



“I’m Gonna Cook My Baby in a Pot”: Young Black Girls’ Racial Preferences and Play Behavior

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Abstract

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Keywords

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Methodology

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Context

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Data Analysis

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Findings

Racial Preferences can Shape Play Behaviors

... playing with dolls ...

Playing with Other Dolls

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Playing with Other Toys

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Everly places the doll in the pot and then turns the knobs on the stove.

Other dolls were not chosen for this activity; the Black dolls, however, were observed being 'cooked' in the pot on more than one occasion, by more than one child. Everly also poked the darker Black doll in the eye with a makeup brush, and stated: "I poke her in the eye."

Everly further engaged in an extended violent play sequence with the darker Black doll (reconstructed from participant-observer notes and video recording).

The House kitchen had a removable round plastic sink. Sometimes the children took the sink out to use it as a large mixing bowl. When the sink was removed from the cabinet, it left a hole in the countertop. The children used this space as a washer and dryer, dropping clothes into the hole on top to be cleaned, and then opening the cabinet door on the front to reveal clean and dry clothes. Everly found a different use for the furniture. Everly picked up the darker Black doll and put her in the sink hole.

Everly: I'm gonna put the baby in here!

She places the baby inside the hole again.

Everly: Tyson put the top on it! (shutting the doll inside of the space under the sink).

Everly removes the plastic sink again and begins to pour baskets full of food on top of the baby doll.

Tyson: I'll put this in (adding more food).

Tyson goes to the refrigerator and gets more baskets of food. Everly smiles and then opens the cabinet and looks inside.

Everly: The baby!

After revealing the doll covered in piles of play food, she tipped the toy counter over letting the food fall out, and she and Tyson repeated the process.

The researchers did not observe this sort of mistreatment with either of the nonblack dolls.

From avoiding the Black dolls, not wanting to play with them, and mistreating them, Amber and Everly reveal their preference for the White and Latina dolls. These preferences shaped their play actions and choices. Their preferences were strong and fixed enough to cause them to exhibit clear rejection of the Black dolls on multiple occasions and in numerous and nuanced ways.

Discussion and Implications

The play of young children provides insight into their thoughts and desires (Vygotsky 1978). In particular, girls model gender expectations and use dolls in their identity construction during sociodramatic play (Frost et al. 2012).

The specificity of prop boxes allows children to engage with particular aspects of their world (Myhre 1993). In addition, play performance helps to construct social categories, including race and gender (Bernstein 2015). The use of representative play items, such as dolls, created a developmentally appropriate approach to unearthing their mental representations and topics with which they might be grappling. By observing their play as it was naturally occurring, data collection captured the perspectives of the participants, provided insight into their thoughts, and allowed children to engage with aspects of their world.

Children are much more sophisticated in their understanding than we give them credit for, often because we believe young children do not yet have the necessary cognitive or social capability (Ausdale and Feagin 2001; Husband 2012).

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minoritized children. *Review of Research in Education* 42(1), 203–225.