort all images, adding a 'don't know' option may provide more explicit flexibility and allow for greater uncertainty. Relatedly, children could be asked if they have ever seen images like this, to assess baseline familiarity to try to tease apart the directionality of ethnic awareness and exposure to symbols in the social ecological context. In the current study, data were collected during the middle of the school year; future research might consider a quasi-experimental design with two time points before and after July (Taylor & McKeown, 2019) to examine how the prevalence of symbols in neighbourhoods around marching season might influence children's awareness.

Third, because age and school grade are confounded in this study, future research should also try to assess the relative influence of different socialization agents – such as peers, family, school and media – on children's awareness (Reidy et al., 2015).

Our future research will examine the subsequent phases of SIDT and further test the predictive and concurrent validity of this tool. For example, future research will explore if greater awareness relates to higher preference for ingroup symbols and/or outgroup prejudice.

Relatedly, in addition to age, we plan to examine the predictors of conflict-relate group awareness. For example, it would be interesting to consider how children's perceptions of conflict may shape their sensitivity to outgroup images because of potential perceived threat. Priming group identities may also serve as an area of future research to understanding how strength of ingroup identity may influence perceptions of threat (Merrilees et al., 2013).

Implications

These findings have implications for research, policy and practice. First, we devised a simple instrument to test children's ethnic awareness that can be used and adapted in future research. We gained insight into at what age children reliably match specific symbols to conflict-related social categories. These symbols can be used to demonstrate or prime social categories in future research in NI. This tool is also easily adaptable to test ethnic awareness about other non-phenotypically distinct groups (e.g. religion, nationality, political groups). Such cross-cultural research may help to disentangle the unique and universal aspects of the development of social categories in other post-conflict settings (Tomovska Misoska, Taylor, Dautel, & Rylander, 2019).

Second, with this paradigm, research can further explore subsequent stages of SIDT; that is, the conditions under which ethno-political awareness may lead to ingroup preference and, subsequently, outgroup prejudice. Children who perceive greater symbolic threat to the ingroup are more likely to report discriminating against outgroup members in divided societies (Štambuk et al., 2019). Understanding these group dynamics also is important because they shape altruism and helping behaviours (Brewer, 1999; Greenwald & Pettigrew, 2014; Weisel & Böhm, 2015). For example, when ethnic identities are more salient, children have shown greater resource allocation to ingroup members (O'Driscoll, Taylor, & Dautel, 2018). In a context of a zero-sum mentality, where a benefit to one community is a detriment to the other, ethnic awareness and ingroup preference may not be benign. Research on ethnic

awareness, thus, can facilitate or constrain practices of cooperation or competition, particularly in settings that are divided along a primary social distinction (Brewer, 1999). By identifying the age at which ethnic awareness is increasing, these findings suggest policymakers and practitioners target interventions to younger children before group identities become solidified or entrenched (McKeown & Cairns, 2012).

Finally, social categorization amongst a post-accord generation can have long-lasting effects for the individual child and the broader society (Bar-Tal, Diamond, & Nasie, 2017; Cummings, Merrilees, Taylor, & Mondi, 2017). Understanding when and how children develop a sense of social group boundaries has implications for practice and policy in conflict resolution (Brewer, 1999; Cairns, 1987). Ethnic awareness, however arbitrary, serves as a lens through which children perceive the social world. For instance, research has demonstrated that the content of children's national and ethno-political categories includes symbolic markers such as flags, street banners, coloured curb stones, and murals. Policymakers might strive to reduce such dividing markers in public settings. Ultimately, understanding children's social categorization in divided societies can inform strategies for promoting the antecedents of children's peacebuilding (Taylor & McKeown, 2017; Taylor et al., 2018; Taylor, O'Driscoll, Dautel, & McKeown, 2019).

References

Aboud, F. (1988). *Children and prejudice*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Anzures, G., Quinn, P. C., Pascalis, O., Slater, A. M., Tanaka, J. W., & Lee, K. (2013). Developmental Origins of the Other-Race Effect. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 22*(3), 173-178. doi:10.1177/0963721412474459

Barrett, M. D., Wilson, H., & Lyons, E. (2003). The development of national in-group bias: English children's attributions of characteristics to English, American and German people. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology, 21*, 193–220. doi:10.1348/026151003765264048

Bar-Tal, D., Diamond, A. H., & Nasie, M. (2017). Political socialization of young children in intractable conflicts: Conception and evidence. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 41*(3), 415-425. doi:10.1177/0165025416652508

Bigler, R. S., Jones, L. C., & Lobliner, D. B. (1997). Social categorization and the formation of intergroup attitudes in children. *Child Development, 68*, 530–543. doi:10.2307/1131676

Bigler, R. S., Spears Brown, C., & Markell, M. (2001). When groups are not created equal: Effects of group status on the formation of intergroup attitudes in children. *Child Development, 72*, 1151–1162. doi:10.1111/1467-8624.00339

Bodenhausen, G. V., Kang, S. K., & Peery, D. (2012). Social Categorization and the Perception of Social Groups. In S. T. Fiske & C. N. Macrae (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of social cognition* (pp. 311-329). London: SAGE.

Brewer, M. B. (1999). The psychology of prejudice: Ingroup love or outgroup hate? *Journal of Social Issues, 55*(3), 429-444. doi:10.1111/0022-4537.00126

Brown, K. & Macginty, R. (2003). Public attitudes toward partisan and neutral symbols in

    post-agreement Northern Ireland. *Identities, 10*(1), 83-108.

    doi:10.1080/10702890304337

Cairns, E. (1980). The development of ethnic discrimination in young children in Northern

    Ireland. In J. Harbison & J. Harbison (Eds.), *Children and young people in a society*

    under stress (pp. 115–127). London: Open Books.

Cairns, E. (1987). *Caught in crossfire: Children and the Northern Ireland conflict*. Syracuse:

    Syracuse University Press.

Cairns, E. & Darby, J. (1998). The conflict in Northern Ireland: Causes, consequences, and

    controls. *American Psychologist, 53*(7), 754-760. doi:10.1037//0003-066x.53.7.754

Connolly, P., Smith, A., & Kelly, B. (2002). *Too young to notice? The cultural and political*

    awareness of 3-6 year olds in Northern Ireland. NI Community Relations Council.

    Retrieved from https://pure.ulster.ac.uk/en/publications/too-young-to-notice-the-

    cultural-and-political-awareness-of-3-6-y-3

Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA, 2015). Teaching

    Controversial Issues at Key Stage 3. Retrieved from http://ccea.org.uk/sites/default/

    files/docs/curriculum/area_of_learning/CCEA_Controversial_Issues.pdf

Crick, N. R. & Dodge, K. A. (1994). A review and reformulation of social information

    processing mechanisms in children's social adjustment. *Psychological Bulletin, 115,*

    74–101. doi:10.1037=0033- 2909.115.1.74

Cummings, E.M., Goeke-Morey, M., Merrilees, C.E., **Taylor, L.K.**, & Shirlow, P. (2014). A

    social-ecological, process-oriented perspective on political violence and child

    development. *Child Development Perspectives*, *8*(2), 82-89. doi:10.1111/cdep.12067

Cummings E.M., Merrilees C.E., Taylor, L.K. & *Mondi, C.F. (2017). *Political violence, armed conflict, and youth adjustment: A developmental psychopathology perspective on research and intervention*. Switzerland: Springer Beliefs in Psychology.

Diesendruck, G. & HaLevi, H. (2006). The Role of Language, Appearance, and Culture in Children's Social Category-Based Induction. *Child Development, 77*(3), 539-553. doi.~~org~~/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2006.00889.x

Dunham, Y., Baron, A. S., & Carey, S. (2011). Consequences of "minimal" group affiliations in children. *Child Development, 82*(3), 793-811. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8624.2011.01577.x

Equality Commission (accessed on 28 August 2019). *Fair Employment in Northern Ireland: Code of Practice*. Retrieved from https://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ ECNI/Publications/Employers%20and%20Service%20Providers/FECodeofPractice@ 09-07.pdf

Escuin Checa, J. & Taylor, L.K. (2017). Political socialisation. *SAGE Encyclopedia of Political Behavior*. In F. Moghaddam (Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

French, D. C. (1987). Children's social interaction with older, younger, and same-age peers. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 4*, 63–86. doi:10.1177/0265407587041005

Fyhri, A. & Hjorthol, R., (2009). Children's independent mobility to school, friends and leisure activities. *Journal of Transport Geography, 17*(5), 377–384. doi:10.1016/j.jtrangeo.2008.10.010

Gallagher, A.M. (1989). Social identity and the Northern-Ireland conflict. *Human Relations, 42*, 917–935. doi:10.1177/001872678904201004

Gallagher, E. & Cairns, E. (2011). National identity and in-group/out-group attitudes: Catholic and Protestant children in Northern Ireland. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology, 8*(1), 58-73. doi:10.1080/17405629.2010.533977

Gelman, S. A., Collman, P., & Maccoby, E. E. (1986). Inferring properties from categories versus inferring categories from properties: The case of gender. *Child Development*, *57*(2), 396-404. doi:10.2307/1130595

Greenwald, A. G. & Pettigrew, T. F. (2014). With malice toward none and charity for some: Ingroup favoritism enables discrimination. *American Psychologist, 69*(7), 669-684. doi:10.1037/a0036056

Hayes, B.C., McAllister, I., & Dowds, L. (2006, January). In search of the middle ground: integrated education and Northern Ireland politics. ARK Research Update, No. 42. Available at https://www.ark.ac.uk/publications/updates/update42.pdf

Houston, J.E., Crozier, W.R., & Walker, P. (1990). The assessment of ethnic sensitivity among Northern Ireland school children. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology, 8*(4), 419-422. doi:10.1111/j.2044-835X.1990.tb00856.x

Hughes, J., Campbell, A., Hewstone, M., & Cairns, E. (2007). Segregation in Northern Ireland: implications for community relations policy. *Policy Studies, 28*(1), 33-53. doi:10.1080/01442870601121429

Jahoda, G. (1962). Development of Scottish children's ideas and attitudes about other countries. *Journal of Social Psychology, 58*, 91–108. doi:10.1080/00224545.1962.9712357

Jahoda, G. & Harrison, S. (1975). Belfast children: Some effects of a conflict environment. *The Irish Journal of Psychology, 3*(1), 1-19. doi:10.1080/03033910.1975.10557616

Kelly, D. J., Quinn, P. C., Slater, A. M., Lee, K., Gibson, A., Smith, M., Ge, L., & Pascalis, O. (2005). Three-month-olds, but not newborns, prefer own-race faces. *Developmental Science, 8*(6), *F31-36.* doi:10.1111/j.1467-7687.2005.0434a.x

Kinzler, K. D., Dupoux, E., & Spelke, E. S. (2007). Reference for infants' preferences for native language and accent: The native language of social cognition. *Proceedings of the National Academie of Scienes, USA, 104*(30), 12577-12580. doi:10.1073/pnas.0705345104

Kinzler, K. D., Shutts, K., DeJesus, J., & Spelke, E. S. (2009). Accent trumps race in guiding children's social preferences. *Social cognition, 27*(4), 623-634. doi:10.1521/soco.2009.27.4.623

Knox, C. (2011). Peace building in Northern Ireland: A role for civil society. *Social Policy & Society, 10*(1), 13-28. doi:10.1017/S1474746410000357

Leonard, M. & McKnight, M. (2011). Bringing down the walls: Young peoples' perspectives on peace-walls in Belfast. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy, 31*(9/10), 569-582. doi:10.1108/01443331111164151

Maccoby, E. E. & Jacklin, C. N. (1987). Gender Segregation in Childhood. *Advances in Child Development and Behavior, 20*, 239-287. doi:10.1016/S0065-2407(08 060404-8

McAuley, J. W. & Tonge, J. (2007). "For God and for the Crown": Contemporary political and social attitudes among Orange Order members in Northern Ireland. *Political Psychology, 28*(1)*,* 33-52. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9221.2007.00550.x

McGrellis, S. (2010). In Transition: Young People in Northern Ireland Growing Up in, and out of, Divided Communities. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 33*(5), 761-778. doi:10.1080/01419870903318177

McKeown, S., & Cairns, E. (2012). Peacemaking youth programmes in Northern Ireland.

Journal of Aggression, Conflict and Peace Research, 4(2), 69-75. doi:10.1108/17596591211208274

McKeown, S., & Taylor, L. K. (2017). Intergroup contact and peacebuilding: Promoting youth civic engagement in Northern Ireland. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology, 5*(2), 415-434. doi:10.5964/jspp.v5i2.769

McKeown, S. & Taylor, L. K. (2018). Perceived peer and school norm effects on youth antisocial and prosocial behaviours through intergroup contact in Northern Ireland. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 57(3), 652-665. doi:10.1111/bjso.12257

Merrilees C. E., Taylor, L. K., Baird, R., Goeke-Morey, M. C., Shirlow, P., & Cummings E. M. (2018). Neighborhood effects of intergroup contact on change in youth intergroup bias. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence,* 47(1), 77–87. doi:10.1007/s10964-017-0684-6

Merrilees, C. E., Cairns E., Taylor, L.K., Shirlow, P., Goeke-Morey, M., & Cummings, E.M. (2013). Social identity and youth aggressive and delinquent behaviors in a context of political violence. *Political Psychology*, *34*(5), 695-711. doi:10.1111/pops.12030

Moeschberger, S. L. & **Phillips DeZalia**, R. A. (Eds). (2014). *Symbols that bind, symbols that divide: The semiotics of peace and conflict*. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.

Nasie, M., Diamond, A. H., & Bar-Tal, D. (2015). Young children in intractable conflicts. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 20*(4), 365-392. doi:10.1177/1088868315607800

Nesdale, D. (2001). Language and the development of children's ethnic prejudice. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 20*(1-2), 90-110. doi:10.1177/0261927x 01020001005

Nesdale, D., Durkin, K., Maass, A., & Griffiths, J. (2005). Threat, group identification, and children's ethnic prejudice. *Social Development, 14*(2), 189-205. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9507.2005.00298.x

Nesdale, D. & Flesser, D. (2001). Social identity and the development of children's group attitudes. *Child Development, 72*(2), 506-517. doi:10.1111/1467-8624.00293

O'Driscoll, D., Taylor, L. K., & Dautel, J. (2018). Intergroup resource distribution among children living in segregated neighborhoods amid protracted conflict. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, *24*(4), 464-474. doi:10.1037/pac0000348

Pozzulo, J. D. & Lindsay, R. C. (1998). Identification accuracy of children versus adults: A meta-analysis. *Law and Human Behavior*, *22*(5), 549-570. doi:10.1023/a:1025739514042

Ramsey, J. L., Langlois, J. H., & Marti, N. C. (2005). Infant categorization of faces: Ladies first. *Developmental Review, 25*(2), 212-246. doi:10.1016/j.dr.2005.01.001

Reidy, C. M., Taylor, L. K., Merrilees, C. E., Ajduković, D., Biruški, D. Č., & Cummings, E. M. (2015). The political socialization of youth in a post-conflict community. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 45*, 11-23. doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2014.12.005

Rennels, J. L., Kayl, A. J., Langlois, J. H., Davis, R. E., & Orlewicz, M. (2016*).* Asymmetries in infants' attention toward and categorization of male faces: The potential role of experience. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology, 142,* 137-57. doi:10.1016/j.jecp.2015.09.026

Reizabal, L., Valencia, J., & Barrett, M. (2004). National identifications and attitudes to national ingroups and outgroups amongst children living in the Basque country. *Infant and Child Development, 13*, 1–20. doi:10.1002/icd.328

Shuttleworth, I. & Lloyd, C. D. (2009). *Mapping segregation in Northern Ireland: Northern Ireland housing executive estates outside Belfast*. Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

Slavtcheva-Petkova, V. (2013). "I'm from Europe, but I'm Not European": Television and children's identities in England and Bulgaria. *Journal of Children and Media, 7*, 349–365. doi:10.1080/17482798.2012.740416

Smyth, K., Feeney, A., Eidson, R. C., & Coley, J. D. (2017). Development of essentialist thinking about religion categories in Northern Ireland (and the United States). *Developmental Psychology, 53*(3), 475-496. doi:10.1037/dev0000253

Štambuk, M., Taylor, L.K., Löw, A., Čorkalo Biruški, D., Merrilees, C. E., Ajduković, D., & Cummings, E. M. (2019). Parental competitive victimhood and interethnic discrimination among their children: The mediating role of ethnic socialization and symbolic threat to the in-group. *British Journal of Social Psychology*. doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12321

Stringer, M. & Cairns, E. (1983). Catholic and Protestant young people's ratings of stereotyped Protestant and Catholic faces. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *22*(3), 241-246. doi:10.1111/j.2044-8309.1983.tb00588.x

Stringer, M. & Cook, N. M. (1985). The effects of limited and conflicting stereotypic information on group categorization in Northern Ireland. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 15*(5), 399-407. doi:10.1111/j.1559-1816.1985.tb00915.x

Sugden, J. & Bairner, A. (1986). Northern Ireland: The politics of leisure in a divided society. *Leisure Studies, 5*(3), 341-352. doi:10.1080/02614368600390251

Taylor, L. K. & McKeown, S. (2017). Youths' peacebuilding potential: Intergroup contact and civic participation amongst a post-accord generation in Northern Ireland. In K.

Niven, S. Lewis, & C. Kagan (Eds.), *Making a difference with psychology* (pp. 56-62). London: Richard Benjamin Trust.

Taylor, L. K. & McKeown, S. (2019). Does violence beget violence? The role of family ethnic socialization and intergroup bias among youth in a setting of protracted intergroup conflict. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, *43*(5), 403–408. doi:10.1177/0165025419844036

Taylor, L. K., Merrilees, C. E., Baird R., Goeke-Morey, M. C., Shirlow, P., & Cummings, E. M. (2018). Impact of political conflict on trajectories of adolescent prosocial behavior: Implications for civic engagement. *Developmental Psychology, 54*(9). doi:10.1037/ dev0000552

Taylor, L. K., Merrilees, C. E., Campbell, A., Shirlow, P., Cairns, E., Goeke-Morey, M. C., . . . Cummings, E. M. (2011). Sectarian and nonsectarian violence: Mothers' appraisals of political conflict in Northern Ireland. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, 17*(4), 343-366. doi:10.1080/10781919.2011.610199

Taylor, L. K., Merrilees, C. E., Goeke-Morey, M. C., Shirlow, P., & Cummings, E. M. (2016). Trajectories of adolescent aggression and family cohesion: The potential to perpetuate or ameliorate political conflict. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology, 45*(2), 114-28. doi:10.1080/15374416.2014.945213

Taylor, L.K., O'Driscoll, D., Dautel, J., & McKeown, S. (2019). Empathy to action: Child and adolescent outgroup attitudes and prosocial behaviors in a setting of intergroup conflict. *Social Development.* doi.org/10.1111/sode.12421

Tomovska Misoska, A., Taylor, L. K., Dautel, J., & Rylander, R. (2019). Children's understanding of ethnic group symbols: Piloting an instrument in the Republic of North Macedonia. *Peace & Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology.* doi:10.1037/pac0000424

Vaughan, G. M. (1964). The development of ethnic attitudes in New Zealand school children. *Genetic Psychology Monographs*, *70*, 135–175.

Weisel, O. & Böhm, R. (2015). "Ingroup love" and "outgroup hate" in intergroup conflict between natural groups. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 60*, 110-120. doi:10.1016/j.jesp.2015.04.008

Ziv, T. & Banaji M. R. (2012). References on infants' preferences based on gender & race: Representations of social groups in the early years of life. In S. T. Fiske & C. N. Macrae (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Social Cognition* (pp. 372–389). London: Sage Publications Limited.

Table 1

Images that Children (N = 218) Sorted Above Chance for Aims 1 and 2

Image	Aim 1		Aim 2	
	National	Ethno-Political	Catholic	Protestant
Neighbourhoods and Flags				
Red Pavement	**	**	**	**
Orange Pavement	**	**	**	**
Red Street	**	**		**
Orange Street	**	**	**	**
Mural Will of Orange	**			
Mural with Union Flag	**	**	**	
Mural of Bobby Sands				
Mural with Tri Colour	**	**		
Ulster Banner	**			
Union Flag	**	**		**
Harp Flag	**	**		
Tri Colour Flag	**	**	**	
Poppy	**			**
Shamrock	**	**	**	
Sports and Activities				
Hockey	**	**		
Camogie	**	**	**	
NI Badge				
Ireland Badge	**	**	**	
Rangers	**	**	**	
Celtic	**	**		**
Cricket	**	**		
Rugby				
Hurling	**	**	**	
Gaelic Football	**	**	**	
Orange Parade	**	**	**	
Irish Dancing	**	**	**	
Community and Religion				
Queen of England	**	**		**
President of Ireland	**			
Shankill Road Sign				
Falls Road Sign				
British Passport	**	**	**	**
Irish Passport	**	**	**	
Protestant School	**	**	**	**
Catholic School	**	**	**	**
Minister	**			
Priest	**			
Protestant Church		**	**	
Catholic Church	**	**	**	
Totals (**)	**32**	**27**	**19**	**9**
Cohen's d effect size [M, SD]	[M=.47, SD=.28)]	[M=.32, SD=.20]	[M=.43, SD=.33]	[M=.37, SD=.26]

Note: ** $p < .0013$ (Bonferroni-adjusted value); the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) of Cohen's d effect size across all images for each set of analyses is shown in brackets.

Figure 1. For each age group in the sample (Total N = 218), the bars represent the number of images – out of 38 – that children sorted above chance (*p<.05 = checks; ** p < .0013 = solid) in the hypothesized direction for ethno-political (grey) and national (black) labels (Aim 3).
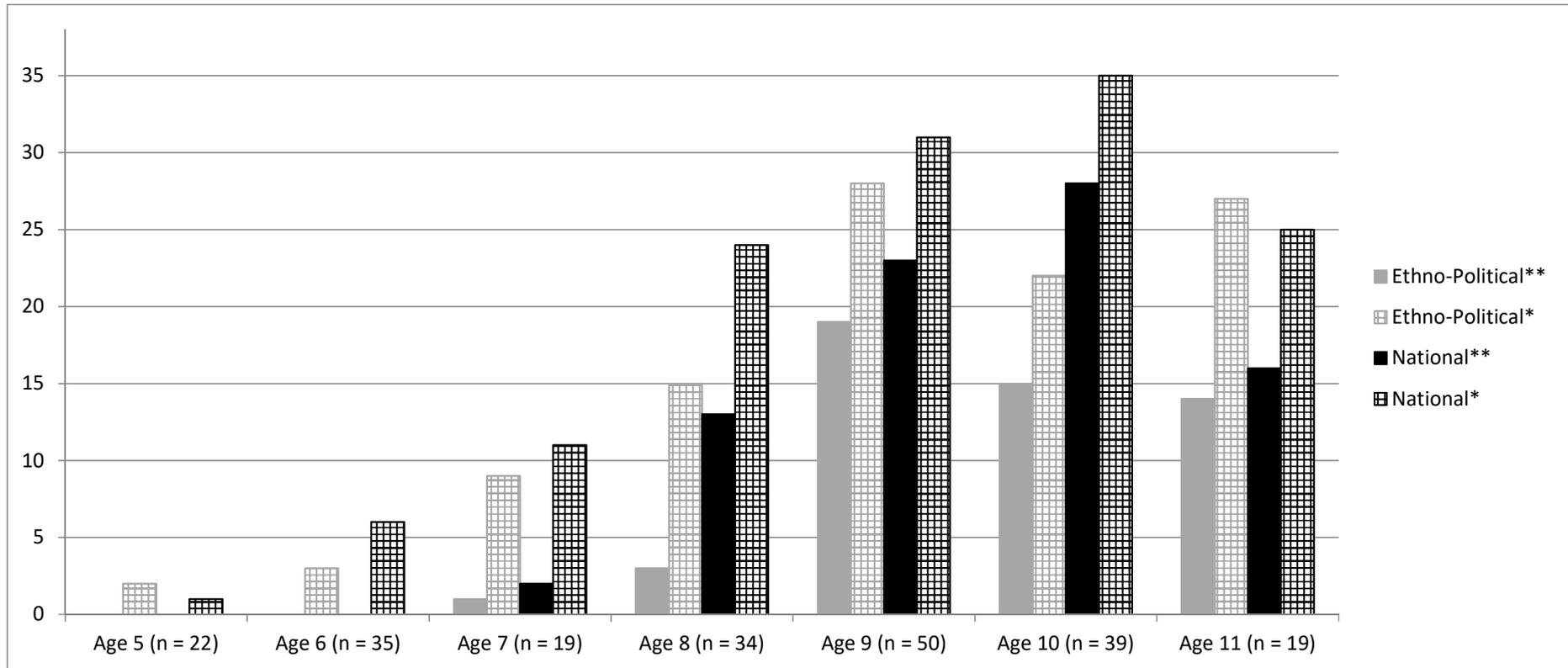
Figure 2. For each age group in the sample (Total N = 218), the lines represent the number of images – out of 38 – that children sorted above chance (*p*<.05) in the hypothesized direction for national (black) and ethno-political (grey) labels (Aim 3).