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BLACK SELF-CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT:
A REEXAMINATION

by

Joyce Anna Jones

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College in the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Psychology

Under the Supervision of Professor Richard A. Dientsbier

Lincoln, Nebraska

August, 1978

TITLE

BLACK SELF-CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT:

A REEXAMINATION

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DEDICATION

To

Joseph and Zephyr Jones
my loving parents

....for listening to me and hearing what I said,
....for encouraging me when I wanted to give up,
....for believing in me when I had doubts myself,
....for being with me when I needed them.

As they have shared my agonies and frustrations,
may they now share in the fulfillment of our
dream come true.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I did not accomplish this endeavor alone. Several people deserve thanks for their assistance.

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PREVIEW

INTRODUCTION

Despite definitional and measurement problems, one of the areas in psychological research which has generated an extensive amount of research is self-concept. There have been numerous definitions of self-concept published, and both Wylie (1961) and McCandless (1967) have critically discussed the difficulties surrounding the definition of self-concept. In spite of differing definitions, Wyne, White, and Coop (1974) define five points of common agreement which surface from the literature: (1) self-concept is learned; (2) most research deals with the good/bad or positive/negative dimension of self-concept; (3) self-concept is comprised of many different aspects of the individual (i.e., perceptions of how others see him or her, his or her environment, his or her family; (4) self-concept and overall personality have important relationships; and (5) self-concept is significantly related to "other learnings" which have to be mastered in order for the individual to adjust to the demands of society.

Though major works on self-concept (Wylie, 1961; Coopersmith, 1967) have attempted to investigate and define the concept, they have traditionally ignored black self-concept development. However, in reviewing the literature which has dealt specifically with black self-concept, Baughman (1971) has outlined three major approaches to

the investigation of the black self-concept. The first type relies on anecdotal evidence (i.e., Ladner, 1971). While often interesting, it is difficult to make an accurate assessment of the reliability of conclusions drawn from such evidence. The second type of evidence is best described as clinical and best exemplified by Grier and Cobbs' Black Rage (1968). The third type of evidence outlined by Baughman is of a more empirical, objective type, such as the classic studies of Clark and Clark (1947).

Though the third type of evidence abounds in the literature, several reviews have been critical of past research and report diverse methodological problems and weaknesses (Taylor, 1976; Nobles, 1973; McCarthy & Yancey, 1971). Taylor (1976) reports that:

The difficulty in reaching any conclusions or in producing findings that are at all generalizable is increased by methodological problems. Many studies suffer from basic weaknesses in both design and methods of data analysis, resulting in findings that are often incomplete, fragmentary, and at times contradictory. In some studies techniques for measuring self-referent constructs are lacking in construct validity, and, because a variety of measuring operations are employed, comparison among studies becomes difficult (p.11).

McCarthy and Yancey (1971) delineate variables traditionally ignored in the literature, such as socio-

economic status, sex and age differences, race of the examiner, test validity, and the lack of racial comparisons in many studies. Failure to adequately control for such variables makes it difficult to know the effects of these variables on the self-concept development of black Americans. Nobles (1973) also critically reviews past research on the self-concept development of blacks and concludes that not many decisive, definitive statements can be made based on the findings generated to this date. It is the empirical approach which the current study undertakes in an effort to shed some light on contradictions which are prominent in the literature. One of the major contradictions in the study of black self-concept deals with the conflicting approaches adopted by traditional and contemporary theorists in their investigation of black self-concept development.

Both traditional and current theorists (Pettigrew, 1964; Frazier, 1962; Brand, Ruiz & Padilla, 1974) agree that a definition of black self-concept includes how the individual perceives him or herself, as related to how he or she perceives others' perceptions of him or herself, stemming from what he or she learns initially from "significant others" (Sullivan, 1953; Mead, 1934) and then later in development from the extended society. This approach assumes, as do Mead (1934) and Cooley (1902), that self-concept is a continuous product of social interaction with others. According to Cooley's "looking-glass self", what

an individual internalizes as part of the "self" is based on information received from others.

One of the major points of dispute between these traditional theories and current views is who these "significant others" are in the personality formation and development of self-concept of blacks. Traditional theorists have assumed that whites in the larger society serve as these significant others for blacks (McCarthy & Yancey, 1971). An extension of this assumption suggests strongly that if indeed black children "identify" with whites, this represents a desire to "be white" (Frazier, 1962; Clark & Clark, 1947). This traditional belief in the tendency of black children to identify with the white majority and reject their own racial group has been documented in scores of studies (e.g., Stevenson & Stewart, 1958; Frazier, 1962; Morland, 1963; Clark & Clark, 1947; Rainwater, 1966; Goodman, 1952; Radke & Trager, 1950). Further, this desire to "be white" is assumed to be pathological in nature, leading to identity delusions, feelings of inadequacy and self rejection, which are likely to produce other psychological consequences in the behavior, attitudes and sense of well-being of the black child. Such authors think it important that if the larger American society has a history of "teaching" inferiority to blacks, that this devaluation has become internalized and inevitably is incorporated into the development of black self-concept (Baughman, 1971; Grambs, 1965). Wyne, White,

and Coop (1974) state that "the Americanized black individual has experienced a long history of oppression, both obvious and subtle, profoundly affecting the image he develops of himself as a person" (p. 4). An interpretation of other research as well (Clark & Clark, 1947; Pettigrew, 1964) suggests that the experiences of blacks in America are such that blacks are subjected to inevitable conflict and strife, which affects self-concept--usually detrimentally.

Much of this traditional "self-hatred" literature is based on early research in the area of racial identification and preference (Clark & Clark, 1947; 1965). In a fairly recent review of the literature on ethnic identification and racial preference, Brand, Padilla, and Ruiz (1974) review the major studies in this area and point out the weaknesses of much of this early research. The classic Clark and Clark (1947) study initiated the use of dolls in ethnic preference research. Their study generated extensive additional research using dolls as stimuli in tests of ethnic attitudes and preferences. Brand, Ruiz, and Padilla (1974) point out that most studies of ethnic attitudes among children have employed dolls as ethnic stimuli.

In the Clark and Clark (1947) study, the researchers showed dolls to 250 two to seven year olds. The dolls were identical except for hair and skin color. Researchers asked the children specific questions, such as: "Give

me the doll that is a nice doll"; "Give me the doll that looks bad", etc. The Clarks found that the majority of positive preference choices such as "nice color" were given to the white dolls. In one of many replications, Stevenson and Stewart (1958) studied 225 black and white children to determine their ability to discriminate physical differences and found that black children made a lower frequency of own-race choices than did white children in items involving the selection of a child as a playmate, as looking most like yourself, etc. The black children assigned negative roles to black children more frequently than the white children assigned such roles to white children. Numerous replications of the Clark study provide support for their conclusions that minority children identified with the majority (white) dolls (Stevenson & Stewart, 1958; Radke & Trager, 1950; Werner & Evans, 1968; Goodman, 1952; Ammons, 1950). From such studies, the rejection of self and "self-hatred" theory have been postulated. Ward and Braun (1972) validated doll tests as measures of self-concept related to ethnic identification and found that black children with a high choice of black dolls (in response to the same Clark questions) scored higher on a standardized self-concept scale than blacks with a low selection of black dolls.

However, Brand, Ruiz, and Padilla (1974) provide alternative explanations for the doll study results which

are not supportive of the "self-hatred" view and which decrease the powerfulness of such conclusions drawn from the "doll studies" used by early researchers. One major criticism of past doll studies relates to the reliability and validity of doll tests in ethnic research. Hraba (1972) studied item variability to Clark and Clark (1947) questions and reported that a greater variety of racial preference among questions reduced racial ethnocentrism. It is obvious that more studies are needed which validate doll tests as measures of self-concept and ethnic identification. Kline (1970) suggests that indeed doll studies may only measure a part of ethnic attitudes. Brand, Ruiz, and Padilla (1974) suggest additional studies using non-black minority subjects in order to evaluate fully the methodology and before conclusions about majority/minority relations can be drawn.

Contradictory to the Clark and Clark findings, other researchers have found strong identification of black children to a black doll (Greenwald & Oppenheim, 1968; Gregor & McPherson, 1966; Hraba & Grant, 1970; Kline, 1970; Ward & Braun, 1972). One interpretation points out that most studies reporting a black doll preference by black children have been completed within the last ten years (Hraba & Grant, 1970). Hence, it is postulated that the experimental differences in doll preference may reflect the impact of the "black movement" of the 60's and consequently

a growing black awareness. Brand, Ruiz, and Padilla (1974) also point out the differences in our current doll manufacturing processes. Manufacturers have improved their techniques, and black dolls of the 60's and 70's have different skin color, hair color, hair texture, and facial features more indicative of persons of African descent than earlier dolls. The only difference in white and black dolls used by many early researchers was the skin and hair color--facial features, hair style and texture were the same. Often, (Greenwald & Oppenheim, 1968) in early studies, the doll color was extremely dark or black--which may have appeared unrealistic to brown or lighter skinned black children. Greenwald and Oppenheim (1968) supported the hypothesis that variation in the color intensity of experimental ethnic stimuli can significantly alter experimental results. In addition, up until recently, there were not many black dolls on the market and consequently, children tested in the earlier doll studies may have selected the dolls which were most familiar to them (the white dolls) and rejected the black dolls due to unfamiliarity, rather than self-rejection.

Brand, Ruiz, and Padilla (1974) examined nine previously neglected variables which are related to ethnic identification and preference and which need to be controlled if future doll studies are to have much meaning. They are: (1) examiner ethnicity and sex, (2) geographical residence

of the target population, (3) population proportion of each ethnic group in the research sample, (4) length and quality of contact, (5) subjects' socioeconomic level, (6) subjects' ages, (7) sex of ethnic stimuli employed in instrumentation, (8) subjects' sex, and (9) skin color intensity of subjects and of the ethnic stimuli employed in the experiment.

As a result of criticisms such as Brand, Ruiz, and Padilla's (1974), contemporary theorists question the "self-hatred" theory of the past and have taken a more positive approach to the study of ethnicity, identification, and self-concept. Recent opponents (e.g., Cummings, 1975; Taylor, 1976; Comer & Pouissant, 1975) of the traditional "self-hatred" view point out the important fact that the social context within which most black children grow up is predominantly black; a fact that has important implications for the study of development of black self-concept. Rosenberg and Simmons (1971) have indicated that this early "racial insulation" deals with the notion that people do not internalize norms from the whole society or culture, but rather from segments of society or sub-cultures on selective bases. These norms may not be typical of the larger society. Rosenberg and Simmons concluded that: "Even if they (blacks) are aware that white society holds their group in low regard, they do not thereby reach the conclusion that they personally have little worth" (p.38). Taylor (1976) also states that "the tendency is for black