

Undergraduate Psychology Research Methods Journal

Volume 1 | Issue 11

Article 7

5-2010

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Recommended Citation

Roessleain, Jessica (2010) "Perceived Racial Expectations of Children," *Undergraduate Psychology Research Methods Journal*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 11 , Article 7.

Available at: https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/psych_journals/vol1/iss11/7

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Perceived Racial Expectations of Children

Jessica R. Roesslein⁶

This is a proposed research study concerning the presence of prejudice among children, especially concerning ambiguous everyday situations. Racism can be a source of chronic stress, mental health issues, and physical health issues for those involved, and everyday acts of prejudice can be even more harmful than overt acts of racism. These acts can cause health problems as serious as cardiovascular disease. Therefore this study aims to identify racial preferences among children, in the form of everyday ambiguous situations by having them identify what is occurring in a picture involving ambiguous interactions between white and black children on a playground. These interactions include a child passing candy to another, children playing tag, and a child picking up books with another child on looking. The participant responses would be recorded and coded by a blind judge to reveal race preferences in children. Identifying racism early in life could help combat the cumulative stress effects that racism has on individual. By reducing this stress, you can in turn decrease the frequency of mental and physical health issues amongst adults. Identification of prejudice could perhaps lead to future research to provide solutions for racism among school children in the future. By bringing to light the prejudices that may still exist in schools today, students, parents, and educators may be made more aware of their actions and in turn may take steps to decrease prejudicial acts. Since the curriculum in schools is highly structured, implementing a program to reduce racism is a realistic goal for the future.

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This proposed study aims to explore when and in what context prejudice occurs in children. Although it is a well versed norm that outright discrimination is not acceptable, there is question about the influence of racism in ambiguous situations (Marino, Negy, Hammons, McKinney & Asberg, 2007). Therefore, the proposed study will be conducted in order to examine these ambiguous, everyday situations.

Discrimination is no doubt a common part of society. In one study of racial discrimination, 100% of African Americans reported some instance of racial discrimination in their lifetime. Of these African Americans, 99.4% reported stress as a result of discrimination (Kessler, 1999; Klonoff as cited in Negy, Hammons, McKinney & Asberg, 2007). Kessler, Mickelson, and Williams (1999) also found that experiences of perceived discrimination are significantly related to mental health issues in adulthood. Not only are overt racist acts harmful, but so are everyday encounters with racism, such as exclusion and rejection. These common interactions can occur so frequently that they become a source of chronic stress (Broudy, et al., 2006). The frequency of these discriminatory acts can change the way one interprets certain encounters, in such a way that intensifies future feelings of discrimination. The longer the discrimination occurs, the harder it becomes to cope with, and the more exhausted the use of coping strategies becomes. This exhaustion of coping resources can overall lead to an increase in stress related health problems such as cardiovascular disease (Broudy, et al., 2006). Therefore, catching discrimination early on is vital to helping relieve stress and improve mental and physical health among individuals in the school system and elsewhere.

Previous studies on racial prejudice in children have often yielded very different results. In a well known study by Clark and Clark, black children and white children both were found to show a greater preference for the white doll over the black doll (Clark & Clark, as cited in Hraba

& Grant, 1969). A second study done over two decades later by Hraba and Grant (1969) set out to retest Clark and Clark's, 1947, research and they found some contradicting results. In this study they tested children age 3 to 8 and found that the children, both white and black, preferred to play with the doll of their own race. They also found that the preference to play with the doll of their own race increased as their age increased (Hraba & Grant, 1969). In both of these studies, the social climate of race was very different from that of today. In fact, Hraba and Grant(1969), state that during the time of their study, a black pride campaign had been occurring for the past two years in the town in which they tested, which could have caused more positive identification with the African American race. Undeniably, racial prejudices still exist in society today, but the outright racial discrimination and segregation is no longer at the forefront.

In present day, racial issues tend to take a submissive role over other issues. In yet another, later version of the Clark and Clark (1947) study by Jordan and Hernandez-Reif (2009), racial prejudice was examined using computer based sketches instead of dolls and four skin tones were used in one part of the study, and only two were used in another. Jordan and Hernandez-Reif (2009) found that there were no skin tone preferences when children were presented with four different skin tones, but that when asked to choose only between a black or white drawing, white children preferred the white drawing while black children were divided in preference for the white or black drawing. These results suggest that prejudices still exist in children today, and the variation of the results of the three previous studies show that repeated research is needed to confirm findings of racism. Since the social climate is ever changing regarding race, and racism can cause stress and harm, continuing to study race in children is a worthy endeavor.

Often small ambiguous situations regarding racism can cause more profound physical and mental health consequences than that of overt acts of racism (Bennett, Merritt, Edwards, &

Sollers, 2004). Therefore the proposed study will be conducted in order to examine ambiguous acts of prejudice in children. In the proposed study, three ambiguous focus areas will be presented to the children in a drawing. These focus areas will contain one Caucasian child and one African American child interacting with one another. The participants will then be asked to describe what is happening in the focus areas. It will then be noted if the participants attribute positive or negative comments to those of their own race or to a race other than their own.

The results of Habra and Grant's study (1969) indicated that the children's preference for their own race increased with age. Since the children that will be tested in the proposed study have a higher median age (6-12 years) than those in their study (3-7 years), the children in the proposed study are likely to show the same trend of increased preference for their own race. In regard to the results of the Jordan and Hernandez-Reif (2009) study, they found that whites tended to prefer their own race, while black students were split in their decision. This may also be due to the lower median age of their participants (3-7 years). In the proposed study, children age 6-12 will be tested, increasing the likelihood that the participants will attribute more positive qualities to their own race. The later dates of these studies are more relevant to today's society than Clark and Clark's (1947) study of race and therefore more relevant to the study proposed.

In a study by Nesdale (1999), it is suggested that during the ages from 7 years on, racism and prejudices emerge and become concrete. Since the participants in this study fall close within this age range, the current proposal should yield results containing prejudices.

Based on the results of these studies, the proposed hypothesis is that children will show a greater preference for their own race by interpreting the focus areas of the study in a way that is more favorable to the member of their own race.

Method

Participants

Participants will be recruited through many schools throughout many school districts, with a wide range of ethnic diversity. Students age 6- 12 will be eligible to be recruited for this study and will be given permission forms to be signed by their parents. One hundred participants will be recruited. All students, participating or not, will receive a sticker as compensation from the researcher. Analysis of the sex of the participants will be presented as a frequency count. The race of the sample will be percentages, providing the reader with the composition of the sample.

Materials

The study will take place within the private school at which the participants will be recruited. The interviews will be conducted in an empty classroom area used for afterschool care. The interviews will be done at a small table with two chairs. This room will have adequate lighting. There will be two drawings used in this study (see Appendix A and B). The drawings have three focus areas; the children passing candy to one another, the children playing tag, and the child picking up books. Everything that the child says will be recorded with pen and paper by the researcher. Results will be coded by the researcher and a blind judge to ensure consistency of the coding. The responses that the children give will be coded as either positive or negative. There will be a short, three question survey to be filled out by the parent (see Appendix C). There will also be a permission form for parents to allow their child to participate (see Appendix D), a letter of explanation and consent from the Director or Principle of the school (see Appendix E), a feedback letter to the individual teachers of the classes that participated (see Appendix F), and a feedback letter to the parents of the children who participated (see Appendix G).

Procedure

A letter of explanation and consent will be sent to the director of the school. Once this has been read and signed, participants will begin to be recruited. The researcher will send out permission forms to the parents of all eligible students. Students with signed parent permission slips on file with the researcher will be called individually out of the classroom and randomly assigned to either drawing A or drawing B. The participant will be reassured that if at any time they do not wish to continue they may return to the classroom without prejudice. The child will then be seated at the table next to the researcher and the drawing will be placed in front of them. The child will then be prompted to tell the researcher what is happening in the picture.

As the participant describes the picture, everything he/she says will be recorded with pen and paper. If the child fails to describe any of the focus areas of the drawing they will be prompted, "And what are these children doing?" as the researcher points to the focus area the participant failed to describe. If he/she does not give a description they will not be prompted further. The student will be asked if they were previously informed about what the study was about and this information will be recorded. The student will then be debriefed and escorted back to he/she classroom by the researcher. At this time the researcher will call the next student down to be interviewed.

The procedure above will then be repeated until all participants that received permission are interviewed. After the completion of the interviews, all students in the classrooms will receive a sticker, whether they were able to participate or not. All participants in the study will have an envelope with a feedback letter sent home with them at the end of the day by their teacher; this will be addressed to their parents. A feedback letter will also be given to the individual classroom teachers who allowed their students to participate.

The mean and standard deviation of the participants' age will be provided, along with the range. The statistical analysis performed will be a 2(Child's race) X 2 (child in picture favored) factorial design.

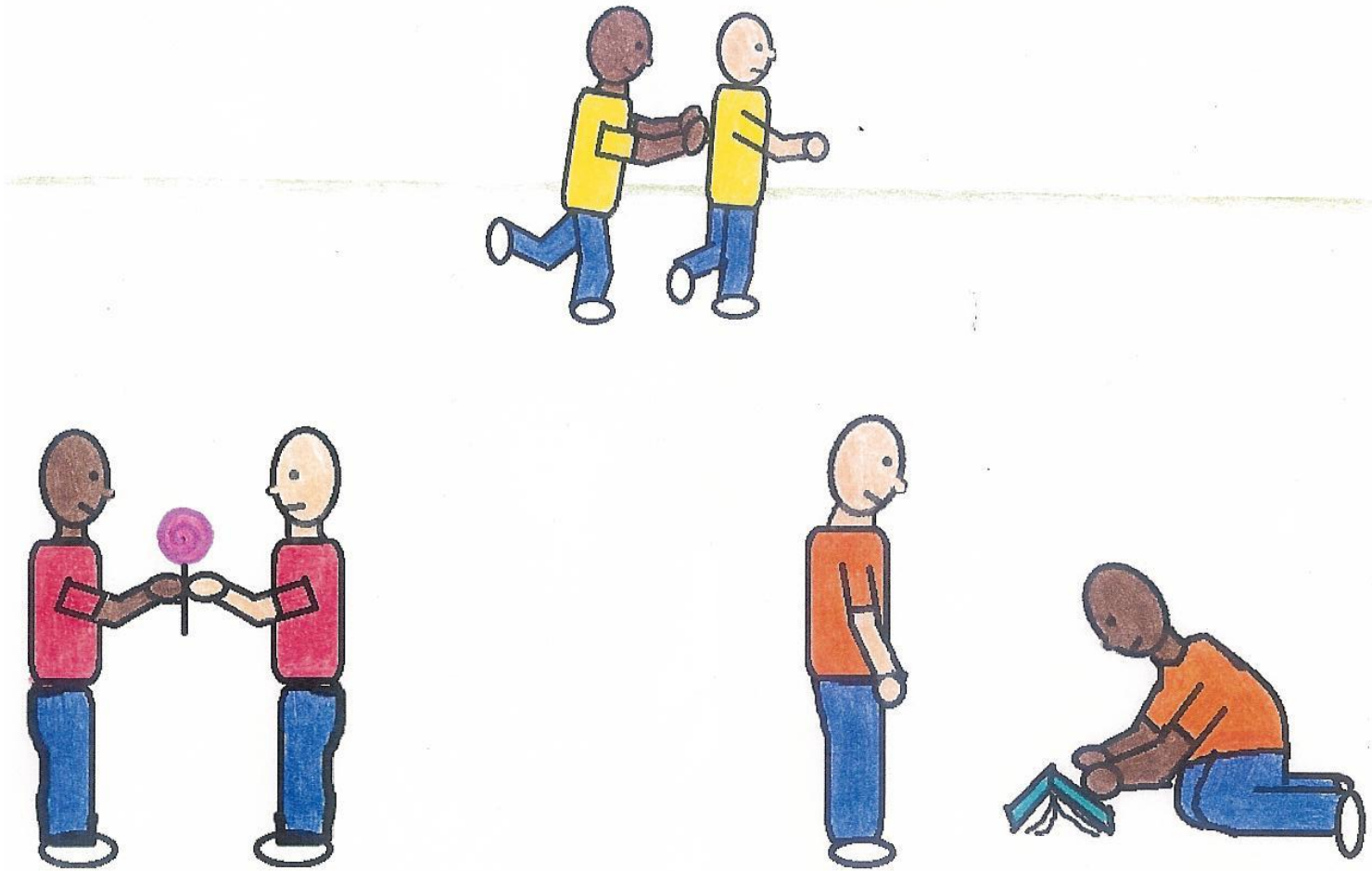
The implications for this proposed study are far reaching. If the results of this proposed study conclude that there are slight prejudices among actual childhood situations, not just against a single object, such as a doll, future research could then identify ways to decrease these prejudices and in turn, decrease the mental and physical health consequences of ongoing racism. This will also help bring attention to the prejudice that exists in early childhood and therefore open up discussion on how prejudice and discrimination can be helped in the school system, which in turn will reduce stress and anxiety over the victims of racism in schools. Since the school system is such a controlled curriculum, it would be easy to implement systems to help reduce racism in school. Participation in this proposed study could bring awareness to children, parents, and educators about their unknown prejudices. Making them aware of this could open up discussion in school and home, and could cause people to more clearly evaluate their thoughts on race.

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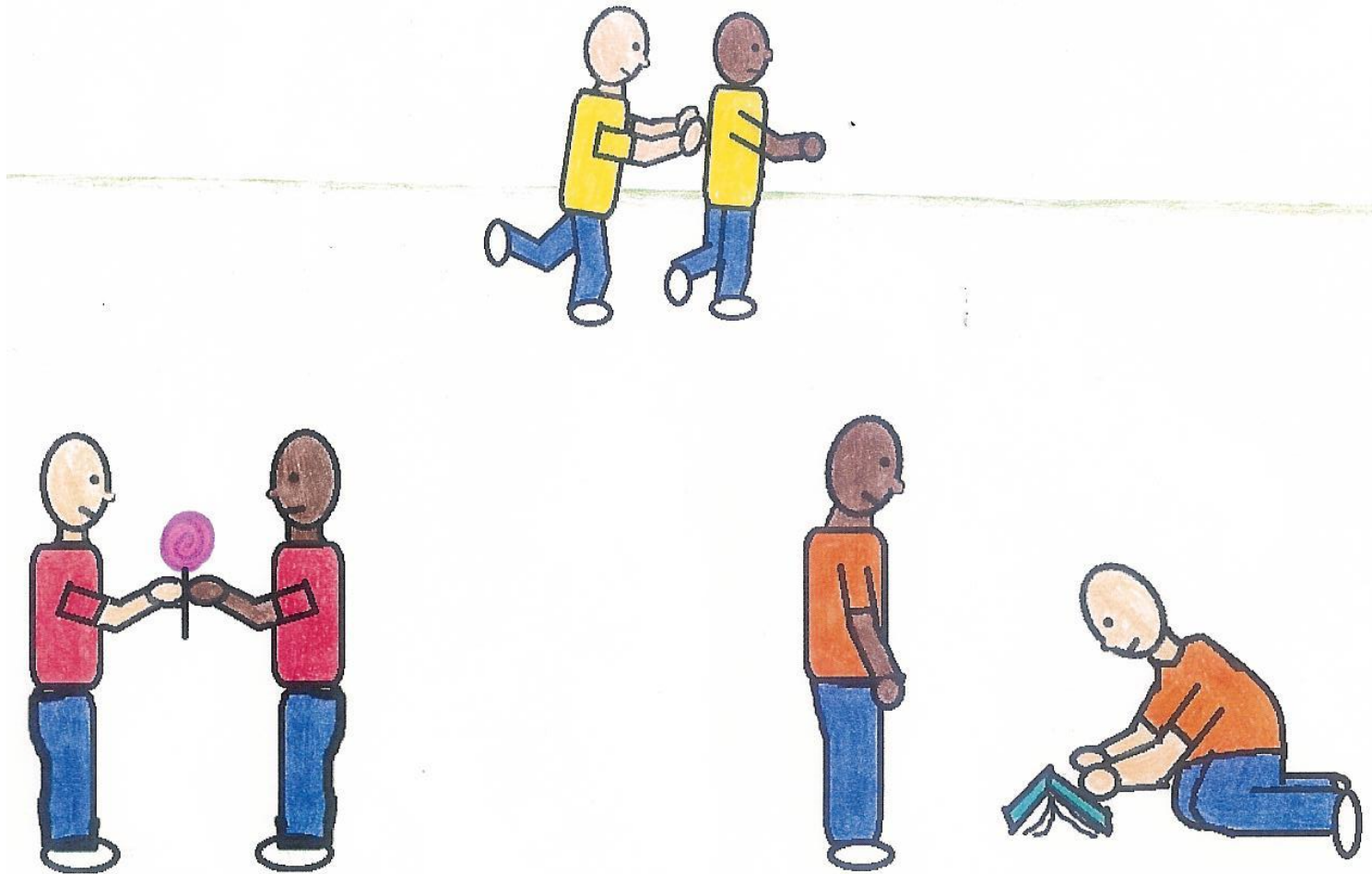
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Appendix A



Appendix B



Appendix C

Please complete this short survey regarding your child, participant number_____.

Thank you!

Survey

Sex _____

Age _____

Race _____

Appendix D

Invitation to Participate in a Study of Perceived Racial Expectations of Children

Description of the Study:

Your child is being invited to participate in a study about racial expectations they may have involving everyday situations. The goal of this study is to learn what slight preferences children might have with respect to different races in the context of everyday life. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before you agree to your child being in the study.

If you decide to let your child take part in this study he/she will be asked to look at a scene with various children of different races at play with one another. In this picture there will be ambiguous situations such as a child passing candy to one another. Your child will be asked to tell the researcher what is happening in the picture and your child's responses will be recorded with paper and pencil. This will take about 15 minutes.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Though there does not appear to be any risks or discomforts to your child the researcher will let the child know that he/she may withdraw for the study at anytime without any penalties.

Your child may benefit from the curiosity of the experiment process and the feeling of being involved. He/she will also receive a sticker for participation in the study.

Confidentiality:

I will protect your child's confidentiality by coding his/her information with a number so no one can trace the answers to his/her name. All the findings will be combined and no

identifying information will be used. All the information from the study will be kept confidential and shredded after 1 year.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your decision to allow your child to take part in the study is voluntary. Your child is free to choose not to take part in the study or to stop taking part at any time without any penalty.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have questions or concerns you may contact the researcher or Faculty Supervisor at the contact information listed below.

Researcher:

Jessica Roesslein

(314)-712-1069

Jrr626@lionmail.lindenwood.edu

Supervisor:

Dr. Michiko Nohara-LeClair

(636)-949-4371

mnohara-leclair@lindenwood.edu

Statement of Consent:

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree allow my child _____ to

participate in this study.

Print your child's name

Print Parent/Guardian Name

Signature of Parent or Guardian

Date

Appendix E

Name of Director/Principal

Name of School

Address of School

As we discussed, I will be doing my research through Lindenwood University under the supervision of Dr. Michiko Nohara-LeClair. The research cannot take place until it has been passed through an ethics board at Lindenwood University to ensure the well being of the children who participate. The children at Campbell Montessori are being asked to participate in a study about racial expectations they may have involving everyday situations. The goal of this study is to learn what slight preferences children might have to their own race or other races in the context of everyday life. The students will be pulled out of class and individually be asked to look at a scene with various children of different races at play with one another. In this picture there will be ambiguous situations such as a child passing candy to one another. The student will then be asked to tell me what is happening in the picture and the child's responses will be recorded with paper and pencil. This will take about 15 minutes. The students who chose to participate must turn in a signed parental consent form that I will supply. If at anytime they choose not to continue they can stop and return to class without prejudice. Although I do not anticipate any major risks to the students, if they appear uncomfortable at anytime during the study I will reassure them that they do not have to participate. All of the children will receive a sticker after the study, whether they participated in the study or not.

If you have questions or concerns you may contact the researcher or Faculty Supervisor at the contact information listed below. Thank you so much for your time!

Researcher:

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Supervisor:

Dr. Michiko Nohara-LeClair

(636)-949-4371

mnohara-leclair@lindenwood.edu

Statement of Consent:

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree allow this study to take place at my facility, Campbell Montessori School.

Signature and Date

Appendix F

Dear _____ :

Thank you for allowing me to take time out of your schedule to invite willing students with parent permission to take part in my study. Your students are being asked to participate in a study about racial expectations they may have involving everyday situations. The goal of this study is to learn what slight preferences children might have to their own race or other races in the context of everyday life.

Your students will be pulled out of class individually for about 15 minutes each and be asked to look at a scene with various children of different races at play with one another. In this picture there will be ambiguous situations such as a child passing candy to one another. Your students will be asked to tell me what is happening in the picture and his/her responses will be recorded with paper and pencil.

If you are interested in the aggregate of this study it will be made available for you to look at after the completion of the study upon your request. If you have any questions or concerns please contact me at the information listed below.

Thank you!

Jessica Roesslein

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