

BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL: A REEXAMINATION OF RACIAL PREFERENCE AND IDENTIFICATION

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This study examined the racial preferences of black children in an interracial setting. The Clark and Clark doll study was duplicated in Lincoln, Nebraska, during May 1969. Unlike the Clarks, the present authors found that the majority of the black children preferred the black dolls. Like the blacks, the majority of the white children preferred the doll of their own race. The racial identifications of both black and white children are reported. Furthermore, the effects of age and skin color upon racial preference and identification are compared with those reported by Clark and Clark. A control for the race of interviewers showed that this variable did not have a significant effect upon the dependent variable. The correspondence between doll choice and friendship was ambiguous. Interpretations of all the results are given.

Clark and Clark (1947) found that black children preferred white dolls and rejected black dolls when asked to choose which were nice, which looked bad, which they would like to play with, and which were a nice color. This implies that black is not beautiful.

This observation has been repeated, using a variety of methods and in a variety of settings (Asher & Allen, 1969; Frenkel-Brunswick, 1948; Goodman, 1952; Greenwald & Oppenheim, 1968; Landreth & Johnson, 1953; Morland, 1958, 1966; Radke, Sutherland, & Rosenberg, 1950; Radke, Trager, & Davis, 1949; Trager & Yarrow, 1952).

However, Gregor and McPherson (1966) found that Southern, urban black children, 6 and 7 years old, generally preferred a black doll. Their procedures were identical to Clark and Clark's, except only two dolls were presented. They proposed that black children's preference for white stems from their contact with whites; "... Negro children tend to be more outgroup oriented the more systematically they are exposed to white contact [p. 103]." Clark and Clark did find that black children in interracial nursery schools were more pronounced in their preference for white dolls than those in segregated nursery schools. However, Morland (1966), using a picture technique, found just the opposite.

Still, Clark and Clark and Goodman (1952), when using similar techniques, found that black children in interracial settings preferred objects representing whites. However, Johnson (1966) found 18 black youths (mean age of 12) in a Harlem freedom school rated black equal to white. He concluded that his "study presents evidence that not all Negroes have negative self-attitudes . . . [p. 273]." Perhaps, but the techniques used by Johnson and Clark and Clark differ. Johnson had groups of respondents rate black and white on four semantic differential scales. Furthermore, the samples are not comparable on age and social setting. Possibly techniques, sampling, and attitudes are confounded in a comparison of these two studies.

The thesis that for black children interracial contact engenders preference for white cannot be overlooked in this literature. Some have advocated this interpretation (Gregor, 1963; Armstrong & Gregor, 1964; Gregor & McPherson, 1966). Unfortunately, any comparison of the evidence confounds time, techniques, sampling, and setting with the dependent variable. The present study will test this thesis in an interracial setting by duplicating the Clark and Clark doll study.

METHOD

Procedure

The procedures used by Clark and Clark were followed as closely as possible. The respondents were interviewed individually using a set of four dolls, two black and two white, identical in all other

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respects. The same questions used by the Clarks were asked. They are as follows:

1. Give me the doll that you want to play with.
2. Give me the doll that is a nice doll.
3. Give me the doll that looks bad.
4. Give me the doll that is a nice color.
5. Give me the doll that looks like a white child.
6. Give me the doll that looks like a colored child.
7. Give me the doll that looks like a Negro child.
8. Give me the doll that looks like you.

Clark and Clark contended that Items 1-4 measure racial preference, Items 5-7 measure racial awareness or knowledge, and Item 8 measures racial self-identification.

In an attempt to identify the behavioral consequences of racial preference and identification, we asked the children to name and indicate the race of their best friends. We also asked the teachers for the same information.

Sample

For our sample, respondents had to be 4-8 years of age. Five public schools provided a sampling frame containing 73% of the correct age black children in the public school system of Lincoln, Nebraska. The total sample consisted of 160 children, 89 blacks, or 60% of the eligible blacks attending Lincoln public schools. The 71 white children were drawn at random from the classrooms containing black respondents. The interviews were completed at the five schools during May 1969.

The respondents were assigned to both black and white interviewers. Previous research has controlled for race of interviewer (Asher & Allen, 1969; Morland, 1966). Morland reported that race of inter-

viewer does not significantly affect respondents' choices. Nevertheless, we controlled for race of interviewer.

Setting

Blacks comprise approximately 14% of the total population of Lincoln. The five public schools reflected this fact. Blacks accounted for 3% of the enrollment of three schools, and 7% and 18% of the other two schools. Furthermore, 70% of the black sample reported they had white friends.

RESULTS

Racial Preference

The Clarks' finding that the majority of the black children preferred a white doll has been interpreted that they would rather be white. This was one of the Clarks' important findings and is the focus of this paper.

Table 1 provides two comparisons. First, the differences in racial preference of the Clark and Clark (1939) sample and the Lincoln sample of 1969 are striking. On all the items the difference reaches statistical significance using chi-square.

Secondly, the sample of white children was collected to provide a bench mark against which to compare the racial preferences of black children. Gregor and McPherson (1966) and Morland (1966) have found that white children are more likely to prefer their

TABLE 1
A COMPARISON OF THE PRESENT RESULTS WITH THE CLARK AND CLARK (1939) DATA

Item	Clark & Clark ^a (1939) blacks	Lincoln sample (1969) blacks	χ^2 (1939-1969) blacks	Lincoln sample (1969) whites
1. (Play with)				
White doll	67 (169)	30 (27)	36.2**	83 (59)
Black doll	32 (83)	70 (62)		16 (11)
Don't know or no response				1 (1)
2. (Nice doll)				
White doll	59 (150)	46 (41)	5.7*	70 (50)
Black doll	38 (97)	54 (48)		30 (21)
3. (Looks bad)				
White doll	17 (42)	61 (54)	43.5**	34 (24)
Black doll	59 (149)	36 (32)		63 (45)
Don't know or no response		3 (3)		3 (2)
4. (Nice color)				
White doll	60 (151)	31 (28)	23.1**	48 (34)
Black doll	38 (96)	69 (61)		49 (35)
Don't know or no response				3 (2)

Note.—Data in percentages. *N*s in parentheses.

^a Individuals failing to make either choice not included, hence some percentages add to less than 100.

* $p < .02$.

** $p < .001$.

own race than are black children. Table 1 shows that black and white children preferred the doll of their own race. The white children were significantly more ethnocentric on Items 1 and 2, there was no significant difference on Item 3, and the black children were significantly more ethnocentric on Item 4 using chi-square.

Age. The Clarks found that black children preferred white dolls at all ages (3-7), although this decreased with age. We found that a majority of the black children at all ages (3-8) preferred a black doll, and this preference increased with age. With white children there was a similar age trend except on Item 4.

Skin color. The Clarks classified their subjects by skin color into three categories: light (practically white), medium (light brown to dark brown), and dark (dark brown to black). The interviewers in our study used the same criteria. The Clarks found that the children of light skin color showed the greatest preference for the white doll and the dark children the least. We did not find this trend. The children of light skin color were at least as strong in their preference for a black doll as the others.

Racial Identification

Items 5, 6, and 7 were to measure knowledge of racial differences, while Item 8 was to measure racial self-identification. On Items 5 and 6 the Clarks found that a majority of their respondents correctly identified white and "colored" dolls (94% and 93%, respectively). Our black sample was comparable. Ninety percent correctly identified a white doll and 94% correctly identified a colored doll. In regard to Item 7 (doll that looks like a Negro child), we found that more of our respondents made the correct identification (86% as compared to 72%).

Age. Like the Clarks, we found an inverse relationship between misidentification (Items 5-8) and age. This relationship held for whites as well.

Skin color. Like the Clarks, we found insignificant differences in misidentification (Items 5-7) among black children by skin color. However, on Item 8 the Clarks had

found that more black children with light skin color misidentified themselves (80%). Adding a mulatto doll, Greenwald and Oppenheim (1968) reduced the misidentification for these respondents to 11%. Fifteen percent of our black respondents with light skin color misidentified themselves. However, there was no significant difference in misidentification on Item 8 by skin color.

Race of interviewer. Race of interviewer was not related to choice of doll on any of the items for both black and white children.

Race of respondents' friends. For both black and white children there was no apparent relationship between doll preference and race of friends. The sociometric information agreed and were combined. If a relationship were to be found, it would be most pronounced for those who preferred dolls of their own race without exception. Furthermore, only these respondents demonstrated reliability in their doll preferences. Twenty-three black and 20 white children made the choices favorable to their own race on all four items measuring racial preference.

Even for these children there appears to be no relationship between doll preference and race of friends. Twenty, or 87%, of the 23 black children had white friends. Twelve, or 60%, of the 20 white children had all white friends. However, 41% of all white children had all white friends.

DISCUSSION

Doll Preference

These results indicate that black children in interracial settings are not necessarily white oriented. We will offer possible interpretations. First, times may be changing. That is, Negroes are becoming Blacks proud of their race. If change is occurring, previous research indicates that it is not at a universal rate across the country (Asher & Allen, 1969; Gregor & McPherson, 1966).

A second interpretation is that even 30 years ago black children in Lincoln, unlike those in other cities, would have chosen black dolls. This interpretation cannot be examined. A third and more reasonable interpretation is that conditions indigenous to Lincoln have mediated the impact of the "Black Move-

it." Johnson (1966) suggested that local organizations in black communities disseminate black pride. We note that during the last 2 years a black pride campaign, sponsored by organizations which are black conscious, has been directed at adolescents and young adults in Lincoln. Black children through interaction with kin and friends may be modeling these attitudes.

The fourth interpretation is that interracial contact may engender black pride. Pettigrew (1967) proposed that interracial acceptance mediated the effect of interracial contact on the academic performance of blacks. Perhaps this influences black pride. The fact that 70% of the black sample had white friends and 10% of the white sample had black friends, given the racial composition of the schools, suggests this interpretation.

Doll Preference and Friendship

The above interpretations have assumed that doll choice corresponds with interpersonal behavior. Our findings suggest that such correspondence cannot be presumed. Three explanations of the lack of relationship between doll choice and friendship will be offered. These explanations are predicated on two assumptions, one about the doll technique and the other about the meaning of "Black is beautiful."

The first explanation assumes that children will use the same criteria in friendship and doll choice. "Black is beautiful" is assumed to mean a rejection of whites. Combining these two assumptions, we expected those black children who without exception preferred black dolls to have all black friends. This expectation was not realized. However, being pupils of predominately white schools, these respondents may have found it impractical to have all black friends in spite of their preferences.²

The second explanation makes the same assumption about the doll technique. But it assumes that "Black is beautiful" translates into an acceptance of and by whites. Combining these we expected black children who without exception preferred black dolls to

have both black and white friends. This expectation was nearly realized. More black children who had friends of both races preferred black dolls (except on Item 4) than those who had all black friends. This relationship approached statistical confirmation.

The third explanation does not assume doll choice corresponds with interpersonal behavior. First, in the experimental setting, four dolls, which were identical except for race, were presented to the respondents. Although black children may prefer a doll of their own race when race is the only cue that differentiates it from other dolls, they may consider other criteria more important in friendship. Perhaps race is not salient in friendship at this age (Criswell, 1937; Moreno, 1934). Secondly, Piaget has observed that children before 11 or 12 years of age cannot detect conceptual self-contradictions (Hunt, 1961; Maier, 1969). The fact that a majority of the respondents who were consistent in answering the four preference questions did not clearly reflect the bases for their doll preferences in their friendships suggests this possibility. Furthermore, the fact that a majority (73%) of all the respondents were inconsistent in answering the four preference questions supports this suggestion.

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² The restricted racial composition previously noted and sample size prevented a test of this possibility.

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