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Internalized Racism: Biases Children and Adults Hold

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Abstract

Due to one's surroundings, many African American children have internalized these racial biases without them without consciously being aware of it. Hence, this paper highlights various studies that have done previous research on the racial biases children hold like the pioneering study, the Clark doll experiment of 1947. Furthermore, this paper elaborates on measurements of how children have internalized these biases along with the influence adults play on the lives of these children. Therefore, I expand on the many implications these biases have on the lives of African American children and suggest possible approaches to aid in the reduction of these racial biases.

Internalized Racism: Biases Children and Adults Hold

During the Jim Crow Laws in the United States allowed many young children to become exposed to being separated because the color of their skin did not look the same. Consequently, this had a negative impact on the development of both Caucasian and African American children because they are unconsciously learning how to see people because of the color of their skin and not for who they are. Today, segregation of schools may be declared unconstitutional because of the *Brown v. Board of Education* 1954 (Beschloss, 2014), but the racial prejudice that exists in America today, is the same if not worse than it ever was back then.

The purpose of this paper is to present evidence from various studies regarding the racial biases children hold. One of the most significant studies in history is the Clark doll experiment of 1947. After this first pioneering study, many researchers have done follow up experiments and added to the conclusion that children have indeed internalized these racial biases without them without consciously being aware of it. Furthermore, these studies provide measurements of how children internalize racism, but evidence of how to measure the internalization of adults will also be discussed. Finally, this paper will consider the implications these racial biases have on many different aspects of the lives of African Americans along with approaches to reduce racial biases.

The first pioneering experiment of the doll experiment was conducted by K.B. Clark and M.P. Clark (1947). They understood the significant impact segregation had on the development of many children. In fact, these two researchers intended to challenge the "separate but equal" doctrine and demonstrate the traumatic experience African-

American children were facing because of segregation. Their study focused on observing the racial attitudes and preferences of 253 African American children, ages 3 – 7. Participants were presented with four different types of dolls (2 white dolls with yellow hair or 2 brown dolls with black hair). Eight questions were surrounding three different topic areas in this study. The first set of four questions were about children's preferences which consisted of questions like which one is the nice or bad doll? The second set of three questions observed their knowledge of racial differences, asking objective questions like which one is the white or black one? Finally, they ended with a self-identification question of asking the participant to point to the doll that looked like the participant.

Results yielded 94% accuracy when choosing which one was the white doll and 93% when selecting which one was the colored doll. Hence, children were very much aware of the racial differences between whites and blacks. However, when asked to self-identify, one-third of the participants chose the white doll instead of the black one. Additionally, 59% of children picked the colored doll when indicating which doll looks bad and 59% chose the white doll as being the nice doll. Not only do we see that children are very much aware of the difference in skin tones but we see how they associate more negative attributions to the black dolls rather than the white dolls. These results suggest that these are internalizing negative race biases because when asked to explain why they prefer the white doll over the black doll they say because black is ugly and it is not pretty. This study not only helped win the Brown v. Board of Education case but it also it also set the stage for future researchers to look further into whether or not children still hold those racial biases.

In 2010, CNN conducted a follow-up study to the Clark doll experiment. This study adds to the previous one because it also looks at white children and observes five different subscales: positive attitudes and beliefs, negative attitudes and beliefs, social preferences, color preference, and color rejection. The study consisted of 133 African American and White children in early (n = 65) and middle (n = 68) school schools. Each child looked at five cartoon pictures ranging from lightest to darkest and was asked questions on the five subscales. The early childhood sample of white students associated positive attitudes and beliefs to lighter skin cartoons and negative attitudes and beliefs to the darker ones than the black students. White children also selected lighter skin cartoons when asked questions about their social and color preferences. The middle childhood sample yielded similar results with the only exception of there being no significant difference between the groups when relating the cartoons to negative attitudes and beliefs or color rejection (CNN, 2010). This follow up study demonstrates the even though decades have passed since the first study, children in America today still hold these race biases that lead them to associate lighter skin with positive attributes and darker skin negative attributes. Hence, segregation has indeed ended, but it still holds an implicit value in Americans lives, allowing these internalizations to progress and devalue African Americans.

A sociological approach replicated the doll experiment and looked at children's self-concept (Byrd et al., 2017). This most recent study emphasizes the effect of Eurocentric beauty standards and explains that "good" hair is perceived as fine texture and straight; thus, more people prefer long straight hair. The study consisted of 50 children ranging from 5-10 years of age (47 African American, 2 Latino American, and 1

White). Participants were presented with four different dolls. Doll A was white with dark long straight hair and dark eyes, doll B was white with short blonde hair and blue eyes, doll C had light brown skin with curly dark hair and dark eyes, and doll D had dark tone skin, dark hair, and dark eyes. Researchers added three questions from the eight questions that K.B. Clark and M.P. Clark (1947) proposed. They asked which doll was the nice one, which was the mean one, and which hairstyle did they prefer?

Results show that even though 98% of the sample was African American, the majority of the children chose the light skin doll when asked which doll looked more like them, even though their skin was darker. In fact, the children were not asked to explain their choice, but some participants indicated that they did not want to look like the dark doll. Additionally, when the children were asked about the preference for hair type, the majority of participants preferred long straight hair (doll A). Meaning that children are internalizing European standards as beautiful and a part of that is rejecting the color of their skin tone. This suggests that children are not only aware of the racial differences, but they are also internally holding a negative perception about the attributes of people with darker skin.

These three previous studies have placed a strong emphasis on analyzing the responses of these children and how their racial biases have been measured. However, one significant factor to look at is measuring the racial biases of adults. It is crucial to also look at adults because they can also play a big role in the development of children and how they perceive their race. Pyke (2010) explains the difficulty of Sociology being able to study internalized racism is not because of the inability to measure it, but they lack the methods of analytical inquiry. Thus, she proposes the Matsuda's Method to

analyze the resistance and complicity of internalized racism by asking questions like, "what is the internalized racism in this act of resistance?" and "where is the resistance in this act of internalized racism?" Questions like these are what she refers to as asking the other question to build on qualitative studies and analyzing both sides of how racism is internalized.

Additionally, another measurement of how adults are internalizing racism is the Appropriated Racial Oppression Scale (Campón & Carter, 2015). Their study was focused on validating this scale of five dimensions to study internalized racism. Only four of them were validated: emotional responses, the American standard of beauty, devaluation of own group, and patterns of thinking. These four dimensions serve as components that contribute to developing racial biases and can demonstrate where these influences originate from. Thus, this scale analyzes each dimension to look at the bigger picture of racial oppression. The items on each domain are presented to participants, and they indicate their opinion on a 7 point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). This scale is a reliable and accurate way to measure internalized racism because it presents participants with scenarios that demonstrate holding these racial biases like "I find people who have straight hair and narrow noses to be more attractive" and "people of my race do not have much to be proud of." It informs researches how the daily lives of African Americans are influenced by these different dimensions that can cause internalized racism.

Both the Matsuda's Method and the Appropriated Racial Oppression Scale are best suitable for teenagers and adults. This is because older participants can draw from their experiences and explain how their surroundings have impacted them to hold these

racial biases implicitly. Whereas, if you were to ask a younger child these scenarios they would not to be able to formulate the words to explain the reason of why they think the way they do. Thus, experiments with dolls, pictures, stories are best suitable for them because it is most applicable to them at that age and easier for them to generate an accurate response to their personal experiences. Future research can build on the Matsuda's Method and the Appropriated Racial Oppression Scale to see the impact parents have had on their children and analyze if they play a significant role in embracing these racial biases or reject them.

Campón and Carter (2015) had a valuable approach to measuring internalized racism because they observed internal race biases through analyzing the influences internalized racism had on people's experiences. It is essential to comprehend how people are internalizing these racial biases because it demonstrates how African American children and adults perceive themselves in society and how they perceive society to see them as. There are many influences in which these racial biases affect people's self-concept like toys, books, beauty standards, and career aspirations.

Woodson (2016) discusses how growing up, she would see commercials of the Crissy doll but what they failed to display was that the doll also came in black too. To her, these commercials reminded her that in society's eyes people who looked like her did not exist. Commercials and toys like these are what increases the likelihood of children acquiring negative perceptions of someone who is other than white. Additionally, Bishop (2015) discusses the importance of literature for minority children by explaining that books are like windows, providing the reader with a view of the world, and those windows can act as sliding doors allowing one to walk through their

imagination. She also explains how those windows can also be mirrors, allowing literature to reflect back to the reader's lived experiences which in turn acts as a form of self-affirmation. She emphasizes that when children cannot find their mirrors in the books they read, they are learning that society devalues them. These experiences and interactions children face increases the lack of representation they see.

Influences like these have a major impact on the development of younger children. Toys and books are some of the things young children are exposed to on a daily basis. Thus, if African American children are playing with toys and reading books that show them no examples of people that look like them, the likelihood of children holding these internal racial biases will increase. Throughout these early years, children are learning how to play, share, and have manners. Thus, if they see toys and pictures in books that are nothing other than not representative of their identity, African American children will believe that society is not accepting of who they are. Leading them to believe that they should not embrace who they are or be proud of that. Furthermore, they will not be able to feel like they are a part of society or believe that society holds positive attributes of darker people. This also impacts white children because if they are seeing nothing other than dolls or children their skin color, they are learning to only associate themselves with people who look just like them.

Another big influence is how people perceive beauty standards. Westernized features like straight air, slim nose, slim body, and lighter skin are ways that influence people to want to look like this. Thus, this becomes the norm and people are influenced to want to look like this. They are internalizing these beauty standards and deviating from their natural self. Stephens and Few (2007) looked at the attitudes of African

American adolescents regarding physical attractiveness. They found that girls considered certain features beautiful like dreadlocks, but they stated that they would not wear that hairstyle because they believe boys will find that unattractive. Additionally, boys clearly preferred westernized features and gave it more value when choosing pictures that contained these features. These results demonstrate that African American adolescents have internalized western features as being more beautiful and not as attractive as the traits African Americans hold. They are internalizing that in order to look beautiful, they have to alter how they look to match western beauty ideals.

Another area where someone's self-concept can be affected because of internalized racism is their self-efficacy. Brown and Segrist (2016) looked at the interaction of internalized racism and the career aspirations of African Americans. They found that participants who valued their African heritage, values, and beliefs were more like to have more perseverance with their education and take on leadership roles. Whereas, those who devalued their African heritage, values, and beliefs had lower career aspirations. This supports that those people who internalize negative attributes with the Black race also attribute themselves with those same ideals, leading them to believe they are not as competent enough.

Additionally, Brinkley-Rubinstein, Craven, and McCormack (2014) build on the perception of African American's self-efficacy by discussing adolescent's awareness of how society perceives black people. Researchers looked at the attitudes of African Americans regarding incarceration and their aspirations for the future. These participants were 10 (8-13 years old) and 6 (13-18 years old) enrolled in a leadership development program (RDMCE). Results showed that older participants were very

much aware of how society perceives the black community as criminals and responsible if something went wrong. One of the participants stated that people are always looking down on black people and pointing fingers at them. Thus, older participants were less likely to have an achievement ideology than the younger children because of their lived experiences. These older adolescents are very much aware of how society devalues African Americans because of the racial biases they hold. Indeed, some individuals may think of themselves as less competent because they devalue their race but a huge factor that plays a role in understanding African American's self-efficacy is recognizing that society constantly perceives black people as criminals and not as equals.

Therefore, it is important to recognize the impact the education system can have on young children to reduce racial biases. Researchers asked teachers whether or not they believed it was important to discuss race (Vittrup, 2016). Findings show that some of the reason teachers said no is because it was not part of the required curriculum to have those types of conversations. Other teachers mentioned that they found it irrelevant to discuss race in classes because they perceived the children to be color blind so in their eyes, it was not something that needed to be pointed at. However, studies presented at the beginning of this paper show that even from a very young age children are very much aware of the racial differences in society; thus, they are not colorblind. Teachers also explained that the reason they do not discuss race is that they lack confidence and are not comfortable having these conversations. If teachers cannot have these difficult conversations about race and different kinds of diversity with students, there is no way to help children embrace the differences that are among them.

A starting point to reduce these racial biases should start in the classroom, allowing children to learn about diversity as early as their early childhood education. Before children even start school, they are becoming aware of the differences there are between people amongst them, and if they do not receive the proper education, then there will be no one to tell them otherwise when they make incorrect or hurtful preconceived judgments.

Derman-Sparks and Edward (2010) speak about the importance of providing ways for schools and families to help foster an environment that increases anti-bias education. Both researchers develop four goals surrounded on developing anti-bias education. The first goal is allowing children to develop self-awareness and pride of their individual and group identity. This could be accomplished through self-concept activities and exploring various group identities in the classroom. The second goal is to have children explore the similarities and differences between each other and explore diversity beyond the classroom. This would be applicable not only for the personal experiences they have encountered but also for the future; hence, exploring a broad spectrum of human differences. The third goal is helping children recognize unfairness. The teacher should engage in discussions with students to find out how children view different types of diversity to help decrease misconceptions and stereotypes that lead to those biases. Finally, the fourth goal is action based, assisting children to develop the skills to act against unfairness.

All of these goals build on top of one another; however, the fourth goal allows students to practice and combine all three, demonstrating knowledge and comprehension for not only one's identity but also the fair treatment for others. It is

important to recognize that there is no one way to build a curriculum for anti-bias education because there are many different dimensions of diversity. Thus, these goals for anti-bias education serves as a base factor to future topics, and discussions teachers may have. This touches directly onto racial biases because teachers can build curriculums through understanding the needs of their students by using these goals.

Tichnor-Wagner, Parkhouse, Glazier, and Cain (2016) developed pedagogical strategies to educate students on global citizenship within the classroom and connecting them to various subjects like humanities, social sciences, technology, and the environment. The first strategy is integrating global topics and multiple perspectives to the curriculum. Along with that, engaging in discussing ongoing global issues. The third strategy is connecting teacher's and student's global experiences to the curriculum. This, therefore, allows students to look at the interconnectedness of global communities and embrace the differences. Allowing students to become aware of global issues can, in turn, motivate them to take action towards these issues.

The suggestions of both Derman-Sparks and Edward (2010) and Tichnor-Wagner, Parkhouse, Glazier, and Cain (2016) are very much alike because the goal is to raise awareness of various aspects of diversity to help reduce the biases and misconceptions people may hold. These approaches can be used to reduce racial biases by having open-ended discussions to understand what young children are thinking. It will not be a solution to society's internalized racism, but it can be a start to help children value their race and not let society determine who they are. Future research should look at the relationship between these approaches and the impact it has on children's racial biases. Indeed, children need to see a more positive and

accurate representation of darker African Americans in media, schools, and politics, but

we should also start educating them at a young age. Children are not color blind and

are very aware of racial differences. Schools and parents need to play a vital role in

reducing these racial biases they hold through approaches that can reduce racial

biases.

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