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# SEGREGATION AS A FACTOR IN THE RACIAL IDENTIFICATION OF NEGRO PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN: A PRELIMINARY REPORT

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In conjunction with an investigation (1, 2) of racial identification of Negro pre-school children as indicative of a phase in the development of consciousness of self, some Negro children from mixed New York nursery schools were compared with the main group of Negro children from segregated Washington, D. C. nursery schools. It was believed that such a comparison would give an indication of the possible effects of segregation as a factor affecting the problem investigated.

In the segregated Washington nursery schools the children and personnel were all Negroes. In the mixed New York nursery schools there were two sub-groups: (1) Negro subjects from a nursery school with all Negro children, some Negro teachers, one White teacher and a White cook. This group is classified as a semi-segregated group in view of the fact that the children, all of whom were colored, came in contact with two White members of the staff. (2) Negro subjects from a nursery school containing both White and Negro children and White personnel. This group is classified as the mixed group proper.

In this report the results obtained from the semi-segregated and mixed New York groups will be presented and compared with results obtained from the segregated Washington group. Data from the latter group have already been published (1) and will therefore not be presented here in detail.

A modification of the Horowitz picture technique (3) was used. Children were asked to show the experimenter which one of a series of drawings of white and colored boys, animals and a clown they considered to be themselves. The Washington children were tested by the experimenter whereas the New

York children were tested by their teachers who had full directions as to procedure.

Only three- and four-year-old subjects were compared among the three groups since there were no five year olds in the New York schools. It should also be noted that the number of cases in the semi-segregated (19) and in the mixed group (21) are too few to permit definite conclusions. Since there were 100 children in the segregated group, however, the results may serve as a basis for the observation of some general trends in the New York groups which might serve as a basis for future work on the problem.

## RESULTS

*Total Group Responses.*—There were no clear cut differences between the semi-segregated subjects (New York Group 1) and the segregated subjects in choices of colored or white boys or irrelevant pictures on the picture series. Both groups made more choices of the colored boy than of the white boy. The semi-segregated group made 30 choices of colored boy, 22 choices of white boy and 5 irrelevant choices. Subjects in the mixed group (New York Group 2), however, made an equal number of choices of white and colored boy (25 each) and 13 irrelevant choices. As compared with the segregated (7.5%) and the semi-segregated (8.7%), the percentage of irrelevant choices in the mixed group (20.6%) is high.

In general, the tendency to identify with either the colored or the white boy seems to approximate a chance frequency among those Negro children in nursery schools where there are both white and colored children, while a trend toward identifying with the colored boy is more pronounced in the Negro children in the semi-segregated group and even more so in the all-Negro nursery schools.

*Age Level Responses.*—In the segregated group there was an increase in the percentage of difference between choices of colored and white boys, in favor of the colored boy, from the three to the four year level. In spite of the few cases, the semi-segregated group shows this same trend (difference between percents of choices of white and colored boy was 10.5% at the three year level and 22.3% at the four year level, both in favor of the colored boy). In both these groups the percentage of choices of colored boy increases from the three year to the four year level, while the percentage of choices of white boy remains approximately the same (for semi-segregated group choices of colored boy 48.7% to 61.1% from three to four year level respectively; white boy 38.2% to 38.8%).

The mixed group tends to resemble the segregated group in that the difference between percents of choices of white and colored boy increases with age in favor of the colored boy (—8.3% at the three year level to 11.1% at the four year level). But whereas the increase in choice of colored boy over white boy in the segregated and semi-segregated groups is at the expense of choices of less relevant pictures of animals and clown, this does not appear to be true of the mixed school subjects. Beginning at the four year level, the segregated and semi-segregated children cease to identify themselves in terms of the animals or the clown and consistently identify in terms of either the colored or white boys with a greater trend toward choice of colored boy. At the four year level, although children in the mixed school tend to identify themselves more with the colored boy than with the white boy, some of these four-year-olds still identify themselves with irrelevant pictures. Here again the choices of mixed children at the four year level are rather confused as compared with the clean cut dropping off of irrelevant responses by the segregated and semi-segregated children. These results suggest that the level in development of self-awareness, where identification of self is in terms of distinct persons, which was attained by the segregated and semi-segregated Negro children at the end of three years of age, was not attained at the end of the three year level by Negro children in mixed school situations.

This general tendency of the Negro subjects in the mixed nursery schools to deviate

from the trends of the all-Negro nursery school subjects and the semi-segregated subjects suggests the possibility that racial identification as a phase of ego-consciousness develops comparatively later in the mixed nursery school subjects and tends to be more confused in its expressions.

When age level groups were further subdivided into male and female the few cases in each sex classification showed no different trends and are therefore not compared with sex-difference results from the segregated children.

*Skin Color.*—Three- and four-year-old children in each of the three groups were subdivided, on the basis of skin color, into light, medium and dark. Due to the small number of New York children the three and four year children were combined for analysis of these results.

Whereas light children in the segregated group made more choices of the white boy than of the colored boy, choices of light children in both the semi-segregated and mixed groups approximated chance (light semi-segregated: 11 choices of white boy and 10 of colored boy; light mixed: 5 choices of white boy and 4 of colored boy).

While both medium and dark children in the segregated group made more choices of colored boy than of white boy, and medium and dark children in the semi-segregated group followed the same trend, choices of medium and dark children in the mixed group approximated chance (semi-segregated group: medium-colored boy 13 choices, white boy 10; and dark-colored boy 6 choices, white boy 2; mixed group: medium-colored boy 11 choices, white boy 10; and dark-colored boy 9 choices, white boy 11).

In the segregated group identification of light children more with pictures of the white boy and identification of medium and dark children more with pictures of the colored boy had suggested a level of development in self awareness where racial identification of self is in terms of one's own skin color.(2) In the semi-segregated group, results suggest that this might also be true of these children were there more cases. It is difficult to assume any indication of the same trend for children in the mixed group since light, medium and dark children make choices approximating chance.

It is impossible to draw any definite conclusions from these results in the light of the small number of cases in each classification of the mixed and semi-segregated groups. The data indicate, however, that the semi-segregated New York group is similar to the segregated Washington group in reference to the relationship of racial identifications to the skin color of the subjects; while the mixed New York group shows no such relationship, since racial identifications of each classification of skin color approximates chance.

#### DISCUSSION

In an analysis of these preliminary data, the fact that the mixed New York subjects deviated from the general trend of responses found in both the segregated Washington subjects and the semi-segregated New York subjects stand out clearly. If this finding is substantiated by further investigation, it will be necessary to interpret the problem of consciousness of self and racial identification not only in the light of such personal factors as age, intelligence and skin color of the subject, but also in terms of the nature of the environment in which the subject is tested.

The data indicate that children in the mixed nursery school appear to develop a consciousness of self and concomitant racial identification at a later chronological period than either the wholly segregated children or the semi-segregated children.

Even this indicated analysis in terms of a retardation is an assumption which will need further investigation, in that it is difficult to know at present whether these children in mixed schools follow the same sequence of development of ego and racial awareness as was found in the segregated Washington children. Nevertheless, for purposes of comparison a general similarity in pattern of development will be assumed. This retardation and seeming confusion of identifications of these subjects in the mixed nursery school suggest that other factors not present in the semi-segregated or segregated group situation are operative in modifying the expressions of this function.

The most obvious factor seemingly responsible for this retardation and chance racial identifications of the subjects in the mixed nursery school is the presence of white children of their own age in the same nursery school. This factor seems at present to be

the determinant of the deviation in responses of this mixed group from responses of the other two groups. The factor of intelligence will have to be investigated before this conclusion can definitely be stated.

This difference in the physical characteristics of individuals making up the environment for the developing child seems at present sufficient to change markedly the operation of the dynamics of self-awareness and racial identification as found in a study of segregated Negro children.

The differentials of age in the mixed group do not seem to operate in the same manner as in the segregated and semi-segregated groups. Children in the mixed groups made identifications in terms of irrelevant pictures at the four year level, while the other groups ceased to identify themselves with irrelevant pictures at the end of the three-year level.

Skin color differentials also seem to break down with a change in the environment of the subjects. In the segregated group racial identifications were made for the most part upon the basis of the skin color of the subjects. This same trend was found to be operative in the semi-segregated group. However, there was no tendency whatsoever toward this trend in the mixed group. This suggests the possibility that the racial identifications of children in the mixed group were to a large extent determined by the physical characteristics of those in their immediate environment. It is a question, to be settled by further work, whether this social factor has not gained priority over the factor of their own skin color as a determinant of the racial identifications of these Negro children.

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