

# An Exploratory Study of Racial Understanding Among Preschool Children

Molly Hussey, Faculty Mentor: Dr. Sham'ah Md-Yunus

Department of Early Childhood, Elementary, and Middle Level Education

Funded by College of Education and Professional Studies Grant, Eastern Illinois University

## Purpose of the Study

To explore preschoolers preferences towards children from different cultural backgrounds.

## Research Questions

1. Do preschoolers choose playmates who look like them?
2. Do preschoolers identify ethnic foods as representing certain ethnic groups?

## Hypothesis

Preschoolers develop their racial understanding based on their physical knowledge.

## Theoretical Framework

1. Children as young as six months judge others based on their skin color (Bronson & Merryman, 2009).
2. Parents and adults had significant influence on the children's awareness about their racial identity (Derman-Sparks, 2005; Copple, 2003).

## Methodology

**Sample:** 49, 3-5 year old children from 7 classrooms, from three centers.

**Sampling:** Convenience

**Instruments and Data Source:**

- a. Checklist based on the Preschool Racial Attitude Measure II [PRAM II](Williams, 1972)
- b. Checklist on the ethnic foods
- c. Researchers observational notes

## Data Collection Procedures

Children were interviewed during center time one at a time in a separate room. Each interview lasted from 5-10 minutes.

Total of time spent collecting data was approximately 250-300 minutes.

First, each child was shown a series of pictures; five boys and five girls. One boy and one girl were used to represent each of the five different ethnicities (African American, Asian American, Caucasian, American Indian, and Hispanic).

Next, the researcher asked seven questions evaluating the child's preference of playmate based on the PRAM II Checklist.

## Pictures of Children from Each Ethnicity



## Data Collection Procedures (Cont.)

The researcher used five pictures of children, one from each ethnicity.

One by one the child was shown pictures of ethnic foods corresponding with the ethnicities of the children (fried chicken, pizza, white rice, Indian corn, and tacos).

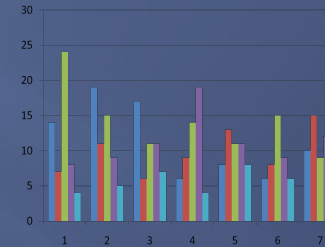
The researcher asked the child to name the food and then match the food with a picture of the child.

While completing checklists the researcher made written notes on children's verbal comments.

## Ethnic Foods



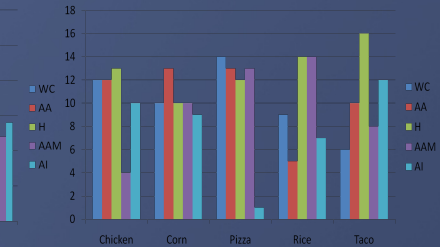
## PRAM II Checklist Results



## Findings

1. Do preschoolers choose playmates who look like them?
  - a. Children did not choose their playmates based on ethnicity; however, children did choose based on gender.
  - b. Girls chose pictures of girls approximately two time more than they choose pictures of boys.
  - c. Boys chose pictures of boys approximately three times more than they chose pictures of girls.
  - d. Even though demographically we live in a Caucasian dominant setting, and participants being 89.7% Caucasian, the participants did not show racial preference in choosing their playmates.

## Ethnic Food Checklist Results



## Findings (Cont.)

2. Do preschoolers identify ethnic foods as representing certain ethnic groups?
  - a. Findings show that children did not associate ethnic foods as being representative of certain ethnic groups.
  - b. Findings show that children equally associate all foods with all ethnicities.

## Conclusion

Setting and demographic are not valid variables to measure children's ethnic preferences.

## PRAM II and Ethnic Food Checklist Key:

WC - White Caucasian  
 AA - African American  
 H - Hispanic  
 AAM - Asian American  
 AI - American Indian