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RACIAL PERCEPTIONS AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH PERCEPTIONS OF
SCHOOL SUCCESS

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ABSTRACT

The White-Black achievement gap still persists, leaving Black children far behind their White peers. Research shows that children who struggle during their early childhood years are more likely to be at risk for academic failure in their elementary and high school years. Educators and social scientists continue to grapple with creating schools that improve Black educational achievement.

This study is grounded in the premise that racial perception is intrinsically linked to school success. Racial preferences are explored through participant selection in the forced choice questionnaire. Racial perceptions are examined in this study by how children take in racial stimuli and their reactions in response to these stimuli.

Two themes emerged from the participant responses: physical attributes (or visual cues) and behavioral attributes. Generally, participants perceived the physical traits of the Black doll positively. In the past, the studies of racial perception indicated that Black children were rejecting the visual images (dolls, pictures, etc.) that indicated internalization of negative physical (visual) perceptions of Black images. Unlike these former studies, the participants in this study show positive perceptions of physical characteristics of Black images. The participants ascribed negative behavioral characteristics to the Black doll, especially those related to school. The fact that Black children are ascribing negative behavioral traits to the doll they most identify with should not be

overlooked. The consistent assignment of negative behaviors to the Black doll by Black children is problematic because the children identify with the group which they believes regularly behaves undesirably. This presents a conflict in how Black children are developing their racial perceptions and the perceptions of school success that may incorporate into their developing racial identity structures.

This study has raised several issues for further research and also suggests a need for intervention during the early childhood years. The disconnect between the students identifying positively with physical characteristics of Blacks but assigning negative behavioral traits to Blacks is too great to ignore. Given that racial perceptions are tied to school success, interventions that develop positive racial identity outcomes are necessary in schools.

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To my amazing daughter Madison Rose, the light in the darkness.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The White-Black achievement gap still persists leaving Black children far behind their White peers. Black children score lower than Whites on vocabulary, reading, and math tests, as well as on tests that measure scholastic aptitude and intelligence. Furthermore, Black kindergarteners are less likely than their White peers to persist at tasks, to be eager to learn, and to pay attention (West, Denton, & Germino-Hausken, 2000). Educators and social scientists continue to grapple with creating schools that improve Black educational achievement. I believe the answer may lie in the work begun by the Warren Court–framing the educational crisis that plagues young Black children around Black racial perceptions. The Warren Court (1953-1969), using both sociological and psychological research to guide their decision, came to the conclusion that "a sense of inferiority affects the motivation of a child to learn." The implication of their decision speaks to the effect of racial perceptions on educational success.

Negative racial perceptions in Black children can have a negative effect on perceptions of school success, often leading children to feel inadequate to perform at school norms and/or high academic levels. For Blacks, these negative perceptions can impact the ability of the child to profit from the educational opportunities provided. Fortunately, racial perceptions are

malleable, so early childhood educators can provide environments and opportunities for the development of positive racial development.

This chapter provides an introduction to and overview of the dissertation, beginning with the background of the problem, followed by the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study and research questions, and concluding with the limitations of the study and an overview of the dissertation.

Background of the Problem

Educators and other social scientists remain committed to researching and implementing an assortment of reform programs that seek change in education for minority students. Unfortunately, these efforts have not been generally successful (Henig, Hula, Orr, & Pedescleaux, 1999). For Black children in particular, making strides in education has been an uphill battle. Black children score 75% below White children on almost every standardized test, as well as on tests that measure scholastic aptitude and intelligence (Haskins & Rouse, 2005; Jenks & Phillips, 1998; Vanneman, Hamilton, Baldwin Anderson, & Rahman, 2009).

Research shows that children who struggle during their early childhood years are more likely to be at risk for academic failure in their elementary and high school years (Haskins & Rouse, 2005). The Black–White achievement gap appears before children enter kindergarten and persists into adulthood (Haskins & Rouse, 2005; Levitt & Fryer, 2004; West et al., 2000). Unfortunately, race "continues to operate as a barrier to educational and social mobility and change.

Given this national context, it becomes imperative that educators acquire ways to cope with race as a social, educational and personal construct" (R. Carter, 1994, p. 291-292).

An important part of this discussion should include examining racial perceptions. How Black students perceive their race can play a role in academic achievement (Smith & Hung, 2008). A further examination of racial perceptions can provide data on how educational institutions can create environments that support high achievement among Black students.

Problem Statement

The U.S. Supreme Court weighed in on the relevance of racial perceptions to school success in the *Brown v. Board of Education, Topeka, Kansas* (1954) court case. In *Brown*, the Court tackled the question of whether racial segregation in public schools deprived minority group children equal educational opportunities. The Court decided that segregation was unconstitutional and asserted that the negative impact of segregation applied "with added force to children in grade . . . schools" (*Brown v. Board of Educ.*, 1954). This conclusion was based, in part, on the use of Kenneth and Mamie Clark's findings from their studies of young Black children since they provided tangible evidence to support the idea of an intangible psychic damage resulting from racial discrimination. The focus of the Clarks' research was on understanding the racial perceptions of Black children. The Clarks found that by the age of 5, Black children were developing negative racial perceptions about their own race and that these

children had internalized being Black as a mark of inferiority (Clark & Clark, 1950).

The Clark study used in the *Brown* decision is known as the Doll Study. In the Doll Study, the categories of topics explored included racial preferences and perceptions, racial differences, and self-classification. Children between the ages of 3 and 5 were presented with four dolls, identical in every way except for skin color (two brown and two white). The children were asked to respond to eight commands by pointing to one of the dolls. For example, the children were asked to choose the doll that was the "nice doll." The majority of the Black children rejected the brown doll as the "nice doll" or the one they wanted to play with, suggesting they evaluated "blackness" negatively. In the published version of the studies, the Clarks (1950) concluded:

> The discrepancy between identifying one's own color and indicating one's 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. (p. 350)

Several other studies were cited as evidence in the *Brown v. Board of Education* case documents, including the works of Deutscher and Chein (1948), Frazier (1944), Radke and Trager (1950), Radke, Trager, and Davis (1949, and Reid (1949). Each one of these research studies asserted that negative racial perceptions in young Black students were manifested in adverse ways in school.

In 1952, K. B. Clark, Chein, and Cook wrote a social science statement as an appendix to the appellants' briefs in the *Brown* case. This statement was approved by 32 prominent social scientists, and it attested to the fact that negative racial perceptions result in a "lowering of pupil morale and a depression of the educational aspiration level" (Clark, Chein, & Cook, 2004, p. 496). According to this position statement, children who develop negative racial perceptions usually have low levels of expectations for school achievement.

Based on the research findings from the social sciences community, the Supreme Court recognized that the "policy of separating the races is usually interpreted as denoting the inferiority of the negro group" and that "a sense of inferiority affects the motivation of a child to learn" (*Brown v. Board of Educ.*, 1954). Using the Clarks' research, the Court made an assertion about race that was not common to the discourse at the time. Race was no longer simply a socially constructed label; instead, the Court recognized that there was an internal psychological dimension to race. In addition, the Supreme Court recognized that segregation itself was leading to the internalization of negative racial perceptions by Black children. Minority children were developing low levels of personal self-worth because of negative racial perceptions, which impaired "the ability of the child to profit from educational opportunities provided him" (Clark et al., 2004, p. 496). Largely based on psychological research presented by the Clarks and other social scientists, the Supreme Court judges publically recognized that the psychological development of racial perception can impact young Black children's potential achievement at school.

The use of the social science research in the *Brown* decision was significant in putting the focus on racial perceptions as a factor to consider when thinking about educational change for young Black students. Sixty years after the *Brown* ruling, this study seeks to understand young Black children's racial perceptions and perceptions of school success. This study employs the framework of the Clark Doll Study as a basis from which to gather information on racial perceptions and extends the research to looking at perceptions of school success.

The problem this study addresses is the need to understand the role of individual racial perceptions and their relationship to perceptions of school success. Researchers have moved away from racial perceptions studies in early childhood partly due to a shift to postracialism in the social science field in the 1980s. As a result, the inquiry into this topic has slowed dramatically. This study aims to end the silence and to again explore racial perceptions since the last major studies on this issue were conducted.

Purpose Statement

Racial perceptions can affect student performance in several ways. Contemporary researchers such as Joshua Aronson, Claude Steele, and John Ogbu have also generated theories around racial perceptions and their connection to school performance. Aronson's (2004) and Steele's (1997) shared theory of stereotype threat suggests that internalizing stigmas has a negative impact on school performance. The authors found that Blacks are "hyperaware of the negative expectations of their [racial] group" and Black students tend to

internalize how "the mainstream sees them as less intelligent" (Aronson, 2004, p. 15). Steele (1997) notes that this can "depress their intellectual performance, and over the long run, undermine the identity itself, a predicament of serious consequence" (Steele, 1997, p. 627). According to stereotype theory, negative racial perceptions can play a critical part in actual school performance.

The empirical literature that employs methods to examine young Black racial perceptions and provides a formal examination of Black racial perceptions (similar to the social science research completed for the 1954 *Brown* case) has not been performed since the 1990s. In April of 2010, CNN conducted an informal pilot study of racial perceptions for its coverage of the 50th anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling. Generally, however, there has been a relative silence in this field of research for many years due to the shift to a postracial society discourse in the 1980s (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; M. Brown et al., 2003; Williams, 1997). My study aims to end the silence and begin to explore racial perceptions in early childhood to determine whether the racial attitudes of Black children have changed more positively or negatively over time.

This study explores this link between racial perceptions and perceptions of school success. The purpose of this research is to determine the racial perceptions and perceptions of school success of a sample of young Black children in Southern California. This study is grounded in the premise that racial perception is intrinsically linked to school success.

Data on Black student outcomes suggest that educational programs and policies often fail in creating environments that lead to high levels of Black achievement (Henig et al., 1999). Examining racial perceptions can help shed light on how students view themselves and how educators will be able to address these students' needs in a more effective manner (R. Carter, 1994). I propose that racial perceptions are related to academic success and, as a result, educators need to create experiences that support positive racial perceptions to promote Black student achievement.

Schools are in the unique position to be able to provide an environment where positive racial perception development can flourish on multiple levels. Most school systems recognize the importance of multicultural education in classroom and many have development multicultural curriculum for the K-12 students. Multicultural education is important to the development of positive racial perceptions in early childhood as well, but work in this area prior to kindergarten is not as common.

Research Questions

One of this study's research goals is to illustrate the racial perceptions of Black children, with a focus on the early years from 4 to 7 years of age. To do so, I will examine the responses of young Black children to racial stimuli. The second research goal is to understand Black children's perceptions of school success. This study will use forced choice questions as well as open ended interview questions to gather information from a selected group of Black youth.

As a result of the above goals, the research is built around these questions:

1. What are Black children's preferences in selecting a Black doll or White doll in a forced choice questionnaire?

2. How do children explain their doll selections?

3. How do perceptions about race relate to perceptions of school success?

Significance of the Study

This research will make a significant contribution to educational leadership because it has implications for whether school environments can be shaped for improved racial perception development and thereby for an improved environment of learning. Successful schools will embrace reforms that "are informed by an understanding of *why* children from specific minority groups are experiencing learning and performance difficulty" (Ogbu, 1992, p. 350). Schools can provide an environment which consistently creates experiences that will promote positive racial perception.

Scope of the Study

This study examines racial perceptions and their relationship to perceptions of school success in a small sample of students who attend a variety of schools in Southern California. Given the young age of the participants, parental influence on racial perceptions could have a significant impact on participant answers. I did not determine intergenerational differences in terms of racial perceptions; in other words, this study does not seek to understand how

this generation of parents differs from their children in terms of their own identity. At this time, I did not interview the parents to determine how they teach/talk to their own children about race. This study does not reach beyond the child and is concerned only with the child's racial perceptions.

Assumptions of the Study

Based on racial identity development theory, I make the assumption that the subjects in this study are at different stages of their racial identity development and will respond based on the stage in which they are currently situated. The subjects are early childhood students, so I expect their responses to the open ended questions to be short but succinct. In this study, I also assume the participants answered the interview questions truthfully and that the questions of the interview accurately measure students' perceptions of race.

Study Delimitations

This study is delimited to pre-school-aged Black children in Los Angeles county. The study looks closely at the specific experiences of a small sample of Blacks in Southern California, therefore the results cannot be generalized to other racial groups. Due to the limited geographic area, the results may also differ slightly from region to region within the state and the country. Available evidence by psychologists suggests that race awareness develops during the nursery/preschool age beginning as early as 3 years of age (Clark 1939a; E. Horowitz, 1936; R. Horowitz, 1939). This means that research on racial identity development and education should begin at this point in a child's development. As a result, I focus my research only on Black youth from 4 to 7 years of age.

Study Limitations

The primary criticism of the Doll Study is the forced choice format of dolls of two races (two Black and two White). Hraba and Grant (1972) suggested that the Doll Study technique is a "measure of racial ethnocentrism" and does not provide the opportunity for children to express a possible liking for both races (p. 526). As a result, in some studies, children have inconsistent choices, which undermines the tool's content validity. However, according to Byrd (2012), the Doll Study has been used in over 30 studies and "could be seen as the standard paradigm to evaluate racial identity in children" (p. 8). This technique is used with early childhood students because racial identity dimensions can be obtained without verbal indications, and they provide concrete representations (the dolls) that do not require abstract thinking (Byrd, 2012).

This study leads to additional questions about perceptions of school success that had not been tested multiple times previously, so the reliability of these new inquiries are undefined. Because of time constraints and the challenge of finding sufficient participants, the questions are not tested over multiple trials to validate test–retest reliability of the additional questions. Given the age of the subjects, multiple administrations of the test would lead to fatigue and not be developmentally appropriate.

Definitions of Key Terms

Black. Black refers to those who self-identify as Black or African-American who are not immigrants.

Perception. Perception is the processes that organize information in the sensory image and interpret it as having been produced by properties of objects or events in the external, three-dimensional world (Borkowski, 2011; Lindsay & Norman, 1977).

Racial identity. This can be defined as the significance and meaning for race in individual's lives (Byrd, 2012).

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 introduces the problem statement and research questions. Chapter 2 presents a critical review of the literature pertaining to the research questions. Chapter 3 contains the research design, including data collection and analysis methods. Chapter 4 explores the major findings of the study in elation to the primary research questions. Chapter 5 presents the discussion, interpretations, implications of the study and recommendations for schooling. It concludes with a summary of the dissertation.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

More than 60 years ago, the U. S. Supreme Court's *Brown* decision established that racial perceptions are important to the developing identity structures of young Black children and also linked to the educational success of young Black children (Brown v. Board of Educ., 1954) The social science literature was important in determining the decision, which was significant in putting the focus on racial perception as a factor to consider when thinking about educational change for young Black students. Contemporary researchers have reiterated the fact that racial perceptions can impact school performance. Thus, it is imperative that persons seeking to improve the educational experiences for young Black students consider racial perceptions.

Without empirical research on racial identity perceptions, we are unable to understand how young Black children make sense of their racial identities and their role in the greater social framework. Determining whether they have a positive or negative sense of self and group identity will provide information on how they view their learning. For example, Black children who view their Blackness as a mark of inferior status will find it difficult to be motivated to learn. My study aims to end the silence in the racial perceptions research and begin to explore how racial perceptions of a sample of Black youth has shifted since the last major studies were conducted more than 20 years ago. It also seeks to

understand the connection between students' racial perceptions and their perceptions of school success.

Review of the Scholarly Empirical Literature

In order to effectively provide opportunities for educational mobility for Black children, we must draw on empirical literature and educational theory to understand the importance of considering racial perceptions in academic achievement for these students. This chapter provides the historical foundation, conceptual framework, and theoretical foundation that guides this study. Within each of these sections, there is a review of the relevant research related to the dissertation topic. The chapter concludes with the summary and implications for educational practice.

Historical Foundation

Research shows that young Black children can develop both negative and positive perceptions of race influenced by the sociopolitical climate. The research literature illustrates shifting racial perceptions based on shifting social contexts. Racial perceptions can be viewed as resulting from a variety of factors, including both social and political structural factors and individual, everyday experiences with social institutions (Omi & Winant, 1994). "Everybody learns some combination, some version, of the rules of racial classification, and of her own racial identity, often without obvious teaching or conscious inculcation. Thus we are inserted in a comprehensively racialized social structure" (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 60). Racial perceptions are not only an internal process of becoming,

those perceptions are also simultaneously formed within a particular sociopolitical climate (Perry, Steele, Hilliard, 2003).

The empirical research shows that Black children often perceive their race as negative or positive depending on social context. Taken as a whole, the general trend coming out of the multitude of racial perception studies over the past 60 years suggests that children's perceptions about their own racial group are related to the social variables associated with the period in which the study was conducted. Examining the results of racial perception research since the late 1950s confirms the relationship between the current sociopolitical climate and the formation of racial perceptions.

Civil rights era. A period of unprecedented resistance against the second-class citizenship assigned to Blacks became part of the public discourse leading up to the Civil Rights era in the 1950s. This caused a shift in thoughts around race in many parts of the nation (Bowles & Gintis, 2000, R. Carter, 1994, 1995; C. Ogletree, 2004; Omi & Winant, 1994; Perry et al., 2003). With the focus on creating a more equal society, research began to call attention to the unequal distribution of social, economic, cultural, and educational resources across racial lines.

Psychologists Kenneth and Mamie Clark's work (1939a, 1939b, 1940, 1947, 1950) suggested that the psychological effects of being discriminated against, segregated, and culturally deprived have lasting negative effects on how Black children perceive their own race. Kenneth Clark's 1950 fact-finding report for the White House indicated that Black children internalize their inferior status,

which makes them "confused about their own personal worth" (Clark, 1953, p. 429). Focusing on Blacks, the Clarks found that this awareness of their inferior status in society affects their racial perception development in a negative way toward their own racial group.

Using various methods of measuring Black racial perceptions, empirical research during the 1950s and 1960s consistently demonstrated that Black children perceive Blackness negatively. Goodman (1964), Radke, Sutherland, and Rosenberg (1950), Radke and Trager (1950), and Stevenson and Stewart (1958) found that Blacks have a higher frequency of negative attitudes toward their own group. The findings were consistent with other research findings across the nation at that time.

The Civil Rights movement caused a shift in perceptions around race in the Black community (Bowles & Gintis, 2000; R. Carter, 1994, 1995; C. Ogletree, 2004; Omi & Winant, 1994; Perry et al., 2003). By the late 1960s, a growing radical political movement called the "Black Power" movement entered the discourse on race relations. This movement provided an opportunity for Blacks to promote their own values rather than look to the White majority to validate them. It represented the need for Blacks to define the world in their own terms. One of the main points of the Black Power movement was the recognition of "Blackness" as positive. The emphasis was on the appreciation of Black standards of beauty and building strong self-esteem in the community. The Black Power movement promoted racial unity among Blacks and embraced the motto "Black is Beautiful." In essence, this movement supported the perspective that Black behaviors and

performance should not be interpreted as being contrary to White norms but merely validating the differing behaviors between the two races (R. Carter, 1994, 1995).

The onset of the Black Power movement allowed positive reinforcement of Blackness and seemed to promote positive racial perceptions among Black children. (Wright, 1985). Feinman (1979) reviewed the racial perception research and asserted that the "racial self-identification and preference of Black children became more positive with the occurrence of both the Civil Rights and Black Power/Black Pride movements" (p. 497). Gregor and McPherson (1966) and Hraba and Grant (1970) employed a version of the Clark Doll Study to determine racial perceptions in Black children. Both of these studies found that the Black children sampled had an in-group orientation (i.e., favored Black dolls). Hraba and Grant (1970) noted, "times may be changing. . . . That is, Negroes are becoming Blacks proud of their race" (p. 400).

Kircher and Furby (1971) examined racial preferences in young children in racially mixed preschools and found preference for Black images by Black children. The authors noted that "this reversal . . . could be a result of the relatively recent 'Black is Beautiful' Movement" (Kircher & Furby, 1971, p. 2078). Winnick and Taylor (1977) found that Black children's responses to racial stimuli indicate "the Civil Rights movement of the 1960's has resulted in Black children showing greater Black preference than did their counterparts 36 years ago" (p. 158). In studies reproducing the Clark doll test, the percentage choosing the White doll was lowered and an emphasis on positive associations with being

Black were successful in counteracting negative attitudes (Farrell & Olson, 1983; Hraba & Grant, 1970; Mahan, 1976; Ward & Braun, 1972; Winnick & Taylor, 1977). It appears that the more positive social environment had an impact on what young Black children thought of themselves and their race.

Schools also supported the development of positive racial perceptions in young Black students. Multicultural education developed in the wake of the Civil Rights movement as a corrective to the long-standing de facto policy of assimilating minority groups into the "melting pot" of dominant American culture (Sobol, 1990). Multiculturalism in schools was designed to be more inclusive of diverse group experiences and to give attention to groups that were historically excluded from the discourse (Tai & Kenyatta, 1999). Multiculturalism raised "consciousness about group membership and identity," promoting group identity and pride (Feinberg, 1998).

Black children began to have increased academic success in schools during this period. "During the 1970's and the first half of the 1980's NAEP showed substantial academic improvement of Black . . . students and a significant narrowing of the Black–White achievement gaps" (Lee, 2002, p. 3). The economic gap between Blacks and Whites also narrowed.

Postracialism. Since the 1980s, the promotion of race-blind standards began to grow in popularity. In our current context, M. Brown et al. (2003) asserted that "most Americans think the United States is rapidly becoming a color-blind society, and they see little need or justification for affirmative action or other color conscious policies" (p. 2). Postracialism makes the argument that

race should not be a deciding factor in influencing social policy (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; M. Brown et. al, 2003; Williams, 1997). There is "a desire among academic circles to move past race and racial categories in social analysis" (Warren, 2012, p.197). Postracial theory promotes the idea that race does not significantly impact access and opportunity. Postracial theorists often point to the election of Barack Obama, the country's first Black president, as proof of the assertion that we have moved into a postracial era; however, according to Metzler (2009) "we live in a race-conscious, not a race-blind society" (p. 16). K. Brown (2011) noted that postracialism turns "an ideological blind eye to how race is always present, exerting itself in the inner working of social relations" (p. 99).

The growing acceptance of this view is evidenced in an increasing number of court cases permanently dismantling desegregation orders. The Supreme Court heard several major desegregation cases in the 1990s, including *Board of Education of Oklahoma v. Dowell* (1991), *Freeman v. Pitts* (1992) and *Missouri v. Jenkins* (1995). These decisions show the nation's high court setting a precedent of moving away from the desegregation orders of the post-*Brown* era.

The shift into the postracial era, beginning in the 1980s, also correlates with a dramatic decline in research examining young children's racial perceptions and preferences. There are very few empirical studies that examine early childhood racial perceptions. Gopaul-McNicol is one of the few researchers involved in this work. Gopaul-McNicol's 1988 and 1992 studies (that employed the Doll Study technique) found Black children's racial perceptions had regressed to the views held by Blacks prior to the Civil Rights movement of last century.

According to the author, the children's preference for the White doll was a reflection of the existing societal view that "to be powerful, beautiful, economically successful, and more socially accepted, one ought to be White" (Gopaul-McNicol, 1988, p. 66). Based on this study, the findings would suggest that Black children have displayed responses that resemble studies conducted during the pre-Civil Rights era.

Examinations of the Black racial perceptions of early childhood students are less frequent, and the gap in racial perception studies relating to young children needs to be filled. Although there are studies and dissertations that examine adolescent and college-aged students' racial perceptions, studies that examine these perceptions in young students are rare. This study seeks to fill that gap.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is grounded in the construct of racial perceptions. Psychologists have suggested that racial perceptions develop during the nursery/preschool age (Byrd, 2012; Clark & Clark 1939a,1939b; Stevenson & Stewart, 1958). Clark and Clark (1947) found that Black children exhibit racial perceptions and preference beginning at the age of 3. Aboud's (1988) review of two decades of research on racial perceptions also found that children may develop racial perceptions and preferences around 3 to 4 years of age. In their research, Clark and Clark (1950) suggested that perceptions, preference, self-identification, and identity are connected. In psychology; it is commonly argued that identity develops though internalized images of oneself.

"The sense of self develops gradually in early childhood [and] these images, or more accurately, representations, become integrated into overall structures that finally give the individual the sense of being a person with a sense of identity and unique characteristics" (Almaas, 2000, p. 497). Perceptions are the mechanisms by which people organize images to understand the world around them. In the structure of the Doll Study, children were asked to organize their perceptions of images of brown and white dolls. Their preferences were the expressed attitudes toward these images or, in other words, evaluative judgment of these perceptions of the dolls. The questions within the doll study asked the children to assign value to color preferences, for example, indicating which doll they liked to play with or which doll looked nice.

The Clarks reported that two-thirds of the Black subjects picked the White doll as the "nice doll" and two thirds also selected the brown doll as the one that "looks bad." The responses implied "a concomitant negative attitude toward the brown doll" (Clark & Clark, 1947, p. 175). This landmark study provided evidence that racial preference was evident in young children and that these children ascribed particular attributes and values to being Black.

When the Black child indicated that the doll looked like him or her, the child was self-identifying. In the Clark studies, the researchers noted that the discrepancy between self-identification and color preference was highly problematic. The child was rejecting what he self-identified with. This "introduces a fundamental conflict at the very foundations of the ego structure," and the Black child is left to "resolve the basic conflict between his racial self-

image and the negative social evaluation of his skin color" (Clark & Clark, 1950, p. 350). When a Black child self-identifies with that for which he or she has internalized negative perceptions and preferences, this leads to negative racial identity development.

The multilayered structure of racial identity development can be altered throughout one's lifetime, however. Racial identity is malleable and can move back and forth through the stages of identity development. The Black identity model from Cross (1978, 1980, 1991) has conceived of Black racial identity development as five stages of development, or steps, to the identity and personality construction:

1. *Preencounter stage* is characterized by an attempt to escape from being Black. Blacks view being Black as negative.

2. *Encounter stage* occurs when a personal and challenging experience with Black or White society is marked by feelings of confusion about the meaning and significance of race. An increasing desire to become more connected with the Black culture often occurs.

3. *Immersion–Emersion stage* arises when an individual begins to idealize Black culture. Anti-White feelings emerge.

4. *Internalization stage* is characterized by the resolution of conflicts the individual had experienced in the prior stages of development. Anti-White feelings will subside and an affection for the Black self will emerge.

5. *Internalization–Commitment stage* is when an individual turns positive and internalizes personal identity toward activities that are meaningful to the group and to oneself.

Taken as a whole, the general trend coming out of the multitude of empirical research on racial perception studies over the past 60 years suggests that children have the potential to pass through the first four stages of racial development in early childhood. Several empirical studies found that there can be an internalization of negative images of Blacks by Blacks and an overwhelming preference for White dolls, indicating the pre-encounter stage of racial identity development (Goodman, 1964; Gopaul-McNicol, 1988, 1992; E. Horowitz, 1936; R. Horowitz, 1939; Radke & Trager, 1950; Radke et al., 1950; Stevenson & Stewart, 1958). Children in early childhood can also exhibit affinities toward the Black doll indicating the third and fourth stages of racial identity development: immersion–emersion and internalization stages (Farrell & Olson, 1983; Feinman, 1979; Gregor & McPherson, 1966; Hraba & Grant, 1970; Kircher & Furby, 1971; Mahan, 1976; Ward & Braun, 1972; Winnick & Taylor, 1977). Black children develop an understanding of their place in a social group, of stereotypes related to their group, and the attributes assigned to their social group (Augoustinos & Rosewarne, 2001; Nesdale & Flesser, 2001; Park, 2011).

Given that racial perceptions, preferences, and subsequently identity begin in early childhood, research should also begin at this point in a child's development. As a result, this dissertation focuses on Black children between the ages of 4 and 7 years old. It is during this time in a child's life that racial

perceptions and preference begin to form, and therefore, data should be collected as close to this period as possible.

Theoretical Foundation

The research on how racial perceptions manifest themselves in school success is found in the literature in many forms. For the purposes of this dissertation, this study will explore two of these formulations, one by Steele (1997) and one by Ogbu (2004). Both social scientists formulate statements about racial perceptions and how these translate to perceptions of school success and, ultimately, performance. They are particularly relevant to this dissertation because they provide continued evidence of the link between racial perceptions and perceptions of school success.

Stereotype threat. Stereotype threat is a "self-evaluative threat" where students "internalize an inferiority anxiety" that translates to poor success in school (Steele & Aronson, 1995, p. 797). When students have negative perceptions about their own racial group, it influences how they view their potential for success and impacts their intellectual functionality (Steele, 1997). Negative racial perspectives can become internalized, and these negative stereotypes translate into students' perceptions of their success in school. Perceptions of stereotypes are internalized by the age of 6, therefore stereotype threat can be triggered in the early childhood years of Black children (Aronson, 2004; Smith & Hung, 2008). The "myth of inferiority" has led to Black children's "low sense of self-efficacy, demotivation, and underperformance in school" (Steele, 1997, 617). For Black students, stereotype threat connects racial

perceptions to their perceptions of school success and, ultimately, performance (Thoman, Smith, Brown, Chase & Lee, 2013, p. 231).

In situations where stereotype threat is induced, it causes students to perceive themselves as having lower performance levels, which becomes disruptive to their intellectual performance (Steele & Aronson, 1995; Swanson, Cunningham, Youngblood, & Spencer, 2009). According to Aronson (2004), Black children become hyperaware about the negative expectations most often associated with their group. If children associate Blackness with a negative stereotype, then when "the stereotyped group identity and the associated group stereotype are made salient, performance tends to shift in the direction of the stereotype" (Armenta, 2010, p. 94)

"Acting White." Ogbu's formulation of "acting White" provides further evidence that racial perceptions are tied to perceptions of school success. Black children perceive academic success as more appropriate for Whites and since being Black and doing well are in conflict with each other, children struggle with adopting school norms (Ogbu, 1985, p. 867). A "cultural antagonism" develops among Black students toward school because of their perceptions of what school represents (Ogbu, 1985, p. 866). Black students equate being Black with negative outcomes in school.

Fordham and Ogbu (1986) provide us explanations of how and why perceptions of Blackness are related to perceptions of school success. If Ogbu and Steele are correct, there is a need to develop school environments that help students divorce the ideas of Blackness from being associated with school

failure. As a result, this relationship needs to be recognized and be the focus of educational policy and programs.

This study seeks to describe racial perceptions of children and demonstrate the relationship to perceptions of school success. The outcomes of this study will have implications on how we begin to think about creating improved school environments for Black students.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 2 of this dissertation provides an overview of the relevant literature on the topic. We know from the literature that racial perception develops during the early childhood years and is influenced by greater social context. Since the introduction of postracialism, studies around racial perceptions in early childhood have slowed over the last three decades. This study helps to fill this gap in the literature.

Stereotype threat and "acting White" suggest that racial perceptions influence perceptions of school success (and subsequently impact performance). "Educators need to consider the perceptions of race by Black students and how this may influence students in educational contexts" (Thoman et al., 2013, p. 234). Without this work, we are unable to understand young Black children's perceptions of race in the context of the greater social framework. Determining whether they have a positive or negative sense of self and group identity will provide information on how Black students perceive their potential for school success.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research was to determine the racial perceptions and perceptions of school success of a sample of young Black children in Southern California. In this chapter, the general methodology of the study to meet the research goals and to answer the research questions are presented. The chapter begins with a description of the research design and research methods. Each of the three settings of the study and participants are described followed by the data collection procedures, instrumentation, pilot study, and data analysis . The methods to ensure validity of the study are discussed along with positionality of the researcher. The chapter concludes with a chapter summary.

Research Design

In this study, I employed the use of forced choice and open ended interview questions. Forced choice questions required the participants to respond to an option that expressed a definitive preference. For those who truly had uncertain opinions, they had the option of making no choice to express their ambiguity. The purpose of open ended questions was to determine the meanings underlying the forced choice selections. Interviews are effective tools to use when trying to understand the story behind participant perceptions.

In this study, the main emphasis was on understanding how Black students perceived racial stimuli and how their perceptions related to school

success. I chose not to have a comparison racial group because the history of other racial groups have been historically diverse and distinct. Arguably, there are no racial groups in the United States that have had a experience over time similar to that of Blacks in this country. Normally, by including a comparison group, a study would gain counterfactual knowledge; this study does not.

Research Methods

My research employed a qualitative research design. In order to uncover the racial perceptions of Black children, I needed to develop or replicate a method of collecting information on these perceptions. The Clark Doll study was a model used in several previous studies to explore Black children's racial perceptions. The Doll Study "could be seen as the standard paradigm to evaluate racial identity in children" (Byrd, 2012, p. 8). Since it was a valid, reliable method, I used the Clark Doll study as a framework.

In addition to the questionnaire, I added open ended interview questions to understand what the participant's perceptions were of the dolls. Interviews are a useful data collection technique in qualitative research. "Interviewing is key to many forms of qualitative educational research; we interview respondents for oral histories, life histories, ethnographies and case studies" (Dilley, 2004, p. 127). I asked follow-up open ended questions immediately following the choices (when appropriate). During the actual interview, the questions were asked with fidelity and discontinued if the interviewees indicated discomfort (verbal or nonverbal). Some examples of nonverbal cues I looked for was constant movement in the chair, shifting eyes around the room, and tearing. Signs of discomfort also

included verbal cues such as changing the subject often, asking to leave the interview room, or asking when is the interview is over.

In this section, I discuss the settings, sample description, and recruitment procedure. Next, I describe in detail the data collection procedures, the instrumentation, and the pilot study conducted to test the interview questions. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the data analysis procedures, steps taken to ensure the validity of the study, and positionality of the researcher.

Settings of the Study

The data were collected in schools in Southern California in Los Angeles county. Los Angeles county has a population of close to 4 million inhabitants, with close to 10% of the population identifying as Black (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014a). The median household income for this county is $49,487, and approximately 22% of the population lives below the poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014a). I identified schools in the county that have Black students between the ages of 4 and 7. I used the pseudonyms School X, School Y, and School Z to conserve the anonymity of the participating sites.

School X is a K-6 school in Cerritos, California. It serves over 700 students, with approximately 18% of the students participating in the free or reduced-price lunch program. The student body is approximately 55.4% Asian, 15% Hispanic, 7.6% Black, and 8.3% White, with mixed race, Native American and Pacific Islander making up the remaining student population groups (Education Data Partnership, 2014). In the town of Cerritos, the median household income is $89,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014b).

School Y is located in Los Angeles in the neighborhood of Westmont. This school provides a comprehensive education program for children ages 2 to 5 years old. At this site they serve 139 students from low-income families. Admission is determined by low-income status and a need for services. Families who are working or who are actively seeking gainful employment are eligible for the center. Families who attend must demonstrate need for childcare, most often because they are currently seeking employment. Fees are based on state income guidelines on a family income fee schedule. Close to 30% of the families pay a reduced fee and 70% of the families attend for free. The student body includes 108 Hispanic students and 31 Black students. The range of yearly income of families that attend School Y is $14,400-$21,600.

School Z is private school located in West Hollywood. This school serves 539 students as young as infants and up to Grade 6. Approximately 21% of the student population requires financial aid. Financial aid rewards range from 3% to 99% of tuition. Forty-nine percent of the students are students of color, with 9% of this population identifying as Black. The mean income for the families that attend this school is $350,000.

These demographically diverse settings provided access to students with a myriad of experiences. Although the students are diverse, the participants are not a representative sample of Black students in Los Angeles County. Black students in Southern California most often attend schools that are largely White or Hispanic (Orfield, Siegel-Hawley, & Kucsera, 2011) . Only School Y has a population that is typical for a Southern California school. Black students

attending private schools (School Z) only represents a very small percentage of the private school population.

Sample Description

The empirical research literature suggests that racial perceptions develop during the early childhood years (Clark 1939b; E. Horowitz, 1936; R. Horowitz, 1939). This means that research on racial perceptions should begin at this point in a child's development. As a result, this study focused the participant selection on Black students between the ages of 4 and 7. Children who were not identified as Black and between the ages of 4 and 7 were excluded.

The participants in this study ranged from ages 4 to 7 years of age (Table 1). Of the 23 participants, 12 were male (52.2%) and 11 were female (47.8%). From the 23 participant's families, 19 reported their highest degree obtained and 18 indicated their household income levels. Of those that reported, the majority of the participants came from households that held graduate degrees (56.5%), while 26.1% came from households with a college degree. From School X, I obtained a sample size of 6; while from School Y, I drew a sample size of 9. There were 8 participants from School Z.

Table 1

Sample Description (N = 23)

Age	Percentage
4	30.4
5	8.7
6	43.5
7	17.4

This was a sample size of convenience. Due to the small sample size, I was unable to make generalizations about the larger Black population. Further research should be conducted with larger sample sizes to be able to make conclusive statements related to the larger population and the disaggregated group data.

Recruitment Procedures

Once approval from the site administrator was granted and participants identified, a meeting was held at the site for the investigator to talk about the research with parents and guardians. Parents and guardians had the opportunity to ask any additional questions. At this paired meeting, informed consent forms were distributed and parents were asked to sign the form. A copy machine was available on the premises so that a copy of the consent form could be made soon after collection and be returned to the parents or guardians. Those parents and guardians who were unable to attend the meeting were contacted by phone and provided with the information about the study (using the same script as that of the face-to-face meeting) and given the opportunity to ask questions about the

study. Informed consent forms were mailed to homes. Only subjects whose parents or guardian had approved their participation were involved in the study.

Data Collection Procedures

This study employed aspects of the Doll Study by Kenneth and Mamie Clark. The purpose of using this instrument design was to collect data on racial perceptions. The questions were altered from the original to incorporate contemporary vernacular. Using this instrument helped me understand how a current sample of Black children view their racial perceptions. Subjects were presented with four dolls: two brown and two white. The subjects were prompted with eight commands and then asked to respond by choosing one of the dolls and giving it to the researcher. The second aspect of this study was to understand how perceptions of race influence perceptions of school success. I used a data collection protocol similar to that of the original Doll Study to examine perceptions of school success.

To enhance the study, I employed the use of interviews. In qualitative research, interviews are a useful data collection technique that seeks to gather information on the story behind the participant's responses (Creswell, 2007, 2009; Dilley, 2004). Subjects were asked open ended interview questions to gather further information on why they have made certain responses to the commands. With the interview, there was an opportunity to ask additional clarifying questions (Whiting, 2008). The questions presented inquired more deeply about racial perceptions and the students' thoughts about school success.

The commands were structured the same way as the original Clark Doll Study with the addition of open ended interview questions. Participants were asked to respond to a request by picking up the doll and showing it to the researcher. Following selected commands, children were asked open ended questions (noted in bold type) to clarify their response. An example of the commands and questions are listed below:

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

I1:　　Why do you think that this is the best doll to play with (or like best)?

2.　　Give me the doll that is a nice doll.

I2:　　Why do you think this is the nice doll?

4.　　Give me the doll that you think is smart.

I4:　　Why do you think this one is smart?

On each protocol recording sheet, the subjects were identified by age and gender. The researcher recorded each child's answer on the recording sheet. During the actual interview, the questions were asked with fidelity and discontinued if the interviewee indicated discomfort (verbal or nonverbal). Each of the sessions were audio recorded to ensure accuracy of the written transcription.

Once the written data were collected, the documents were placed in individual folders and locked securely in a file cabinet. Audio data are stored on a password-protected computer. The complete interview lasted no longer than 15 minutes, so as not to seriously interrupt classroom instruction. All subjects

were tested individually in a room or office especially provided for the purpose of the study.

Before the actual study began, I spent 3 to 4 hours in the classrooms as a volunteer so the students could gain familiarity with me before the interview. This was done to help alleviate the level of nervousness that might accompany interacting with a stranger. By doing so, the children interacted with me before participating in the interview. In the afternoon, the interview commenced.

Prior to the interview, I obtained assent from each of the students. If they indicated that they did not want to participate, they were escorted back to their classrooms immediately. During the administration of the interview, I looked for signs of discomfort or fatigue. As an early childhood educator with more than 15 years of experience, I am trained in early child development and have the ability to identify the social cues of young children in a school setting.

Instrumentation: Original Doll Study

In the most famous of the Clarks' studies, they performed what came to be known as the Doll Study to try to understand how Black children view their race. In this study, 253 subjects ages 3 to 7 were presented with four dolls that were identical in every way except for skin color and hair color. In the protocol, the children were asked to respond to the following commands by handing one of the dolls to the researcher:

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.

The first four questions were designed to indicate *racial preferences and perceptions*, questions 5-7 are designed to indicate *racial differences* (whether they can respond to common racial labels), and the last question was designed to indicate *self-identification*. The majority of the Black children overwhelmingly rejected the brown doll as the "nice doll," or the one they wanted to play with, suggesting they evaluated Blackness negatively and, inevitably, viewed their own Blackness negatively. By measuring racial perceptions, the Clarks uncovered the subjects' preference for Whiteness and rejection of their own race.

Pilot Study

A pilot study is a tool used by researchers to test the viability of the study's questions. I conducted a pilot study with the interview protocol with a small group of five Black children (ages 4 through 7). The pilot subjects were asked the eight commands and open ended questions to test the interview protocol's viability with this age group. The selected five students all attend schools in Southern California.

Overall, the students responded to the commands aptly. The answers to the open ended questions varied depending on the student. For example, when asked to explain her choice of the white doll as the best doll to play with and why

that doll was smart, one student said, "Because it has light skin." When asked to explain why she chose the brown doll as the one that looks bad, the student responded, "It is brown." Another student shared that he chose the brown doll as the doll that is not good at school because "it is the dark one." Students were able to explain many of their choices in the open ended questions with age-appropriate answers.

Data Analysis

The questionnaire was structured in terms of racial preferences and perceptions, perception of school success, and self-identification. The questions that gauged racial preferences determined whether Black children had a positive or negative perception toward one "race" of doll. The implications of these results speak to whether Black children were developing positive Black racial perceptions. The questions that examined perceptions of school success determined whether children associated certain perceptions towards one "race" of doll. The responses to question 8 determined self-awareness of their racial identity.

When conducting open ended interviews with several interviewees, there is "the enormous task of developing coding systems and coding the transcripts" (Weston et al., 2001, p. 381). I used thematic content analysis to analyze the answers to the open ended interview questions. Thematic content analysis consists of "classifying, comparing, weighing, and combing material from the interview to extract the meaning and implications, to reveal patterns, or to stitch together descriptions of events into a coherent narrative" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005,

p. 201). This process involved three major steps: In the first step of data preparation, I conducted open coding at the sentence level (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The second step involved organizing the codes into categories. Finally, these categories were analyzed for larger themes. These themes were contextualized in the larger analytical framework and connected to the racial identity literature (Wolcott, 1994).

Validity

The forced choice format of the data collection protocol does not allow for the opportunity for the subjects to express choice. As a result, in some studies, children have inconsistent choices, which calls into question the tool's face validity. The Doll Study interview instrument, however, has been used in several dozen studies and is a commonly used tool to measure early childhood racial perspectives (Byrd, 2012). This technique is effective with early childhood students because the questions do not require verbal indications and because it provides concrete representations (the dolls) that do not require abstract thinking (Byrd, 2012). The high acceptance in the social sciences of this instrument communicates its high face validity.

To ensure the internal validity of the study, I conducted a pilot study with a small sample of five students. A pilot study is a small-scale methodological test intended to ensure that proposed methods and procedures will work in practice before being applied in a large, expensive investigation. Pilot studies provide an opportunity to make adjustments and revisions before incurring the heavy costs associated with a large study.

Positionality

Clarifying researcher bias from the outset of the study is important so that the reader understands the researcher's position and any biases or assumptions that impact the inquiry (Merriam, 1998). The "social position, history, and political stance will influence the relationships s/he forms and as a result, how the research is conducted, what is learned, how it is communicated, and what resultant actions are taken" (Barab, 2004, p. 256). As a member of the group being researched, I must put my bias forth. This is a study of Black perceptions conducted by a Black researcher who has her own set of perceptions of the race and perceptions of school success. In addition, I am currently an employee of School Z. Although I interviewed the children within the first two weeks of my employment, it is worth mentioning that my role was dual—both as researcher and person of authority.

I also identify as a critical theorist. This study supports a dialogue around the ramification of race on school success, especially whether it could have a positive impact on schooling and give voice to a population that is often marginalized. "Those of us who openly call ourselves 'criticalists' definitely share a value orientation. We are all concerned about social inequities, and we direct our work toward positive social change" (Carspecken, 1996, p. 3).

I have an educational background with early childhood populations and have worked with early childhood students for 15 years. I have a Master's of Science degree in Early Childhood and Elementary Education. As part of my

current position as Director of Early Childhood program at School Z in Southern California, I work with young students every day.

Chapter Summary

The problem this study speaks to is the need to understand racial perceptions and their relevance to perceptions of school success. To do so, I employed forced choice and open ended interview questions to help understand preferences and perceptions. The forced choice questions helped to understand racial preferences and perceptions of race in relations to school success. Open ended questions gather information on the story behind the participant's responses (Creswell, 2007, 2009; Dilley, 2004).

The data was collected from three school sites from Black students aged 4-7 years old. The forced choice data was used to determine racial preferences. The open ended question results were analyzed on the sentence level, organized into categories and then analyzed for larger themes.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This study explores racial perceptions and the link between racial perceptions and perceptions of school success through an examination of responses of young Black children to racial stimuli. This study answers two research questions:

1. What are Black children's preferences in selecting a Black doll or White doll in a forced choice questionnaire?

2. How do children explain their doll selections?

3. How do perceptions about race relate to perceptions of school success?

This study uses data collected from a forced choice questionnaire and open ended interview questions from a sample of Black youth ages 4-7 to understand how they exhibit racial perceptions and to see if these perceptions are related to perceptions of school success.

In this chapter, I discuss the significant findings for each research question. I first report the results of the forced choice interview that addresses whether or not children exhibit racial preferences for the Black or White doll and explore how they express these perceptions. The next section addresses the child's perceptions of race and school success, which answers the third research question. I analyze responses to open ended question to identify themes that

emerged. Finally, in the chapter summary I synthesize the findings and review the significant discoveries gleaned from the data.

Racial Preferences in Early Childhood

The forced choice questions were designed to answer the first part of research question 1, which asks "What are black children's preferences in selecting a Black doll or White doll in a forced choice questionnaire?" The results of the forced choice questions are presented in Table 2. As shown in Table 2, the participants more frequently chose the Black doll in all but one of the forced choice questions. For the question, "Give me the doll that is not good at school", the White doll was chosen slightly more frequently than the Black doll. Taken as a whole, the forced choice questionnaire indicated that participants prefer the Black doll over the White doll. They appeared to have preference for the doll that looked most like them.

Table 2

Percent of Participants Choosing Doll by Question (N = 23)

Item	Black doll	White doll	No choice
Give me the doll that...			
1. You like to play with–(a) like best	52.2	34.8	13
2. Is the nice doll	60.9	39.1	0
3. You think looks bad	47.8	30.4	21.8
4. You think is smart	52.2	39.1	8.7
5. You think is not smart	43.5	34.8	21.7
6. You think is good at school	56.5	34.8	8.7
7. You think is not good at school	43.5	47.8	8.7
8. Looks like you	78.3	21.7	0

The forced choice questions also provided evidence that the participants have a duality of perceptions when it comes to race. The majority of the participants selected the Black doll for questions worded in the positive and the negative. For example, the majority of participants selected the Black doll as the doll they "like best" and the one they thought was "the nice doll" (52.2% and 60.9% respectively), but a large percentage of participants (47.8%) identified the Black doll as looking "bad." Participants more frequently selected the Black doll as the one that is "smart" and "good at school" but also selected the Black doll as the one they viewed as "not smart" (52.2%, 56.5%, and 43.5%, respectively). The next section discusses the emerging themes identified in an analysis of the open ended questions, which helps to further explain participant racial perceptions.

As explained in the previous section, the participants more frequently chose the Black doll, showing a preference for the doll that looks like them. The open ended questions, which asked the participants to explain why they choose a particular doll, helped to answer the second research question: "How do children explain their doll selections?"

Regardless of their choice of doll on the first two questions, participants more frequently used explanations that focused on some element of the doll's skin color or evaluation of the doll's beauty. Those who selected the White doll for the third question, where children needed to choose the doll that looked "bad," described physical traits as the reason for selecting the doll. The majority of the children who chose the Black doll for the doll that looked "bad" responded using negative behavioral traits, however. For example, one participant said the Black doll looked "bad" because "he is bad. He fights people and he scratches."

The remaining forced choice questions were designed to understand participants' perceptions of school success. The open ended responses to these questions will be explored more fully in the next section. In terms of doll preferences, more participants chose the Black doll in response to all of the remaining questions except "not good at school" (Table 2). On this question 47.8% of the participants chose the White doll, while 43.5% chose the Black doll.

When answering the forced choice questions, the participants preferred selecting the Black doll regardless of the question. Two major themes emerged from the open ended responses. From what they visually processed, the

children articulated their perceptions of the dolls in terms of physical characteristics and behavior attributes.

Perceptions of Race and School Success

Perceptions of school success were examined by asking the children to choose the doll that they believed was "smart," "not smart," "good at school," and "not good at school." Those that chose the Black doll as "smart" used both physical and behavioral features to explain their choices. For example, one student noted that "he is smart because he has the same skin" while another noted "he is listening." For those who selected the White doll (39.1%), participants also focused on physical features as to why the doll was "smart." When asked about the doll that was "not smart," more respondents chose the Black doll (43.5%) over the White doll (34.8%). Those who chose the Black doll focused mostly on behavioral aspects. Examples of this include, "she does not listen to the teacher," "It doesn't study," and "He won't [sic] listening." These responses appeared to be related to school behavioral expectations. They reflected communicated expectations of school. Among those choosing the White doll, responses did not have one dominant theme that emerged. Children selecting the White doll had answers that were split between describing physical and behavioral traits.

The majority of the participants chose the Black doll as the one that was "good at school" (56.5%). These participants had responses that both describe physical and behavioral traits. Those who responded with a physical descriptor generally referred to the doll's skin color or feature they interpreted as positive

such as "She looks happy." Others described behavioral features, or behavioral expectations, they translated as being "good at school," such as "he wants to learn" and "he listens to the teacher." Participants who chose the White doll highlighted both physical and behavioral attributes as well.

When asked to choose the doll that was "not good at school," the participants more frequently chose the White doll (47.8%). Of these, the responses are split between physical and behavioral attributes. The answers that focused around behavioral expectations of school included statements like "he be bad," and "he stomps his feet at the teacher." For others, the physical attributes prevailed. One participant said that the doll was "not good at school" because "it is white." No clear pattern could be found among the participants that selected the White doll. For those who selected the Black doll, the participants framed their answers around negative behaviors, which included two students responding that the Black doll was a "bully."

For those who chose the White doll in answer to the school-related questions, responses most frequently focused on both behavioral and physical attributes. For the remaining questions, those who chose the White doll expressed their choices in terms of physical attributes. When asked a query framed in the negative ("looks bad," not smart," "not good in school"), the participants who chose the Black doll responded most often describing negative behaviors. When questions were framed in the positive, children who selected the Black doll focused mostly on physical traits, except when asked which doll

was "good as school." On this question, participants responded with both behavioral and physical reasons for their choice.

Black Participants Selecting Black Dolls

The Black participants selected the Black doll most often regardless of question. They appeared to pick the doll that look most like them, which shows a preference for the Black doll which has not been displayed since the studies conducted during the Black Pride movement. Children appear to gravitate to and prefer the doll that is most familiar to them. When we look at the open ended responses, what we see is that they have positive responses to the Black doll's physical features (Table 3).

When I examined the open ended answers, I found that participants used language that focused on negative behavioral traits when asked a question framed in the negative. When it came to (negative) questions related to school, the children often described behaviors that were contrary to the standard school norms. Similar to what Ogbu noted, these children expressed views that Black dolls had behaviors that were in conflict with what is typically expected in school (Table 3)

Table 3

Example of Open Ended Responses

	White doll selection		Black doll selection	
	Physical traits	Behavioral attributes	Physical traits	Behavioral attributes
Positive questions: • Play with/like best • Nice doll • Smart • Good at school	I like to play with this doll/ nice doll "because it is white." He is smart because "he looks like he has a brain."	It is smart because "brown people do not like to study."	"I think this is the best doll because when I was little it looks just like me." It is smart because it "has the same skin." It is good at school because "its all Black."	He is good at school because "he listens to the teacher." The doll is smart because "it is focused."
Negative question: • Looks bad • Not smart • Not good at school	It looks bad because "he doesn't have the same skin." It is not good at school because "it has white."	It is not smart because "he does not talk." It is not good at school because "he wants to play around."	The doll looks bad "because it looks dark."	The doll is bad "because it is bad. He fights people and he scratches." She is not smart because "she does not listen to the teacher." He is not smart because "it doesn't study." The doll is not good at school because "it is a bully."

Chapter Summary

This chapter presents the significant findings from the interviews conducted with 23 Black early childhood students. Racial preferences are explored through participant selection in the forced choice questionnaire. Racial perceptions are examined in this study by observing how children take in racial stimuli and their reactions in response to these stimuli. Two themes emerged from the participant responses: physical attributes (or visual cues) and behavioral attributes. There is evidence that Black children more often ascribed negative behaviors to the Black dolls than to the White dolls. When a question was asked that was framed in the negative, the children most often described the Black doll using negative behavioral traits.

The phenomenon of ascribing negative behavioral traits to the doll you most identify with should not be overlooked. The consistent assignment of negative behaviors to the Black doll by Black children is problematic because the children themselves identify with that which they believe regularly behaves undesirably. This presents a conflict in how Black children are developing their racial perceptions and perceptions of school success that may incorporate into their developing racial identity structures.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This study has two major findings. The Black children in this sample were found to have more positive perceptions of race based on physical appearances, and Black children internalize negative behavioral traits related to their race. It appears from the findings reported in Chapter 4 that participants have formed racial preferences and racial perceptions reflected in their reactions to the Black doll. Generally, they perceive the physical traits of the Black doll positively but ascribe negative behavioral characteristics to the Black doll, especially r school-related behaviors. Steele and Ogbu have different philosophical underpinnings as an impetus for their work, yet both authors recognize that negative racial perceptions can influence Black children's perceptions of school success. Steele (1997) recognizes the external influences of racial stereotypes on individual perceptions of race and achievement, while Ogbu (2004) explores the internal cultural struggles that impede positive school perceptions. From the research of Steele (1997) and Ogbu (2004), we know that negative perceptions of race can lead to lower levels of school achievement. Educators who are committed to school reform for Black students should look carefully at the relationship between racial perceptions and perceptions of school success.

Due to the current lack of racial perception research with early childhood students, I sought with this study to close the gap which has existed since the

last major empirical studies on the topic (Gopaul-McNicol, 1988,1992). This study examined the perceptions of race and perceptions of school success in a small group of Black students by using forced choice and open ended interview questions. The questionnaire for this study was derived from the original doll studies conducted by Kenneth and Mamie Clark in the 1930's (Clark & Clark, 1950). They were among the first researchers to link the psychological development of racial perception to children's perception of their achievement at school.

Interpretations

This study provides additional evidence that supports earlier findings that racial perceptions develop in early childhood. These perceptions form when children internalize images of themselves and others, which later are integrated into their structures of identity. In the past, the studies of racial perception indicated that Black children were rejecting Black images (dolls, pictures, etc.), which indicated internalization of negative physical (visual) perceptions of Black images (Goodman, 1964; Radke and Trager 1950; Radke et al. 1950, Stevenson & Stewart, 1958). Unlike the previous studies, the participants in this study show positive perceptions of physical characteristics of Black images.

Racial perceptions are malleable and can shift throughout one's lifetime (Cross, 1978). The interview responses indicate that the students share both positive and negative perceptions related to Blackness. In this study, children perceived the doll as being like them and something that should be "liked best" or that is "nice." This is a marked difference from the Gopaul-McNicol (1988, 1992)

studies of Black perceptions of race. The children's perceptions of the doll and themselves indicate a positive perception of their race based on physical features. This indicates that they do not have a color preference for White but show preference for the physical attributes for Blacks.

The participants focused on behavioral attributes when asked to explain why the doll "looked bad." The children assigned negative behavioral attributes to the Black doll more often than the White doll. From this data there seems to be two layers of racial perceptions. There is an internalization of positive perceptions of the physical aspects of being Black and internalization of negative perceptions of the behavioral attributes of their race. As we look at the questions that examine how Black students perceive their race in relation to school success, students were more likely to note negative behaviors as their reason for selecting the Black doll when asked a question that was framed in the negative ("not smart" and "not good at school").

This duality in perceptions–the positive responses to physical attributes and negatives responses to behavioral attributes–indicates that, overall, the children interviewed reflect Cross's (1978, 1980, 1991) encounter stage of racial development. The encounter stage is categorized by confused perception about race and an increasing desire or need to connect with Black culture. Early childhood identity studies have found children classified in the pre-encounter stage, immersion–emersion stage or in the internalization stage. This study, however, is different in that it included students who indicate a sense of confusion about their perceptions of race.

The information from this study's interviews indicate there may be negative stereotypes related to behavior, especially school behaviors, that are internalized by the participants, and these stereotypes will have an impact on the children's school success as their performance can shift in the direction of the stereotype (Armenta, 2010; Aronson, 2004; Smith & Hung, 2008; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Those participants who have associated negative behaviors with their perceptions of school success are consistently equating being Black with negative school behaviors.

According to Ogbu (1985), this way of thinking will present barriers to students being able to perform to school expectations and norms, which will impact their school achievement levels. With these participants, the link between racial perceptions and perceptions of school success is negative. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) note that this link needs to be recognized and intervention efforts must be put in place.

Implications

Based on the data from this study, it is clear that these students have formulated perceptions about the physical and behavioral aspects of their race. "Internalized images at early age become integrated into overall structures that finally give the individual the sense of being a person with a sense of identity and unique characteristics" (Almaas, 2000, p. 497). These children perceive Black physical attributes as positive but, unfortunately, ascribe negative behavioral attributes to their race, especially when it relates to elements of school success.

This has major implications for future school success if these children continue to hold negative perceptions of their race in relation to school.

Implications for Policy

The integration of negative attributes about race into identity structures has an impact on success in school (Ogbu, 2004; Steele, 1997). As a result, the conflict that exists between negative perceptions of race and potential school success requires an intervention to produce more positive perceptions in order to have a better chance of achieving positive school outcomes. Ogbu (1986) suggests that the issues of negative perceptions of school success should be a focus of educational policy and intervention.

Educational policy has the ability to support more positive racial development in Black students and to help curb the persistent achievement gap between White students and Black students. Understanding that positive racial development is tied to school success, it becomes imperative that intervention is provided on behalf of students. Educational policy can be put in place to require schools to provide interventions to support positive racial development. These potential policies can close the achievement gap and improve educational equity.

Implications for Practice

There are several interventions that can support positive racial perception development. Possibilities include the implementation of multicultural education, ongoing professional development, and diversity assessments. Each of these has implications for different stakeholders, but each is critical for positive racial development for Black children.

Multicultural education. During the Civil Rights era, schools engaged in multicultural education that supported positive racial identity development, which seems to have had an impact on students' perspectives and subsequent increased academic success. Currently in California, the multicultural curriculum serves students only in Grades K-12. In early childhood, foundational skills are acquired during this time, so developmentally appropriate exposure to multicultural education has the potential to have a huge impact. James Banks, a recognized expert in multicultural education, suggests that there are five crucial elements in effective multicultural education. Banks (1993) notes that effective multicultural education includes content integration, knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and empowering school culture and social structure.

Ogletree and Larke (2010) make relevant suggestions to the early childhood community for implementation using Banks' s framework. For example, they suggest that early childhood classrooms have a variety multicultural materials, including dolls, puppets, crayons, books, etc., for children to explore. Classrooms should explore different cultures and allow children to share their own stories about their lives. Multicultural education should be part of the discourse at every early education site that serves Black students.

Schools should provide multicultural instruction, curriculum, facilities, and other educational resources to support positive racial perceptions and racial identity development. In order to provide high-quality, effective multicultural education, intervention studies should be conducted to determine the most

effective intervention practices in individual schools. It is important that program evaluation studies are conducted periodically to determine that the program is being implemented correctly and that it is effective.

Professional development. Early childhood teachers need to engage in professional development that helps them learn to effectively reduce prejudice in the classroom as well as improve the perceptions of Black children regarding school achievement. All educators and students should be given the opportunity to understand racial identity and the impact of their own racial identity on themselves and others. Professional development should include teacher competencies in designing racially sensitive classroom experiences that promote positive racial perceptions.

Teacher education programs should include strands of learning that include racial studies. Teacher training programs often lack this crucial element in its curriculum, and unfortunately, "many students in pre-service education programs enter with little previous contact with racial groups other than their own (P. Carter et al, 2014, p. 4). P. Carter (2014) noted that educators carry stereotypes with them into schools that they are not even aware that they have. These biases often manifest themselves in the form of higher than normal referrals for special education and disproportional responses to school punishments for discipline issues (suspension, expulsions, etc.). To improve environments for Black children, educators need to begin an honest dialogue about race and create culturally relevant instruction and classrooms (and teachers) responsive to race.

Diversity assessments. Each school site should consider creating a diversity task force and conduct a self-assessment of their diversity awareness, teaching, and learning. There are several organizations who have developed self-assessments that are currently used in schools. For example, the National Association of Independent Schools regularly employs the Assessment of Inclusivity and Multiculturalism in schools, which evaluates inclusivity and multiculturalism and gives schools data that they can use to create a strategic plan for effective multicultural environments. The National Association of School Psychologists also has an assessment tool that is designed to raise awareness of diversity levels and seeks to help schools design programs that foster positive school climates. If schools were to regularly assess and monitor how they are doing in relation to building positive environments for minority students, then Black students would have a far better change of developing positive racial perceptions than do those students who attend schools that do not engage in dialogue about diversity.

Implications for Future Research

Further research still needs to be conducted related to racial perceptions of early childhood students. The silence in the field needs to be filled. This study has only scratched the surface of understanding perceptions of young Black students. A further understanding of the manifestation of stereotype threat and "acting White" needs to be achieved to help support identification and subsequent intervention.

Because of the small sample size, generalized statements can not be made. There were some indications from the data that further research should be conducted with a special focus on Black female students and including data disaggregated by education levels and income. There are other external factors that exist in society that can have an impact on racial perceptions, including family environment, influence of the media, and a variety of external factors.

Recommendations

This study has suggested several issues for further research and also highlighted a need for intervention during the early childhood years. The disconnect between the students identifying positively with physical characteristics of Blackness but assigning negative behavioral traits to Blacks is too great to ignore. Given that racial perceptions are tied to school success, interventions that develop positive racial identity outcomes are necessary in schools. In the past, multicultural education in schools had resulted in increased positive perceptions and school achievement. This is one direction schools may want to explore to create change for Black students.

Cultural Literacy in Early Childhood

We know that stereotype threat and "acting White" impedes school success and achievement (Aronson, 2004; Ogbu, 1985, 1986; Steele & Aronson, 1995). The good news is that the empirical research says that early childhood students have the ability to go though stages of racial development rapidly in the early part of their life and this development is malleable. With the ability to shape racial perceptions, schools have the ability to provide opportunities for the

development of positive racial development in early childhood classrooms. Since racial perceptions begin to develop in the early years, preschools become a likely and important medium in this dialogue.

Examination of Early Childhood Manifestations

Racial preference and perceptions begin in early childhood. Research needs to be conducted to better understand and name the behaviors seen in young children. Naming the behaviors will help educators to more readily recognize the phenomena and provide corrective measures. Educators would need to be trained in effective techniques to identify typical behaviors and learn how to implement effective instruction that will have positive outcomes.

Summary of the Dissertation

The achievement gap between Black and White students still persists today. As a result, it is important for educators who are looking at school reform for Black students to consider how racial perceptions impact their potential school achievement. In this study, a sample of Black early childhood students were interviewed to determine their racial perceptions and the relationship between these perceptions and their perceptions of school success. In this research, I found that Black children perceive the physical traits of Blacks as positive but assign negative behavior attributes to the Black doll when asked about school. It is promising to think that children today do not dismiss the physical characteristics of brown skin as readily as those in the empirical research conducted in the past. However, the fact that students are internalizing perceptions of negative behaviors when it comes to school is disturbing.

Since racial perceptions begin to form in early childhood, a targeted, effective intervention has the potential to help support positive racial development in young students. In the past, multicultural education has shown to have a positive impact on racial perceptions. Since a shift to a postracial outlook, these supports have been thought of as unnecessary in schools. In light of the results of this study, educators and researchers may want to take a closer look at revisiting these interventions, especially for Black families.

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APPENDIX A

RESEARCH DESCRIPTION

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH

You and your children are invited to participate in a research study on emergent racial perceptions and perceptions of school success of young Blacks. Participation in this study is completely voluntary.

Over the span of approximately twenty years beginning in the late 1930's, Psychologists Dr. Kenneth and Mamie Clark embarked on several studies that sought to uncover the nature of the development of racial identity in Black children. In one of these studies the Clarks performed a "Doll Study." Children were presented with four dolls, identical in every way except for skin color. The questions attached to the test were designed to indicate racial perceptions. In the original doll test, children were presented with four dolls, identical in every way except for skin color. Two of the dolls were brown and two were white. The children were asked to respond to eight question by choosing one of the dolls and giving it to the researcher. In my research, I will replicate the structure of this Doll Study. For example, one of the questions asks, "Give me the doll that looks like a Black child." The child can respond by choosing one of the dolls and handing it to me. In addition, I would also like to ask additional open ended questions using the dolls so I may better understand how your children think about school.

I would like to conduct this research with your children to determine racial perceptions and perceptions of school success. I will interview approximately 20 children for my study, which will consist of Black students ages 4 to 7 years of age from schools in Southern California.

TIME INVOLVEMENT

The interview session conducted with the children should take no longer than 15 minutes, as not to seriously interrupt classroom instruction. Your child will be removed from their classroom and taken by a school staff person and the researcher to a different room for the interview. All children will be tested individually in a room or office with a school employee present during the entire duration of the interview.

RISKS AND BENEFITS

There are minimal risks. There is some risk that your child may have discomfort and speaking to someone they don't know and in answering the questions. The loss of time from the classroom may also cause some uneasiness. If there is any indication that your child does not want to participate as indicated by physical or verbal cues, I will not begin the interview. If there is any indication that your child is feeling discomfort while participating in the survey, as indicated by physical or verbal cues, I will stop the interview.

PAYMENTS

No payments will be made.

DATA STORAGE TO PROTECT CONFIDENTIALITY

I will not record your name or your child's name at any point in time. I will record the answers to the interview via audio and on an interview script. Once the data is collected, it will be placed in individual folders and locked securely in a file cabinet. This data will be kept in my office. The results of the interview will be used to formulate a

dissertation on racial perceptions and perceptions of school success in Black children. All data will be destroyed after five years.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS AND CONSENT

Principal Investigator: <u>Tashon McKeithan</u>

Research Title: Racial perceptions and its relationship with perceptions of school success

I have read and discussed the Research Description with the researcher. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the purposes and procedures regarding this study.

- My child's participation in research is voluntary. I may refuse to have my child participate or withdraw from participation at any time.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at his/her professional discretion.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue to participate, the researcher will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research project that personally identifies me or my child will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- Data and research recoded will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law.
- My child will be removed from their classroom and taken by a school staff person and the researcher to a different room for the interview.
- If at any time I have any questions regarding the research or my participation, I can contact the investigator's advisor, Dr. Estela Zarate at (657) 278-5663 or mazarate@exchange.fullerton.edu. If you have questions about the rights of human research participants, contact the CSUF IRB Office at (657) 278-7640 or irb@fullerton.edu.
- I will receive a copy of the Research Description document.
- Audio taping is part of this research. I consent for my child to be audio taped.
- My signature means that I agree to have my child participate in this study.

Child's name: _____ Date:____/____/____

Guardian's Signature/consent: _____ Date:____/____/____

Highest Degree Earned:
☐ High School Diploma
☐ College Degree
☐ Graduate School Degree

Number of household members ____

Family income:
☐ Under $30,000
☐ 30,000-50,000
☐ 50,000-80,000
☐ 80,000-100,000
☐ 100,000+

APPENDIX B

PARENT LETTER

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am Tashon McKeithan and I am a doctoral student at California State Fullerton conducting a study under the direction of Professor Estela Zarate. I am in the process of conducting a study that seeks to uncover the emergent racial perceptions of early childhood students and their relationship to perceptions of school success.

Over the span of approximately twenty years beginning in the late 1930's, Psychologists Dr. Kenneth and Mamie Clark embarked on several studies that sought to uncover the nature of the development of racial identity in Black children. In one of these studies the Clarks performed a "Doll Study." Subjects were presented with four dolls, identical in every way except for skin color. The questions attached to the test were designed to indicate racial perceptions. In the original doll test, children were presented with four dolls, identical in every way except for skin color. Two of the dolls were brown and two were white. The children were asked to respond to eight question by choosing one of the dolls and giving it to the researcher. In my research, I will replicate the structure of this Doll Study. For example, one of the questions asks, "Give me the doll that looks like a Black child." The child can respond by choosing one of the dolls and handing it to me. In addition, I would also like to ask additional open ended questions using the dolls so I may better understand how your children think about school.

I would like to replicate this Doll Study with your child to determine his/her racial perceptions and perceptions of school success. There are minimal risks. If there is any indication that your child does not want to participate as indicated by physical or verbal cues, I will not begin the interview. If there is any indication that your child is feeling discomfort while participating in the survey, as indicated by physical or verbal cues, I will stop the interview. The entire process should take no longer than 15 minutes.

You are free to withdraw your child from participation at any time you wish. Their participation is strictly voluntary. The results of this study may be published but your name (or your child's name) will not be identified and information you submit will be anonymous.

I would like to invite you to a parent meeting to discuss this research further and to answer any questions. The parent meeting will be held _____ at _____am/pm.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me by email at tashon_mckeithan@hotmail.com.

Sincerely,

Tashon McKeithan

APPENDIX C

SCRIPT FOR SUBJECTS (4-7 YEAR OLDS)

Interviewer: Hello, my name is Tashon. How are you? *(wait for response).* I am just going to ask you a few questions about some dolls. Okay? I don't want to keep you too long because I know how much fun you are having in your class. I am going to show you some dolls. (*I will place the dolls in front of the subject on a table).* I am going to ask you some questions about these dolls. After I ask the question, I want you to show me that doll. Okay? *(I will begin interview here).*

After completing the interview: Thank you so much. You are beautiful (handsome) and an incredibly smart student. You must do so well in school. You did a great job. Your teacher probably misses you, so I am going to walk you back to class now. It was really nice to meet you.

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW SCRIPT

Age: _____

Gender: Male   Female

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

    White doll   Black doll   No choice

    I1: Why do you think that this is best doll to play with (or like best)?

2. Give me the doll that is a nice doll.

    White doll   Black doll   No choice

    I2: Why do you think this is the nice doll?

3. Give me the doll that looks bad.

    White doll   Black doll   No choice

    I3: Why do you think this doll looks bad?

4. Give me the doll that you think is smart.

    White doll   Black doll   No choice

    I4: Why do you think this one is smart?

5. Give me the doll that is not smart.

    White doll   Black doll   No choice

    I5: Why do you think this one is not smart?

6. Give me the doll that is good at school.

    White doll   Black doll   No choice

    I5: Why do you think this one is good at school?

7. Give me the doll that is not good at school.

White doll   Black doll   No choice

I6: Why do you think this one is not good at school?

8. Give me the doll that looks like you.

White doll   Black doll   No choice