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## RACIAL IDENTIFICATION AND PREFERENCE IN NEGRO CHILDREN

By *Kenneth B. Clark and Mamie**P. Clark*

## PROBLEM

The specific problem of this study is an analysis of the genesis and development of racial identification as a function of ego development and self-awareness in Negro children.

Race awareness, in a primary sense, is defined as a consciousness of the self as belonging to a specific group which is differentiated from other observable groups by obvious physical characteristics which are generally accepted as being racial characteristics.

Because the problem of racial identification is so definitely related to the problem of the genesis of racial attitudes in children, it was thought practicable to attempt to determine the racial attitudes or preferences of these Negro children—and to define more precisely, as far as possible, the developmental pattern of this relationship.

## PROCEDURE

This paper presents results from only one of several techniques devised and used by the authors to investigate the development of racial identification and preferences in Negro children.<sup>1</sup> Results presented here are from the Dolls Test.

**Dolls Test.** The subjects were presented with four dolls, identical in every respect save skin color. Two of these dolls were brown with black hair and two were white with yellow hair. In the experimental situation these dolls were un-

clothed except for white diapers. The position of the head, hands, and legs on all the dolls was the same. For half of the subjects the dolls were presented in the order: white, colored, white, colored. For the other half the order of presentation was reversed. In the experimental situation the subjects were asked to respond to the following requests by choosing *one* of the dolls and giving it to the experimenter:

1. Give me the doll that you like to play with— (a) like best.
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.

Requests 1 through 4 were designed to reveal preferences; requests 5 through 7 to indicate a knowledge of "racial differences"; and request 8 to show self-identification.

It was found necessary to present the preference requests first in the experimental situation because in a preliminary investigation it was clear that the children who had already identified themselves with the colored doll had a marked tendency to indicate a preference for this doll and this was not necessarily a gen-

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<sup>1</sup> Other techniques presented in the larger study include: (1) a coloring test; (2) a questionnaire and (3) a modification of the Horowitz line drawing technique. (R. E. Horowitz, "Racial Aspects of Self-identification in Nursery School Children," *J. Psychol.*, 1939, VII, 91-99.)

uine expression of actual preference, but a reflection of ego involvement. This potential distortion of the data was controlled by merely asking the children to indicate their preferences first and then to make identifications with one of the dolls.

### SUBJECTS

Two hundred fifty-three Negro children formed the subjects of this experiment. One hundred thirty-four of these subjects (southern group) were tested in segregated nursery schools and public schools in Hot Springs, Pine Bluff, and Little Rock, Arkansas. These children had had no experience in racially mixed school situations. One hundred nineteen subjects (northern group) were tested in the racially mixed nursery and public schools of Springfield, Massachusetts.

Age distribution of subjects:

Age, years	North	South	Total
3 . . . . .	13	18	31
4 . . . . .	10	19	29
5 . . . . .	34	12	46
6 . . . . .	33	39	72
7 . . . . .	29	46	75
Total . . . . .	119	134	253

Sex distribution of subjects:

Sex	North	South	Total
Male . . . . .	53	63	116
Female . . . . .	66	71	137

Skin color of subjects:

Skin color	North	South	Total
Light <sup>a</sup> . . . . .	33	13	46
Medium <sup>b</sup> . . . . .	58	70	128
Dark <sup>c</sup> . . . . .	28	51	79

<sup>a</sup> light (practically white)

<sup>b</sup> medium (light brown to dark brown)

<sup>c</sup> dark (dark brown to black)

All subjects were tested individually in a schoolroom or office especially provided for this purpose. Except for a few children who showed generalized negativism from the beginning of the experiment (results for these children are not included here), there was adequate rapport between the experimenter and all subjects tested. In general, the children showed high interest in and enthusiasm for the test materials and testing situation. The children, for the most part, considered the experiment somewhat of a game.

### RESULTS

**Racial Identification.** Although the questions on knowledge of "racial differences" and self-identification followed those designed to determine racial preference in the actual experimental situation, it appears more meaningful to discuss the results in the following order: knowledge of "racial differences," racial self-identification, and finally racial preferences.

The results of the responses to requests 5, 6, and 7, which were asked to determine the subjects' knowledge of racial differences, may be seen in Table 1. Ninety-four percent of these children chose the white doll when asked to give the experimenter the white doll; 93 percent of them chose the brown doll when asked to give the colored doll; and, 72 percent chose the brown doll when asked to give the Negro doll. These results indicate a clearly established knowledge of a "racial difference" in these subjects—and some awareness of the relation between the physical characteristic of skin color and the racial concepts of "white" and "colored." Knowledge of the concept of "Negro" is not so well developed as the more concrete verbal concepts of "white" and "colored" as applied to racial differences.

The question arises as to whether choice of the brown doll or of the white doll, particularly in response to ques-

TABLE 1  
CHOICES OF ALL SUBJECTS

Choice	Request 5 (for white)		Request 6 (for colored)		Request 7 (for Negro)		Request 8 (for you)	
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent
Colored doll . . . . .	13	5	235	93	182	72	166	66
White doll . . . . .	237	94	15	6	50	20	85	33
Don't know or no response	3	1	3	1	21	8	2	1

tions 5 and 6, really reveals a knowledge of "racial differences" or simply indicates a learned perceptual reaction to the concepts of "colored" and "white." Our evidence that the responses of these children *do* indicate a knowledge of "racial difference" comes from several sources: the results from other techniques used (i.e., a coloring test and a questionnaire) and from the qualitative data obtained (children's spontaneous remarks) strongly support a knowledge of "racial differences." Moreover, the consistency of results for requests 5 through 8 also tends to support the fact that these children are actually making identifications in a "racial" sense.

The responses to request 8, designed to determine racial self-identification follow the following pattern: 66 percent of the total group of children identified themselves with the colored doll, while 33 percent identified themselves with the white doll. The critical ratio of this difference is 7.6.<sup>2</sup>

Comparing the results of request 8 (racial self-identification) with those of requests 5, 6, and 7 (knowledge of racial difference) it is seen that the awareness of racial differences does not necessarily determine a socially accurate racial self-identification—since approximately nine out of ten of these children are aware of racial differences as indicated by their correct choice of a "white" and "colored" doll on request, and only a

little more than six out of ten make socially correct identifications with the colored doll.

**Age Differences.** Table 2 shows that, when the responses to requests 5 and 6 are observed together, these subjects at each age level have a well-developed knowledge of the concept of racial difference between "white" and "colored" as this is indicated by the characteristic of skin color. These data definitely indicate that a basic knowledge of "racial differences" exists as a part of the pattern of ideas of Negro children from the age of three through seven years in the northern and southern communities tested in this study—and that this knowledge develops more definitely from year to year to the point of absolute stability at the age of seven.

A comparison of the results of requests 5 and 6 with those of request 7, which required the child to indicate the doll which looks like a "Negro" child, shows that knowledge of a racial difference in terms of the word "Negro" does not exist with the same degree of definiteness as it does in terms of the more basic designations of "white" and "colored." It is significant, however, that knowledge of a difference in terms of the word "Negro" makes a sharp increase from the five- to the six-year level and a less accelerated one between the six- and seven-year levels. The fact that all of the six-year-olds used in this investi-

<sup>2</sup> These results are supported by similar ones from the Horowitz line drawing technique.

TABLE 2  
CHOICES OF SUBJECTS AT EACH AGE LEVEL\*

Choice	3 yr.		4 yr.		5 yr.		6 yr.		7 yr.	
	No.	Per- cent	No.	Per- cent	No.	Per- cent	No.	Per- cent	No.	Per- cent
Request 5 (for white)										
colored doll . . . .	4	13	4	14	3	7	2	3	0	
white doll . . . .	24	77	25	86	43	94	70	97	75	100
Request 6 (for colored)										
colored doll . . . .	24	77	24	83	43	94	69	96	75	100
white doll . . . .	4	13	5	17	3	7	3	4	0	
Request 7 (for Negro)										
colored doll . . . .	17	55	17	59	28	61	56	78	64	85
white doll . . . .	9	29	10	35	14	30	12	17	5	7
Request 8 (for you)										
colored doll . . . .	11	36	19	66	22	48	49	68	65	87
white doll . . . .	19	61	9	31	24	52	23	32	10	13

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

gation were enrolled in the public schools seems to be related to this spurt. Since it seems clear that the term "Negro" is a more verbalized designation of "racial differences," it is reasonable to assume that attendance at public schools facilitates the development of this verbalization of the race concept held by these children.

In response to request 8 there is a general and marked increase in the percent of subjects who identify with the colored doll with an increase in age—with the exception of the four- to five-year groups.<sup>3</sup> This deviation of the five-year-olds from the general trend is considered in detail in the larger, yet unpublished study.

#### Identification by Skin Color. Table 3

shows slight and statistically insignificant differences among the three skin-color groups in their responses which indicate a knowledge of the "racial difference" between the white and colored doll (requests 5 through 7).

It should be noted, however, that the dark group is consistently more accurate in its choice of the appropriate doll than either the light or the medium group on requests 5 through 7. This would seem to indicate that the dark group is slightly more definite in its knowledge of racial differences and that this definiteness extends even to the higher level of verbalization inherent in the use of the term "Negro" as a racial designation. In this regard it is seen that 75 percent of the dark children chose the colored doll

<sup>3</sup> These results are supported by those from the use of the Horowitz line drawing technique.

TABLE 3

CHOICES OF SUBJECTS IN LIGHT, MEDIUM, AND DARK GROUPS\*

Choice	Light		Medium		Dark	
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent
Request 5 (for white)						
colored doll . . .	2	5	8	6	3	4
white doll . . .	43	94	118	92	76	96
Request 6 (for colored)						
colored doll . . .	41	89	118	92	76	96
white doll . . .	4	9	8	6	3	4
Request 7 (for Negro)						
colored doll . . .	32	70	91	71	59	75
white doll . . .	9	20	27	21	14	18
Request 8 (for you)						
colored doll . . .	9	20	93	73	64	81
white doll . . .	37	80	33	26	15	19

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

when asked for the doll which "looks like a Negro child" while only 70 percent of the light children and 71 percent of the medium children made this response. The trend of results for requests 5 and 6 remains substantially the same.

These results suggest further that correct racial identification of these Negro children at these ages is to a large extent determined by the concrete fact of their own skin color, and further that this racial identification is not necessarily dependent upon the expressed knowledge of a racial difference as indicated by the correct use of the words "white," "colored," or "Negro" when responding to white and colored dolls. This conclusion seems warranted in the light of the fact that those children who differed

in skin color from light through medium to dark were practically similar in the pattern of their responses which indicated awareness of racial differences but differed markedly in their racial identification (responses to request 8 for the doll "that looks like you") only 20 percent of the light children, while 73 percent of the medium children, and 81 percent of the dark children identified themselves with the colored doll.

It is seen that there is a consistent increase in choice of the colored doll from the light to the medium group; an increase from the medium group to the dark group; and, a striking increase in the choices of the colored doll by the dark group as compared to the light group.<sup>4</sup> All differences, except between

<sup>4</sup> These results substantiate and clearly focus the trend observed through the use of the Horowitz line drawing technique.

TABLE 4

CHOICES OF SUBJECTS IN NORTHERN (MIXED SCHOOLS) AND SOUTHERN (SEGREGATED SCHOOLS) GROUPS\*

Choice	North, percent	South, percent
Request 5 (for white)		
colored doll . . . . .	4	6
white doll . . . . .	94	93
Request 6 (for colored)		
colored doll . . . . .	92	94
white doll . . . . .	7	5
Request 7 (for Negro)		
colored doll . . . . .	74	70
white doll . . . . .	20	19
Request 8 (for you)		
colored doll . . . . .	61	69
white doll . . . . .	39	29

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

the medium and dark groups, are statistically significant.

Again, as in previous work,<sup>5</sup> it is shown that the percentage of the medium groups' identifications with the white or the colored representation resembles more that of the dark group and differs from the light group. Upon the basis of these results, therefore, one may assume that some of the factors and dynamics involved in racial identification are substantially the same for the dark and medium children, in contrast to dynamics for the light children.

**North-South Differences.** The results presented in Table 4 indicate that there are no significant quantitative differences between the northern and southern Negro children tested (children in mixed schools and children in segregated

schools) in their knowledge of racial differences.

While none of these differences is statistically reliable, it is significant that northern children know as well as southern children which doll is supposed to represent a white child and which doll is supposed to represent a colored child. However, the northern children make fewer identifications with the colored doll and more identifications with the white doll than do the southern children. One factor accounting for this difference may be the fact that in this sample there are many more light colored children in the North (33) than there are in the South (13). Since this difference in self-identification is not statistically significant, it may be stated that the children in the northern mixed-school situation do not

<sup>5</sup> K. B. and M. P. Clark, "Skin Color as a Factor in Racial Identification of Negro Preschool Children," *J. Soc. Psychol.*, 1940, XI, 159-169; "Segregation as a Factor in the Racial Identification of Negro Preschool Children: a preliminary report," *J. Exper. Educ.*, 1939, IX, 161-163; "The Development of Consciousness of Self and the Emergence of Racial Identification in Negro Preschool Children," *J. Soc. Psychol.*, 1939, X, 591-599.

TABLE 5  
CHOICES OF ALL SUBJECTS

Choice	Request 1 (play with)		Request 2 (nice doll)		Request 3 (looks bad)		Request 4 (nice color)	
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent
Colored doll . . . . .	83	32	97	38	149	59	96	38
White doll . . . . .	169	67	150	59	42	17	151	60
Don't know or no response . . . . .	1	1	6	3	62	24	6	2

differ from children in the southern segregated schools in either their knowledge of racial differences or their racial identification. A more qualitative analysis will be presented elsewhere.

**Racial Preferences.** It is clear from Table 5 that the majority of these Negro children prefer the *white* doll and reject the colored doll.

Approximately two thirds of the subjects indicated by their responses to requests 1 and 2 that they like the white doll "best," or that they would like to play with the white doll in preference to the colored doll, and that the white doll is a "nice doll."

Their responses to request 3 show that this preference for the white doll implies a concomitant negative attitude toward the brown doll. Fifty-nine percent of these children indicated that the colored doll "looks bad," while only 17 percent stated that the white doll "looks bad" (critical ratio 10.9). That this preference and negation in some way involve skin color is indicated by the results for request 4. Only 38 percent of the children thought that the brown doll was a "nice color," while 60 percent of them thought that the white doll was a "nice color" (critical ratio 5.0).

The importance of these results for an understanding of the origin and development of racial concepts and attitudes in Negro children cannot be minimized. Of equal significance are their implications, in the light of the results of racial identi-

fication already presented, for racial mental hygiene.

**Age Differences.** Table 6 shows that at each age from three through seven years the majority of these children prefer the white doll and reject the brown doll. This tendency to prefer the white doll is not as stable (not statistically reliable) in the three-year-olds as it is in the four- and five-year-olds. On the other hand, however, the tendency of the three-year-olds to negate the brown doll ("looks bad") is established as a statistically significant fact (critical ratio 4.5).

Analyzing the results of requests 1 and 2 together, it is seen that there is a marked *increase* in preference for the white doll from the three- to the four-year level; a more gradual *decrease* in this preference from the four- to the five-year level; a further decrease from the five- to the six-year level; and a continued decrease from the six- to the seven-year level. These results suggest that although the majority of Negro children at each age prefer the white doll to the brown doll, this preference decreases gradually from four through seven years.

Skin color preferences of these children follow a somewhat different pattern of development. The results of request 4 show that while the majority of children at each age below 7 years prefer the skin color of the white doll, this preference increases from three through five years and decreases from five through seven years. It is of interest to point out that

TABLE 6

## CHOICES OF SUBJECTS AT EACH AGE LEVEL\*

Choice	3 yr.		4 yr.		5 yr.		6 yr.		7 yr.	
	No.	Per- cent	No.	Per- cent	No.	Per- cent	No.	Per- cent	No.	Per- cent
Request 1 (play with)										
colored doll . . . . .	13	42	7	24	12	26	21	29	30	40
white doll . . . . .	17	55	22	76	34	74	51	71	45	60
Request 2 (nice doll)										
colored doll . . . . .	11	36	7	24	13	28	33	46	33	44
white doll . . . . .	18	58	22	76	33	72	38	53	39	52
Request 3 (looks bad)										
colored doll . . . . .	21	68	15	52	36	78	45	63	32	43
white doll . . . . .	6	19	7	24	5	11	11	15	13	17
Request 4 (nice color)										
colored doll . . . . .	12	39	8	28	9	20	31	43	36	48
white doll . . . . .	18	58	21	72	36	78	40	56	36	48

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

TABLE 7

## CHOICES OF SUBJECTS IN LIGHT, MEDIUM, AND DARK GROUPS\*

Choice	Light		Medium		Dark	
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent
Request 1 (play with)						
colored doll . . . . .	11	24	41	32	31	39
white doll . . . . .	35	76	86	67	48	61
Request 2 (nice doll)						
colored doll . . . . .	15	33	50	39	32	40
white doll . . . . .	31	67	72	56	47	60
Request 3 (looks bad)						
colored doll . . . . .	31	67	73	57	45	57
white doll . . . . .	6	13	22	17	14	18
Request 4 (nice color)						
colored doll . . . . .	13	28	56	44	27	34
white doll . . . . .	32	70	68	53	51	65

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



TABLE 8

CHOICES OF SUBJECTS IN NORTHERN (MIXED SCHOOLS) AND SOUTHERN (SEGREGATED SCHOOLS) GROUPS (REQUESTS 1 THROUGH 4)\*

Choice	North, percent	South, percent
Request 1 (play with)		
colored doll . . . . .	28	37
white doll . . . . .	72	62
Request 2 (nice doll)		
colored doll . . . . .	30	46
white doll . . . . .	68	52
Request 3 (looks bad)		
colored doll . . . . .	71	49
white doll . . . . .	17	16
Request 4 (nice color)		
colored doll . . . . .	37	40
white doll . . . . .	63	57

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

only at the seven-year level do the same number of children indicate a preference for the skin color of the colored doll as for that of the white doll.

The majority of these children at each age level indicate that the brown doll, rather than the white doll, "looks bad." This result shows positively the negation of the colored doll which was implicit in the expressed preference for the white doll discussed above.

The evaluative rejection of the brown doll is statistically significant, even at the three-year level, and is pronounced at the five-year level. The indicated preference for the white doll is statistically significant from the four-year level up to the seven-year level.

It seems justifiable to assume from these results that the crucial period in the formation and patterning of racial attitudes begins at around four and five years. At these ages these subjects appear to be reacting more uncritically in a definite structuring of attitudes which

conforms with the accepted racial values and mores of the larger environment.

**Preferences and Skin Color.** Results presented in Table 7 reveal that there is a tendency for the majority of these children, in spite of their own skin color, to prefer the white doll and to negate the brown doll. This tendency is most pronounced in the children of light skin color and least so in the dark children. A more intensive analysis of these results appears in a larger, yet unpublished study.

**North-South Differences.** From Table 8 it is clear that the southern children in segregated schools are less pronounced in their preference for the white doll, compared to the northern children's definite preference for this doll. Although still in a minority, a higher percentage of southern children, compared to northern, prefer to play with the colored doll or think that it is a "nice" doll. The critical ratio of this difference is not significant for request 1 but approaches significance for request 2 (2.75).

A significantly higher percentage (71) of the northern children, compared to southern children (49) think that the brown doll looks bad (critical ratio 3.68). Also a slightly higher percent of the southern children think that the brown doll has a "nice color," while more northern children think that the white doll has a "nice color."

In general, it may be stated that northern and southern children in these age groups tend to be similar in the degree of their preference for the white doll—with the northern children tending to be somewhat more favorable to the white doll than are the southern children. The southern children, however, in spite of their equal favorableness toward the white doll, are significantly less likely to reject the brown doll (evaluate it negatively), as compared to the strong tendency for the majority of the northern children to do so. That this difference is not primarily due to the larger number of light children found in the northern sample is indicated by more intensive analysis presented in the complete report.

**Some Qualitative Data.** Many of the children entered into the experimental situation with a freedom similar to that of play. They tended to verbalize freely and much of this unsolicited verbalization was relevant to the basic problems of this study.

On the whole, the rejection of the brown doll and the preference for the white doll, when explained at all, were explained in rather simple, concrete terms: for white-doll preference—" 'cause he's pretty" or " 'cause he's white"; for

rejection of the brown doll—" 'cause he's ugly" or " 'cause it don't look pretty" or " 'cause him black" or "got black on him."

On the other hand, some of the children who were free and relaxed in the beginning of the experiment broke down and cried or became somewhat negativistic during the latter part when they were required to make self-identifications. Indeed, two children ran out of the testing room, unconsolable, convulsed in tears. This type of behavior, although not so extreme, was more prevalent in the North than in the South. The southern children who were disturbed by this aspect of the experiment generally indicated their disturbance by smiling or matter of factly attempting to escape their dilemma either by attempted humor or rationalization.

Rationalization of the rejection of the brown doll was found among both northern and southern children, however. A northern medium six-year-old justified his rejection of the brown doll by stating that "he looks bad 'cause he hasn't got a eyelash." A seven-year-old medium northern child justified his choice of the white doll as the doll with a "nice color" because "his feet, hands, ears, elbows, knees, and hair are clean."

A northern five-year-old dark child felt compelled to explain his identification with the brown doll by making the following unsolicited statement: "I burned my face and made it spoil." A seven-year-old northern light child went to great pains to explain that he is actually white but: "I look brown because I got a suntan in the summer."