

Emotional Factors in Racial Identification and Preference in Negro Children



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The Journal of Negro Education, Vol. 19, No. 3, The Negro Child in the American Social Order (Summer, 1950), 341-350.

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CHAPTER XIII
EMOTIONAL FACTORS IN RACIAL IDENTIFICATION AND
PREFERENCE IN NEGRO CHILDREN

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THE PROBLEM

It has been shown¹ that at each age level from three years through seven years, Negro children have a well developed knowledge of the concept of racial difference between "white" and "colored" as

more stable than in light-skinned children. There were no significant differences between Northern and Southern children in the awareness of racial differences.

Previous studies have shown that the majority of these subjects

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A qualitative observation of the responses of these children as they worked indicated that in general they colored themselves with painstaking care, as compared to the matter-of-fact manner in which they colored the leaf, apple, orange, and mouse. This was true except in those cases which were classified as escape responses; where the child engaged in marked random scribbling when asked to color himself.

In general, with the exception of escape responses, the children tended to color themselves with a noticeably lighter color than their own and applied much less pressure than when coloring the objects and the mouse.

TABLE I
IDENTIFICATION OF ALL SUBJECTS
ON COLORING TEST

three- and four-year olds were not used in the Coloring test.

TABLE II
IDENTIFICATION OF SUBJECTS AT EACH AGE
LEVEL ON COLORING TEST

	5 Year		6 Year		7 Year	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Reality response	30	80	54	86	57	97
Phantasy response	2	5	4	6	2	3
Irrelevant response	6	15	5	8	..	..

Table II strongly supports previously published results with the line-drawing and doll techniques. There is a general increase, with age, in the per cent of subjects who make correct racial identification in terms of their own skin color. Phantasy responses decrease with age. Irrelevant or escape responses decrease sharply with age, disappearing at the seven year level.

sponded to other experimental techniques. A few excerpts from presently observed clinical cases are also appended.

PROCEDURE

In addition to the Doll and Line Drawing techniques described in the previously published material, the five-, six-, and seven-year-old subjects were given a Coloring test.

This test consisted of a sheet of paper on which there were outline drawings of a leaf, an apple, an orange, a mouse, a boy, and a girl. A box of crayons, including the usual assortment and brown, black, white, and tan, was given to the child. Each child was asked first to color the objects and the mouse in order to determine whether there was a stable concept of the relationship of color to object. If the child passed this portion of the test he was then told: "color this little boy (or girl) the color that you are". This is _____ (child's name), color him (or her) the color you are. After this request was complied with the child was then told: "Now this is a little girl, (or boy)*. Color her (or him) the color you like little boys (or girls) to be".

There was a total of 160 subjects whose responses on the coloring test were stable enough to analyze. The following tabulation shows the number of subjects according to

*Each subject was given a picture of the opposite sex.

*Study made possible by fellowship grant from the Julius Rosenwald Fund, 1940-41.

age, region in which they lived, and skin color:

	5 year	6 year	7 year	Totals
Southern:				
Light	0	3	1	4
Medium	3	14	19	36
Dark	3	13	10	26
Northern:				
Light	11	7	7	25
Medium	15	18	13	46
Dark	6	8	9	23
Totals	38	63	59	160

RESULTS

Identification Based upon Coloring Test

The results of the Coloring test reveal an extensive pattern of the basic dynamics which formed the context of the racial preferences and identification of these children. In the main the responses fell into the following categories: reality responses, phantasy responses, and irrelevant or escape responses. Reality responses were those in which the children colored the outline drawing of a child with a color reasonably related to their own skin color. Phantasy responses were those in which the child colored his representation in a color markedly different (*i.e.*, very much lighter, white, yellow, etc.) from his own skin color. Irrelevant or escape responses were those in which a child who had colored the leaf, apple, orange, and mouse in realistic and relevant colors, colored his own representation or preference in a bizarre fashion (*i.e.*, purple, red, green, etc.).

A qualitative observation of the responses of these children as they worked indicated that in general they colored themselves with painstaking care, as compared to the matter-of-fact manner in which they colored the leaf, apple, orange, and mouse. This was true except in those cases which were classified as escape responses; where the child engaged in marked random scribbling when asked to color himself.

In general, with the exception of escape responses, the children tended to color themselves with a noticeably lighter color than their own and applied much less pressure than when coloring the objects and the mouse.

TABLE I
IDENTIFICATION OF ALL SUBJECTS
ON COLORING TEST

	Number	Per Cent
Reality response	141	88
Phantasy response	8	5
Irrelevant response	11	7

The results in Table I support the previous finding that the majority of these children were able to make identifications based on the reality of their own skin color. The higher percentage of reality identifications found in the coloring technique, 88 per cent, as compared with 66 per cent found when using the doll technique, reflects that: (1) in the Coloring test it was considered a reality response for a very light-skin child to color himself as white; and (2)

three- and four-year olds were not used in the Coloring test.

TABLE II
IDENTIFICATION OF SUBJECTS AT EACH AGE
LEVEL ON COLORING TEST

	5 Year		6 Year		7 Year	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Reality response	30	80	54	86	57	97
Phantasy response	2	5	4	6	2	3
Irrelevant response	6	15	5	8	..	..

Table II strongly supports previously published results with the line-drawing and doll techniques. There is a general increase, with age, in the per cent of subjects who make correct racial identification in terms of their own skin color. Phantasy responses decrease with age. Irrelevant or escape responses decrease sharply with age, disappearing at the seven year level.

TABLE III
IDENTIFICATION OF SUBJECTS IN
LIGHT, MEDIUM, AND DARK SKIN COLOR
GROUPS ON COLORING TEST

	Light		Medium		Dark	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Reality response	29	100	70	85	42	86
Phantasy response	....	.....	3	4	5	10
Irrelevant response	....	.....	9	11	2	4

Table III further substantiates the previous finding 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.

It can be seen from Table III

that 15 per cent of the medium children and 14 per cent of the dark children made phantasy responses (colored themselves white or yellow) or gave irrelevant or escapist responses (colored themselves in a bizarre color such as green, red, etc.). The 100 per cent reality responses of the light children represent the authors' decision to classify their coloring of themselves as white or yellow as a reality response—since such a response appears to be an indication of the child's concept of reality, based upon a concrete perceptual fact. Of these 29 light-colored children, 10 colored themselves light brown, indicating a growing awareness of social reality which is in contrast to perceptual reality.

TABLE IV
IDENTIFICATION OF SUBJECTS IN NORTHERN (MIXED SCHOOLS) AND SOUTHERN (SEGREGATED SCHOOLS) GROUPS ON COLORING TEST

	North		South	
	No.	%	No.	%
Reality response	81	86	60	91
Phantasy response	7	8	4	6
Irrelevant response	6	6	2	3

TABLE VI
COLOR PREFERENCES OF SUBJECT AT EACH AGE LEVEL ON COLORING TEST

	5 year		6 year		7 year	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Brown	14	37	25	40	38	65
White	11	29	32	50	15	25
Irrelevant color	13	34	6	10	6	10

That there are no significant differences between Northern and Southern children in self-identification, confirms previous findings.

Color Preference Based Upon Coloring Test Results

TABLE V
COLOR PREFERENCE OF ALL SUBJECTS ON COLORING TEST

	Number	%
Brown or black	77	48
White or yellow	58	36
Irrelevant color	25	16

Table V indicates that 48 per cent of the subjects colored their preferences in brown, 36 per cent of them colored their preferences in white, and 16 per cent used a bizarre or irrelevant color. When all of the children refusing to use the color brown or black are considered, it is significant that 52 per cent of this total group rejects the color brown. Only 5 of the 77 children who colored their preference brown or black used the black crayon. These results tend to support previous results, although the trend was seen more definitely with the Dolls test.

Table VI again substantiates the previous finding that the rejection of brown color decreases with age. At the seven year level, for the first time with any of the techniques used, the majority (65%) of the children indicate their preference for brown color. However, even at age seven a sizable percentage (35%) of the group rejects the brown or black color by coloring their preference white or making an escapist response to the test.

This discrepancy might be explained by the fact that the Coloring test appears to be a more sensitive method for bring out some of the subtleties, complexities and conflicts involved in the pattern of children's attitudes toward skin color. The fact that 16 per cent of the dark children and 17 per cent of the medium children make irrelevant responses to the request for coloring their preference would seem to suggest a conflict in this area which this method is capable

TABLE VII
COLOR PREFERENCES OF LIGHT, MEDIUM, AND DARK SKIN
COLOR GROUPS ON COLORING TEST

	Light		Medium		Dark	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Brown	15	52	42	51	20	41
White	11	38	26	32	21	43
Irrelevant color	3	10	14	17	8	16

Table VII indicates that for the light and medium children the percentage of preference for the brown color and rejection of this color is about the same. Both groups are equally divided in preferring and rejecting the brown color. On the other hand, only 41 per cent of the dark children prefer brown while 43 per cent prefer white and 16 per cent escape the issue by making bizarre responses. Altogether 59 per cent of the dark children rejected brown. This finding is at variance with the results from the Dolls test which showed the darker children showing less preference for the white and a higher preference for the brown doll compared to the light children.

of detecting and which these results reflect.

TABLE VIII
COLOR PREFERENCES OF SUBJECTS IN
NORTHERN (MIXED SCHOOLS) AND SOUTHERN
(SEGREGATED SCHOOLS) GROUP ON
COLORING TEST

	North		South	
	No.	%	No.	%
Brown	34	36	46	70
White	41	44	17	25
Irrelevant color	19	20	3	5

Table VIII indicates a significant difference between Northern and Southern children in their skin color preferences. A substantial majority of the Southern children (70%) color their preference

brown while only 36 per cent of the Northern children indicate a preference for brown. On the other hand 44 per cent of the Northern children color their preference white while only 25 per cent of the Southern children do so. It is significant to note from Table VIII that additional evidence of greater emotional conflict in the Northern children is suggested by the fact that 20 per cent of these children made an irrelevant response (colored their preference in a bizarre color). Only 5 per cent of the Southern children colored their preference in a bizarre color.

It cannot be argued that the greater tendency of the Northern subjects to color their preferences white was merely a reflection of the fact that there were 25 light children found in the Northern sample and only 4 light children in the Southern sample.

The evidence against this assumption is found in the following Table IX which compares the preferences of Northern and Southern 6 and 7 year old dark and medium children only.

It is clear from the results in

Table IX that the greater tendency of Northern children to prefer white or give an irrelevant or escapist response, compared to Southern children, is a consistent fact even when only the medium and dark children are compared. A substantial majority of the Northern dark and medium 6 year-old children (77%) color their preferences *white* — while 67 per cent of the Southern dark and medium children of this age color their preference *brown*.

Eighty per cent of these Southern 7-year olds color their preference brown compared to 60 per cent of the Northern dark and medium 7-year olds who color their preference brown. While there is a substantial increase in indicated preference for brown from 6-to-7-year-old Northern children it should be pointed out that even at the 7-year level 40 per cent of the Northern children are still indicating a preference for white or giving an escapist response to the request for a preference coloring. This fact is considered further indication of a greater degree of emotional conflict centering around

TABLE IX
PREFERENCE OF NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN MEDIUM AND DARK CHILDREN
(6 AND 7 YEAR OLDS) (MEDIUM AND DARK COMBINED)

	6 Year				7 Year			
	North (N=26)		South (N=27)		North (N=22)		South (N=29)	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Brown	4	15	18	67	13	60	23	80
White	20	77	8	30	4	18	5	17
Irrelevant	2	8	1	3	5	22	1	3

racial or skin color preference in the Northern children.

Spontaneous Comments

Southern children have nearly three times as many spontaneous explanations of their choices of brown or white in the preference series as do Northern children; 54 such comments come from Southern children and 20 from Northern. This might be considered as being indicative of the greater preoccupation of these Southern children with racial matters, or a greater spontaneity on their part in reference to this subject, or an attempt on the part of the Northern children to have as little contact with a probably disturbing or painful area as possible—to repress their anxiety and to say as little as possible. Some evidence in support of this latter hypothesis is the fact that for the most part only the Northern children refused to continue in the experiment when they were confronted with the task of identifying with a brown-skin color after they had already negated the brown and indicated a preference for white.

In classifying the types of spontaneous responses made by those children who explained their choices, the following categories emerged:

- (1) Explanation in terms of color as the definite and deciding factor.
- (2) Explanation in terms of ugly or pretty.

(3) Explanation in terms of dirty or clean.

(4) Evasive explanation.

(5) Explanations with the use of the epithet "nigger".

TABLE X
TYPES OF EXPLANATIONS OFFERED FOR PREFERENCE CHOICES

	North (N=20)		South (N=54)	
	No.	%	No.	%
Color				
Bk—Wh	9	45	29	53
Ugly—Pretty	2	10	17	32
Dirty—Clean	1	5	1	2
Evasive	8	40	5	9
"Nigger"	..	..	2	4

Fifty-three per cent of the explanations of the Southern children were in terms of the skin color or race of the dolls which they chose. Thirty-two per cent were explained in terms of the ugliness of the colored doll and the prettiness of the white doll (an occasional child chose the brown doll in terms of its prettiness.) Nine per cent of the children sought explanations in terms of the ugliness of the brown doll or themselves being a "nigger" and only 2 per cent in terms of "dirty" or "clean".

For the Northern children, the picture is somewhat different. Forty-five of these Northern children who explained their choice explained them in the simple, definite terms of color differences between the dolls. However, whereas only 9 per cent of the explanations of the Southern children were eva-

sive, 40 per cent of the explanations of the Northern children can be classified as being evasive or in terms of trivial and irrelevant factors. This finding tends further to support the assumption that the Northern group (even at this age) generally tends to repress or attempt to escape from the apparently painful fact of the meaning of color differences in American society.

Ten per cent of these Northern children explained their choices in terms of "ugly" or "pretty". Again this explanation was in terms of the brown doll being "ugly" and the white doll being "pretty". Only one of the Northern children explained his choice in terms of "dirty" or "clean". It may be of significance to point out that whereas two of the Southern children explained their choices with use of the term "nigger" to designate the rejected brown doll, none of the Northern children used this epithet.

Some Examples of Spontaneous Comments of Children

1. Explanations of Rejection of Brown Doll:

South

- "because him foot ugly"
- "looks bad all over"
- "looks bad cause it don't look pretty"
- "cause its brown—I would like to be brown"
- "cause him black—cause his cheeks are colored—it's ugly"
- "cause he is a nigger"

North

- "I don't like brown"
- "cause it looks like a Negro"

- "I look brown cause I got a suntan"
- "cause it hasn't got any eyelashes"

2. Explanations of Choice of White Doll:

South

- "cause he's not colored like these—they are the best looking cause they're white"
- "cause its the prettiest one"
- "cause she's got red on her cheeks"
- "cause it got pretty hands, eyes, and eyebrows"

North

- "cause its got blue eyes—cause its got pretty eyes"
- "cause its white—it's pretty"
- "my teeth are pretty—they're white—my mother is white too"
- "I'm a high yellow gal"
- "cause that the good one"
- "cause his feet, hands, ears, elbows, knees, and hair are clean"

*Some Data From Clinical Experience**

Although data from clinical experience are not conclusive in themselves they strongly support the results and conclusions presented in this and other papers.

It appears that where the child brings up the subject of race at all, his expressions are indicative of negative attitudes toward the Negro race. Following are some samples of the spontaneous expressions of children using identical families of white and brown dolls in free play.

P. Age 9, Medium brown

(Selects only white family of dolls)
 "Who likes black men" . . . "My mother is pinky white like" . . . I would never mar-

*Some cases in psychiatric treatment at Northside Center for Child Development.

ry a black man" . . . "Lets get her a man with white skin" . . . "No ladies don't mingle with white men but lets us get a man with *light* skin".

T. Age 6, Light brown

(Separates white from colored dolls—pairs off white with colored—they fight—always the white doll wins. When replacing dolls separates white from colored in same box). "The white and the black should not be in one box".

R. Age 11, Medium brown

(Played taking dolls to doctor—used only white dolls—gave brown dolls to therapist saying she didn't like colored children). Therapist asked which doll was herself and R. replied "none—I am the mother of them all". When therapist asked which doll she preferred the most, R said, "no preferences".

S. Age 9, Medium brown

(Noted two sets of dolls, selected only colored dolls to play with). Asked therapist if he were white or colored—when therapist answered white said, "that's good—white people treat you better. I don't like colored".

SUMMARY

Significance of results from Coloring Test

The data here strongly support the conclusions drawn from the line-drawing and doll techniques concerning the dynamics of racial identification and preference in Negro children.

The Coloring test offers a greater choice of responses to be made than either the line-drawing or doll technique. Thus the tendency of these Negro children to reject the brown color is expressed not only in coloring their preferences white but also in making irrelevant or escapist responses. The latter form of expressing rejection of the brown color points to an emotional conflict centering

around some children's evaluation of their own skin color and particularly in their skin color preferences.

This escapist response (in coloring preferences) is most marked in children living in the North and most marked in five year olds but is found in some children in both North and South, at all ages, and through all skin color groups.

The clear-cut rejection of brown as a skin color preference (coloring one's preference white) is most marked in the dark children, but appears to a considerable extent in all skin-color groups and throughout all age levels.

The above is further significant when it is seen that in making self-identifications on the Coloring test only 5 per cent of the children color themselves white (as compared to 36 per cent preferring white) and only 7 per cent color themselves in an escapist manner (as compared with 16 per cent coloring their preferences in an escapist manner). Moreover, in identifying themselves the escapist response of using a bizarre color had disappeared by the age of seven.

These data suggest that by the age of seven the Negro child cannot escape realistic self-identification, but many of them indicate a clear-cut preference for white and some of them evidence emotional conflict (bizarre responses) when requested to indicate a color preference.

It appears from the data that

coincident with the awareness of racial differences and racial identity there is also the awareness and acceptance of the existing cultural attitudes and values attached to race. It is clear that the Negro child, by the age of five is aware of the fact that to be colored in contemporary American society is a mark of inferior status.

The discrepancy between identifying ones own color and indicating ones color preference is too great to be ignored. The negation of the color, brown, exists in the same complexity of attitudes in which there also exists knowledge of the fact that the child himself must be identified with that which he rejects. This apparently introduces a fundamental conflict at the very foundations of the ego structure. Many of these children attempt to resolve this profound conflict either through wishful thinking or phantasy—expressing itself in a desire to escape a situation which focuses the conflict for them. By the seven-year level the Negro child seems to be developing some stabilizing ideas which might

help to resolve the basic conflict between his racial self-image and the negative social evaluation of his skin color. The early age at which this conflict exists and for which stabilizing mechanisms appear in an attempt to resolve them seems a significant finding not only for scientists interested in the problem of personality development but social scientists interested in racial problems and techniques for racial adjustment.

These results seem most significant from the point of view of what is involved in the development of a positive, constructive program for more wholesome education of Negro children in the realities of race in the American culture. They would seem to point strongly to the need for a definite mental hygiene and educational program that would relieve children of the tremendous burden of feelings of inadequacy and inferiority which seem to become integrated into the very structure of the personality as it is developing.

