



In a Nutshell

Africa in Science (AiS) Lectures

How Racial Awareness Shapes Play Politics



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In my recent article I asked the question: how do Black preschool girls engage in play with racially diverse dolls? To answer the question, I added four racially diverse dolls: two black dolls with brown, tightly coiled hair, a Latina doll with straight brown hair, and a white doll with crimped blonde hair, along with salon props, such as combs, brushes, mirrors and pretend makeup to a 4-year-old classroom in a child development center.

I found that the children operated under unspoken, but anti-Black rules. The children would freely switch the non-Black dolls with peers that wanted to trade dolls. However, when their peers requested to switch a Black doll for one that was not Black, the request would be denied. Additionally, children used their understandings about race to enact rules based on the value of the dolls. The girls used the Latina and White dolls as bargaining tools to secure sought after roles in their pretend play. However, the children never tried to use either of the Black dolls for this purpose. These children, though only 4-years-old not only had racial awareness, but were aware of prevailing messages within our greater society that places value on people based on assigned race. The Black girls and their peers, understood that the non-Black dolls were seen as more valuable than the Black dolls and this showed up in their play. To conclude, how young Black children view their racial identities matters.



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Implications for Africa:

The findings of my research are applicable to children of the African diaspora as a whole, as well Africans residing in the continent, as we are all exposed to messages of anti-blackness, due to the colonization, imperialism and the globalization of Western media that promotes Eurocentric beauty standards and anti-Blackness.