

Spring 5-5-2016

Self Perception in the Eyes of a Child: Exploring How the Development of Children as Thinkers Relates to the Ways in Which They Self Define and Ascribe to Social Groups

Laura Elizabeth Dean
University of South Carolina - Columbia

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/senior_theses



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Dean, Laura Elizabeth, "Self Perception in the Eyes of a Child: Exploring How the Development of Children as Thinkers Relates to the Ways in Which They Self Define and Ascribe to Social Groups" (2016). *Senior Theses*. 116.
https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/senior_theses/116

This Thesis is brought to you by the Honors College at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Theses by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact dillarda@mailbox.sc.edu.

SELF PERCEPTION IN THE EYES OF A CHILD: EXPLORING HOW THE
DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN AS THINKERS RELATES TO THE WAYS IN WHICH
THEY SELF DEFINE AND ASCRIBE TO SOCIAL GROUPS

By

Laura Elizabeth Dean

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for
Graduation with Honors from the
South Carolina Honors College

May, 2016

Approved:

Dr. Meir Muller
Director of Thesis

Dr. Kortney Sherbine
Second Reader

Steve Lynn, Dean
For South Carolina Honors College

Table of Contents

Summary	3
Abstract	4
Introduction	5
Theoretical Basis for Age	5
Methodology	7
Expected Results	10
Results	11
Significance of the Research	24
Conclusion	26
Works Cited	27

Summary

This thesis is founded on the principles of Early Childhood Education theory and explores the relationship between cognitive development described by the theorist Jean Piaget and self-identity development. This paper describes how I developed the concept for exploration, the data collection, results, conclusions and its significance to the early childhood field. The development of this concept was inspired by my interest in the socially constructed notion of normal. At the core of this paper's conception was a curiosity about whether children feel they belong through their awareness of their own identity, cultural, and racial background. From this interest came the desire to explore how children view themselves and their relation to their peers. I developed a research protocol designed to answer some of my questions about self-identity and the development of the social self as a progression in relation to cognitive phases of significant development. Through the creation of the protocol came a discussion of the theoretical framework related to cognitive and social development in the field of educational theory. This is covered along with the methodology of the research.

The research I conducted involved interviewing eleven students from a local elementary school. Six were in kindergarten and were representative of children in the preoperational stage of cognitive development. The other five were in third grade and served to educate me in the concrete operational stage of development. I asked them questions related to their awareness of their own identity and to their perception of other children and the creation of friendships with said children. From these answers I gained a better understanding of how children view and develop friendships, and how their awareness of gender and racial differences grow and develop through this time of growth. In the kindergarten subgroup there was an emphasis on physical

observations such as descriptors about hair and skin color and also on physical objects depicted. The third grade group demonstrated a greater awareness of gender roles and stereotypes, and their qualifications for establishing friendships were more focused on commonalities and shared interests. This study helped demonstrate the evolution of the concept of friendship and the development of gender roles or stereotypes between these two age groups. From this greater understanding I conclude that there is a need for more early childhood emphasis on the diversity and similarities in the classroom. Multicultural education through exposure to diverse texts and discussions about friendship and gender are all needed in the evolving area of early childhood curriculum.

Abstract

This thesis explores the social emotional development of children in the preoperational and concrete operational stages of cognitive development and their relationship to themes such as friendship, race, and gender. Through an analysis of the ideas of educational theorists Piaget, Bronfenbrenner, and Erikson and a research study with kindergarteners and third graders in a local school, the development of social concepts is examined. From these findings comes an exploration of how the development of these social and emotional concepts require more exposure in the early childhood education curriculum.

Introduction

This research came out of curiosity about the concept of normal. An idea briefly touched on in many classes, a theme in my life, and a concept ever changing, socially constructed, and intertwined with the vast area of inquiry into identity and power relationships. The idea that this word encompasses so much of how we view ourselves and our place in the world around us implies its importance in development. In what ways do we feel we fit in or mesh with the societal norms, and in what ways do we feel out of place, alone, and different? Expanding this issue to the developmental ages in early childhood brings into question how and when these social identities develop and how pressures of societal norms, such as views on sex or race develop in young minds. When does demographic terminology become that which defines your self-identity or culture and the way you are treated? At what age are these biases instilled? These questions are explored on a small scale in this paper.

Theoretical Basis for Age

The significance of choosing this transitional age is that in this period children move from the preoperational stage of psychological development into the concrete operational stage. Educational and psychological researchers such as Jean Piaget theorize that in the preoperational stage children hold egocentric views and are unable to put themselves in another's shoes. In contrast, the concrete operational stage is characterized by the ability to think about how a person's view might be different or what different perspectives might be. (Piaget's Stages). Some theorists disagree with the ages proposed by Piaget, however most acknowledge the

child's developing ability to describe him or herself. Limited research tells us that children around seven begin to describe themselves and their relations to others with personal characteristics and labels of social and cultural groups making the connections between what they see and what they are told. They may not understand the societal implications of such social, cultural, and racial groups, however their answers indicate an awareness of these distinctions (Bennett and Sani, 2004). The theories proposed by Piaget primarily correspond to cognitive and individualized development without exploration into the context and social emotional development that occurs alongside and deeply integrated with this time of growth. Other theorists such as Bronfenbrenner look more broadly at the spheres of influence and the context in which a child develops in an ecological systems based analysis, however the transitions that occur by age range are not addressed (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, pg. 7). On the opposite end is Erikson who is one theorist who looks at the full scope of ages and the psychosocial development that occurs. His identity crises are built around inner turmoil which is integral especially in these egocentric years before the shift to concrete operational thinkers, however I am interested in this transitional period and interactions based analysis. How kids relate themselves to others and how their own identity is defined by societal impressions in this critical time of cognitive development. One broad goal of this research and paper is to better understand this time and how children's views of themselves and their relation to others develop. I feel this area is multifaceted and has previously been approached from a singular perspective by different theorists.

Methodology

I will interview children in two local schools in two groups. One group will contain children ages five and six, and the other group will contain children ages eight and nine. The two schools will have different demographics with one school more racially homogeneous, and the other more diverse. I will ask them a series of questions related to how they describe themselves. I will ask them to describe themselves or what they would want a friend to know about themselves.

I will ask them a series of questions related to how they describe themselves. I will ask them to describe themselves or what they would want a friend to know about themselves. I will show them a picture of a child in his room with posters and objects on the walls indicating likes and dislikes of the student. I will ask the children to identify things they have in common with the child. I will use a second picture asking the same question. I will then ask if they would want to be friends with this child, why or why not. These questions will look to highlight awareness and similarities with other students of different races, gender, and physical differences such as hair color. I will record my interviews and take notes. After I complete the interviews I will look for trends in each group and between groups.

Listed below are the questions I asked and some examples of the pictures I showed. I first showed the student a child of the same gender but different skin color. The second picture was of the same skin color but different gender. My pictures intentionally drew on gender-stereotyped surroundings.

Questions:

Tell me about yourself

How would you describe yourself to a friend?

If I show you a picture of a child in their room, what do you see in this picture that you have in common with the child?

What do you see that is different?

Would you want to be friends with this child?

Why or why not?







Expected Results

I expect to find that children in the first group, those aged five and six, describe themselves with physical descriptors and physical relationships such as “I am a girl,” or “My hair is brown.” I expect that children in the second group, those eight and nine, will respond with more social and personality related descriptors such as likes, dislikes, interests, and qualities such as being kind. I also expect to find a greater awareness of social and cultural groups and the beginnings of an understanding of what that means in their interactions with other people in the older group. Research from Mark Bennett and Fabio Sani in their book *The Development of the Social Self* published in 2004 reveals the trend that children around seven can espouse knowledge of the groups to which society has assigned them, the example given being that a child knows he is Mexican, however his awareness of the societal beliefs, stereotypes, and broad

definitions of this group are not internalized until around age twelve. In line with this research I also expect to find a greater awareness of each child's own culture, especially in people of color in this group. I will also be looking to see if children define children of the opposite gender with gender generalizations and stereotypes more with the other children and if this awareness can be seen in how they describe themselves. I will be looking to connect these findings to the cognitive developmental phases described by Piaget in each of these groups.

Results

I ended up only interviewing kids at one school the Cutler Jewish Day school and I interviewed six kindergarteners and five third graders. This was due to the lack of communication from the other principal I intended to work with. As a result of this my subject population is very limited and is further constrained by the fact that these students are all in the same environment. In the kindergarten subgroup there were three white boys, two white girls, and one African American boy. They were all between the ages of five and six and were quite specific about the fraction such as $5\frac{3}{4}$ years old.

Kindergarten

Guide- AA-African American
W-White

Name	Age	Race	Gender	Describe			Picture#1	Similarities	Differences	Friends?	Picture#2	Similarities	Differences	Friends?
				Yourself	AA	W								
Nathan	5 3/4	W	M	My name is... My friend is W	AA Boy	I like Iron Man and Batman	I like Iron Man and Batman	Hair is Different	Yes, I like his room	W Girl	I like pink and purple princesses	Hair is different	Yes, I like her room and window	
James	5 1/2	W	M	I have a skateboard and scooter, and big boy bike. Hi I'm James	AA Boy	Same bed, costume, mask and wall	Same bed, costume, mask and wall	Not same color skin, not same curtain	yes, she looks nice	W Girl	Same skin color	Pink and purple room, not the same costume, or shirt	yes, she looks nice	
Sally	5 1/2	W	F	I like dogs	AA Girl	Bed, and room	Bed, and room	princess colored walls	yes, she looks nice	W Boy	Big room and windows	Stickers on walls, blankets	Yes, looks nice	
Cathy	5 1/2	W	F	Moved from Alaska	Asian Girl	Princess nightlight	Princess nightlight	bed, and something about her hair	Yes, same stuff	W Boy	Bed, like her brother	Iron Man	Yes, my brother has the same stuff	
Fletcher	5 7/7	W	M	Love pizza, and I love my mom	AA Boy	No	No	Different room, color, shirt	maybe, looks nice	W Girl	Same hair color	Different room	Yes, looks sweet	
Oliver	6 7/7	W	M	I'm fun	W Boy	Starwars shirt and room	Starwars shirt and room	Not the same color, different houses	Yes, like his room	AA Girl	She is black too, and there are lots of toys	Not the same room or pillows	Yes, I like the room	

Third Grade

<u>Name</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Race</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Describe yourself</u>	<u>Picture#1</u>	<u>Similarities</u>	<u>Differences</u>	<u>Friends?</u>	<u>Picture#2</u>	<u>Similarities</u>	<u>Difference</u>	<u>Friends?</u>
Larry	9	W	M	Brown hair, like being interviewed, like legos, I am nice, I will trade for legos	AA Boy	Bed, both smile, looks like the reads comics	Superheroes everywhere, no legos, brown skin, black hair	Yes, I would need to get used to him	WE Girl	Normal colored skin	Princesses everywhere and pink, blond hair	No, I don't like princesses
Kelly	8	AA	F	Have a Guinea pig, like pink, my scooter	WE Girl	Sized bed, Color pink	Princesses and Disney castle	Yes, same favorite color	AA Boy	Nothing	Avengers, bed and room	No, I don't know why
Evan	8 11/12	W	M	Like soccer, kickball, square, hockey, and swimming, like legos and technology	AA Boy	Bed, green shirt, window, box	superheroes, skin color, hair style	Maybe, I don't know why	WE Girl	Bed, window	Girl stuff, pink	No, I don't like pink
Sam	8	W	M	Like climbing	AA Boy	Polo shirt	Brown skin	Sure, I cool room	WE Girl	Bedside table	Likes princesses	Sure, good looking windows
Claire	9	W	F	Likes to swim, young, funny, active	AA Girl	Color white in the room, I'm not a princess fan	Likes princesses, I like Claire, despises them	No, I'm different, maybe I'll meet her, never lose friends	WE Boy	Love avengers, spiderman	Little too big of a fan of superheroes	No, I don't make friends with boys easily

The first child I interviewed was Nathan, a white 5 $\frac{3}{4}$ year old boy. When asked to tell me about himself he said his name, and that his friend is JW. I showed him a picture of an African American boy in a superhero room. He said the things he had in common with the boy were that they both like Iron man and Batman. The thing that was different was they had different hair. He would want to be his friend because he likes his room. The second picture was a white girl in a princess room. He said what they have in common is that he also likes pink and purple and princesses but that her hair was also different than his. He would want to be her friend because he likes her room and likes her window.

The next boy was white, 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ years old, and named James. He told me about himself by telling me that he has a skateboard, and a scooter, and a big boy bike without the training wheels. He would describe himself to a friend by saying “hi I’m James, what’s your name?” I first showed him a picture of an African American boy in a superhero room. He said the things they have in common are that they have the same bed, the same costume, the same mask, and the same wall. The things that were different were that they had different colored skin, different shirts on, and they didn’t have the same curtain. He would want to be his friend because he looks nice. The next picture was of a white girl in a princess room. The only thing they had in common was the same skin color and he said that’s all. What was different was the pink and purple room, the bed, nothing was the same, not the same curtain, not the same shirt. He would want to be her friend because she looked nice.

The next student was Sally and she is 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ years old and is a white girl. When asked to tell me about herself she responded that she likes dogs and when asked how she would describe herself to a friend she said she would tell them she is nice. I showed her a picture of an African

American girl in a princess room and asked her what she saw she had in common with the little girl. Immediately she focused on the things in the room. She had in common the bed and the room. She found that the difference between her and the girl was the princess stuff and the color of the walls. She said she would want to be her friend because she looked nice. The next picture was of a white boy in his superhero room. She said what they had in common was the big room and the windows. What was different was the stickers on the walls (iron man and captain America) and the blankets. Again she said she would want to be friends with him because he looked nice.

Another child was a white girl named Cathy who is 5 ½ years old. When asked to tell me about herself she responded that she moved from Alaska and with further prompting declared it was when she was three. I asked her how she would describe herself to a friend and she told me she made a friend. I showed her an Asian girl in the princess room and she said she had the same princess nightlight as the girl. She said that the difference was the bed, and that something about her hair was different. Next I showed her a white boy in the superhero room and she said the boy was like her brother so what was in common was the bed and that it was like her brother's room. What was different was that he doesn't have iron man. For both kids she said she would want to be their friend but with the Asian girl it was because they have similar stuff and with the boy it was because her brother would want to play with him and play with the same toys.

The next kid was a white 5 year old boy named Fletcher. He told me he loves pizza and he would want a friend to know that he loves his mom if they didn't already know it. I showed him an African American boy in a superhero room first and he didn't see anything he had in common with the boy. The differences he saw were in the room, his color, and his shirt. He said he maybe would want to be his friend because he looks nice. The next picture I showed him was

of a white girl in her princess room. The commonalities he had with her were that they both had the same blond hair. But they had different rooms. He would still want to be her friend because she looks sweet.

The last kindergartener I interviewed was an African American six year old named Oliver. He told me he is fun. I showed him a white boy in a superhero room and what he saw they had in common was the star wars shirt he was wearing and he said it was also a star wars room. He said what was different about them was their color and that their houses weren't the same. He said he would be friends with him because of his room. The next picture I showed him was of an African American girl in a princess room. He said that what they had in common was that she was black like him and that they both have lots of toys. The difference between them was in their rooms and pillows not being the same. He would also want to be friends with her because he liked her room.

From these interviews, one thing I noticed was that the only ones who mentioned skin color as a difference were three of the boys in the kindergarten group. Two of whom are white and the third is African American. I had expected more to talk about this as a difference at this age. Oliver, Fletcher, and James all said the difference between themselves and the first picture I showed each of them of a boy of a different race was in his color. Oliver, who is African American, talked about it for both the picture of the girl who was also African American and for the white boy. He said the girl was black like him and the boy was not his same color. I found it interesting that the girls did not talk about skin color while the boys did. This brings up potential questions for further research about differences with attention to race and gender at this early age of development. More than the awareness of skin color was the awareness of different hair colors. Possibly because there are variations among and between different racial groups and kids

identify themselves with their hair color as part of a general description of themselves. Fletcher, Nathan and Cathy all mentioned differences in hair color or something being different about the hair depicted.

I expected the kids in the kindergarten group to focus on the kids more than the surroundings and while in principle they still looked at physical differences, they talked about physical differences in the rooms more than I had expected. My intention in showing a child in his or her room was to allow for gender stereotypes to be inferred and for kids to pick up, mainly in the older group, on personality traits such as likes more than physical differences. Some of the kindergarteners did talk about their likes and the likes of the kids depicted but they were physical like I expected. I like the same color, we both like iron man costumes.

Another theme I picked up on was the idea that we are all friends. No child in the kindergarten group said they wouldn't be a child's friend. One child, Fletcher, hesitated and said maybe he would want to be friends with the African American boy but then decided he looks nice so he would be. He was one of the students that talked about being a different color than the boy. At this age it seems the concept of friendship is fairly benign and meanings behind its inception seem undeveloped through the eyes of an adult. Reasons given for being friends with the children depicted were all either because the child looked nice or the kid liked their room. Deeper connection, the need to meet the child, or the fact that they had different interests didn't factor in to the decision. This lines up with the work of Robert Selman on the development of friendship. In his level one type of friendship, otherwise known as the what's in it for me stage, children between the age of five and nine don't see themselves as needing to contribute to the friendship they just see what they could get out of it. For example getting to play with the items in the picture could be a motivator to generate a friendship. While friendships are no longer just

convenient momentary playmates like they are in the level one stage of Selman's theory, they are not yet long lasting and based on a reciprocal relationship like they are in the next stage (Kennedy-Moore, 2012).

One other area of analysis is the fact that no child talked about gender. No child said that a difference between the pictured kid was that they were a boy and the picture showed a girl or vice versa. I found this interesting because from previous experiences and classroom discussions, kids at the preschool age are experimenting with lots of toys and gender roles have not yet been impressed on them fully, however with late kindergarten you start to see the shying away from doing "girl" things as a boy. Less so with expectations of the roles of girls but certainly there are already some kids expressing ickyness at girl things or at kissing or boyfriends or girlfriends at this age. Because of this I expected to see them identify this difference so I found it interesting that none mentioned it.

Reflecting on the process of collecting the data, the concept of telling me about themselves or what they would tell a friend was very confusing to most of the kindergarteners. They didn't know what to tell me. This might be attributed partially to the phrasing of the questions and the awkwardness of being interviewed by a stranger. I did counter the second issue by walking with each child so they warmed up to me, the idea that they should just pick something to tell me about themselves was weird to them. Some understood and told me they are fun or some things they have like a skateboard and this was all with prompting but Nathan just told me his name. The second question also seemed a bit confusing to some of them and they were very literal in describing themselves to friends and said they would say hi my name is... James and Nathan both said this and Oliver couldn't think of anything to say. By the third grade

they pretty much all understood both questions and were able to describe something about themselves.

Third Grade

For the third grade interviews the first student was a nine year old white boy named Larry. When I asked him to tell me about himself he said he has brown hair and he likes to be interviewed. When asked to describe himself to a friend he said he would tell him he has lots of legos but he doesn't just give them away, he will trade for them. He also likes eating things. He is nice, protective of his things and likes being around other people. I first showed him a picture of an African American boy in a superhero room. The things they have in common were that they both have beds, they both smile, and he looks like he reads superhero comics and has a new shirt. The things that were different were that there were superheroes everywhere, no legos, he has brown skin and black hair while Larry has white skin and brown hair. He hesitated but then said he would want to be friends with him. He said he likes being friends and he would need to get used to him. He said he would tell him he likes superheroes and that he likes to be friends with everyone. For the next picture I showed him a white girl in a princess room. He said what they had in common was that they both have "normal" colored skin. What was different was that there were princesses everywhere and she loves pink and has blond hair. He would not want to be her friend because he doesn't like princesses.

The next third grader I interviewed was a eight year old African American girl named Kelly. She told me that she has a guinea pig named Cody. She would want a friend to know that her name is Kelly, her favorite color is pink, she likes to ride her scooter, and she has a guinea pig. I first showed her a white girl in a princess room and she said the similarities would be the

size of the bed and that she also likes the color pink. The difference was all the princesses in the room and the Disney castle. She would want to be her friend because they both love pink. The next picture I showed her was of an African American boy in a superhero room. She said they had nothing in common. What was different was the avengers on the wall and the bed and room. She would not want to be his friend but she didn't know why.

The next student was Evan who is an 8 11/12th year old white boy. He told me he likes soccer, kickball, four square, basketball, football, soccer, hockey, and swimming. He plays soccer. He would want a friend to know that he likes sports, Legos, and technology. I showed him an African American boy in a superhero room. What they had in common was the bed, the green shirt, the window, the wall, and a box. What was different was the superhero stuff, the skin color, and the hair style. He would maybe want to be friends with him but he didn't know really why. The next picture was of a white girl in a princess room. He said what they had in common was the bed and windows and that was it. What was different was the girl stuff and the color pink. He said he would not want to be her friend because he did not like pink.

Sam was next and he is an eight year old white boy. He likes climbing. He would want a friend to know his name. I showed him an African American boy in a superhero room and he said they both have the same polo shirt. What was different was that the boy in the picture had brown skin and Sam didn't. He said sure he would be his friend because he has a cool room. The next picture was of a white girl in a princess room and they said what they had in common was they both have a bedside table. The difference was all the princess stuff. He said sure he would be her friend because she had good looking windows.

The last third grader was Claire, a nine year old white girl. She told me she likes to swim. She said she would want a friend to tell her their likes, and she would tell them her likes. She

would describe herself by saying she is young, funny, and active. I showed her an African American girl in her room and she said they both have the color white in their room but that she is not a princess fan. The difference was that this girl likes princesses and she despises them. She said she would not want to be her friend because they are just too different. Because she hates pink she doesn't see how they could be friends. She said if she knew her personality maybe but they would be off to the side friends never great friends. For the next picture of a white boy in his superhero room she said the commonality was that she loves avengers and Spiderman. The difference is that the boy depicted is too big of a fan of superheroes and she doesn't like blue. She said she doesn't make friends with boys easily so she would not be his friend.

Some themes I found from this set of interviews is the advancement of gender stereotypes seen in both gender assigned interests and in friendships with kids of the opposite gender, the awareness of skin color as a defining difference, and the understanding of activities and interests being central to negotiating friendships and defining oneself. Gender stereotypes were seen in the view of princesses as girly and Sam and Evan both said they would not want to be friends with the girl because of the princess or as Evan said the girly stuff. Sam also said he didn't like princess stuff but he would be friends with the girl because she had nice windows. I found that to be an interesting qualification for friendship and felt it tracked more with the reasons given by the younger group of kids. Claire made the distinction between being a girly girl and having boy assigned interests. She said she despised the princess stuff in the girl's room and she liked some but not all of the stuff in the boy room. She said that she tends to be in between the two rooms because she likes blue but not all the superhero stuff or princess things. Claire even went on to say that she could not see herself being friends with the girl or the boy. She felt she and the girl were too different and that since she hates pink she didn't see how they could ever be friends.

She further clarified that if she knew her personality maybe but because they are so different they could never be really good friends just off to the side friends. With the boy the reasoning was that she doesn't make friends easily with boys. In fact four out of the five said they would not be friends with the kid of the opposite gender, however again none of them listed the gender as the reason, just gender assigned interests such as princesses, superheroes and the color pink.

There was a greater awareness in the third grade group of skin color differences as three out of five kids mentioned it as a difference. Only in one child did it come up as a commonality and this was Larry who first noticed it as a difference between him and the boy in the first picture and then listed it as a commonality with the girl in the picture. He said they both have "normal" colored skin. I believe this is central to an alarming number of early childhood classrooms where the approach to multiculturalism and race is highlighting the otherness of skin colors other than white or presenting other cultures than the mainstream white/European one reflected in schooling culture through a tourism approach. This creates a distinction of normalcy for the prevailing culture of power. People who look different from what is considered normal are distinct from mainstream privileges and see societal effects ranging from biases, lowered expectations, to basic discrimination.

In terms of how children in this group become friends with others is the concept of personality and interests. The reasons for being friends or not being friends with the students pictured ranged from not liking the same color, to gender, to having a cool room. There were kids who said no or that they would need to meet the child to really know like Claire, or Larry who said he would need to get used to them. The kids in this group also made more inferences about the kids based on their rooms. Instead of just listing the color as a commonality they attributed the room more to personality and said the girl loves pink and so do I. The observations

have gone from being trivial to being a central part of who the person is. This has implications for first impressions and children starting to develop a sense of clothing and rooms as being an expression of who you are.

From these interviews I see a greater awareness of gender roles, skin color, and evolving ideas about friendship. An area that I find missing that I expected to find was a greater awareness of skin color in the younger group and racial identity in the self description part of the interview in the older group. Because the question was so open ended to describe themselves to me, the area that I expected this to come out was lacking. If they said anything it was related to their interests which were great to hear about, however it did not get at the core of what I wanted to know about self identity. This set of interviews was enlightening about friendship, however self identity was not as well explored as I would want. From this limited data it appears that kids before the shift to concrete thinkers are more aware of physical differences in terms of things. Hair color, wall color, objects in the room, and skin color to some degree, more so by the boys, were all talked about in this set of kids. The older group focused more on personality or things as a part of personality such as favorite color as seen in paint color. This tracks with the expected result of seeing more interest based responses in this group, however I did not see as much evidence of their self identity development in this regards as I expected. I heard about likes and dislikes but not much of I am kind or I am sweet descriptions.

Friendship in the younger group was formed more by ownership of fun items, and gender stereotyped roles were not developed or talked about. These kids did not seem to have strong feelings against the princesses or superheroes based on their gender and they all said they would be friends with the kids depicted. The comparison with the older group comes from their criteria for friendship and from their greater awareness of gender roles. The primary basis for friendship

in the second group was shared interests and too many differences dissuaded kids from being friends. This shows an advanced definition of what it means to be friends and what qualifies someone of worthy of friendship. At this stage however only two kids mentioned they would want to meet the child to know more about them. Friendship was still superficial in nature.

In both groups there was missing the concept of being defined by race or racially stereotyped traits. More kids in the second group picked up on or talked about differences in skin color, however no children described themselves as being of a certain race. They could say that they were the same color as another child, but because the questions were vague I didn't get at what they think it means to be a certain color or belong to a certain group. I would ask this in further research.

Significance of the Research

Any knowledge gained from this and other research contributes to the general knowledge on early childhood development which impacts everything from curriculum to developmentally appropriate practices, to developmental milestones in social emotional development. The curriculum, especially in early childhood is tied in with developing social skills, routines and expectations of daily schooling, and foundations of schooling practices. Despite this, standards increasingly press higher academic skills down on these kids who are still in need of learning how to work together. As social emotional development is pushed aside in early childhood curriculum for subjects tested such as math and ELA, a disconnect between one of the expanded roles for education, and the curriculum supposed to be covered develops. When children leave the classroom they are expected to know the hidden curriculum not espoused by the standards,

these are influenced by societal norms, values, and ideals. Kids are expected to show respect for their elders, be polite, make eye contact when talking, know to raise their hands, walk in the hallway, be responsible and be able to complete a job as a self sufficient member of society. These may not be delineated in the actual content standards, however with the expanded role of schools as other public and community institutions have failed to provide these (an example being the role churches used to play in this civic and moral upbringing which is seen in more limited close knit communities) more children are left behind in all areas of development not just those we test.

The significance of my findings on gender development and awareness of skin color has implications for the need for exposure to racial, gender, and cultural biases engrained by our society. In particular gender stereotypes. The foundation for these gender roles appears through my research to have been laid between the end of kindergarten and third grade. This has implications for teaching friendship both with the younger and older group. The implications for self identity are even more important in today's expanding world and including this kind of social examination in the classroom of things like what makes a doll for girls is something missing from early childhood curriculum.

Another area that is missing is multicultural education so kids don't think of white skin as "normal," The call for this has been sounded by some scholars but remains unexamined by many and missing from current early childhood curriculum. The trend just starting to be seen in teacher education programs is linguistic and cultural pluralism. The idea of colorblindness is starting to be debunked by scholars who recognize that people cannot simply ignore skin color and have preconceived notions about people of their own color and of other colors. While multiculturalism says we are all equal and should all be treated equal, linguistic and cultural pluralism embraces

the differences between cultural and racial groups and indicates that teaching needs to reflect the diversity in the classroom. Instead of teaching everyone the same way, teachers need to teach to individual differences, explore the cultures represented in the classroom, value them all, and hold the same high expectations for all. Teachers are told to face their own biases and counter the cycle of oppression through education and awareness. The significance of finding cultural identity unexplored or underdeveloped is that this indicates that children do at an early age pick up on the biases of society, and differences and racial issues should be discussed and explored in the early childhood classroom.

Conclusions

The need for early childhood education curriculum to adapt to our diverse world is something encouraged in teacher education programs, but discouraged in some school settings. With politicians deciding what a child needs to know academically by the time they exit each school year while also placing the burdens of molding the democratic citizens of tomorrow's society on teachers' shoulders, an in depth analysis of actual child development is needed. This paper is a brief look at how at a time when children are making leaps and bounds in their cognitive development, we still need to adapt our teachings to their social emotional needs. Without this adaptation or complete overhaul we raise our students to perpetuate the societal inequities that plague our people and impress on us biased concepts of what is normal. These interviews demonstrate a need to discuss race, gender and biases before third grade as these concepts are naturally developed, not once they are ingrained. Aspects such as friendship can be talked about more frankly earlier than we currently do, and with more research into social emotional development we can structure a curriculum which takes these needs into effect.

Works Cited

Bennet, M., and Sani, F. (2004). *The development of the social self*. New York: NY: Psychology Press.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Kennedy-Moore, E. (2012, February 26). Children's Growing Friendships. Retrieved April 20, 2016, from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/growing-friendships/201202/childrens-growing-friendships>

Piaget's Stages of Cognitive Development. Retrieved April 20, 2016, from <http://www.telacommunications.com/nutshell/stages.htm>