Picking the Pretty One: A Qualitative Study of Toy Selection Among Girls Age Four to Ten

By Savannah Anderson-Bledsoe and Donna S. Sheperis, PhD.
Lamar University
Adriana Dyurich
M.S. Texas A&M University - Corpus Christi

Abstract

Children learn gender and social role types through a variety of influences including caregivers, media, and peers. Toy selection, particularly the choices of dolls by young girls, is also largely influenced by the child's concept of beauty.[1] Do they choose what looks most like them or what looks most like what they think is pretty? Are these the same or different concepts? Understanding the influences on preschool age girls is critical to educators working with this population. This research focused on the foundations of a qualitative study that looked into the following questions: What factors influence doll choice in girls age four to ten? If girls have access to a broad range of doll choices, will they tend to prefer a doll more similar to their ethnic or racial backgrounds or will they tend to choose the doll that is a more racially popular (i.e. socially acceptable) choice? It was hypothesized that young girls who have access to dolls that display the diverse range of skin colors, hair types, and facial features of various racial backgrounds, are less likely to choose a doll that is more socially acceptable (i.e. one that represents a white racial background). This qualitative content analysis study derived data from interviews with girls age four to ten in southeast Texas. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed for themes to determine the process used by girls in that sample to make choices about doll selection based on beauty. After the interview data was coded, several themes emerged. Overall, the factors that determined doll choice were: the doll's similarity in appearance to an external female role model, the doll's similarity in appearance to the participants, the appearance of the doll's hair, skin, and eyes, the doll's posture, whether the doll looked realistic, and whether the doll was smiling. Non-realistic dolls were deemed ugly, and dolls that were smiling were deemed nice. The results of this study could impact social change by providing educators and caregivers with a deeper understanding of how girls experience self-image mediated by racial standards of beauty.

Doll play is a common activity for millions of young girls. Using a doll to act out everyday life during dramatic play allows children to learn many things: how to adopt more than one role at a time, how to display nurturing behavior, and how to problem solve. By the age of four, children are engaging in cooperative and pretend play.[2] Doll play is an important part of children's development. Taking care of dolls by dressing and feeding them improves fine motor skills, while role-playing offers the opportunity to develop language and social skills such as sharing and helping.[2] Pretend play also fosters the creative process and allows children to act out what they experience in the real world.[2]

Researchers have established that by the age of four, most children are aware of racial cues and can correctly identify skin color.[3] In order to promote acceptance of diversity and healthy self-image, children in preschool and primary school would benefit from engaging in pretend play with dolls that more realistically display skin colors, hair, and facial features that represent the diversity of the community.[2] Ideally, as dolls become more complex in terms of style, they will also become more ethnically diverse. Examples of these toys are fashion dolls –like Barbie— which are dolls that "place an emphasis on fashionable clothes and other possessions".[2]

For years, Barbies have been a popular choice among young girls. Mattel estimates that 90% of U.S. girls between the ages of three and ten own at least one Barbie doll; girls between three and six own an average of twelve dolls each.[4] The popularity of fashion dolls gives them the capability to affect the lives of young girls. Children are not blind to race and "studies have shown that the self-esteem of young girls is easily influenced even before they hit puberty".[1] Because doll play has an important role on child development, fashion dolls should realistically represent different racial and ethnic backgrounds. In the United States, the dominant –or mainstream—culture is white culture. Its standard of beauty primarily consists of straight blonde hair, blue or green eyes, and thin lips and noses. It is evident everywhere; photographs of white women appear in fashion magazines, on billboards, and in advertisements at department stores. What happens, then, when young girls do not have access to dolls that display the diverse range of skin colors, hair types, and facial features of various racial backgrounds? Limiting doll choices to just a few generic ones that do not deviate in appearance from a white, European standard of beauty can quickly teach children that one particular race is more valuable.

Statement of the Problem

Young girls are in a critical stage of development. This refers not only to the development of the language and social skills necessary to function in society, but also the development of racial attitudes that will contribute to their self-image and self-concept. Research has shown the important role of play in this developmental stage, including playing with dolls.[3] Nevertheless, access to fashion dolls that accurately represent the varied skin colors, hair textures, and facial features of the girls is limited. Even when available, other factors such as price and popularity might be influencing girls' doll preferences, racial attitudes and self-worth.[1]

Previous doll task studies have explored the relationship between doll preferences and racial attitudes in black preschoolers or white pre-schoolers.[3] These studies presented participants with generic black dolls and white dolls that were not wholly accurate representations of the varied skin colors, hair textures, and facial features present in black African American or white European populations. Additionally, how children of other races, ages, and ethnicities respond to racial identity, racism, and racial awareness was not examined.

Still, this is an important area of research. There is evidence supporting the hypothesis that young children who have access to dolls that display the diverse range of skin colors, hair types, and facial features of various racial backgrounds are less likely to choose a doll that represents a white, European racial background.[5] Children know the difference between dolls, not just because of their skin color. They assign values to dolls based on race.[1] By the age of four, children can recognize racial cues; if doll options are limited, perhaps a child's social development in terms of race and racial attitudes will be limited as well. For counselors, educators, and caregivers, it is essential to explore the perceptions that young girls have of dolls when mediated by race and racial features, in order to understand their personal experience, self-image, and self-worth.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative summative content analysis study was to explore the perceptions towards race and racial features that influence doll selection, and uncover the meaning girls attached to these features. The study was conducted among 26 girls, ages four to ten, attending a daycare, preschool, or elementary school in cities across southeast Texas. The recruitment process and interviews happened at the sites that agreed to host the study. The study was limited to female participants, since they more openly and commonly play with fashion dolls.

Guiding Research Questions
1. What are the perceptions that influence doll choice in girls aged four to ten?
2. Given access to a broad range of doll choices that display a diverse range of skin colors, hair types, and facial features of various racial backgrounds, how will girls aged four to ten describe their choices of dolls?
3. What meanings do girls attach to doll choice and dolls' racial characteristics?

Literature Review

Multiethnic (Jewish, Arab, Japanese, etc.) and Multiracial (Black, Asian, White, etc.) Barbie dolls with ambiguous, stereotypical facial features, hair textures, and skin colors are not adequate representations of how people actually look. As the United States increasingly becomes a more diverse country, there is a growing need for accommodations that reflect the reality of its citizens. Without a doubt, there are demands for diverse dolls that help foster positive racial awareness and racial identity in children. There is a relationship between doll choice and children's racial identities. Limiting children's doll choices to just a few generic ones that do not deviate in appearance from a white European standard of beauty can quickly teach children that their particular race is better or worse compared to others. The following six studies attempt to demonstrate and support the hypothesis that girls who have access to dolls that display the diverse range of skin colors, hair types, and facial features of various racial backgrounds, are less likely to choose a doll that is more socially acceptable (i.e. one that represents a white, European racial background).

Role of Doll Play

Doll play is an important part of young children's lives because acting out everyday life, via a doll during fantasy play, allows them to learn many things: how to adopt more than one role at a time, how to display nurturing behavior, and how to problem solve.[2] By the age of four, children are "playing cooperatively with peers" and "using dolls to act out family and school roles [and] roles they have observed, either real or fantasy".[2] Doll play is an important part of children's development, and taking care of dolls heightens fine motor skills. In addition, when children take on roles and play with other kids they "practice language and social skills, including sharing... and helping".[2] At this point in children's development, it becomes increasingly important for them to play with dolls that are diverse. If, for example, in school settings where there may be children who are all the same race or ethnicity, access to dolls that portray community diversity is still needed. Dolls should display diverse features that go beyond skin color: facial features, hair textures, and hairstyles must vary.

Black Barbie Dolls

Raynor addressed doll choice and how it can affect young girls' racial identity by analyzing the meaning that black Barbie dolls can hold for those who collect them. She admitted to "often wonder[ing] how [her] first black Barbie doll" contributed to developing her identity as a "young black girl".[8] Due to her appearance (brown skin, red hair, brown eyes), Raynor believed that she was unattractive and an outsider in her family. Her looks were never complimented because she did not meet the "black standard of beauty".[8] She expressed that she did not ever want to look like a Barbie doll and that, at a young age, discovered the need to create her own beauty standards and accept her racial identity. It was posited that manufacturers took for granted the fact that young Black girls needed dolls "who reminded them that they are also beautiful and worth the time to emulate".[8]

Despite the negative opinions American society had about Barbie dolls, Raynor believed her first black Barbie doll represented positive concepts such as "identity, acceptance, and power".[8] Dolls can help girls, who are members of a sex that is "already perceived as the Other", understand how the relationship between race, gender, and class is structured in society. Mattel tried many times to "broaden the ethnicities of their dolls, even though the focus was still" on light skinned blacks for the most part. Raynor stated it was necessary for young black girls to have dolls that were representative of the diverse range of skin colors present in African Americans.[8]

Overall, through disclosing a positive experience with having a black Barbie doll, Raynor revealed that there is a connection between doll choice and how children feel about their racial identities. Raynor's work supports the hypothesis that young girls who have access to dolls that display the diverse range of skin colors, hair types, and facial features of various racial backgrounds, are less likely to choose a doll that is more socially acceptable (i.e. one that represents a white, European racial background). She by revealed that having dolls is an important aspect of young girls' social development as well as racial identity, and that they should have access to dolls that represent the varied skin colors, hair textures, and facial features that are present in the race(s) of their market.[8]

Doll Selection and Racial Cues

A seminal piece of research supporting the current study was the 1974 work of Katz and Zalk. These researchers examined factors that influenced the development of racial attitudes in young children. Katz and Zalk found that children in preschool could acknowledge, and were familiar with, racial cues. By the time they have reached their fourth birthday, children can accurately recognize skin color as a racial cue.[3]

In the Katz and Zalk study, kindergartners and preschool children were given a doll task by same race and other race examiners. From

an assortment of black and white dolls, the children were asked to select their favorite doll, their least favorite doll, the good doll, the bad doll, the doll that was a nice color, and the doll that they wanted to take home with them.[3] Following their doll selections, the children were also asked to indicate which doll they believed looked the most like them, and to point out the doll that looked like a white child or a black child. Overall, all children in the study chose same race dolls more often and associated them with positive characteristics while associating other race dolls with negative characteristics. The researchers also found a connection between the children choosing dolls and the examiner who administered the doll task. For example, the white kindergarten children typically chose white dolls if the examiner was white and black dolls if the examiner was black.

A weakness of this study is that it used only one racial cue, the skin tone of the dolls, to determine whether the doll was black or white. Katz and Zalk did not find the "strong preference for white dolls" found in previous studies.[3] This was due in part, perhaps, because the male and female dolls did not differ in hair texture or color, eye color, skin color, or facial features. They were chosen because their "facial features were constant across skin color, and noses and mouths were judged...to be ambiguous enough to be either European or African".[3]

If the study were to be replicated, in order to achieve responses that are more substantive, the black dolls should consist of several options that simulate the diverse range of skin colors, facial features, and hair textures that are present in African American populations. For example, a light skinned black preschooler who has medium length curly hair and hazel eyes may not identify with a generic, dark brown doll that has brown eyes and black hair. With the dark brown doll being the only offering under the "black doll" category, the child may indicate the doll as looking the most like them simply because there are no other options. As a result, a forced response (i.e. one that is more socially acceptable) is produced. A second limitation to the study is that Katz and Zalk only selected black children and white children to participate in the doll choice task. Their goal was to assess the "acquisition of racial attitudes in young children".[3] However, the phrase "young children" does not specify a racial or ethnic demographic. Children of other races and ethnicities deal with racial awareness, racial identity, and racism. Thirdly, the fact that examiner's race was not constant is a limitation to the study.

Placing Value on Color

Highlighting the connection between doll choice and children's racial attitudes, Perez discussed the racial attitudes of preschool-aged black children. In another experiment, children were presented with two dolls, a dark skinned doll and a white doll.[1] They were asked which one they preferred and why. Most of the children stated they liked the white doll because it was the nicest one. When it came to the dark skinned doll, those same children described it as the bad one. In the rationale for her study, Perez recognized that young girls showed signs of self-hatred and "internalized racism".[1] She also discussed the idea that the young girls preferred the white doll because modern society –like that in the U.S.—has bombarded people with the idea that white, European racial and ethnic backgrounds should be (and are) the most popular beauty standard. As evidence of this fact, African American Barbie Dolls tend to be cheaper than "otherwise identical" white Barbie dolls. Perez stated that "[By] devaluing the black doll... young black girls [are lead] to devaluing themselves...[by] internalizing that hatred".[1]

As shown by multiple studies, young children who have access to dolls with a limited range of skin colors, hair types, and facial features of various racial backgrounds are more likely to choose a doll that is more socially acceptable (i.e. one that represents a white, European racial background).[1,3,5] From this, the following questions can be asked: "If children are presented with a more diverse range of doll choices, will they choose a doll more similar to their racial or ethnic backgrounds or will they choose the doll that is a more racially popular choice?"

The next section will examine the methodology of the proposed research.

Methodology

Qualitative Research Design

The present study was conducted under the qualitative research paradigm. Qualitative inquiry involves inductive data analysis from a purposeful sample, usually studied in natural settings.[6] Qualitative research explores in-depth the experiences of the participants and the meaning they might derive from the process, while maintaining a contextually sensitive understanding of the topic being studied.[9] For this qualitative study, the researchers used a summative content analysis methodology. Content analysis encompasses systematic techniques used to analyze the informational contents of textual data. Although it can also be used for quantitative designs, it is most commonly utilized as a qualitative technique.[10,11] Summative content analysis requires the identification and counting of keywords, their further comparisons, and the interpretation of their underlying and latent context.[12] In the present study, summative content analysis was conducted to study the perceptions of young girls when selecting fashion dolls with diverse racial and ethnic features, and the meaning derived from this process.

The data collection and analysis process consisted of recorded interviews that were analyzed for themes. Participants were presented with dolls that had a range of attributes and were asked a variety of questions related to doll choice. Each girl was asked the same set of interview questions by the same examiner. Their responses were tape-recorded and transcribed into an Excel spreadsheet for coding. The goal of summative content analysis is to uncover any themes, or factors, that determine the process used by the girls in making choices about doll selection.[12] In this study, the units of analysis were individual qualitative interviews with the participants and the units of meaning were the themes discovered after analyzing the interviews.

Participants and Context

Participants were 26 girls between the age of four and ten attending a daycare, preschool, or elementary school in southeast Texas. Recruitment occurred through the use of flyers at the sites that agreed to host the study. Informed consent was obtained from parents or legal guardians, and participants were given an opportunity to sign an informed assent if they were cognitively capable of doing so. In accordance with qualitative inquiry, the study used a purposeful sampling method on a volunteer basis.[13] Participants were selected if they met the population requirements (female, four- to ten-years-old), signed a letter of assent (if cognitively appropriate to do so), and received consent from their parents or legal guardians. Thirty-five girls met criteria for inclusion and participated in the study.

Materials

The materials consisted of thirteen 11.5 inch Barbie dolls dressed in similar dresses of equal length. Four dolls were dressed in a yellow dress, four dolls were dressed in a pink dress, three dolls were dressed in a black dress, and two dolls were dressed in a blue dress. The dresses were short, and none of the dolls were wearing shoes. The dolls had flexible, moveable arms and could easily be made to sit and stand in various positions. The dolls spanned a variety of races (Asian, black, white) and ethnicities (Hispanic/Latino, Japanese). Hair texture and color,

facial features, and skin tones varied. The participants' responses were recorded using a tape recorder and a video camera.

Data Collection Procedures

Each participant's interview was conducted separately in an empty classroom or meeting room at a local school or church . Upon their arrival to the venue, the parents were given a parental consent form to read and sign. Some of the participants who were able to do so signed a letter of assent. The signed letters of assent and parental consent forms were collected and stored in a file folder, which were then placed into a sealable metal container that could be locked. For the interview, the participants were shown all of the dolls (which represented a variety of ethnically and racially diverse populations) and were asked questions about them. Following qualitative interview standard practices, the interviewer responses were limited and included only minimal encouragers (e.g. uhhuh, I see, tell me more) to elicit a full response set.

The interview questions were as follows:

4. Show me the doll that you like best or that you would like to play with. Why did you choose that one?
5. Show me the prettiest doll. Why is she the prettiest?
6. Show me the ugliest doll. Why is she the ugliest?
7. Show me the doll that looks most like you. How does she look like you?
8. If you could take home one of these dolls today, which doll would you take home with you? Why is that?
9. Point to the nice doll that helps her friends. Why did you choose her?
10. Point to the bad doll that does not help her friends. Why did you choose her?

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher is considered a variable in the study since the data obtained is analyzed through the lens of the researcher.[6] Because the researcher becomes the primary instrument of data collection and analysis it is crucial to be aware of the influence this might have in the study.[9] As a child, the primary researcher played with Barbies frequently. Whenever her grandmother or mother would bring her along with them to the grocery store, she would beg for a Barbie doll. By the time the lead researcher was 7, she had a rather large collection of Barbies including several versions of Barbie, Ken, Skipper, and Christie. Christie was Barbie's black companion,

and by far the researcher's favorite Barbie doll. She states "Christie wasn't a realistic representation of myself or any other black person I knew, but she did bring some much-needed diversity to my Barbie doll collection. Christie was very precious to me, and it seemed my mother liked her as well. Whenever I spent a few hours playing with Barbie dolls on the weekend or after school, my mother would always encourage me to include Christie in whatever scenario I came up with for that day. She wanted to show me that black people belong, that they are a part of [the] world's narrative" (S. Anderson-Bledsoe, personal communication, January 25, 2016). From an early age, the primary researcher knew that racial and ethnic representation was important, and that there was a relationship between racial and ethnic representation and self-esteem. Although too young to put it into words, she knew that developing a healthy racial identity had something to do with the toys she played with. This knowledge resulted in an interest in researching the topic of race and doll selection. Because of the potential for bias, additional researchers were brought into the project to develop the interview process and conduct data analysis.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was achieved by considering the appropriateness of the research questions and participant sample and by utilizing the appropriate methods for data collection and analysis.[6] This study used the methods of summative content analysis to obtain triangulation, including inter-coder agreement.[12] The researcher was trained in qualitative interview protocol prior to conducting the interviews. After interviews took place, the researcher's mentor later reviewed the transcripts and themes.

Data Analysis

Upon completion of the interviews, the interviews were transcribed. Background noise or technical difficulties with the recording made nine of the interviews unusable. Thus, 26 transcripts were available for analysis. Transcription data was placed in an Excel spreadsheet. The most objective part of a qualitative summative content analysis is based on a simple word count for each question.[12] From this word count, data were clustered based on keywordsincontext for each of the questions.[14] Responses were grouped into emergent themes and coded according to major focus or intent of the statement. Next, the number of occurrences per code were counted and interpreted. Finally, a summative content analysis was used to analyze the questions.[12] The source for naming of categories was

investigative and the verification component was technical (e.g., use of inter-coder agreement).[15] Specifically, the two researchers independently coded 20% of the interview data and after establishing 100% interrater reliability, using Cohen's Kappa measure, then coded the remaining data together.[16] To integrate responses across questions, each of the participants' data were subjected to cross case analyses to determine whether emergent themes could be disaggregated.[17]

Results

Several findings emerged as the result of the coding of interview data. They will be discussed here in relation to the questions asked to each participant.

Question 1: Show me the doll that you like best or that you would like to play with. Why did you choose that one?

Participants selected doll #5 most frequently, with six girls choosing it as the one they liked best. Dolls #6, #9, and #12 were each selected three times. The top keywords relevant to why they chose the dolls they selected were "pretty/beautiful" (n=16), "looks like me" (n=16), "hair" (n=14), "brown" (n=9) and "eyes" (n=8). Hair, overall attractiveness, eye color, and the participant's perception of the doll's features being similar to theirs were themes that emerged when asked which dolls the participants liked best and wanted to play with. Finally, nine of the participants referenced a female role model that reminded them of the doll that they chose.

Question 2: Show me the prettiest doll. Why is she the prettiest?

Responses varied to this question with dolls #5 and #9 being selected four times each and dolls #3, #7, #8, and #12 being

chosen three times each. The top keywords relevant to why they chose the dolls they selected were "pretty/beautiful" (n=16), "hair" (n=11), "eyes" (n=6), "face" (n=5), and "different" (n=5). Overall attractiveness, hair, eyes, and face were themes that emerged when asked which dolls were the prettiest. Finally, six of the participants mentioned they chose a doll because of its uniqueness.

Question 3: Show me the ugliest doll. Why is she the ugliest?

Unlike the prettiest doll, the ugliest doll responses were largely focused on two dolls: doll #1 (n=8) and doll #9 (n=5). Keywords relevant to why these dolls were the ugliest were "hair" (n=18), "skin" (n=8), and "dark" (n=6). Overall unattractiveness, face, plainness, hair, and skin were themes that emerged when asked which doll was

the ugliest. Hair that is puffy or poofy and skin that is dark appeared to make dolls unattractive, as did plainness. Uniqueness or specialness, as found in the Q2 results, made a doll attractive while plainness or boringness made a doll unattractive. Also, four of the participants chose a doll as the ugliest because it was weird or fake looking. Dolls that were not realistic in appearance were deemed unattractive.

Question 4: Show me the doll that looks most like you. How does she look like you?

The top keywords relevant to why the participants chose the dolls they selected were "hair" (n=25), "brown" (n=16), "color" (n=14), "skin" (n=13), "eyes" (n=10), "dark" (n=6), "light" (n=6), "looks like me" (n=5), "face" (n=4), and "nose" (n=4). The participants' responses were mainly focused on doll #5 (n=6) and dolls #1, #6, and #9 (n=3). It is important to discuss which participants were or were not accurate in choosing which doll actually looked like them. Out of the 26 participants, only three incorrectly chose which doll actually looked like them. Two of those three participants were eight-years-old and one was six-years-old. One of the eight-year-olds was biracial (black and white) and chose doll #5 as looking most like her. The other eight-year-old was black and chose doll #5, and the six-year-old was black and chose doll #9. Dolls #5 and #9 were two of the most popular dolls and they were chosen incorrectly for Q4 three times.

Question 5: If you could take home one of these dolls today, which doll would you take home with you? Why is that?

The top keywords relevant to why the participants chose the dolls they selected were "looks like me" (n=17), "prettiest" (n=9), "black" (n=6), "hair" (n=6), and "mom" (n=4). The dolls that were chosen most often were doll #5 (n=6), doll #4 (n=3), doll #6 (n=3), and doll #9 (n=3). Interestingly, in response to Q2, participants chose a doll as the prettiest if it was different, unique, or perfect in appearance but in Q5, 17 out of 26 participants chose a doll that looked like them as the one they would want to take home.

Question 6: Point to the nice doll that helps her friends. Why did you choose her?

The top keywords relevant to why the participants chose the dolls they selected were "looks like" (n=12), "nice" (n=16), "smart" (n=3), "smile/smiling" (n=6), "good" (n=5), and "hair" (n=4). The dolls chosen the most in response to Q6 were dolls #3 and #11 (n=4) and doll #8 (n=3). Interestingly, there was no mention of skin

or eyes and there was hardly any mention of hair. Skin, eyes, and hair were mentioned several times in every question but Q6. It is evident that "helpful" is not a visual, even though Q6 asks for a visual. As discovered in Q2, prettiness is based on the appearance of the doll's skin, hair, and eyes, while niceness is based on whether or not the doll was smiling.

Question 7: Point to the bad doll that does not help her friends. Why did you choose her?

The top keywords relevant to why the participants chose the dolls they selected were "mean" (n=10), face (n=5), "diva/fancy/stuck-up" (n=5), "not/isn't smiling" (n=4), "eyes" (n=4), "hair" (n=4), "grouchy" (n=2), and "bossy" (n=2). Doll #1 was chosen nine times, doll #7 was chosen six times, and doll #2 was chosen five times. Interestingly, in Q6 "helpful" is not a visual but in Q7 "mean" is a visual. Lastly, three participants mentioned an external female that behaved in a negative way that reminded them of the doll they chose. The negative external females were "diva", "cousin", "actress", and "mom".

Discussion

The themes that follow are those that were revealed in the coding process. Each theme will be discussed individually.

Themes

Goldilocks to grandma.

In Q1, nine participants mentioned an external female role model that reminded them in some way of the doll they chose. The doll's similarity in appearance to an external role model appears to be one of the factors that determined which dolls the participants liked best and wanted to play with. The external female role models they mentioned were goldilocks, sister, princess, model, teacher, mommy, diva, Selena Gomez, Demi Lovato, and grandma.

Actress to angel.

In Q6, seven participants mentioned an external female role model that reminded them in some way of the doll they chose. The doll's similarity in appearance to an external role model appears to be one of the factors that determined which dolls the participants thought were nice. The external female role models they mentioned were actress, mom, teacher, sister, and angel.

Looks like me.

The doll's similarity in appearance to the participants was one of the factors that determined doll choice. In response to Q1, nine participants mentioned that they chose the doll because it looked like them. In

response to Q5, 17 participants mentioned that they chose a doll because it looked like them. In response to Q6, 12 participants mentioned that they chose a doll because it looked like them. "Looks like me" arose several times in each question except for Q7 and Q3. This finding supports the idea that when girls have access to a broad range of doll choices, they tend to prefer a doll more similar to their own ethnic or racial background.

Hair, skin, and eyes.

Hair, skin, and eyes were three of the most common factors that determined doll choice for most of the questions (whether the hair, skin, and eyes of each doll was similar in appearance to an external female role model that the participant looked up to or the hair, skin, and eyes of each doll reminded the participant of themselves). Only in Q6 was there was no mention of skin or eyes and very little mention of hair. In Q6, participants' concept of niceness was related to whether the doll was smiling or not rather than how pretty the doll was. Therefore, the prettiest dolls were not necessarily the nicest dolls and the ugliest doll were not necessarily the meanest dolls.

Female role model/external female influence.

The dolls' similarity in appearance to an external role model appears to be one of the factors that determined which dolls the participants preferred. In Q1, nine participants mentioned an external female role model that reminded them in some way of the doll they chose. In Q6, seven participants mentioned an external female role model that reminded them in some way of the doll they chose. In Q7, three participants mentioned a negative external female that reminded them of the doll they chose. Doll #1, doll #5 (n=2), doll #6 (n=2), doll #8, doll #9 (n=2), doll #10, and doll #12 were chosen in response to Q1 when participants mentioned an external female role model. Interestingly, the most popular (most liked) dolls were dolls #5, #6, and #9. Doll #1, doll #3 (n=3), doll #6, doll #11, and doll #12 were chosen in response to Q6 when participants mentioned an external female role model. Lastly, dolls #4, #12, and #11 were chosen in response to Q7 when participants mentioned an external female role model.

Doll #1.

One of the least popular dolls (most disliked) was doll #1. It was chosen the most in response to Q3 (n=8) and Q7 (n=9). It was chosen very little in response to Q5 (n=1), Q2 (n=1), Q1 (n=1), and Q4 (n=3). It wasn't chosen at all in response to Q6. In Q7, posture seems to have played a role in

some of the participants' doll choice. Three out of 26 participants mentioned that they thought doll #1 was a bad doll because one of her hands was on her hip. Interestingly, dolls #2, 3, 4, and 13 all had one of their hands on their hips. Dolls #2, 3, and 13 were white and doll #4 was Biracial (black and white). Doll #1 was a dark-skinned black doll. Thus, it appears that Doll #1 was one of the least popular dolls and was perceived in Q7 as having a bad attitude because of her skin color. The perception of a doll having a bad attitude coincided with her hand being on her hip only if her skin is dark.

Nonrealistic dolls are ugly.

In response to Q3, four participants chose a doll as the ugliest because it was weird or fake looking. Dolls that were not realistic in appearance were deemed unattractive. Doll #4 (n=2), doll #1, and doll #13 were chosen were chosen in response to Q3 when participants mentioned weirdness or fakeness. Interestingly, one of the participants that described doll #4 as unrealistic was a fouryearold. This supports the idea that by the age of four, it becomes increasingly important for children to play with dolls that are realistic.[2] Dolls that do not realistically represent a certain racial or ethnic group may be rejected by young girls and looked upon unfavorably.

Smiling.

In Q6, one of the top keywords relevant to why the participants chose the dolls they selected was "smile/smiling" (n=6). Doll #3 (n=2), doll #7, doll #11 (n=2), and doll #13 were chosen in Q6 as the good dolls because they were smiling. Upon examining themes and keywords (word repetitions), it was found that overall prettiness or attractiveness is based on skin, hair, and eyes while niceness is based on smiling. This is interesting because it contradicts with the commonly held belief that someone who has a happy, inviting smile is considered to be attractive.

Implications

There are a number of implications for this research. First, a better understanding of how young girls perceive beauty, and themselves, is essential to child development studies. Therapists and educators working with girls can use these results to better understand the population. Secondly, the concept of beauty is strongly linked to the appearance of skin, eyes, and hair. Since only hair has the ability to be altered, one's own sense of beauty may be rooted in genetics. If young girls have a positive experience with having a doll that reflects their racial or ethnic background, they would be one step closer to developing a healthy identity.

Finally, these girls looked to external female role models to set the standard for beauty and desirability. Adult women who are cognizant of this, particularly mothers, teachers, and other women of authority, can positively influence the development of beauty and desirability in girls.

Further Research

It would be helpful to see how other populations or sample ages perceive doll choice and whether findings are similar or different from those in the current study. Further research could include boys age four to ten or explore the perceptions of girls aged eleven to seventeen who no longer play with dolls. Additional research may include direct observation of children as they make doll selection. Direct observation removes the interviewer from the study and has the potential to reduce bias.

Conclusion

Originally, we hypothesized that young children who have access to dolls that display the diverse range of skin colors, hair types, and facial features of various racial backgrounds are less likely to choose a doll that is more socially acceptable (i.e. one that represents a white, European racial background). Findings related to race and ethnicity portrayed by the doll were anticipated. However, this study's results reveal that it is not the ethnic makeup of the doll that is important but how the girl sees the doll in relation to herself. This is a powerful finding that can impact psychology and education. The use of qualitative interviews helped reveal themes that transcend the mere choosing of a doll, and help to explain the question "why". The results of this study showed the importance of having a doll that "looks like me," as well as the doll's connection to an external female role model. Future research is necessary to continue to explore the factors influencing doll selection in girls, and moreover, the development of their racial attitudes.

Doll Characteristics

Doll Number	Dress Color	Skin Color	Race or Ethnicity	Hair Color	Hairstyle	Eye Color
#1	Pink and White with Black Dots	Dark Brown	Black	Black with Brown Highlights	Ponytail	Light Brown
#2	Hot Pink	Tan	White	Strawberry Blonde	Ponytail	Light Brown
#3	Hot Pink	White	White	Black with Brown Highlights	Ponytail	Light Brown
#4	Yellow and White	White	Biracial; White and Black	Blonde	Ponytail	Green
#5	Pink and White with Black Dots	Medium Brown	Black	Light Brown	Ponytail	Light Brown
#6	Yellow and White	White	White	Blonde	Ponytail	Blue
#7	Yellow and White	Pale White	Asian (Japanese)	Black	Ponytail	Light Brown
#8	Blue and Pink	Tan	Latino	Black with Brown Highlights	Ponytail	Dark Brown
#9	Blue and Pink	Light Brown	Black	Black	Ponytail	Dark Brown
#10	Yellow and White	Tan	White	Dark Brown	Ponytail	Green
#11	Hot Pink	White	White	Honey Blonde	Ponytail	Light Brown
#12	Hot Pink	Brown	Black	Brown	Ponytail	Light Brown
#13	Pink and White with Black Dots	Tan	White	Reddish Brown	Ponytail	Green

Demographics and Doll Choice of Participants

Participant	Age	Race or Ethnicity	Doll Choice for Q1	Doll Choice for Q2	Doll Choice for Q3	Doll Choice for Q4	Doll Choice for Q5	Doll Choice for Q6	Doll Choice for Q7
#1	10	Biracial; Black and White	9	9	8	9	9	10	7
#2	6	White	6	3	2	11	3	9	10
#3	9	Black	12	12	9	12	12	11	1
#4	7	White	3	3	9	6	3	8	7
#5	10	Black	5	7	13	1	1	1	2
#6	8	Biracial; Black and White	5	12	1 and 9	5	5	4	1
#7	9	White	11	3	2	10	8	13	1
#8	9	Biracial; Black and Latino	5	8	9	5	5 and 8	3	1 and 7
#9	10	White	13	10	9	6	5	11	7
#10	4	Black	5	5	1	5	5 and 13	13	4
#11	4	Black	9	9	4	9	5 and 9	12	2
#12	8	Biracial; Black and Latino	1	1	6	5	5	5 and 8	7
#13	9	Biracial; Black and White	4	12	1	4	4	2	1
#14	10	Black	12	9	7	1	12	12	2
#15	6	Biracial; Black and White	9	9	1	4	4	6	2
#16	6	Black	12	5	11	9	9	3	11
#17	10	Latino	8	8	1	8	8	3	12
#18	10	Latino	8	8	1	5	5	9	2
#19	7	Asian (Indian)	5	5	6	1	1	6	11
#20	9	Asian (Indian)	5	5	1	5	5	7	2
#21	10	Biracial; Asian (Japanese) and White	7	7	6	7	7	7	1
#22	4	Biracial; Asian (Japanese) and White	7	7	4	7	7	3	13
#23	4	White	6	6	1	6	6	8	1
#24	8	White	10	10	12	13	13	10	1
#25	9	Biracial; Black and Latino	4	4	7	4	4	11	6
#26	10	White	6	6	13	13	13	11	7

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