

Children's meta-perceptions about out-groups and their association with intergroup attitudes

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INTRODUCTION

Intergroup meta-perceptions are one's beliefs regarding the views the out-group holds about his/her in-group¹. Depending on their content and valence, these meta-perceptions may affect people attitudes towards the out-group positively or negatively^{2,3}. To date, intergroup meta-perceptions and their effects have not been studied among children.

GOALS

To examine the development of Jewish-Israeli children's meta-perceptions about Arabs (a "conflict" out-group) and Scots (a "neutral" out-group) and their association with intergroup attitudes.

METHOD

Participants. 108 Jewish-Israeli children: 40 kindergarteners ($M_{age} = 5.18$), 35 2nd graders ($M_{age} = 7.64$), and 33 5th graders ($M_{age} = 10.73$); 46% female.

Measures.

- Children's familiarity with the out-groups** – e.g., "Do you know what Arabs/Scots are?" Yes/No, "What Arabs/Scots are?" (open-ended questions).
- Meta-perceptions** (open-ended questions) – e.g., "What do you think Arabs/Scots think about Jews?"
- Meta-stereotypes** (forced-choice questions) – e.g., "Do you think Arabs/Scots think Jews are good?" 1=not good at all, 4=very good. We asked about five additional traits: "smart", "like to help", "clean", "friendly", and "polite".
- Willingness to contact** – e.g., "Would you like to play with an Arab/a Scottish boy?" 1=not at all, 4=yes, very much.
- Physical proximity** – The experimenter presented each participant two scenarios of two places (picnic in the park/meeting in the library) where a child from the out-group was already sitting in the first seat and eight vacant seats next to him/her. The experimenter indicated the child's name and his/her group membership. Then, the participant was asked to choose a chair to sit. The scale ranged from 1=the closest seat on the row to 8=the farthest seat.
- Feelings towards meeting an out-group member** – e.g., "Would you feel happy/afraid/pleasant to meet an Arab/a Scottish boy?" 1=not at all, 4=yes, very much.

Procedure. The experimenter sat with each participant individually in a quiet corner of the educational setting and completed the questionnaire with him/her. For counterbalancing, for half of the participants questions about Arabs were presented first, and for the other half of the participants the questions about Scots were presented first.

Analysis. Children's open-ended answers were fully transcribed and coded by two independent judges into shared categories. We conducted weighted cases chi-square test, Pearson correlation analysis, and a repeated-measures ANOVA.

RESULTS

Children's meta-perceptions were classified into four categories:

1. Meta-prejudice – feelings that the out-group has towards the in-group e.g., "They don't like them" (kindergartener about Arabs)

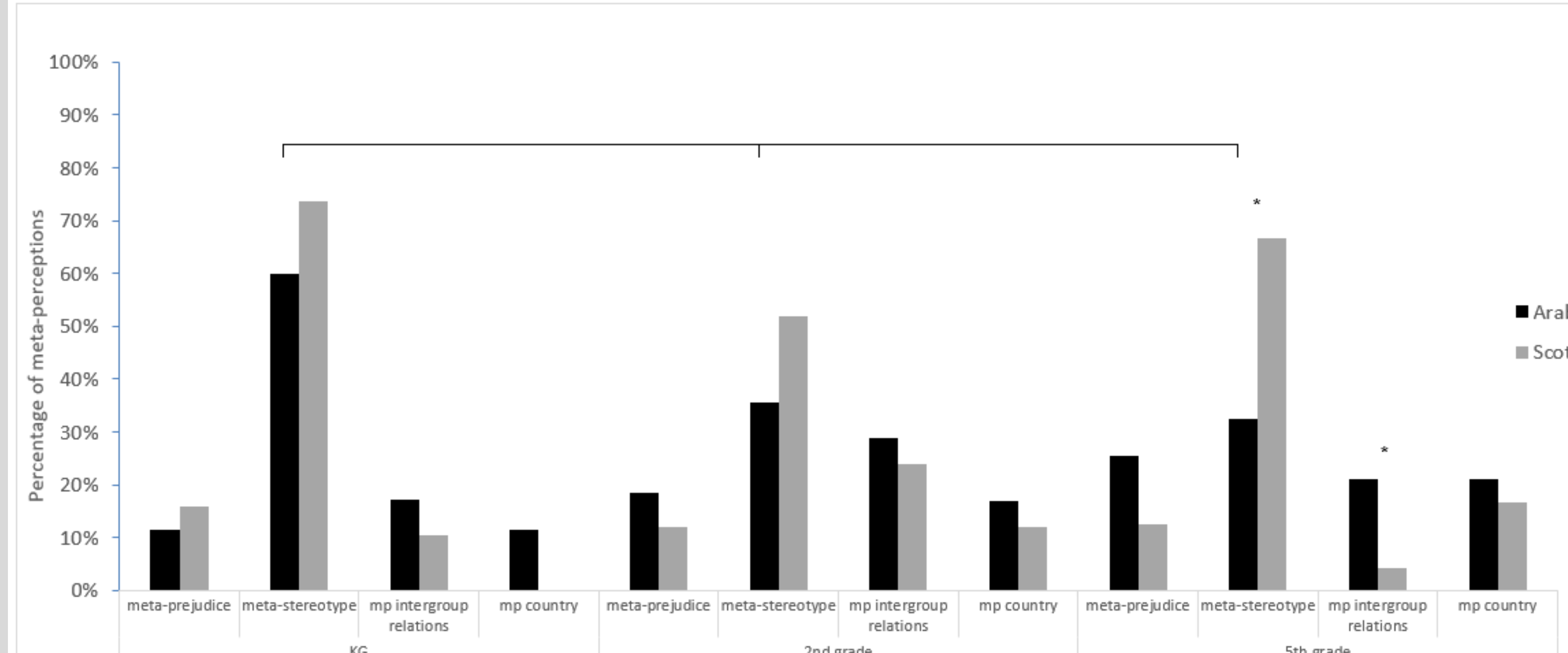
2. Meta-stereotypes – traits that the out-group attributes to the in-group e.g., "That they are nice, that they are good" (2nd grader about Scots)

3. Meta-perceptions regarding relationship between the groups e.g., "That we cause all the wars" (2nd grader about Arabs)

4. Meta-perceptions regarding the country e.g., "It depends. Some think that we are citizens of the country and we have a country, and some think that this country belongs to them" (5th grader about Arabs)

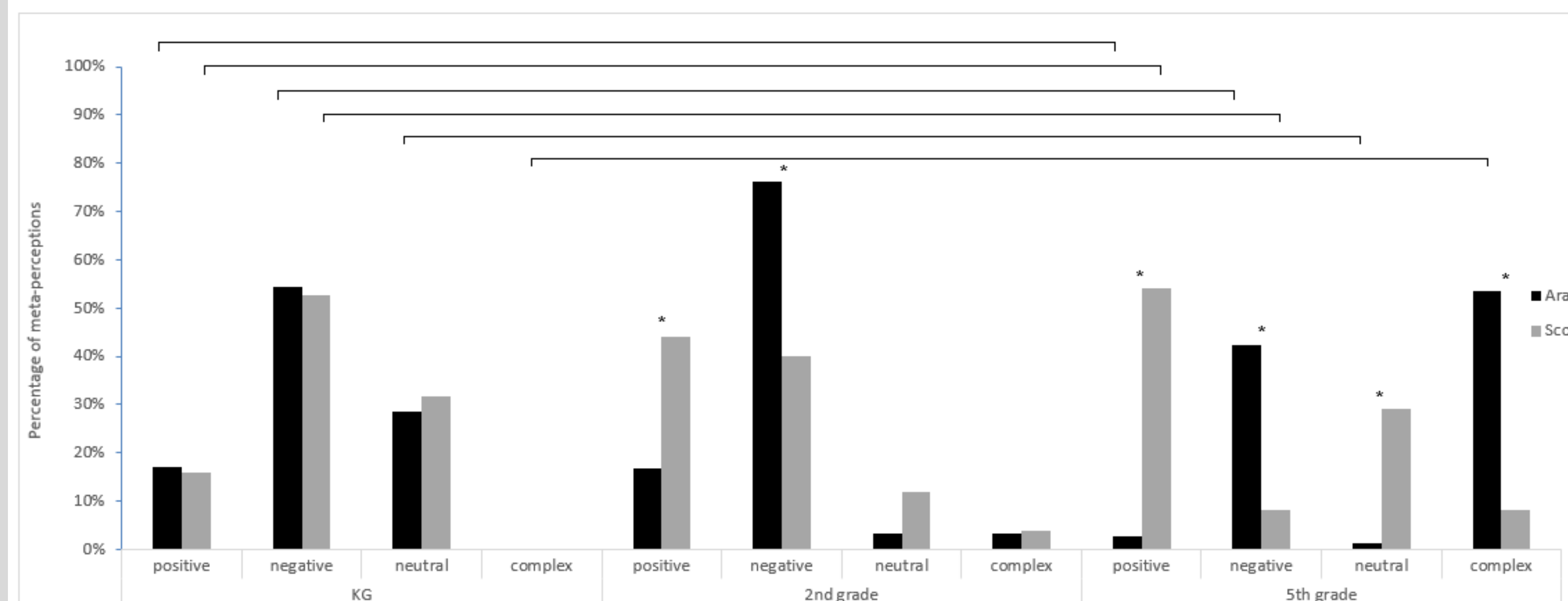
Then, the meta-perceptions were classified according to their valence: **positive/negative/neutral/complex.**

Differences in the types of meta-perceptions between the age groups and between target groups



- Kindergarteners expressed more meta-stereotypes towards Arabs than 2nd and 5th graders.
- 5th graders expressed more meta-stereotypes towards Scots than towards Arabs.
- 5th graders expressed more meta-perceptions regarding relationship between the groups towards Arabs than towards Scots.

Differences in the valence of meta-perceptions between the age groups and between target groups



Positive meta-perceptions

- KG & 2nd graders expressed more positive MP towards Arabs than 5th graders.
- 5th graders expressed more positive MP towards Scots than KG & 2nd graders.
- 2nd & 5th graders expressed more positive MP towards Scots than towards Arabs.

Negative meta-perceptions

- 2nd graders expressed more negative MP towards Arabs than KG & 5th graders.
- KG expressed more negative MP towards Scots than 2nd & 5th graders.
- 2nd & 5th graders expressed more negative MP towards Arabs than towards Scots.

Neutral meta-perceptions

- KG expressed more neutral MP towards Arabs than 2nd & 5th graders.
- 5th graders expressed more neutral MP towards Scots than towards Arabs.

Complex meta-perceptions

- 5th graders expressed more complex MP towards Arabs than KG & 2nd graders.
- 5th graders expressed more complex MP towards Arabs than towards Scots.

The correlation between meta-stereotypes and attitudes

- Overall, children had more negative meta-stereotypes and attitudes towards Arabs than towards Scots.
- Meta-stereotypes towards the out-groups were correlated with intergroup attitudes.
- Meaning, the more children had negative meta-stereotypes, the less they felt positive feelings towards meeting out-group members and the less they were willing to contact them.

CONCLUSIONS

- Already at a young age of 5, Jewish-Israeli children hold meta-perceptions towards out-groups, and with age, the amount and complexity of their meta-perceptions increased.
- The findings revealed the repertoire of children's intergroup meta-perceptions.
- Negative meta-perceptions towards out-groups are related to negative attitudes towards them. Hence, it is important to promote positive meta-perceptions between groups.

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