"I'm Gonna Cook My Baby in a Pot": Young Black Girls' Racial Preferences and Play Behavior

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Abstract

Despite calls for an increase in diversity and equity in early childhood classrooms, preschool teachers sometimes struggle to effectively address race in their classrooms, leaving young children to try to make sense of it themselves. Therefore, in this qualitative study, researchers examined how race issues were manifested in the play of young Black preschool girls. Findings indicate that young Black girls had a strong preference for the nonblack dolls. This preference was evident in their repeated rejection of the Black dolls. These findings have significant implications for early childhood teachers and how they anticipate notions or misconceptions children may have about race, structure discussions and activities about race and racism, and scaffold children's development of their racial identity. Further, the paper presents how teacher educators can help to prepare future practitioners for work in helping to foster positive racial identities.

Keywords Race · Gender · Play · Identity development

Despite calls for an increase in diversity and equity in early childhood classrooms (NAEYC 2019), preschool teachers struggle to ensure that all children are represented in their classroom environment, materials are culturally relevant, and curricula are anti-racist (Derman-Sparks and Olsen Edwards 2010). As reflections of our society, schools, including early childhood classrooms, are spaces where racism is manifested (Husband 2012). Multiple scholars have called for anti-racist education to help teachers challenge notions of racism within their classroom, and to examine their own exposure to racism (Husband 2012; Kailin 2002; Singleton and Linton 2006). Derman-Sparks and Edwards (2010) have developed an anti-bias curriculum for early childhood educators that supports children and their families as they develop a sense of identity and fairness and speak up for the rights of others. This notion is significant because educators often believe young children are incapable of talking about race or understanding the harmful effects of racism (Van Ausdale and Feagin 2001) or feel unprepared for these complex issues (Sturdivant and Alanís 2019). This belief often leads educators to ignore the issue altogether, minimize discussions, or develop/implement a colorblind curriculum (Kuh et al. 2016). However, young children are aware of race and racism at an early age (Winkler 2009) and reveal their understanding through drawings, play, and discourse. Consequently, educators need to learn how young children develop these complex and critical issues and how to develop children's positive racial identities (Derman-Sparks et al. 2015).

Demographic data indicate that 56% of American preschoolers are enrolled in full-day preschool, and 68% of four-year-olds are enrolled in full-day or half-day programs (NCES 2019). Disaggregating the data indicates, 43% of all Black American children are enrolled in a preschool program with the more substantial portion enrolled in full-day programs (NCES 2019). Therefore, teachers' beliefs, pedagogical practices, and discourse surrounding race in early childhood classrooms influence a large portion of young Black children who are developing their racial identities.

In this qualitative study, researchers used an intersectional (Carbado et al. 2013) lens to examine how race issues were manifested in the play of young Black preschool girls by observing and documenting their play with racially diverse dolls. The focus of racial identity development of young Black girls is significant, because the ways in which Black girls develop their racial identity may not

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be the same for Black boys. Many of the stereotypical racial characteristics, such as skin color, and hair texture and length, draw on an aspect of identity that is emphasized more with girls than boys (Earick 2010; Halim et al. 2018). Specifically, this inquiry sought to answer the following question: (1) How do Black preschool girls engage in play with racially diverse dolls? The question allows for an examination of spoken language, body language, play choices, and other ways of communicating ideas about race and gender with dolls that differ in only skin hue and hair texture.

Findings indicate that young Black girls had a strong preference for the nonblack dolls. This preference was evident in their repeated rejection of the Black dolls; through their language and actions. These findings have significant implications for early childhood teachers and how they anticipate notions or misconceptions children may have about race, structure discussions and activities about race and racism, and scaffold children's development of their racial identity.

Literature Review

Critical Race Theory (CRT) illuminates the negative aspects of schooling for children of color (Ladson-Billings 2009; Lynn and Parker 2006; MacNevin and Berman 2017; Souto-Manning and Rabadi-Raol 2018). Additionally, CRT has been used to analyze the concept of best practices in early childhood education as it relates to minoritized children (Souto-Manning and Rabadi-Raol 2018). Further, MacNevin and Berman (2017) utilized CRT to examine how educators addressed race in the policies and practices of preschool centers. When examining the experiences of young Black girls, however, using only a gender-based or race-based analysis would be incomplete due to both racialized and gendered experiences of women (girls) of color (Evans-Winters and Esposito 2010; Wing 2003). Thus, we adopted a critical race feminism perspective.

Critical race feminism (CRF) addresses the experiences of Black women and girls as being different from the needs and experiences of White girls or boys of color (Berry 2010). Critical race feminism is concerned with issues of power, oppression, and conflict. It includes the tenets of critical race theory but calls for theories and practices that study and combat both gender and racial oppression. In education, CRF has been enacted to describe Black high school girls' gendered and racialized experiences of being "adultified" and sexualized (Carter Andrews et al. 2019; Evans-Winters and Esposito 2010) as well as to study school disciplinary policies of Black girls in urban schools (Annamma et al. 2019).

Racial Identity Development

Racial identity development in young children includes racial awareness, racial identification, and racial attitudes (Byrd 2012). Research has shown that young children have racial awareness starting as early as three months (Kelly et al. 2005; Quinn et al. 2016), can racially identify by age three (Clark and Clark 1939b), and display clear racial preferences by preschool (Earick 2010; MacNevin and Berman 2017; Park 2011). In research by Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) for example, preschool children (ages three to five) understood their racial assignments and others'. Additionally, young children can discriminate based on race (Tenorio 2009) and receive negative messages about skin color (Segura-Mora 2008). Stevenson and Stewart (1958) found that Black preschool children had developing racial attitudes. The children in their study were more likely to have negative views about their race than their White counterparts.

Numerous studies have demonstrated a pro-White bias within Black children of various ages (Clark and Clark 1947; Jarrett 2016; Spencer and Markstrom-Adams 1990). The presence of a White bias in Black (and White) preschool children was first established through Clark and Clark's (1939a, b) work with drawings of Black or White children. This research was later performed using dolls (Clark and Clark 1947). According to Byrd (2012), "between 1939 and 1977, more than 30 studies were conducted using this procedure and its variations" (p. 8). Recently, Jordan and Hernandez-Reif (2009) found this same pro-White bias in preschoolers that were presented with two choices of a White or Black digital cartoon character, even when they were told that they did not have to make a choice but could say both or neither.

Along with the use of forced-choice questions, many studies relied on a sole Black-White dichotomy, by asking children to select a Black or White doll or character (Clark and Clark 1939a; Jarrett 2016; Spencer and Horowitz 1973). This dichotomy was addressed by including a greater variety in skin tones in digital characters (Jordan and Hernandez-Reif 2009), using different ethnicities (African American, Caucasian, Asian, and Latinx), or during interviews (Smith et al. 2009). MacNevin and Berman (2017) attempted to offset the highly controlled and unnatural environments of previous studies by conducting observations of children's play in a preschool classroom. In their research, children rejected the available Black baby doll and assigned a negative role (witch) to a dark-skinned figurine. Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) determined that knowledge of racial categories was rooted in physical appearances and began when children interact with people outside of their family and with diverse groups, such as in child care centers and preschools.

The issue of racial identity development goes beyond Black children wishing that they were different or simply preferring whiteness. Black children that identify less with their race do worse academically and feel the impacts of racial discrimination more than those with a positive racial identity (Smalls et al. 2007; Zirkel and Johnson 2016). Positive racial identity development can lead to positive impacts on educational attitudes, attainment, and grades, (Byrd and Chavous 2009; Carson 2009; Chavous et al. 2008; Cokley and Chapman 2008; Gordon et al. 2009) as well as overall psychological well-being (Brittian et al. 2013; Brittian 2012; Street et al. 2009; Whittaker and Neville 2010). Schools are sites for racial identity development (Lynn and Parker 2006; Staiger 2005; Van Ausdale and Feagin 2001). Consequently, educators must examine children's racial identity development at a time when they are in the process of developing their racial identities—early childhood.

Methodology

The larger study from this analysis focused on the racialized and gendered discourse of two young Black preschool girls. The researchers used collective, within-site, instrumental case study research to learn more about their racial awareness, preferences, and identification. According to Mukherji and Albon (2009), qualitative research allows for the possibility of observing children "in the context of their everyday lives" (p. 95) rather than examining the way children react to an experimental situation. Our project fills gaps in earlier research by focusing on the specific and nuanced ways in which a dually gendered and racialized experience manifested in young Black girls' sociodramatic play within a preschool classroom.

Context

The study classroom was one of two PK-4 classrooms for Fairview ISD (pseudonym) and operated on a half-day basis. Of the 12 students enrolled, eight were girls, and five were boys. All five of the boys were Black, four were African American, and one was Nigerian American. Of the eight girls: two were Black, two were White, non-Hispanic, one was Latina, one Indian American, and one girl's family was from Nepal. The Black students made up more than 58% of the classroom, and the Black girls, specifically, represented around 17% of the enrollees.

The teachers divided the classroom into eight interest centers: sociodramatic play, library, art, math, music, blocks, science, and writing. They set up the sociodramatic center as a house area with home and food-related items, such as a shopping cart, cash register, and shopping baskets. It also included kitchen appliances, plastic food, plastic plates, cups, eating utensils, small metal pots and pans, and empty food boxes. There was also a table with chairs, an old laptop, inoperable cell phones, magazines, purses, dress-up clothes, and a large mirror. Additionally, there was a basket of soft dolls, and a crib with baby dolls, diapers, and clothing. The teachers positioned the large items on the perimeter of a large mint green carpet that served as additional seating and play space. No more than four students could be in the house area at one time, which meant that there was always ample space to play.

Participants

Amber

Amber was a four-year-old girl with dark brown hair and walnut-colored skin. She typically wore her kinky textured hair pulled up into a textured ponytail, a style commonly known as an afro puff. Amber was soft-spoken most of the time and seemed shy at first. However, she initiated conversations as time went on and frequently spoke up for herself in an assertive voice with her peers during play periods. Amber's mother, a single parent, had an associate degree, as well as a bachelor's degree. They lived in a neighboring city (outside of the school district's zoning). The zip code in which they lived was 33% Black, 57% White, and 19% Hispanic. The median household income is $42,361. Amber's mother indicated she enrolled her at Fairview CDC for a "better opportunity".

Everly

Everly, also four years old at the time of the study, had light brown, coily hair, often braided and adorned with colorful beads and almond brown skin. Everly was an outspoken girl that often spoke her mind to her peers and the researcher throughout the study. Everly lived in a single-mother household in a neighboring zip code about 11 min from Fairview CDC. Her mother was a high school graduate. The racial makeup of their zip code was 17% Black, 71% White, and 24% Hispanic. The median household income was $47,698.

Data Collection

Following IRB protocol, consent forms were sent home with all 13 students as well as the teachers. Researchers gained assent from the students and looked for cues of dissent throughout the three-month observation period. The Sturdivan of this study took on the role of a participant observer (Mukherji and Albon 2009). She was in the classroom three days a week for 45-min periods. Children's play was both audio and video recorded. In addition, quick on-the-spot unstructured interviews were conducted with the children.

Given the role of play for young children and particularly sociodramatic play for children's development (Frost et al. 2012), the researchers introduced a salon-themed prop box into the classroom's home center. Prop boxes allow children to make sense of their world and to act out their experiences (Myhre 1993). The prop box included four racially diverse dolls, (1) a White doll with crimped straight, blonde hair that was worn down with a bow, (2) a Latina doll with straight, brown hair that was worn down with a bow, (3) a Black doll with dark skin and dark brown kinky hair worn in an afro, and a bow, and (4) a Black doll with skin and hair lighter than the previous doll with kinky hair worn in an afro with a bow.

All four dolls wore the same clothing to minimize additional differences. The researchers included dolls with mid skin tones to differentiate between a preference for whiteness and a preference for lighter skin, which are not necessarily the same. Additionally, the mid-range skin tone provides options that are more of a match for light-skinned African American children (see Fig. 1). The researchers also introduced tools to be used with the dolls, including combs, brushes, a hairdryer, and hair bows.

Following a month of observation, the researchers noticed children's waning interest in the dolls. To maintain children's attention, the researchers added different changes of clothing, hair ties, new small brushes and combs, a mini hair straightener, and a makeup bag. The makeup bag included four laminated foundation makeup palettes, four makeup brushes, and the original four child-safe, handheld mirrors (see Fig. 2).
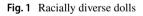
Data Analysis

To elucidate the presence of racial and gender discourse within the play of young children, the researchers analyzed the data using critical discourse analysis. We specifically observed and recorded the ways the girls played with the

Fig. 2 Makeup bag and contents

dolls, the language they used, and their behavior toward each other. Following the data analysis spiral for case study research (Creswell and Poth 2018), data were synthesized both within and across the cases, by sorting the data into broad codes.

Researchers identified 11 categories for the data which had corresponding definitions. These codes included: switching dolls, dolls as currency, intertextuality, children's media, messages from parents, messages from school, abandoned Black dolls, rejection of Black dolls and rejection type, researchers' hair, and aspects of racial identity development. Miles et al. (2014) suggest that within-case analysis can occur after initial codes are established. The researchers

Fig. 1 Racially diverse dolls

created detailed descriptions of Everly and Amber, which included their individual actions, language, and behaviors. These descriptions, along with the sorting of transcription excerpts, allowed for inductive categorical aggregation for within case synthesis (Creswell and Poth 2018) as well as cross-case synthesis (Creswell and Poth 2018). This synthesis led to the major themes regarding the ways the girls played with the racially diverse dolls and the discourse they found within their play. For this article, we focus on the girls' racial preferences as indicated by their actions, language, and behaviors toward the dolls.

Findings

Racial Preferences can Shape Play Behaviors

From the onset of the study, Amber and Everly had a strong preference for the nonblack dolls and repeatedly rejected the Black dolls. Although Amber and Everly occasionally played with the Black dolls, these were for short amounts of time. Each time a nonblack doll became available, the girls would abandon the black dolls to the floor. Their language and actions revealed four distinct ways in which the girls rejected the Black dolls: playing with other dolls, sharing dolls, playing with other toys, and mistreatment of the Black dolls.

Playing with Other Dolls

The most common way the girls rejected the Black dolls was selecting a different doll with which to play. Of the eight times that Amber was the first person in the house area and therefore had her choice of dolls, she chose the Latina doll six times, the White doll twice, and never selected either of the Black dolls. Of the eight times Everly was first in the center, she selected the Latina doll seven times, the White doll once, and never selected a Black doll.

There were times the girls arrived at the home center and were unable to get their first choice, but the Black dolls were not seen as options, as illustrated in the following two examples. (transcribed from video).

> Amber came into the House area and Kate had already selected the Latina doll. Amber unsuccessfully tried to pull the doll away from Kate. She then looked in the container at the remaining two black dolls and one White doll; Amber selected the White doll.
> Amber and Avanthi grabbed the Latina doll. For a moment, they both pulled on the doll, until Amber let go and selected the White doll instead.

Similar situations occurred with Everly (reconstructed from participant-observer notes and video recordings).

Everly asked Kate to give her the White doll. Kate kept the White doll and gave Everly the Latina doll. Everly enters the house area and looks around. Everly asks Avanthi if she can have the Latina doll. Avanthi quickly says, "no". As Everly frowns, Avanthi says, "There's another one in there!" Everly goes to the bin and gets the White doll and starts combing her hair. Both Black dolls were available, but they did not see them as viable play choices.

These excerpts reveal the girls' desire to play with the Latina and White dolls to the exclusion of the Black dolls.

Sharing Dolls

Another way in which the girls rejected the Black dolls was by choosing to share a nonblack doll with a friend, rather than having a Black doll to themselves. One example, as illustrated below (transcribed from video), involves both Everly and Amber.

> Everly (to Amber): Can I have your doll?
> Amber looks away and walks to the sink. Everly follows her and continues to ask for a doll.
> Amber: Lauren, can you share with her?
> Lauren: Yeah.
> Amber (to Everly): She can share with you.
> Amber: Lauren, share with her!
> Sturdivant (to Everly): There's a doll right here and there's another one right there too. Everly looks away.
> Lauren: Here.
> Everly grabs the Latina doll excitedly.
> Lauren: You can hold the baby, and I can brush her hair.

Everly chose to share a doll, rather than play with an available Black doll. On another occasion, Avanthi returned to the house area from the bathroom to find Everly styling the Latina doll's hair, the doll with which Avanthi had been playing with before she took a break. Everly acknowledges her return by saying:

> Everly: Avanthi, I was saving it for you. Ms. Toni I was saving it for her.
> Sturdivant: Ok.
> Everly: You like it? I did it for your baby.
> Avanthi: It's a little bit crooked.
> Everly: Ok, I'll do it again. I gonna do it again.
> Everly pretends to straighten the Latina's doll hair as Avanthi holds the doll.
> Everly: Ms. Toni, I'm doing Avanthi's doll's hair. I'm the "dress hairser."

Everly took on the role of the hairdresser on several occasions to have access to the nonblack dolls. Because

the hairdresser did not necessarily have possession of the doll, but was an auxiliary person, performing a specific and temporary duty, we considered this an act of sharing. The hairdresser either did not get to hold the doll or had to return the doll after completing the requested style.

Playing with Other Toys

The dolls and the props of the study were favorite play items. Children frequently chose the house area and selected one of the dolls as one of their play items. However, in instances when there were only Black dolls available to choose from, Amber and Everly would select another toy in the house area with which to play.

On this occasion (transcribed from participant-observer notes and video), researchers noted that Amber was frowning because Everly was playing with the Latina doll, and Agatha was playing with the White doll.

> Sturdivant: Amber, why don't you play with that doll? (points to the lighter Black doll).
> Amber: Agatha is playing with it (referring to the White doll).
> Sturdivant: No, the one in there. No one is playing with that one.

Amber stands up and goes toward the sink. With a frown on her face, she touches the White doll's hair. She then picks up a cellphone and pretends to talk on the phone.

Despite Amber's apparent desire to play with a doll, when the only available doll was a Black one, she instead chose to talk on the phone.

Everly made similar decisions on separate instances (transcribed from video).

The researcher asks Everly if she wants to play with a doll, but Everly shakes her head, no. Avanthi overhearing the conversation comments, says, "She wanted the long hair doll. She really wanted a doll, but there's no more, so she didn't want to play with one." Everly nods her head in agreement.

On another day, Everly picked up a dress that was on the floor next to a Black doll. She put the dress inside the hair straightener and pulled the straightener down the length of the dress.

In these examples, both Amber and Everly choose to play with other toys or use a substitute, as in using the hair straightener on clothing, rather than engage with the Black dolls that were readily available.

Mistreatment of Black Dolls

Both Everly and Amber also rejected the Black dolls in the differential treatment of the Black dolls as opposed to the nonblack dolls. Both girls spent a great deal of time styling the hair of, dressing, rocking, and holding the non-black dolls, regardless of the play scenario or role that they were fulfilling. Therefore, it was noteworthy when Everly was playing the role of the hairstylist but refused to style the Black doll's hair. Here is the interaction between the researcher and Everly (transcribed from a video):

> Everly: I'm the hairdresser!
> Sturdivant: You're the hairdresser? Can you hand me my baby? I would like her hair done. (Sturdivant points to the darker Black doll).
> Everly (handing Sturdivant the Black doll): This doll's hair is too big. I can't do this hair.

In previous instances, Everly had used her role as the hairdresser to play with both the White and Latina dolls but refused to style the Black doll's hair when given the opening.

The nonblack dolls were the preference for almost all of the children. Amber spent the majority of the time engaged in play that involved playing with the Latina doll's hair. Even when she pretended to be a doctor in the hospital, she still played with the Latina doll's hair. The girls frequently engaged as 'hairstyle assistants' where they combed and brushed the straight hair of the White and Latina dolls. It was socially acceptable to request the help of someone else in completing a hairstyle. Similarly, to the previous event with Everly, Amber also declined an invitation to style a Black doll's hair. This refusal is illustrated in the event below (reconstructed from participant-observed notes and video recordings).

> On this morning, Sturdivant invites Amber to "put twists in her baby's hair". Amber looks at the Sturdivant, frowns, and puts the phone to her ear. Amber ignores the request and pretends to call Jo Jo Siwa, a White child star on Nickelodeon, known for her long blonde ponytail and vibrant bows. She calls Kate and says, "Say hi to Jo Jo". Kate responds, "Hi, Jo Jo."

Amber rejected the Black doll and ignored the request for assistance to style the doll's hair, a common practice and play scenario in the classroom. By pretending to talk on the phone, Amber could effectively ignore the adult playmate, avoiding styling the Black doll's hair, but also not having to say no overtly.

Everly's treatment of the Black dolls occasionally involved physical aggression. On one occasion, Everly stepped on the Black dolls that were left abandoned on the floor to get to other sections of the house area. Additionally, she attempted to remove the heads of the Black dolls, as well as engaged in violent play scenarios as evident in the following excerpt (from video transcript):

> Everly picks up the darker Black doll.
> Everly: I'm gonna cook my baby in the pot.

Everly places the doll in the pot and then turns the knobs on the stove.

Other dolls were not chosen for this activity; the Black dolls, however, were observed being 'cooked' in the pot on more than one occasion, by more than one child. Everly also poked the darker Black doll in the eye with a makeup brush, and stated: "I poke her in the eye."

Everly further engaged in an extended violent play sequence with the darker Black doll (reconstructed from participant-observer notes and video recording).

The House kitchen had a removable round plastic sink. Sometimes the children took the sink out to use it as a large mixing bowl. When the sink was removed from the cabinet, it left a hole in the countertop. The children used this space as a washer and dryer, dropping clothes into the hole on top to be cleaned, and then opening the cabinet door on the front to reveal clean and dry clothes. Everly found a different use for the furniture. Everly picked up the darker Black doll and put her in the sink hole.

> Everly: I'm gonna put the baby in here!
> She places the baby inside the hole again.
> Everly: Tyson put the top on it! (shutting the doll inside of the space under the sink).
> Everly removes the plastic sink again and begins to pour baskets full of food on top of the baby doll.
> Tyson: I'll put this in (adding more food).
> Tyson goes to the refrigerator and gets more baskets of food. Everly smiles and then opens the cabinet and looks inside.
> Everly: The baby!
> After revealing the doll covered in piles of play food, she tipped the toy counter over letting the food fall out, and she and Tyson repeated the process.

The researchers did not observe this sort of mistreatment with either of the nonblack dolls.

From avoiding the Black dolls, not wanting to play with them, and mistreating them, Amber and Everly reveal their preference for the White and Latina dolls. These preferences shaped their play actions and choices. Their preferences were strong and fixed enough to cause them to exhibit clear rejection of the Black dolls on multiple occasions and in numerous and nuanced ways.

Discussion and Implications

The play of young children provides insight into their thoughts and desires (Vygotsky 1978). In particular, girls model gender expectations and use dolls in their identity construction during sociodramatic play (Frost et al. 2012).

The specificity of prop boxes allows children to engage with particular aspects of their world (Myhre 1993). In addition, play performance helps to construct social categories, including race and gender (Bernstein 2015). The use of representative play items, such as dolls, created a developmentally appropriate approach to unearthing their mental representations and topics with which they might be grappling. By observing their play as it was naturally occurring, data collection captured the perspectives of the participants, provided insight into their thoughts, and allowed children to engage with aspects of their world.

Children are much more sophisticated in their understanding than we give them credit for, often because we believe young children do not yet have the necessary cognitive or social capability (Ausdale and Feagin 2001; Husband 2012). Young children reveal their developing racial identities through racial awareness, racial preferences, and racial identification (Byrd 2012). Children's racial awareness "reflects their cognitive ability to differentiate individuals on the basis of racial characteristics" (Swanson et al. 2009, p. 270). Within the natural context of the home center, Amber and Everly exhibited a racial awareness and preferences shown in past studies (Jordan and Hernandez-Reif 2009), including those with forced-choice methodologies and more formal interviewing (Clark and Clark 1939a, 1940, 1947; Jesuvadian and Wright 2011; MacNaughton et al. 2010). Similar to MacNevin and Berman's (2017) research, Amber and Everly made their racial preferences evident through their rejection and mistreatment of the Black dolls and partiality toward the Latina and White dolls.

Findings reveal the "complex and active … processes that form young children's feelings, desires, understandings, and enactments of 'race' (MacNaughton and Davis 2009, p. 18). Children's attentiveness to race, coupled with our society's everyday racism (Delgado and Stefancic 2012; Wing 2003) and anti-blackness (Dumas 2016) helps to explain Amber and Everly's documented preference for whiteness. The notion of whiteness is both pervasive and invisible. White norms dictate the discursive realities of children of color. Although both girls chose the Latina doll more frequently than the White doll, Amber and Everly revealed their preference for dolls with lighter skin and long straight hair—both internalized whiteness markers of beauty in our society. Ladson-Billings (1998) reminds us that "…minority groups internalize the stereotypic images that certain elements of society have constructed in order to maintain their power" (p. 14). Young children are not excluded from this reality. Critical race feminism reminds us that due to their racial and gendered status, young Black girls are at risk for developing a negative identity within educational spaces.

Implications

A vital foundation of children's social and academic development is a strong sense of racial and ethnic identity. Although many factors contribute to this identity (e.g., parents, media, peers), it is crucial that educators consider how they are promoting children's positive racial identity development. This promotion can be done through discussions about race (Cole and Verwayne 2018), culturally relevant literature (Yenika-Agbaw and Napoli 2011), and anti-racist curricula (Derman-Sparks et al. 2015). Educators must continue to think critically about their own biases and how these may be present in their classroom environment, materials, and teaching practices. They must then move toward action to interrupt inequities, dismantle colorblind curricula, and counter racists experiences and discourse for young children (Kuh et al. 2016; Ladson-Billings 2009).

Likewise, faculty within teacher preparation programs must examine their coursework and embed information on promoting cultural diversity, identity development, and anti-bias education. Faculty must advocate for integrating race work throughout the teacher education program, so that teacher candidates learn to reflect on their own biases, challenge racism, and better understand children's daily realities. Preservice teachers need information about the complex ways children grapple with race to understand the importance of anti-bias work with young children. They need to learn this information in theory and be able to envision, in more concrete terms, what an anti-bias early childhood classroom would look like and how they could implement such a curriculum in the future.

Conclusion

Findings from this case study demonstrate that young children are aware of race and are integrating racist messages. We cannot continue to ignore children's capacity to interpret these messages. This colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva 2003) is sustaining racial inequality and racism in our society and, as a result, in our schools. Young children's internalized messages become evident in play and can be a tool of racial learning for other children. Unfortunately, without anti-bias adult intervention, young children are likely to perpetuate messaging that is not only harmful to others but also themselves.

Amber and Everly have the right to develop a positive racial identity. This development will not happen unless educators make the conscious decision to discuss race and racism with young children. Early childhood educators have the responsibility of attending to this reality to counter the daily experiences of racism that permeate children's worlds. When we listen to children's voices and pay attention to

their actions, we learn how to identify and interrupt racism in constructive ways.

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