COLOR, SKIN COLOR PREFERENCES AND SELF COLOR IDENTIFICATION AMONG ETHIOPIAN- AND ISRAELI-BORN CHILDREN

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Skin color appears to be one of the specific problems encountered by the Ethiopian-born child that joins the Israeli educational system. Cross-cultural research shows a consistent preference for white color and light skin color among black as well as white children. In addition, frequent self-color misidentification among black children has been reported. While color preferences do not change with age, self-color misidentifications appear mostly among preschoolers.

The purpose of the present research was to study the effects of age on color preferences and self-color misidentification, while holding constant the time of exposure to a mixed (black and white) social environment.

A group of Ethiopian- and Israeli-born preschool and first and second grade children participated in the present study. The results confirmed the universality of white color and light skin color biases as well as self-color misidentification among black preschool children.

The theoretical and practical implications of these findings are discussed in the framework of developmental and general psychological theory.

Skin-color has emerged as a disturbing factor in the Ethiopian immigrants' absorption into Israeli society (Ashkenazi and Weingrod, 1983). Skin-color appears also as one of the specific problems encountered by the Ethiopian-born child that joins the Israeli educational system. Research carried out in the United States and Europe (West Germany, Italy, France and England) shows a general preference for white color and light skin-color among light-skinned as well as dark-skinned children. A stronger pro-white and anti-black (W+/B-) bias and pro-light skin color/anti-dark skin color (LS+/DS-) bias is reported among light skinned children in comparison with dark skinned children (Williams, Best, Boswell, Mattson and Graves, 1975; Williams and Morland, 1976; Katz and Zalk, 1974). LS+/DS- and W+/B- bias has been demonstrated already at the age of forty months (Williams, Boswell and Best, 1975). Some evidence of pro-white and anti-black color bias among nonwestern children has been reported in three Japanese studies (Goldberg and Stabler, 1973; Goldberg, Iwawaki, Yukawa, Iwata and Ikegami, 1977; Iwawaki, Sonoo, Williams and Best, 1978).

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A functional relationship between color bias and skin-color bias has been postulated. Positive correlations between W+/B- and LS+/DS- bias have been demonstrated among American and European children (Williams and Morland, 1976). In addition, operant conditioning techniques which were used to reduce W+/B- bias affected significantly the LS+/DS- bias (Best, Smith, Suellen, Deborah and Williams, 1975).

A related issue refers to self-color misidentifications among black preschoolers, as reported by Clark and Clark (1947), Hraba and Grant (1970) and Porter (1971), among others. That is, dark children tend to identify themselves as having light skin-color. The frequency of self-color misidentifications decreases with age, while no age effects are reported regarding skin-color preferences (Williams and Rousseau, 1971). Self-color identification is a special aspect in the developmental construction of the self, specifically, the construction of the categorical self (Lewis and Brooks, 1979). By categorical self, these authors refer to the self as an object, the categories by which the child defines him or herself (I am a girl, I am a child, I am black). Social interactions are considered a central aspect in the construction of the categorical self. Self categories develop very early in the infant's life and the evaluative aspects of this categorization remain rather egocentric until school age.

While the above-mentioned empirical findings reiterate themselves cross-culturally, the theoretical implications of these evaluative biases toward white and black colors are rather inconclusive. Two main theoretical approaches have been proposed:

A – The social learning approach (Allport, 1954; Milner, 1975; Katz, 1976) emphasizes almost exclusively the environmental factor and explains color and skin-color evaluative bias as related to children's socialization process. The constancy of this evaluative bias in varied cultures is rather puzzling from this theoretical perspective.

B – A mixed social-early experiences approach is sustained by Williams and his collaborators (see Williams and Morland, 1976). These authors stress the influence of early negative experiences with darkness and early positive experiences with light in human development. Since the human infant is a diurnal animal, most of its satisfactory experiences as well as its relationships become associated with light. This basic characteristic is believed to create a receptivity to cultural symbolizations of black as bad and white as good. Thus, from this point of view, cultural learning is only complementary to the biological factors in human development. Some confirmation of this theory may be found in the positive correlation between W+/B- bias and fear of darkness reported by Boswell and Williams (1975). But direct empirical evidence for this suggestion is still very scarce.

Despite the efforts to verify and understand the existence of W+/B- and LS+/DS- biases and self-color misidentifications, relatively little attention has been given to the following two problems:

a) In the study of mixed (i.e. White and Black) populations, the effect of age on color and skin-color preferences has been generally confounded with the time of exposure to the environment (and cultural influences within it). In this case, color preference stability with age can be understood as a consequence of two opposed

effects, namely a developmental tendency towards a more realistic attitude towards color and skin-color on the one hand (Flavell, 1977), and a longer exposure (the older the child) to reinforcements of the biases (W+/B-, LS+/DS-), on the other hand. These two opposing effects result in the apparent stability of the color preferences.

b) The literature on self-color identifications among black children is based on the study of children born into a racial heterogeneous environment. Since self-categories are acquired very early in life (Lewis and Brooks, 1979), the study of black children that were born in an homogeneous environment is central to the understanding of this phenomenon.

A study was carried out in a population of preschool and first- and second-grade Ethiopian-born children who had arrived in Israel 24 to 30 months before the study commenced. Attending the regular Israeli education system provided these children with their first continuous contact with a white population. The purposes of the present investigation were: a) to study the effect of age on color and skin-color preferences while holding constant the time of exposure to a mixed environment; b) to verify the existence of self-color misidentification among black children that spend the first three or four years of their life in an almost homogeneous environment.

Clark and Clark's (1974) doll technique is usually employed in the assessment of self-color identification. To verify the results provided by the use of this technique, an adaptation of the Draw a Person test (Levy, 1980) was implemented.

MATERIAL

Color Meaning Test: This is an adaptation of Williams' Color Meaning Test – CMT (Williams, Boswell and Best, 1975). On each trial of the test, the child was presented with drawings of two animals, one colored white and one colored black but otherwise identical. He or she was asked to point to one of the drawings on the basis of an evaluative adjective in a story that accompanied the drawings. For example, the child was presented with drawings of two elephants and the examiner said: "Here are two elephants, one of them is strong and can walk a long way without getting tired. Which is the strong elephant?" Minor changes were implemented so that the test would fit the Israeli- and Ethiopian-born children's knowledge and vocabulary. The test consisted of six stimulus cards, each with two drawings (white and black cats, bears, dogs, elephants, rabbits and monkeys). Each card was used twice, once with a postive adjective (beautiful, happy, good, strong, clean and clever) and once with a negative adjective (ugly, sad, bad, weak, dirty and stupid). Thus, the whole test included 12 items.

Skin-color preference test: This test is an adaptation of Williams' Preschool Racial Attitude Measure – PRAM (Williams and Robertson, 1967; Williams, Best, Boswell, Mattson and Graves, 1975). A series of six stimulus cards were employed. Each card contained two human figures (two infants crawling, men standing, girls sitting, old women standing, boys walking and girls standing), one with pinkish-tan skin, the other with dark-brown skin. Each card was accompanied by a story containing one of six positive evaluative adjectives or one of six negative evaluative adjectives, which were the same as those employed in the previous color-meaning test. The child was asked to

point to the figure described in the story. As in the former test, each card was used twice, once with a positive adjective and once with a negative adjective. Thus, the test included 12 items.

Self-color identification measure: In order to measure self-color identification two procedures were employed. One consisted of part of Clark and Clark's (1947; Hraba and Grant, 1970) dolls test, and one consisted of a drawing of one's self in color. In the original dolls test there was a set of four dolls, two black and two white, identical in all other respects. The child was presented with eight questions,[1] and after each of them was asked to choose the doll that seemed to correspond to the description in the question. In the present, adapted form of the test, question 6 was omitted, the expression "white child" was replaced by "Israeli child" and "Negro child" by "Ethiopian child". As a measure of self-color identification we used the last question in the test ("Give me the doll that looks like you").

The second measure was a special elaboration of the Draw a Person Technique (Levy, 1980). The child was given a white paper, two color pens (one pinkish-tan and the other dark-brown) and asked to draw a girl (boy) like her (him) self.

SUBJECTS

The subjects were 168 children, half of them light skinned Israeli-born and half Ethiopian-born, who came to Israel 24-30 months before the research took place. In each group of kindergarten children (Ethiopian or Israeli-born), there were 20 boys and 15 girls. There were 98 first- or second-grade chldren, half of them Israeli-born – 22 girls and 27 boys – and half of them Ethiopian born – 26 girls and 23 boys.

The children attended several schools and kindergartens in Beer-Sheva. In each class or kindergarten, all the Ethiopian-born children were asked to participate in the introductory discussion, it was explained that the examiner was not a teacher and that the various tests were not graded tests.

PROCEDURE

The examiner was an Israeli-born female. Each child was taken from his or her classroom to a private room where the tests were administered. After a brief introductory discussion, it was explained that the examiner was not a teacher and that the various tests were not graded tests.

The order of administering the various tests was different for different subjects and the allocation of order to child was randomly determined.

RESULTS

Color-meaning: Each child's color-meaning score was determined by counting one point for the selection of the white animal in response to a positive adjective and one point for the selection of the black animal in response to a negative adjective. Thus, the total color-meaning score based on all 12 items had a range of 0-12, with high scores indicating a pro-white/anti-black bias, low scores indicating a pro-black/anti-white bias, and mid-range scores (around 6) indicating no bias.

Regardless of origin, most children preferred the white color [for the Israeli-born χ^2 (6) = 542.54, $p < .001$, and for the Ethiopian-born χ^2 (6) = 166.16, $p < .001$[2]]. The distributions of color-meaning scores are depicted in Figure 1.

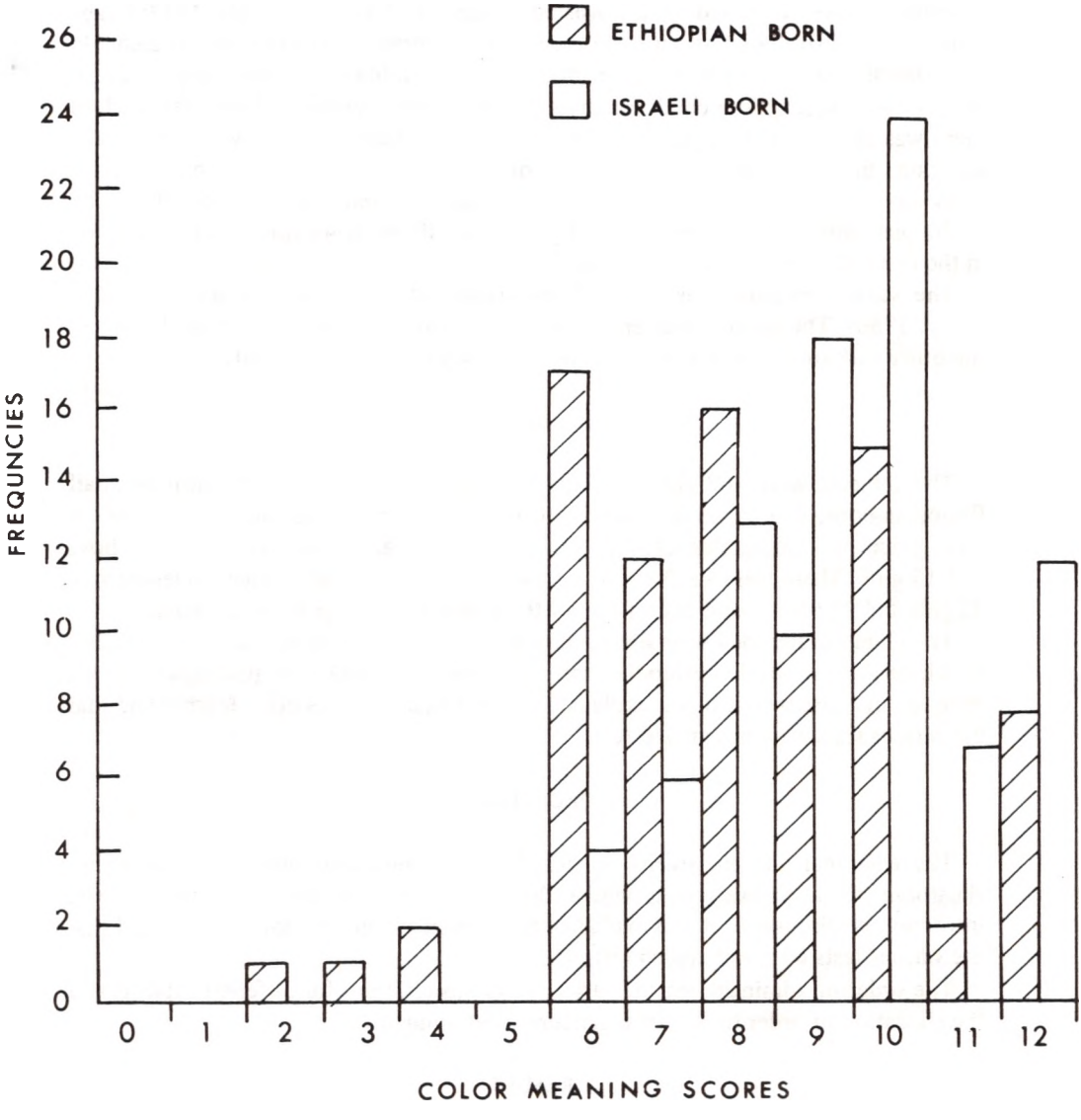

Figure 1: Frequency distributions of color meaning scores as a function of origin.

In order to study the influence of age, sex and origin on the children's color preferences, the color-meaning scores were subjected to a three-way fixed model analysis of variance. The mean score of the Ethiopian-born children was lower (8.15) than that of the Israeli-born children (9.44). [$F(1,160)=18.26$, $p < .001$]. No other variable (or interaction) had a significant effect upon the color-meaning scores.

Skin-color preferences: The skin-color preference score was determined by counting one point for the selection of the light-skinned figure in response to a positive adjective, and one point for the selection of the dark-skinned figure in response to the negative adjective. The total skin-color preference score based on 12 items had a range of 0-12 with high scores indicating a LS+/DS- bias, low scores indicating LS-/DS+ bias, and mid-range scores (around 6) indicating no bias.

Similarly to the color-meaning results, most of the children, regardless of origin, preferred the light-skinned to the dark-skinned figures [for the Israeli-born χ^2 (6) = 746.54, $p < .001$, and for the Ethiopian-born χ^2 (6) = 311.00, $p < .001$][2]. The distribution of the skin color preference scores are depicted in Figure 2.

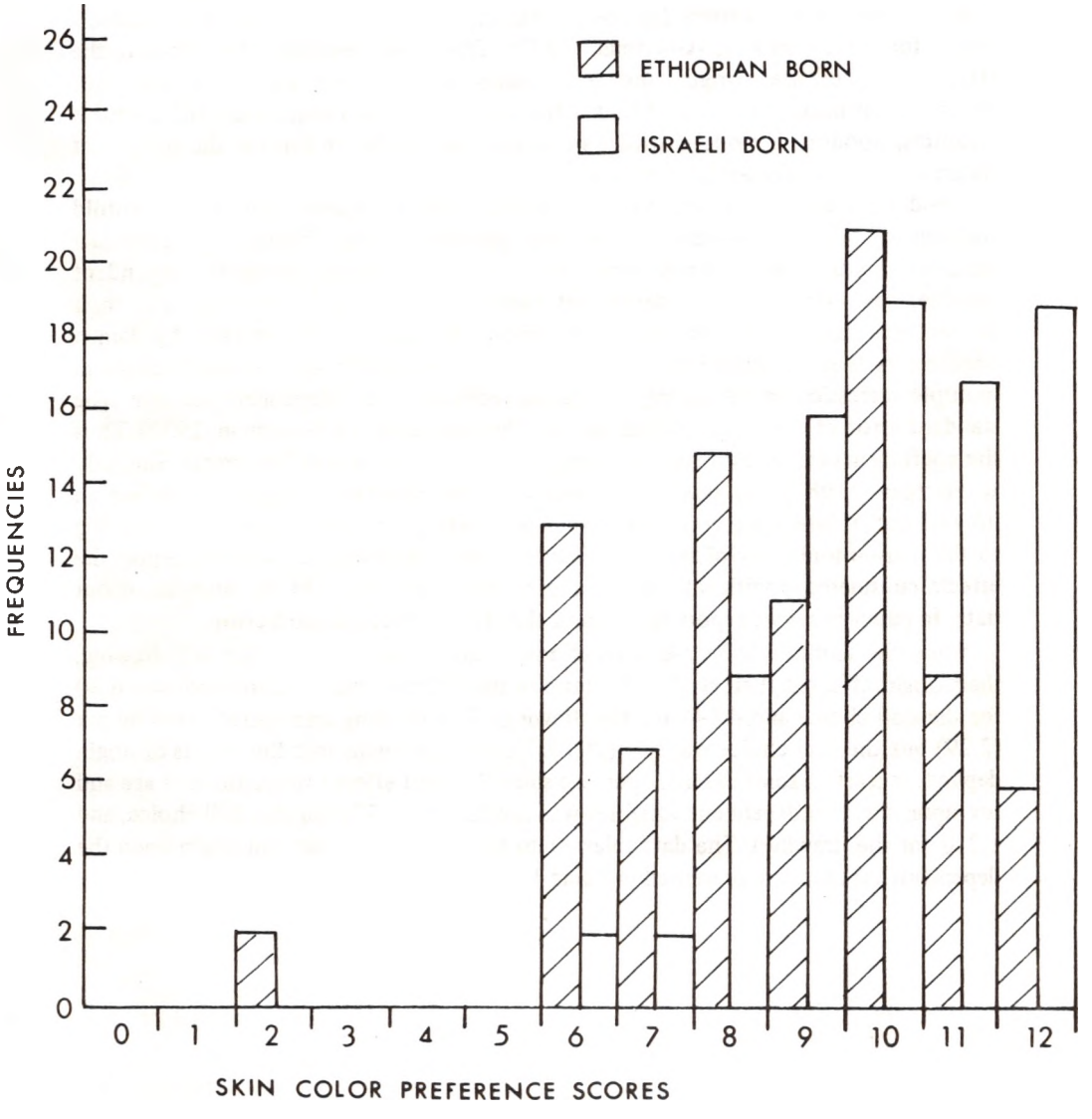

Figure 2: Frequency distributions of skin-color preference scores as a function of origin.

To test for the influence of age, sex and origin upon skin-color preference, the scores were subjected to a three-way fixed model analysis of variance. Again, the only significant effect was due to origin [$F(1,160) = 24.00$, $p < .001$]. As before, the Israeli-born children were more biased (mean skin-color preference score = 10.08) toward the light skin-color than the Ethiopian-born children (mean skin-color preference score = 8.70).

The biases among the two populations of children seem to be the same on the two tests employed. A Pearson product moment correlation between the scores on the two tests was 0.64 ($p < .001$).

Self-color identification: Each of the two measures of self-color identification (i.e. Doll Test and Draw a Person Technique) was subjected to an analysis by Goodman's model for survey analysis (Goodman, 1972). This model enabled us to observe the effects of age, sex, origin and interactions among them upon the self-color identification measures. Thus, although the two dependent variables are dichotomous measures, Goodman's model provides an analysis comparable in form to the analysis of variance employed for the former data.

Goodman's model assumes that the distribution of observations in a multifold contingency table is determined by the multiplication of the effects of the individual variables and their interactions. When we assume one variable to be the dependent variable, the effect on this dependent variable of the other variables and their interactions can be determined. The various effects are represented by lamda coefficients that are similar in form (but not in content) to the beta coefficients in multiple regression in measuring the various effects on the dependent variable. The standard error of these coefficients can also be estimated (see Goodman, 1972). Thus the coefficients can be evaluated by comparing them to their standard errors. Similarly to Hartman (1982), we used the criterion of one standard deviation to define an interval out of which we considered the lamda coefficient to be significant. According to the conventional way of reporting results of analysis of variance, we now report the effects considered significant (in the above mentioned sense) in the analysis of our data. In parentheses we report the ratio of the effect to the standard error.

When the children were asked to choose a doll or a color for their self-drawing, their origin affected their choice (the ratio of the effect to the standard error was 6.30 for the doll choice and 4.846 for the drawing). The drawing was also affected by sex (2.29) but the doll choice was not (.920). However, it seems that the effects of origin depend, at least to some extent, upon age since the joint effect (interaction) of age and sex upon the two dependent variables was substantial (1.571 for the doll choice, and 1.216 for the drawing). The data relevant to the influence of age and origin upon the dependent variables are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1

Percentages of color and doll choices as a function of origin and age

	Ethiopian-born		Israeli-born	
Color choices	Kindergarten	School	Kindergarten	School
Dark	54.3	65.3	22.9	16.3
Light	45.7	34.7	77.1	83.7
	Ethiopian-born		Israeli-born	
Doll choices	Kindergarten	School	Kindergarten	School
Dark	60.00	83.7	2.9	0.0
Light	40.0	16.3	97.1	100.0

DISCUSSION

Our results show W+/B- and LS+/DS- biases in both Ethiopian- and Israeli-born children. As mentioned in the introductory section, these results are similar to those reported in the literature. In addition, self-color misidentification was found among Ethiopian-born children, when either Clark and Clark's doll technique or the present adaptation of the Draw a Person test, were employed.

The studied Ethiopian-born population had been exposed to Israeli culture for 24 - 30 months at the time when this investigation was carried out. Since the exposure time factor was constant across ages, we were able to study the influence of age on the development of W+/B- and LS+/DS- biases. The obtained results did not reveal an effect of age on the development of W+/B- and LS+/DS- biases. Thus, one may conclude that the particular exposure time experienced by the present sample – 24 to 30 months – was sufficient to reinforce the bias at all ages (i.e. among preschoolers as well as among first- and second-grade children). However, one may suggest an alternative explanation to these results. Namely, no significant change in the children's evaluative attitude towards color and skin-color is related to the age groups studied. These findings are in accordance with Zajonc's theoretical conceptualization of a relative independence between the affective and the cognitive systems (Zajonc, 1980). According to this author, affective reactions precede cognitive discriminations, they are more intense, their retrieval occurs without effort and they are very resistant to change (Aboud, 1984). The opposite is postulated for the cognitive information. Since W+/B- and LS+/DS- biases may be considered affective reactions, they may change only with great difficulty and are not necessarily influenced by an improvement in the perceptual and cognitive discriminations. Thus, although the school children may have improved perceptual and cognitive discriminations, relative to the preschool children, this difference did not change their primary affective reactions to color and skin-color.

The children's origin has a major effect on self-color misidentifications: dark-skinned children misidentify themselves more frequently than light-skinned children. The high

frequencies of self-color misidentifications among Ethiopian-born children are in accord with the existing data on this problem, even though these children were born in a homogeneous black environment. However, age seems to play an important role. Self-color identifications become more realistic (i.e., Israeli-born children describe themselves as light-skinned and Ethiopian-born children describe themselves as dark-skinned) with the increase in age. Since there seems to be no effect of age on the W+/B- and LS+/DS- biases, the significant effect of age on self-color identification is of special interest. The significant effect of age on color self-identification can be understood according to Lewis and Brooks (1979) theory of the evolution of the categorical self. These authors maintain that the evaluative aspects of self categories are subject to many lifelong changes. These changes are attributed to the other changes in the child's cognitive capacities as well as to the changing social relationships and cultural values (Lewis and Brooks, 1979, p. 11). In this context a more realistic self-color identification among school age children, in comparison with preschoolers, is expected. While the effect of age on color self-identification can be explained according to existing self-developmental theory, the existence of color misidentifications in itself is yet to be explained, in spite of serious attempts to solve this problem (Spencer, 1982; Porter, 1971).

Similar results were obtained with both the Clark and Clark (1947) doll technique and the present adaptation of the Draw a Person test, regarding self-color identification. The only difference was linked to the effect of sex on the Draw a Person test. Since we did not have an *a priori* hypothesis about this effect, further research is needed in order to verify these findings.

We would like to point out that, even though the obtained results are in accordance with the prevalent reported findings in the literature, the different effects of age on color self-identifications and on the evaluative attitudes towards color and skin-color are a theoretical problem difficult to explain within a unitary theoretical framework and in need of further investigation.

The present report indicates that skin-color biases among Israeli- and Ethiopian-born children may be a disturbing factor in their everyday contacts. In this encounter, the Ethiopian-born child finds himself in a disadvantaged position. The findings about Ethiopian-born children's misidentifications show a specific difficulty in coping with their ethnic identity in addition to all other problems of absorption. The above-mentioned characteristics of the Ethiopian-born children should be taken into account when planning absorption programmes. The studied skin-color biases and misidentifications imply a challenge for integration and for the attempts to promote the acceptance of differences.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Dolls test questions:
1. Give me the doll that you want to play with.
2. Give me the doll that is a nice doll.
3. Give me the doll that looks bad.
4. Give me the doll that has a nice color.
5. Give me the doll that looks like a white child.
6. Give me the doll that looks like a colored child.
7. Give me the doll that looks like a Negro child.
8. Give me the doll that looks like you.

[2] When there is no preference for one of the colors, the choice of one drawing instead of another is at chance level and the same applies to a score of 1 or 0 on each item of the test. Hence, the significance test was performed by comparing the observed distribution of scores on the test to an expected binomial distribution in which p = ½. The scores 0 - 3 were combined into one category and the same was done with respect to scores 9 - 12 because of the small number of subjects at the two extremes of the scale.

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