Children’s and Adults’ Friendship Judgments for Multiracial Targets

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Introduction

U.S. children judge that other children ("targets") prefer to have same-race friends.1

Previous research focused on monoracial black and monoracial white targets.

RQ: Are targets with black and white parentage ("multiracial targets") judged to be friends with white and black children equally? Do judgments vary by participant age and/or social group?

White and black adults (unlike white or black children) categorize multiracial targets as black even when it is clear that the targets have black and white heritage.2 Thus, white and black U.S. adults (unlike white or black children) may reason that multiracial targets have equivalent friendship patterns to black targets.

Multiracial adults are categorized by other adults as racial minority, and so may perceive themselves as racial minority3, and therefore judge that multiracial targets’ friendship patterns parallel those of racial minority targets.

Multiracial children, as a result of fewer experiences with being categorized by others as racial minority, may show different judgment patterns than adults.

Method

Participants (N = 162)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Group</th>
<th>Age (Mean)</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>4-6 yrs</td>
<td>5.40(7.7)</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>34(11.6)</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>4-6 yrs</td>
<td>5.14(8.0)</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>34(11.2)</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>4-6 yrs</td>
<td>5.58(9.8)</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>29(8.82)</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each trial included one target and two response images (one black; one white) (see Figure 1):

- Black Targets
- Multiracial Targets
- White Targets

Images: Drawn from previous research4, online, and the Child Affective Face Set (CAFE)5. They were pretested on 55 adults, confirming intended categorization (e.g., multiracial).

Design/Procedure: 12 trials in random order depicted targets (4 black, 4 white, 4 multiracial; half girls, half boys)

Results

Higher scores indicate how often black response images were selected for black, white, and multiracial targets (range 0-4). Scores above chance (green line) indicate selecting black friends; scores at chance indicate selecting black and white friends. * indicates scores that differ from chance (p ≤ .05).

Fig 1. Example multiracial trial. "This is Sabrina. Her dad and mom are friends. Which of these girls is friends with Sabrina?"

Discussion

We found age and social group variation in judgments concerning the friendship patterns of black, white, and multiracial targets.

- White children expected multiracial targets and black targets (but not white targets) would have black and white friends. White adults expected multiracial targets and black targets (but not white targets) to have mostly black friends. These data may reflect a tendency to categorize multiracial targets as black.3
- Black children’s judgments paralleled white children’s, whereas black adults (unlike white adults) differentiated between multiracial and black targets. Black adults may see multiracial as social liaisons between black and white - capable of navigating both "worlds."4
- Multiracial children treated multiracial targets equivalently to white targets (the only group to do so), which may reflect pro-white biases.5
- Multiracial adults treated black targets and multiracial targets equivalently, perhaps due to their experiences with being treated as racial minority.
- All groups reasoned that white targets would be friends with white children, but overall they granted more flexibility toward black and multiracial targets. This may reflect a more general tendency for U.S. children and adults to expect the friendship patterns of white children, the dominant social group, to be more exclusive than those of racial minorities.

Limitations and Future Directions

- Future research should include older children and adolescents as well.
- This study only included targets of three backgrounds (black, white, multiracial). Additional research should include targets from other backgrounds (e.g., Asian, Latino).
- Our multiracial sample consisted of individuals of a variety of backgrounds (e.g., multiracial [not further specified]; black, white, Latino/white, Latino/black); future research should examine the within-group variation in the multiracial population.

Acknowledgments

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Our multiracial sample consisted of individuals of a variety of backgrounds (e.g., Asian, Latino).

References

1. Shutts, K., Pemberton Roberts, C. K., & Spelke, E. S. (2013). Children’s use of social categories in thinking about people and social relationships.
5. Langner, O. et al. (2016). Presentation and validation of the Multiracial Face Database.