# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PEER-REPORTED AGGRESSION AND SOCIAL PREFERENCE AS A FUNCTION OF ETHNICITY IN THE CLASSROOM 

A Senior Thesis
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Group: PSYCHOLOGY II

# The Relationship Between Peer-Reported Aggression and Social Preference as a Function of Ethnicity in the Classroom 

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# The Relationship Between Peer-Reported Aggression and Social Preference as a Function of Ethnicity in the Classroom 

Racial tensions have long been a major issue in society. There have been many researchers doing studies on peer reported sociometrics. When studying children, racial identities have been shown to play a key determinant in the outcomes of psychological research. In a recent experiment, using peer nominations (students nominate their peers based on what characteristics the nomination calls for), it was found that proportionately fewer African-Americans were selected as popular than Caucasians (Coie, Dodge, \& Coppotelli, 1982). This observation was labeled as race effect because African-American children were the minority in the classrooms. From this same study it was shown that African-Americans received more nominations for disruption and fighting, and less for cooperation. These results were attributed to the racial differences in the school. Even though these results were not seen as significant to the study, the results themselves show that in Caucasian classrooms, with an African-American minority, African-Americans are seen as more aggressive and less popular than Caucasian children. Singleton and Asher (1979) noted that significant preferences for same-race peers did exist, and same race preferences tended to increase with age, particularly for AfricanAmerican children. In looking at these results, a question arises whether or not
different races prefer on another simply because of their race, or because of current social norms. Hobbs and Walle showed that children who score high on positive peer nominations responded in a significantly less aggressive manner than children who received low scores on such nominations (Hobbs \& Walle, 1985). They also found that African-American children demonstrated significantly greater aggressive responses than white children to situations involving either adults or peers. Gatlin, Kistner, Metzler, and Risi (1993) measured race and gender effects in classrooms with different racial majorities. They found that in white and majority AfricanAmerican classrooms, African-American boys received more nominations as being likely to engage in externalizing behaviors than Caucasian boys. In classes with a majority of Caucasian peers, African-American boys received the highest number of nominations, significantly more nominations than were received by Caucasian boys and by African-American boys in classes in which they comprised the racial majority. Caucasian boys in classes with a majority of African-American peers were seen as least likely to engage in externalizing behaviors, obtaining fewer nominations than African-American boys, and a tendency toward fewer nominations than African-American boys in majority Caucasian classes. Most of this research tends towards the idea that African-American children act more aggressively than Caucasian children. It was shown that children in classes composed mostly of
minority students but also in majority Caucasian classes, African-American students were chosen as more aggressive by their peers. It has also been shown that in majority Caucasian classrooms children who received aggressive nominations did not receive positive peer nominations.

The present study examines the relationship between aggression and social preference nominations as a function of ethnicity in the classroom. It is predicted that the correlation between aggression and social preference among Caucasians will be replicated as a negative relationship, while this correlation for AfricanAmerican children will be less negative or slightly positive. I will also be looking at Hispanics. It is predicted that they will have the same results as the AfricanAmericans. It would help to explain the difference between actions in the races if one race was more tolerant of aggression, or even saw it as a means of being socially acceptable. In order to answer this question, an experiment has been conducted, using peer nominations and ratings, measuring the variables of race, gender, popular nominations, and aggressive nominations in classrooms that contain different racial majorities.

## METHOD

I have been lucky enough to be able to use the data from my advisor's, Dr. Timothy Cavell, Ph.D., research that he has recently conducted. The project that I am carving my variables out of is trying to pre-screen for children who are at risk of becoming drug addicts and predict them according to certain variables. This project has been given the name of Prime Time and that is how I refer to it from here on out. This study is in its forth year of research, and the Department of Health and Human Services granted it a 1.2 million-dollar grant last year for further continuance. The research entailed going out to elementary school classes and targeting a problem child in each class. The data set was collected three years ago in which researchers went out to twelve different schools in the Bryan Independent School District in Bryan, Texas and administered sociometrics to children. The subject number of this study is 904 . Prime Time measures eleven different variables including ethnicity, aggression and social preference.

The tests used in Prime Time for the targeted child are the Social Cognitive Assessment Profile -Revised (SCAP -R) and Susan Harder's Measure of Self Perceived Competence tests. Group administered sociometrics were conducted in 44 classrooms. The whole class was given a questionnaire to fill out as a researcher
read directions to them. These tests used peer nominations and roster-rating-scales to measure the class' opinions of each other. The social preference nominations were conducted by using a roster-and-rating method (Appendix A). The subjects were presented with a roster of all of their classmates names on it. They were then asked to scratch out their own name because they would not be rating themselves. The researchers told the children to circle the face that corresponds to how much they like to play with each of the children on the roster. The smile on the faces corresponded to a saying about that face and a number: $1=$ not at all, $2=$ some, $3=$ a little, $4=\mathrm{a}$ lot, and $5=$ very much. The children were reassured of the confidentiality of their answers and were given a cover sheet to cover their pages up. They were also asked not to talk to anyone. The subjects were given a score by taking the average of all of the ratings that they received. Aggression nominations were done by peer nomination (Appendix B). The subjects were told to act like they were the directors in a classroom play. They were given a list of behaviorally descriptive items and asked to name the three best people who fit each role. The items of interest in this study were who starts fights ("These three children call other mean names, start fights, and hit or push other kids a lot.") and children who get angry ("When mad, these three children get even by keeping someone out of their group, say they won't be friends if they don't get their way, and ignore someone they
are mad at."). The subjects were given a score for each category by the number of nominations that they received. Scores were calculated for each child from the nominations of all of the children in the class and all scores were then standardized within classrooms.

## RESULTS

T-tests were used comparing correlation coefficients between the subgroups of Caucasian, African-Americans and Hispanics to evaluate the efficacy of the hypothesis. Aggression and social preference were the variables and they were grouped by their ethnicity. The data was analyzed on an individual level across classrooms.

Students were measured class by class to get the percentages of ethnic groups in each class. Their percentages ranged from 11.1 to 88.2 for AfricanAmericans, from 9.5 to 50.0 for Caucasians, and from 4.8 to 50.0 for Hispanics (Appendix C). This shows that there was a great variability of the ethnicity across classrooms and that we had a broad base of ethnic majority classrooms with which to test from.

Students were measured within their class to see what the correlation was between aggression and social preference for the different ethnicities. The result of the analysis showed no significance in numbers that there was any difference in the way the ethnicities viewed aggression and social preference of their peers. This disproved my hypothesis that African-Americans and Hispanics would be less negative or slightly positive in their correlation between the two variables. The correlation for African-Americans was -.24 , for Caucasians was -.23 , and for Hispanics was -.19 (Appendix D).

## DISCUSSION

One of the major unsolved questions concerning race relations is why Caucasian children are rated higher on social preference ratings and why African-American children are rated higher on aggression ratings. This study tried to prove that the two were correlated. The hypothesis was that Caucasian children would have a negative correlation, African American children would have a less negative or slightly positive correlation, and Hispanic children would have a less negative or slightly positive correlation. However, the results of this study did not support the hypothesis. Although Caucasians had a negative correlation, and Hispanics had a less negative correlation, the results are still insignificant because there was such a small difference between the numbers.

We tried to figure out how to account for ethnicity when you have variability across classrooms and yet you are standardizing within classrooms. The reasoning behind this was because we did not feel as though an African-American student in majority Caucasian classroom would vote the same as one who was in a majority AfricanAmerican classroom. Also, the minority student's votes were outweighed by the rest of the class because the votes were calculated and ran together. We may have been able to eventually worked something out, however, we simply ran out of time.

A confounding variable that we ran into is that preferences for racial in-group members over out-groups members appears stronger when measured by traditional sociometric peer nominations than by the roster-and-rating method (Schofield and Whitley, 1983). The aggression of the children was measured on a traditional sociometric peer nomination scale. This means that some of the data is biased based on the fact that the children were more likely to vote with their own racial group. Also peer status may have greater predictive validity for majority members than for minority individuals (Write, Giammarino, \& Parad, 1986).

A final confounding variable is that we did not collect any socioeconomic data. I strongly believe that there would have been significant results had we used this as a fourth variable. If the sample of students were drawn from a different population, the relations between these three variables might be quite different. Also, if given more time, I would have liked to have seen if gender played a significant role in the outcome of the study.

Finally, these results show that there appears to be no variation in the way the different races view aggression and social preference. It appears as if aggression is seen as negative and is not associated with a high social preference, but rather a lower social preference. This does not account for why African-American children are seen as more aggressive and less popular in both African-American and

## Subject Area

In designing this institutional unit and lesson plan, I intend to focus on Texas History and the elements of history as taught to Texas 7th graders. The history book is Texas and Texans, a 7th grade history book published by Glencoe Social Studies.

Caucasian majority classrooms. I would like to see this study replicated, except with a few changes in the variables collected. Socioeconomic data needs to be taken in order to determine if significant differences arise among economic classes. Again, I feel that there should be a test run on gender to see if there is a discrepancy in the way that males and females correlate aggression and social preference. There may have been some significant results between genders of different races. I enjoyed taking part in the Senior Honors Thesis - Fellows Program. The knowledge that I have gained this year is irreplaceable and I feel that I will be a better graduate student having participated in the program.

A confounding variable that we ran into is that preferences for racial in-group members over out-groups members appears stronger when measured by traditional sociometric peer nominations than by the roster-and-rating method (Schofield and Whitley, 1983). The aggression of the children was measured on a traditional sociometric peer nomination scale. This means that some of the data is biased based on the fact that the children were more likely to vote with their own racial group. Also peer status may have greater predictive validity for majority members than for minority individuals (Write, Giammarino, \& Parad, 1986). A final confounding variable is that we did not collect any socioeconomic data. I strongly believe that there would have been significant results had we used this as a fourth variable. If the sample of students were drawn from a different population, the relations between these three variables might be quite different.

## REFERENCES

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Appendix

## Appendix A

## Appendix B

Find your name below and write the NUMBER next to your name HERE: $\qquad$
Grade: $\qquad$ School: $\qquad$ Teacher: $\qquad$

Look at the list of names on this page. Next to each name is a row of faces to mark how much you like to play with that person. Think about that person and put a check on the face which will show how much you like to play with that child. Be sure to check one face for each name on the list.
17

1. These three children are good leaders than everyone likes to be with, they do nice things for others, or cheer others up. They have many friends.
2. These three children call others mean names, start fights, and hit or push other kids a lot.
3. These three children get left out, get their feelings hurt easily, and are usually sad.
4. When mad, these three children get even by keeping someone out of their group, say they won't be friends if they don't get heir way, and ignore someone they are mad at.

## Appendix C

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$\begin{array}{ll}\stackrel{\sim}{c} & \\ 0 & N \\ 0 & \infty \\ \vdots & \infty \\ 0 & \end{array}$
0
のレレ
$\stackrel{\infty}{\wedge}$ 으으

17
SPSS RELEASE 4．1 FOR IBM OS／MVS
TEXAS A\＆M UNIVERSITY：CIS IBM 3090－400」 MVS／ESA／JES3

| Value Label |  | Value | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cum <br> Percent |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| BLACK |  | 1 | 13 | 65.0 | 72.2 | 72.2 |
| WHITE |  | 2 | 4 | 20.0 | 22.2 | 94.4 |
| HISPANIC |  | 3 | 1 | 5.0 | 5.6 | 100.0 |
|  |  | ． | 2 | 10.0 | Missing |  |
|  |  | Total | 20 | 100.0 | 100.0 |  |
| Valid cases | 18 | sing | ses |  |  |  |

## Appendix D

（6！s pəl！eq－て／（sesej）／子uə！ว！ffəoう）
＂．＂is printed if a coefficient cannot be computed


