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The racial attitudes of black children as a function of skin color of teacher

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THE RACIAL ATTITUDES OF BLACK CHILDREN
AS A FUNCTION OF SKIN COLOR OF TEACHER

A Thesis
Presented to the
Department of Psychology
and the
Faculty of the Graduate College
University of Nebraska at Omaha

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Anna Marie D'Aguillo
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Abstract

The racial preferences of black third grade children as a function of the race of present and previous teachers were investigated. It was hypothesized that those Ss exposed to black teachers would be more favorable toward black skin than those not exposed. A variation of the Clark and Clark Doll Test (1947), involving both positive and negative questions was used, along with a two-minute Doll Play situation. The results showed no systematic variation in color preference according to the race of teacher. Both male and female Ss chose like-self dolls, however, and manifested a general favorability toward black skin. The results were discussed in relation to previous research, particularly with regard to the methodological ambiguities involved in using only positive questions for the Doll Test.

Table of Contents

	Page
I. Introduction	1
II. Method	5
A. Subjects and Experimenters	5
B. Apparatus	5
C. Procedure	6
III. Results	7
A. Doll Test as a Predictor of Doll Play	8
B. Response Frequencies for Doll Test	9
C. Doll-At-Home Question	9
D. Frequency Comparison with Similar Studies	9
E. Table I	10
F. Favorability Score and Skin Color of Teacher	10
G. Favorability Score and Skin Color of <u>S</u>	11
H. Identity Questions	11
I. Aspiration Questions	12
IV. Discussion	12

In recent years, there has been a renewed awareness of racial injustices and attempts have been made to rectify the inequalities which have existed. All too often, social change has been initiated without the strong foundation of empirical evidence; indeed, many innovations have been the result of arbitrary decisions based on "common sense" concerning racial issues. Empirical evidence on such an important question as the formation of self-attitudes in minority groups is necessary to insure that the change being effected is in the proper direction. The purpose of the present study is to test one treatment condition which may enhance the self-attitudes of minority group children: exposure to both minority and majority group teachers.

Research concerned with the racial attitudes of young children has had a long history, and, prior to this decade, has yielded uniform results: both blacks and whites manifested a negative attitude toward dark skin (see reviews by Goodman, 1964; Stevenson, 1967; Proshansky, 1968). Moreover, developmental research has shown that the perception of color differences begins at about three years of age, and in the two years following, the child also learns the positive or negative value and stereotyped roles associated with race (Horowitz, 1936; Ammons, 1960; Stevenson, 1967). Regarding the former finding, Stevenson and Stewart (1958) found that children as young as three were aware of color differences. With regard to preference, white and black children chose white figures as companions to bring home, to serve as guests at a birthday party, and to be potential playmates. Similarly, Clark and Clark (1950) reported that when black children

were given dark crayons and asked to color themselves, they generally colored themselves lighter than they actually were. An observational study conducted by McCandless and Hoyt (1961) with Caucasians and Orientals revealed that these preschool children chose like-sex and like-race play companions.

Using a more structured attempt at portraying real-life situations, Moreland (1966) showed preschoolers 8" x 10" photographs of young children engaged in play activities, and adults engaged in daily home activities. The children were presented with questions and rated on several attributes concerned with racial awareness and acceptance. Moreland concluded that both whites and blacks identified with the more dominant white race. In keeping with the prevalent social emphasis on skin-color, Southern whites developed racial recognition earlier than did Northern whites.

Much has been done in the last decade, however, to alter the negative cultural value placed on dark skin; indeed, instead of a negative value, the Afro-American may now feel positively toward brown skin. Since several recent studies (Gregor & McPherson, 1966; Moreland, 1966; Asher & Allen, 1969; Hraba & Grant, 1970) have reported inconsistent results, such a change in attitudes may be occurring at different rates across the country. Two studies by Gregor and McPherson (1966) and Hraba and Grant (1970) reported positive changes in preference for dark skin color while using the Clark and Clark Doll Technique (1947). The former study found that both black and white children between six and seven years of age identify themselves with their respective communities and express preferences for their

own racial traits. Integrated schools served as the setting for a study performed by Hraba and Grant (1970). They reported that blacks preferred their own race at all ages (3-8 years), with the children of lighter skin color equally as strong in their preference for dark skin as those of darker skin color. These studies stand in contrast to the Clark and Clark (1947) study in which black children ascribed a negative value to dark skin color. Moreover, the children of light skin color showed the greatest negativity for the black doll while the darker children showed the least negativity.

The pervasiveness of white society has caused black children to assimilate the more dominant white culture. Apparently, at about the time that children notice skin color differences, they acquire the bias which links skin color and personal character. In part from the notion that contact between children of various backgrounds will precipitate more tolerant racial attitudes among children, programs of integration have begun. While consequences of intergroup contact are difficult to predict, status appears to be an important variable (Amir, 1969). Summarizing the data on intergroup contact, Amir states that, "Some of the favorable conditions which tend to reduce prejudice are...when contact is between members of a majority group and higher status members of a minority group...." (p. 338).

Other research (Pallone, Rickard & Hurley, 1970) demonstrates that teachers are key influencers of occupational preference among black youth. If young children can be exposed to both majority and minority groups in high-status positions, such as classroom teachers, the poor self-concept that minority group children manifest may be eliminated.

Children who have experienced a minority group member in the status position of teacher may then be expected, according to Amir's reasoning, to manifest a favorable attitude change toward the minority group in general. With the exception of a study performed in England, no investigations have tested the previous proposition. James (1955) investigated the effect of contact between female African teachers and their white pupils. For the two-week experimental period, the teachers interacted with the children by answering questions concerning the daily activities of African life, while stressing the fundamental identity between the two racial groups represented by teacher and pupils. James found that, as a result of their interaction with black teachers, the white students became more favorable to Africans in general.

It will be recalled that the present investigation is a study of racial attitudes of young black children. Although Amir's conclusions are applicable, they are only indirectly so, because they specify an interaction between members of the majority with the higher status minority member. In the present case, the interaction occurs between minority group members and higher status figures from the same minority group. Since past research has shown that black children incorporate the values of the prevalent culture, their attitude change may be similar to the interaction between the majority group with the minority group: the black child may become favorable toward black skin, even to the point of expressing a preference for it.

The purpose of the present study was to test the hypothesis that black children who have had black teachers will be more favorable toward their own skin color than those who have been exposed only

to white teachers.

Method

Subjects and Experimenters

The Ss were 18 male and 13 female black children enrolled in Grade 3 at Lake Elementary School of the Omaha Public School System, Omaha, Nebraska. Lake School is situated on the North Side of Omaha, where play and frequent contacts with children of different races are unlikely. Blacks account for approximately 99% of the enrollment, although the black population of Omaha consists of about 10% of the total population. The ratio of black to white teachers was nearly equal, thereby facilitating a comparison of the effect of the skin color of past and present teacher on racial identification and attitudes.

All Grade 3 children were tested, but only those children who had attended Lake School since Kindergarten were used as Ss. The mean age of the children was 8.8 years.

Two Es, one black male, and one white female, tested each child. The male administered the Doll Test and the female recorded aspects of their doll play behavior.

Apparatus

The materials consisted of four dolls, two black and two white of each sex, which were 13½" high and manufactured by Mattel. All were identically dressed in modern fashion: olive green bell-bottom slacks, yellow turtleneck tops, and green leather vests from Simplicity Pattern #9054. Each doll had a 3" clear plastic base which supported the legs in a standing fashion.

In order to objectively rate the darkness of each S's skin color, the E used ten painted cardboard squares, ranging from very light to very dark brown. The ten Negroid skin colors were constructed from a base mixture of acrylic (polymer emulsion) paint which consisted of two parts burnt umber mixed with one part raw sienna. The darkest color consisted of the base, and the other nine colors were derived by mixing 10 grams of base with 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18 grams of white paint.

Procedure

The four dolls were placed seven inches apart on a table in an unused classroom. The position of the dolls on the table was randomized for each S.

Each S was tested individually. The E escorted the S to the unused classroom and both were seated across a table. While the S was stating his age and name, the E matched his skin color with one of the ten squares which remained hidden from view. He was then told, "I am going to ask you some questions about these dolls, and I'd like you to answer by pointing to the doll that you choose." The following questions were asked:

1. Show me the doll that you would like to play with the most.
2. Show me the doll that you like the best.
3. Show me the doll that is a nice color.
4. Show me the doll that looks like you.
5. Show me the doll that you would like to play with the least.
6. Show me the doll whose color is not as nice.
7. Show me the doll that you like the least.

8. Show me the one that does not look like you.
9. A boy was pushed down on this spot. (Here the E placed a small piece of paper in front of the S as representative of the spot.) Which one of these do you think pushed him down?
10. Which one picked him up?
11. If these dolls were people, which one would you invite to your birthday party?
12. Which one would you leave out?
13. Which one would you like to walk home from school with the most?
14. Which one would you like to walk home from school with the least?

In addition, two questions were used to measure the child's level of aspiration and a third indicated the type of dolls with which the S had most experience. The E introduced these questions with: "Now I'm going to ask you a different type of question."

1. What work do you want to do when you grow up?
2. What work do you really think you will do?
3. Which of these dolls is most like the ones you have at home?

When the question period was completed, the S was told that he could play with the dolls while the E left the room. His doll play behavior was monitored for a two-minute period. The behaviors monitored were: 1) doll which the S touched first, and 2) total time the S spent touching the black versus the white dolls.

The skin color of both present and past teachers was obtained from the school principal.

Results

In order to obtain a measure of favorability toward black skin,

each of the 14 questions was assigned a score based upon the S's choice of doll. If the S's answer indicated a preference toward black skin, it was scored +1. If the S's answer indicated a preference toward white skin, it was scored as -1. Therefore, the range of favorability scores was from -14 to +14, with the positive pole representing a favorability toward black skin and the negative pole representing a lack of favorability.

Doll Test as a Predictor of Doll Play

The Doll Play behavior of each S was used as a measure of the partial validity of the 14 Doll Test questions. No significant correlation was found between the color of the doll that was touched first and the S's favorability score ($r_{pbis} = .03, p > .05$). To further assess the predictability of the Doll Test, it was correlated with the second measure of the Doll Play situation, the duration of touch for the black versus the white dolls. The actual dependent measure used was the number of seconds the Ss touched the black dolls minus the number of seconds the S touched the white dolls. A Pearson-r correlation yielded no significant relationship between these two measures ($r = .009, p > .05$).

As a third measure of predictability, the choices on the Doll Test were analyzed separately for both sexes of S in relation to sex of doll and color of doll. Four binomial tests were performed and yielded significant differences for both the male and the female Ss. Therefore, black female Ss preferred black dolls and female dolls, and the black male Ss preferred black dolls and male dolls (females:

$z = 2.06, p = .04, z = 3.38, p = .00001$; males: $z = 1.93, p < .06, z = 4.74, p = 0001$).

Response Frequencies for Doll Test

It was found that for questions 1 and 5, 2 and 6, 3 and 7, which were pairs of opposite questions, a significant number of Ss chose the same doll. Since this represented the same response to two different, indeed, opposite questions, binomial tests were performed for questions 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 only. Significant differences were found for questions 4, 8, 11, 13, indicating a preference for black skin on these items. The z values for questions 4, 8, 11, 13, were, respectively, 4.31, $p < .001$; 2.16, $p < .03$; 2.16, $p < .03$; 2.52, $p < .01$.

Doll-at-Home Question

Separate binomial tests were performed for color and sex of doll for both male and female Ss on the question which asked, "Which doll is most like the one you have at home?" The results showed that female Ss had more female dolls than male dolls at home ($z = 2.25, p < .04$), but did not have significantly more dolls of one color at home. The results for the male Ss found no significant differences for either color or sex of dolls they reported having at home.

Frequency Comparison with Similar Studies

A comparison may be made on questions 1 and 3 with the results obtained by Clark and Clark (1947), Hraba and Grant (1970) and the present study. Table I shows the frequencies obtained by each.

Table 1
Comparison of the Present Study with that of
Hraba and Grant (1970) and Clark and Clark (1947)

Question 1 (Play with)	Clarks	Hraba & Grant	Present Study
White doll	67	30	23
Black doll	32	70	77
<hr/>			
Question 3 (Nice color)			
White doll	60	31	26
Black Doll	38	69	74

Note. -- All data in percentages.

Table 1 illustrates the increasing preference for black skin in each successive study. It is interesting to note that there is a greater similarity between the present study and that of Hraba and Grant than between these two and the Clark study. Both of the later studies reveal that young black children react positively toward the black dolls on these two items.

Favorability Score and Skin Color of Teacher

The favorability score for each S was analyzed with regard to the skin color of his present teacher and the number of years (0, 1, or 2) that the S was taught by a black teacher. A 2x3 analysis of variance for unequal cell frequencies was performed yielding a marginally significant main effect for the number of years of a black teacher ($F = 3.18$, $df = 2/27$, $p < .07$). No other main and interaction effects were significant ($F < 1$). The cell means for Ss who had 0, 1, or 2

years of a black teacher were 1.18, 4.00, 2.08. A Tukey A test found no significant differences among those who were taught 0, 1, or 2 years by a black teacher.

Favorability Score and Skin Color of S

In order to assess the relationship between the S's own skin shade and his favorability toward black skin, the ten skin color shades were divided into light (1, 2, 3), medium (4, 5, 6, 7), and dark (8, 9, 10). Each S, therefore, was placed into one of these three categories on the basis of his rating. A single factor analysis of variance for unequal cell frequencies yielded no differences in favorability among Ss possessing the three skin shades ($F = 1$). Hence, the relative darkness of the S's skin was not related to his doll preference.

Identity Questions

For questions 4 and 8, which represented a measure of racial identity or awareness, frequencies were obtained and the combination of the two responses were analyzed for the underlying basis of the judgement: the S may have based his choice on skin color of doll, sex of doll, or both of these. To calculate the S's choice, discrepancies between questions 4 and 8 were used. For example, if in answer to question 4, a black male S chose the black male doll, and on question 8 chose the white male doll, the choice was based upon skin color of doll. Conversely, if he chose the black female doll for question 8, the choice was based upon sex of doll. Using this analysis, 48% of Ss based their answers on skin color, 16% on sex, 25% on color and sex, and 9% chose the same for both. The

greater percentage of Ss basing their answers on the skin color dimension may be interpreted as a measure of the importance of that variable.

Aspiration Questions

The data compiled from the two questions concerning aspirations were insufficient for a complete analysis. However, several observations may be made. The responses of the male Ss to the first question covered nine occupations, only two of which, doctor and artist, could be regarded as professional. The female Ss gave answers which encompassed seven different occupations, with "Teacher" as the one requiring the greatest amount of education. Unfortunately, there were too few Ss who chose "Teacher" as an occupation to relate it to the race of teacher variable. Indeed, the S's choice of "Teacher" as an occupation may serve to sensitize the S to the race of teacher variable.

In general, responses to the second question, "What work do you think you really will do?" were nearly identical to the aspired occupational level for both male and female Ss. This data seem to indicate that the young black child does not aspire to the occupations above which he believes he can actually achieve.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to test the hypothesis that black children who have had black teachers will be more favorable toward their own skin color than those exposed only to white teachers. This hypothesis was predicated on the notion that the presence of a black person in a high status position may have a positive effect on

black self-attitudes. The greater exposure that black children have to black teachers should, therefore, produce more favorable black attitudes. The results showed that, although the Ss were generally favorable toward black skin, there was no systematic variation according to the race of the present teacher or previous exposure to black teachers. In other words, those children who had been taught by black teachers were no more favorable toward black skin than those who had been exposed only to white teachers in the classroom situation.

However, it is interesting to note the relationship of the present study to the previous literature concerning children's attitudes toward skin color. The long history of research concerned with racial attitudes of young children has consistently shown that blacks and whites have maintained negative attitudes toward dark skin (see reviews by Goodman, 1952; Stevenson, 1967; Proshansky, 1968). It is only recently, and in particular, in the last decade, that a change in attitudes has been noted by researchers (Gregor & McPherson, 1966; Hraba & Grant, 1970). The present study is consonant with these more recent studies which have documented the improvement in black self-attitudes. Specifically, on four of the questions, items 4, 8, 11, 13, there were significant differences between the frequency of black/white choices, all of which indicated a preference for the black doll. Clark and Clark (1947) contended that two of these questions, items 4 and 8 in the present study, measured racial self-identification, apparently an aspect of racial preference associated with the S's own self-image.

A further indication of the tendency toward self-identification was the finding that Ss consistently chose like-self dolls. The female Ss chose the female dolls and the black dolls, and the male Ss chose the male dolls and the black dolls significantly more often than they chose the other dolls. These results suggest that the test was administered correctly, since it would be expected that children choose like-self dolls.

However, the validity of the Doll Test in predicting Doll Play behavior may be questioned. The Doll Play situation following the questions did not reveal any differences in the amount of time the S spent playing with the dolls of each color, or in the S's first choice of a doll. Both of these measures would be expected to yield results similar to the Doll Test in the Ss' preferences for like-self choices. The lack of a relationship between the Doll Test and the Doll Play situation may have been due to the presence of the black E during the administration of the former but not during the latter measure. The presence of a black person during the administration of the Doll Test may have served to make skin color a more salient dimension. In any case, researchers must, in the future, confront the issue of construct validity--whether the Doll Test bears any relationship to the child's Doll Play behavior, or more importantly, actual racial interactions.

Although no systematic difference was found in this study, the interaction between minority group members and higher-status figures from the same minority group may still remain a relevant factor involving self-attitudes. As is well known, there are limitations

when conducting research in real-life settings which are not present in more controlled laboratory situations. Naturally, in studies of this kind, when data concerning classroom composition is the topic of study, it is necessary to accept these settings as they exist. The problem of sample size was particularly prominent in the present study. At the present time, few grade schools have integrated faculties and the one local school which met the requirement of race of teacher only contained grades K through 3. This, together with the mobility of lower socioeconomic groups, greatly reduced the number of children available for experimentation.

Although the sample consisted of Grade 3 children only, the Ss' poor comprehension of language necessitated several changes. Six of the original 14 questions had to be omitted from the analyses due to a high proportion of contradictory answers. For each of these three pairs of questions, a significant portion of the sample gave the same answer to opposite questions, thus indicating a lack of understanding and/or the tolerance of young children for conflicting ideas. The recent volume of literature stemming from the work of Piaget and others is only beginning to reveal the extent to which the young child is not capable of recognizing opposing ideas or concepts. It is known that early in cognitive development, the child reconciles conflicting thoughts with his own constructs, and the extent to which this is performed by different groups of children, particularly those from varied socioeconomic backgrounds, is presently under investigation.

The contradictory answers noted in this study question previous research which has only measured positive attitudes, and has interpreted the meaning of children's answers in a straightforward manner. Future studies should separate contradictory answers due to misperceptions, misunderstandings, and cognitive difficulties among different-aged children and those from different socioeconomic groups. Regarding the latter two factors, the language difficulties of lower socioeconomic groups have been well documented; yet, the extent to which the children's contradictory answers reflect language-cognitive problems must be assessed by future research.

In conclusion, the results of the present study showed a general favorability toward black skin by black primary grade children. There was no systematic variation due to the number of years students were taught by a black teacher; however, as discussed above, several limitations may have precluded a rigorous test of the hypothesis. The similarities between the recent Hrabá and Grant study performed in Lincoln, Nebraska, and the present one would be expected from previous research showing that the change in black self-attitudes is related to geographical location in the United States.

Future research should concentrate on assessing the validity of the Doll Test and the meaning of contradictory answers given by children when positive and negative questions are used.

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