

TITLE: Are Preschoolers Color-Blinded?: The Role of Their Gender & Ethnicity

AUTHORS: Jaelyn Jeff

FACULTY SPONSORS: Dr. Kyong-Ah Kwon

CO-AUTHORS: Chaehyun Lim & Dr. Chenyi Zhang

Introduction/Purpose: Racial/ethnic identity and attitude emerges in early years (Aboud, 2003) and has an impact on many aspects of young children's lives such as peer relationships and school adjustment (e.g., Phinney, 1996). However, race and ethnicity is a very complex and difficult concept for young children to understand it in part due to their cognitive immaturity in understanding the concept and limited experience with and exposure to diversity (Quintana, 1998). Also it may greatly vary by the children's characteristics (e.g., gender, ethnicity). For example, generally girls are more likely to express positive emotion, have a higher level of sympathy than boys (e.g., Chaplin & Aldao, 2013). Still there is limited evidence available for young children's racial/ethnic identity and attitudes and their association with child gender and ethnicity. Thus, this study will examine how the variations in child gender and ethnicity play a key role in preschoolers' racial/ethnic identity and attitudes.

Method: A sample of children, ages three to five were recruited from nine different early childhood education programs located in the Atlanta metropolitan area. Children were interviewed twice using a modified version of Skin Color Opinions and Perceptions Evaluation (Spencer, 2008). The children were to choose one picture from a set of pictures that ranged in racial and ethnic background. Those pictures included boys or girls who were considered African-American, Caucasian, Asian, or Hispanic. In another interview, the children were asked to choose from a scale of drawings, ranging in skin color from light to dark. The questions were used to gather information about the children's attitudes towards their own ethnic/racial identity and how they perceive other children's racial/ethnic identity.

Results/Conclusion: Our preliminary data analysis (e.g., descriptive statistics, One-Way ANOVA) showed that White children (75%) are more likely to choose a playmate with a light skin color than black children (48%). On the other hand, 25% of Black children wanted to play with a child with dark skin color while only 17% of children who perceived their skin color white wanted to play with a child with dark skin color. There was no gender difference in children's racial/ethnic attitudes.