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Examining the Relationship between Racial Respect among Black Early Childhood Professionals and their Perceptions of Black Children

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Examining the Relationship between Racial Respect among Black Early Childhood
Professionals and their Perceptions of Black Children

by

Kayla Nembhard

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science
with a concentration in Behavioral Health
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DEDICATION

To Desmond and Jaiden.

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ABSTRACT

Black children are exposed to the highest rates of negative teacher perceptions and punitive consequences. Healthy People 2020 acknowledges the significance of the first five years of child development and the various factors that promote or hinder health outcomes during this time. Furthermore, it highlights the significance of quality relationships between children and their caregivers, including their ECE teachers. Overall, Black children tend to fare better academically when they are able to engage with Black educators and other ECE professionals. However, there is recent evidence Black educators in ECE settings, specifically, also uphold racialized negative perceptions of Black students that can result in disproportionate punitive outcomes. This cross-sectional study explored the potential relationship between the level of racial respect reported among ECE professionals and their perceptions of Black ECE students. Thirty-four ECE professionals completed a brief electronic survey, which included a standardized instrument that measured racial respect and a vignette that measured ECE professionals' perceptions of children from different racial backgrounds. Quantitative results point to a statistically significant difference in positive perceptions of Black girls compared to Black boys; participants also generally reported neutral levels of racial respect overall. Qualitative findings yielded four primary themes reflecting participants' reasoning as to why they selected a particular child as "most cooperative," "most patient," or "most aggressive" when prompted during the survey. While this study's findings should be reviewed with caution due to the small sample size and therefore being significantly underpowered, this study offers a more nuanced examination of how racism impacts various health and behavioral health outcomes.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In the last two years, racism has been declared a “public health crisis” by the American Public Health Association and various policymakers across the United States (APHA, 2021; Harvard School of Public Health, 2020). In April, 2021, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) declared racism to be a “serious public health threat,” and it “affects the well-being of millions of Americans” (CDC, 2021). Yet, such declarations still do not seem sufficiently specific or targeted. Ford and Airhihenbuwa (2010) highlighted how more conventional public health theory and methodology inadequately acknowledges and addresses the nuances in the ways in which structural racism pervades and adversely impacts all facets of a population’s health. When the problem is acknowledged insufficiently, the public health theory and methodology designed to potentially address and resolve the problem will also be insufficient.

Racism and Public Health

Race-based traumatic stress, “an emotional trauma based on the stress of racism”, is linked to negative psychological and physical health outcomes later in life, including depression, substance use, and heart disease (Carter, 2007; Richman & Jonassaint, 2008; Padela & Heisler; Leventhal et al., 2020; Johnson, 2020). As evidenced from a recent study by Leventhal and colleagues (2020), as worry about societal discrimination (negative and undesirable perceptions) increases among adolescents, the risk of increased mental health and substance use challenges also increases. Leventhal and colleagues (2020) found the likelihood of depression and symptoms of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) manifesting increased more than

10% among adolescents who expressed more concerns about such negative societal perceptions. Elevated levels of worry or concern for societal discrimination among this sample of adolescents also correlated with increased use of substances and an increase in the number of different substances used as well (Leventhal et al., 2020).

From a child development perspective, centuries of racialized harm, and an internalizing of this harm, can be observed as developmental milestones are examined over time. For example, child development research conducted on the African continent in the 1950s and 1970s comparing Black and White infants concluded that not only were the Black infants in these samples consistently more advanced than their White counterparts, but they were also more advanced than Black infants are today as it relates to reaching various developmental milestones. As reported in one of these previous studies (Wilson, 1978; Geber, 1958), while Black infants were shown to begin sitting up by just under 2 months of age, White infants in this study were sitting up by about 5 months of age.

The current mainstream child development literature supports the notion that “normal” child development (for *all* infants) consists of reaching this milestone of sitting up by about 5 months (as opposed to earlier in life). By 5 months of age, Black infants were observed to be able to stand up while holding onto an object for support; White infants were observed to be able to execute the same milestone by about 9 months of age (Wilson, 1978; Geber, 1958). The current mainstream child development literature dictates the average infant will be able to stand with support at about 9 months as well, again reflecting historically White norms (CDC, 2021). Consequently, Black children are generally performing under what has historically been known to be their capacities, and are even currently performing under the developmental standard today

in many cases potentially as a result of chronically expressed negative perceptions of these children and the internalization of these experiences over time (Wilson, 1978; CDC, 2021).

Disparities in ECE

Racism pervades public health systems and is ultimately built into public health infrastructure (Ford and Airhihenbuwa,2010). Some of the ways in which this can be observed within the early childhood education (ECE; early learning environments that consists of children, birth to five years of age) domain include ECE professionals' lack of access to their own educational progress. On a national scale, while about 40% of White ECE teachers possess a bachelor's degree, about 21% of Black teachers possess a bachelor's degree. Black teachers were the least likely to possess a bachelor's degree out of all the racial and ethnic groups observed (Paschall et al., 2020), and ECE professionals' lack of access to livable wages (while the ECE workforce struggles overall to be acknowledged and paid on par with the physical, emotional and psychological labor they exert each day, Black teachers are shown to be paid anywhere from \$0.78 to \$1.71 less per hour than their White counterparts depending on the age group they engage) (McLean et al., 2021). Black teachers are more likely to be in assistant-teaching positions (versus being acknowledged and paid as the lead teacher) or working with age groups that are not as substantially funded as other age groups, thus, (again) adversely impacting their access to fair wages (McLean et al., 2021).

The lack of acknowledgment and respect for ECE as a legitimate and professional field, and the many disparities within the field, speak to a historical context in this country in which caregiving has been relegated to women, and even more specifically, Black women and women of color. These continued (observed) trends perpetuate this historical status quo and therefore further marginalize Black women and women of color.

Healthy People 2020 lists education as one of five place-based categories in their conceptualizing of the social determinants of health. ECE is cited as a “key issue” in the domain of education (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 2022). This national public health agenda acknowledges the significance of the first five years of child development and the various factors that promote or hinder health outcomes during this time. While considerations are not made for health outcomes for children within the context of race in ECE, this agenda does highlight the significance of quality relationships between children and their caregivers, including their ECE teachers (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 2022).

If Black ECE teachers and professionals are stifled in various disparate ways, including, but not limited to the circumstances just cited above, the quality of the relationship between the Black child and Black teacher is more likely to be adversely impacted, thus adversely impacting health outcomes for these children (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 2022; Magnuson et al, 2005), Potential adverse health outcomes include: developmental delays; poor social-emotional skills that increase the likelihood for behavioral challenges and mental health challenges; poorer physical health; lower educational success; and a higher risk of engagement in the carceral system (Center on the Developing Child, 2010).

Perceptions of Black Children in the ECE Context

Although children of color in general tend to face more punitive consequences than their White counterparts in the ECE setting, it is Black children, specifically, who are exposed to the highest rates of negative teacher perceptions and punitive consequences (Giordano et al., 2020; Petras et al., 2011; Gilliam et al., 2016). Black children as young as toddler and preschool age are subject to the insidious and harmful impacts of racism that persist within their teachers,

regardless of their teacher's race/ethnicity (Gilliam et al., 2016). These adverse effects tend to set Black children on a challenging and oppressive path in their subsequent years (Rashid, 2009).

In the classroom, Black children are monitored and reprimanded by their teachers at greater rates than their White peers, even when their behaviors are no different than their White counterparts (Giordano et al., 2020). Black children have also been observed to be reprimanded when there is no negative behavior present warranting such action from a teacher (Giordano et al., 2020). This negative disposition toward Black children from teachers leads to higher suspension and expulsion rates. In fact, Black children are also the most likely to experience suspension and expulsion as early as preschool (Giordano et al., 2020; Petras et al, 2011).

Within the last 5 years, Black children in the ECE setting have been 3.6 times more likely to be suspended and about twice as likely to experience expulsion when compared to their White counterparts (Giordano et al., 2020; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Education, 2016). Expulsion rates early in the educational trajectory are found to be correlated with dropout rates during later years of a Black child's academic journey (Gilliam et al., 2016; Giordano et al., 2020). Expulsion rates are also correlated with an increased risk of entering the carceral system. This is a process often referred to as the "school to prison pipeline" or the "cradle-to-prison pipeline" (Gilliam et al., 2016; Meek & Gilliam, 2016; Rashid, 2009).

More attention has shifted to focus on the macro contexts that adversely impact early childhood teachers' psychological wellbeing and the quality of ECE and caregiving as a result of teachers' wellbeing. This can be observed especially since the U.S. population has attempted to be responsive to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, interventions remain limited to more individualized approaches (Eadie et al., 2021; Jalongo, 2021). Furthermore, while more consideration is being made for the ways in which racism adversely impacts ECE outcomes, not

enough consideration is made for the complex ways that racism impacts different racialized populations within this context. As previously discussed, the quality of the relationship between a child and their caregiver is a significant factor for consideration when attempting to assess or predict a child's various health outcomes. This study centers Black ECE teachers and other ECE professionals, and the impact of racism on their perceptions of self (racial respect) and their Black students.

Aims of the Study

Even though more attention has been placed on understanding and addressing what is popularly referred to as *implicit bias* (“the automatic and unconscious stereotypes that drive people to behave and make decisions in certain ways” (Gilliam et al., 2016, p. 3) a more nuanced understanding of why racialized negative perceptions manifest within Black populations is necessary. The construct of racial respect, defined as “the experience of inherent worth through affirming and nurturing relationships between African Americans and their family, peers, and society,” might illuminate a more critical understanding around perceptions among Black early childhood professionals of their Black students (Briggs et al., 2015, p. 270).

The purpose of this cross-sectional study is to explore the potential relationship between the presence of negative perceptions of Black early childhood students among Black ECE professionals and the level of racial respect reported among them. This thesis study builds off Dr. Joy DeGruy's operationalization of racial respect, the initial adolescent racial respect scale she designed and validated, and the subsequent modified adult version of her scale that also has been validated. The adult version of the scale (*African American Respect Scale-Women/Male*; AARS-W/AARS-M) will be utilized in this study (Briggs et al., 2015). Specifically, the research questions that will be addressed include the following:

1.) What is the relationship between racial respect and Black ECE professionals' perceptions of Black children?

2.) Might the relationship between racial respect and perceptions of Black children change based on professional role/position, and length of time working in the ECE field?

While Black students tend to fare better with Black teachers (Gershenson et al., 2018), child development research reveals that Black children have the capacity to excel far beyond the established norms observed in these contemporary times. By approaching this cited phenomenon related to harsher negative perceptions of Black early childhood students by Black early childhood educators from the perspective of racial respect (Gilliam et al., 2016), this author hopes to establish an alternative path to a more effective and healing method of intervention for Black early childhood educators and their students. Such a perspective could also be considered in broader interventions that intend to target racism and race-based trauma across all public health domains, from educational and mental health systems to medical health systems and systems of policy development.

Conclusion

Findings from the cited studies point to a more complex imagining of factors that impact how an individual who identifies as Black or African American might perceive themselves and then engage with others, sometimes in harmful ways, at least partly as a result of this perception of self within a racialized context. This understanding leads to more critical thinking and questioning around how racism adversely impacts Black populations across the spectrum of health and behavioral health. This more nuanced examination may also shed light onto the insidious ways in which racism can produce harm and unhealthy outcomes between Black people.

Examining how Black ECE professionals score among the various domains of racial respect (family, peers, society) could also potentially reinforce the need to focus on and transform the infrastructural context of early childhood care and teaching/training for *all* ECE professionals. This would include more closely examining and transforming public perceptions and misconceptions of who ECE professionals are as caregivers and professionals/experts, simultaneously; and therefore, more effectively supporting ECE professionals via paying livable wages and salaries and providing access to health care in all of its forms, as the field of early childhood tends to report significant rates of depression (Kwon et al., 2019). Increased stressors, including reported depressive symptoms are associated with “less sensitive” interactions with their students and less developmental gains among their students (Roberts et al., 2019; Kwon et al., 2019). While these infrastructural issues pervade the field as a whole, when keeping an intersectional lens at the forefront, it is highly conceivable these broader issues only compound and complicate the impact of the role of racial respect among Black ECE providers and their perceptions of self and their Black students.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Racial respect is defined as “the experience of inherent worth through affirming and nurturing relationships between African Americans and their family, peers, and society” (Briggs et al., 2015, p. 270; DeGruy et al., 2012). Findings from Dr. DeGruy’s studies of racial respect offer evidence the presence of racial respect is related to prosocial activities and positive health outcomes. A lack of racial respect predicts “*maladaptive identity [adjustment]* and poor mental health adjustment” (Briggs et al., 2015, p. 269).

Might the level of racial respect, a construct rooted in historical context and African axiology, reported by Black ECE professionals be associated with their levels of positive and negative perceptions of their Black students? If so, it is important to understand the implications for the ways in which one currently conceptualizes and attempts to reduce racialized negative perceptions among this population. On a broader scale, it is also important to understand the implications for Black ECE professionals and their students when racial respect is something that is actively promoted and enhanced within such a developmental context.

This cross-sectional study sought to examine the relationship between perceptions of Black early childhood students among Black ECE professionals and the level of racial respect reported among them. Taking this potential relationship into consideration could effectively impact the ways in which the field continues its efforts to reduce, if not eliminate, the presence and adverse impacts of racism in ECE systems. While there is a dearth of empirical literature related to the construct of racial respect in general, and especially as it relates to early childhood educators, the following section is a review of the literature currently present on this construct.

A Theoretical Grounding

According to social identity theory, when one feels they are a member of and identify with a “positively evaluated group,” this individual will likely possess a healthy self-construal (specific beliefs about self) and self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Smith, Tyler, & Huo, 2003; American Psychological Association, n.d.). Similar parallels can be drawn as it relates to the construct of racial respect. When discussing historical racialized trauma specifically among the Black population in his 2015 lecture, clinician and trauma expert Dr. Kenneth Hardy explored the concept of devaluation, or “when one’s sense of dignity has been assaulted,” and how such historical, systemic, and chronic devaluation of a people leads to “a very high premium on respect... so much so that one might be willing to die for respect” (Hardy, 2015). Similar to DeGruy’s theory of “vacant esteem” (2005), Hardy continued on to reflect the state of a historically oppressed and traumatized group by stating, “I live my life so devalued on a day-to-day basis that I am willing to die for respect” (Hardy, 2015).

This sentiment was captured a little over a decade before Hardy’s lecture during DeGruy’s dissertation work when she developed a scale to measure racial respect among Black male youth and also examined its relationship to acts of violence among this population (DeGruy, 2001). DeGruy posited that as a result of “the historical disrespect [Blacks] have experienced from European Americans beginning with slavery and continuing to the present day,” respect is a theme that permeates the Black experience and therefore should be examined more closely (DeGruy, 2001, p. 3).

While there is currently a limited empirical emphasis on the construct of racial respect, since the development of DeGruy’s African American Respect Scale (AARS), racial respect has been found in a small number of studies to be correlated with positive prosocial development and

school engagement. This relationship between racial respect and healthy school engagement and prosocial behavior was observed in various racially marginalized groups, but was not observed among White youths (Huo et al., 2010). This distinction related to the role of racial respect among racially marginalized populations, namely Blacks in contrast to its insignificance among Whites, speaks to the varied ways in which different racial groups perceive the self in an intrapersonal context and also in relation to the external world.

Dr. Edwin Nichols's axiological model (1976), which explores the various ways in which cultural groups engage with and assign value to various aspects of the material world, can be used to make further meaning of the significance (or insignificance) respect holds to various racial groups (Nichols, 1976; Leary, 2001). This model includes the following four categories: 1) *Member-Great Spirit*, in which Indigenous or Native American groups are characterized by attributing the most value to one's connection to the Great Spirit; 2) *Member-Member*, in which the most value is attributed to one's relationships with others; African, Latino/x/Hispanic and Arab group values are characterized through this lens; 3) *Member-Group*, in which Asian groups are characterized by attributing the most value to group cohesion; and 4) *Member-Object*, in which European groups are characterized by attributing the most value to the object and the attainment or "acquisition" of the object (Leary, 2001; Nichols, 1976).

According to Nichols, such axiological constructs are the result of how groups of people have managed to adapt and ultimately survive their conditions over time. Once respective core values manifest as it relates to such survival mechanisms, these values persist for centuries to come. As noted above, and as empirical findings related to racial respect and relational outcomes reinforce, African/Black people tend to connect value to relationships and the "integrity" of such relationships (Leary, 2001).

Overall, Black children tend to fare better academically when they are able to engage with Black educators (Yarnell et al., 2018). However, there is recent evidence that reveals Black educators in ECE settings, specifically, also uphold racialized negative perceptions of their Black students that result in disproportionate levels of punitive outcomes (Gilliam et al., 2016). In some instances, negative perceptions conveyed by Black early childhood educators (perceiving Black children as more aggressive, uncooperative, and/or disruptive; assuming and therefore anticipating Black children will exhibit more frequent challenging behaviors than their White counterparts; perceiving Black children's behaviors more harshly than their counterparts) were found to be more severe compared to their White counterparts (Gilliam et al., 2016). Such negative perceptions often precede discriminatory actions and have been shown to adversely impact educational outcomes, as Black children then tend to become less academically engaged and motivated (Johnson, 2020; Dotterer et al., 2009; Wong et al., 2003).

These negative experiences during the first five years of development have been linked to chronic health issues into adulthood, which include heart disease, obesity and diabetes (Center on the Developing Child, 2010). Other studies have highlighted the impact of negative perceptions on Black adolescent girls as well. Such perceptions that are followed by problematic treatment of Black children also have been observed to correlate with the increased likelihood of metabolic health issues in Black adolescent girls, which is connected to physical health problems, also including higher risk for developing diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease (Johnson, 2020; Clark et al., 1999; Mays et al., 2007; Gee et al., 2012).

This author utilized the findings on racial respect thus far in addition to professional observations and experiences in the ECE field to develop the research questions and hypotheses included in this study. As referenced throughout this literature review, as Black people

internalize their racial identity in healthy ways, the likelihood of prosocial attitudes and actions about and towards others tends to increase (Briggs et al., 2015; DeGruy et al., 2012). Therefore, if levels of racial respect are higher among Black ECE professionals, it is reasonable to surmise the quality of the relationship with their Black students would be healthier and therefore produce healthier and more successful outcomes. Taking into consideration the factors cited that potentially adversely impact levels of respect among Black people, this author considered common variables within the ECE field that have reportedly adversely impacted ECE professionals' capacity to be deemed as "professionals" in a field that is not necessarily esteemed or respected.

This author considered the relationship between the ECE professional and the Black child to be a significant intervention in itself that impacts child outcomes, but is not examined closely enough. How might Black ECE professionals' levels of racial respect ultimately impact their Black students' outcomes? Relational dynamics among professionals throughout the ECE system are also worthy of examination as teachers, in particular, navigate the hierarchies present in their work setting. Perhaps higher levels of racial respect support one's capacity to persist in this field. An exploration of racial respect with the ECE context would provide a more expanded understanding of the circumstances previously mentioned.

Conclusion

The literature focusing on the construct of racial respect is limited. However, a closer examination of racial respect among Black ECE professionals contributes to a more multifaceted understanding of potential factors that impact a Black child's educational, developmental, and behavioral health outcomes over time. This literature review provides some context for the construct of racial respect, how it manifests and is influenced, and how racial respect functions.

This perception of self (racial respect) and even others who share the same common group (racial identity), tends to predict various outcomes related to mental health, physical health, educational success, and child welfare involvement. A closer examination of racial respect also has been shown to offer more insight around its role in promoting such positive health outcomes among this population via aspects of reported attitudes and behaviors (Huo et al., 2010; Briggs et al., 2015).

Therefore, more nuance (as opposed to a *universal* lens) is necessary in understanding this phenomenon and its implications. With this more refined understanding, interventions that are more targeted toward and center Black adults and children in efforts to impact health and behavioral health outcomes may be more transformational (Briggs et al., 2015). This study attempts to add to the literature related to racial respect within the ECE context. The following chapter details the methods used for data collection and the subsequent analyses.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This study utilized an exploratory cross-sectional study design, as this author was interested in examining a specific population's (Black ECE professionals) perceptions of racial respect and child perceptions at a particular point in time. This study design allowed for the capacity to observe various variables and make comparisons as needed depending on the research question and hypotheses developed. This study sought to explore the following research questions:

1.) What is the relationship between racial respect and Black ECE professionals' perceptions of Black children?

2.) Might the relationship between racial respect and perceptions of Black children be different based on professional role/position and length of time working in the ECE field?

Based on these research questions, the following hypotheses were examined:

1.) As respondents report increased perceptions of racial respect, the perceived differences in behaviors observed between Black and White children when responding to the vignette will decrease.

2.) As respondents report lower scores of racial respect, respondents' perceptions of Black children's cooperation and patience will be lower, while perceptions of aggression will be higher.

3.) *Perceptions of racial respect will be lower for respondents who identify as teachers as opposed to leadership roles (directors, ELC professionals).*

4.) *Respondents' perceptions of racial respect will be higher as length of time in the field increases.*

Procedures

A cross-sectional survey was used in this study. This survey was disseminated electronically via Qualtrics. Recruitment efforts and data collection began on March 16, 2022, and concluded on April 22, 2022. This study was approved by the University of South Florida's Institutional Review Board (IRB#: 003957).

Sample

Participants were eligible to take part in the study if they identified as Black or African American, were English or Spanish-speaking, and had current or previous experience working in the ECE field (defined as work that centered on children, from birth to five years of age). A power analysis was initially completed to determine if the proposed sample size (N=100) was appropriate to observe the effects of interest in this study. It was determined that a sample of approximately 180-200 participants would be necessary for optimal power. However, taking time constraints as it relates to recruitment into consideration in addition to the power analysis completed, it was this author's goal to obtain at least 100 participants for this study. Fifty ECE professional completed the survey. However, after "cleaning" the data, a total of 34 participants (N=34) were included in the analysis. A total of 16 surveys were excluded due to missing a significant number of responses; a few submitted surveys that included no responses at all.

Recruitment

Snowball sampling was used to recruit participants. Participants were not compensated for their participation. Participants were recruited via email and the posting of a study flyer via social media. Everyone who was contacted via email or social media was encouraged to pass the study information and survey link on to others in their network who were eligible to complete the study. Various prospective and eligible participants provided contact information for individuals and organizations that were potentially eligible and willing to participate in the study. The recruitment email provided details related to the purpose of the study, who would be eligible to participate in the study, and what to expect once consenting to participate. The email and flyer included a direct link to a Qualtrics survey.

Participants were recruited locally, statewide, and ultimately, nationwide. This author initially planned to recruit ECE professionals only throughout the state of Florida. However, barriers to recruitment included: attempts to engage prospective participants during the spring break season, which varies throughout the months of March and April depending on where the participant is located in Florida; poor timing related to various ECE organizations and childcare centers being in the midst of preparing for the conclusion of their fiscal year and/or completing end-of-year child assessments; and the lack of direct access to ECE teachers (in particular) due to the COVID-19 global pandemic and also due to a certain level of gatekeeping that is commonly present in the field.

As a result of such barriers, this author expanded recruitment to include potential participants outside the state of Florida, as a broader sampling pool was accessible via social media platforms. During the first three weeks of recruitment efforts, this author sent out three to five emails daily to individuals and groups of people from various ECE organizations and

childcare centers. This author made a list of contacts that included individuals and organizations in this author's community and professional network and extended to additional contacts provided from those initial individual, community, and professional contacts. This author would follow up on all initial contacts made, since survey responses were anonymous, on a weekly basis via email and/or via phone and provide a brief reminder to complete and share the survey if they had not done so already. During the fourth week of recruitment, this author made initial contact via email with several more eligible ECE professionals. Follow-ups via email and phone were also completed with them on a weekly basis until recruitment efforts concluded one week earlier than planned, due to survey responses remaining stagnant.

Data Collection

This cross-sectional survey consisted of 49 items which included a demographics instrument, a standardized measure of racial respect, and a vignette measuring child perceptions. The survey began with items from the Degruy's African American Respect Scale (AARS), which was then followed by the vignette measuring child perceptions. The AARS and vignette were pilot tested with five people (males and females) to determine the order of the measures and to assess overall feasibility related to length of time to complete and comprehension of instructions and items. Minor typos and transitioning errors were brought to this author's attention during this process; this author immediately corrected the typos and updated the settings for transitions in the Qualtrics survey. Otherwise, no significant concerns or errors were observed or reported during the piloting of the survey. Two of the pilot surveys were included in the total sample. The other three were not included, as those individuals did not meet all of necessary inclusion criteria to be counted in the total sample. This survey took 5-10 minutes for participants to complete.

Measures

The measures included in the survey instrument included a demographics instrument, AARS, and a Child Perceptions Vignette.

Demographics. Once participants electronically consented to participating in the study, they were instructed to select their sex and confirm if they identified as Black or African American. Participants were instructed to provide the following demographic information: professional position/role; length of time working in in the ECE field; hours per week spent in the presence of children; and whether or not they are presently working in the field. Participants identified whether they worked in home-based childcare centers or brick and mortar childcare centers as well.

African American Respect Scale-Women/Men (AARS-W/M). The African American Respect Scale (AARS) measures the extent to which the African American responder feels respected in four domains (family, romantic partners, peers, and society). The family subscale looks at the extent to which the responder feels respected within their family systems. The subscale focusing on romantic partners assesses the extent to which responders perceive respect by their romantic partners. The peers subscale focuses on perceived respect among peers. Finally, the societal subscale examines responders' perceptions of respect from societal institutions (Briggs et al., 2015). Higher scores throughout the domains reflect higher levels of racial respect. All subscales of the modified AARS measures were found to be reliable except the peer subscale for women.

Validity was also generally established with reported observations related to differences in validity based on gender, as men and women were shown to experience these domains of respect differently (Briggs et al., 2015). This study utilized the societal, family, and peer

subscales of this measure. The AARS was completed first as a measure of racial respect and was then followed by the vignette to examine child perceptions.

DeGruy's African American Respect Scale (AARS; 2001) consists of three domains: 1) respect within the context of a peer group; 2) respect within the family system; and 3) respect within society (Leary et al., 2005). The measured items were developed through a focus group that was completed among a group of Black male youth who were instructed to share their experiences with respect and disrespect. Once survey items were created reflecting the themes and content of the focus group, face and content validity were assessed by five expert stakeholders from various disciplines related to Black community and mental health. The 20 items that make up this measure were then administered to a sample of 200 youth as part of a broader battery of measures for a larger study in efforts to explore the relationship between respect and the use of violence among adolescent Black males.

Each subscale of the AARS was found to be significantly negatively correlated with the measure of intensity of violence. This means the less respect these participants felt as it related to family, peer, and societal domains, the higher their reported score on the measure of violence. And conversely, the more respect reported correlated with lower scores on the measure of violence. Furthermore, participants who were not incarcerated tended to score significantly higher than their incarcerated counterparts in all three domains of the racial respect scale.

For more context, two qualitative questions were asked following the survey items: 1) *"If you and your friends have felt disrespected at some time in your life, why do you think it happened?"*; and, 2) *"Why do you think people like you are disrespected?"* History and intensity of violence among participants was measured by their responses to a total of seven items used in a 1994 study by DuRant and colleagues about urban Black youth (DeGruy et al., 2005).

Through a linear regression analysis, the author's hypothesis that the higher scores of racial respect were among this sample, the lower their reports of use of violence was confirmed. Another finding worth noting was that youth who scored higher on the racial respect scale, or in other words, felt respected, also reported engaging in more racial socialization. In her 2012 study, DeGruy and colleagues were able to establish a moderating effect of racial respect and racial socialization on violent behaviors among this population. Racial socialization being observed as a likely protective factor for Black children and adults must be considered within the context of ECE and development, and identity development.

In their study, Briggs and colleagues (2015) sought to evaluate the validity and reliability of adapted versions of the AARS to be used among Black women (AARS-W) and men (AARS-M). An additional domain or subscale was included in order to explore the relationship between romantic relationships and racial respect. A total of 278 Black adults completed the measure (161 men; 117 women). All subscales of the modified AARS measures were found to be reliable except the peer subscale for women. Validity was also generally established with reported observations related to differences in validity based on gender. Similar to DeGruy's initial published study using the AARS (Degruy et al., 2005), findings further supported how racial respect is positively associated with prosocial behaviors and adaptive identity. That is, a higher degree of racial respect tends to be related to a variety of positive health outcomes for Black men and women (and children). (Briggs et al., 2015; Degruy et al., 2005).

Child Perceptions Vignette. Participants were initially instructed to observe a group photo provided within the survey of four children (one Black boy, one Black girl, one White boy, and one White girl) and also provided with the following instructions:

The four children pictured (figure 1) are engaging in play and are expected to practice sharing their space and toys with one another. We are interested in what you think about how

each child will feel and how they will behave. In the pages to follow, we'll show you a picture of each child and ask you to evaluate how each child will feel and how each child will behave.

Photos of the children that were displayed in the survey can be found at:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/04/black-students-teachers-implicit-racial-bias-preschool-study> (Photos are labeled, “Figure 1,” and “Figure 2”).

In the subsequent pages, the group photo was provided as a reference along with an individual photo of the child of interest in each set of questions. Three questions were asked regarding each child: *“How cooperative do you perceive this child to be in this scenario;”* *“How aggressive do you perceive this child to be in this scenario;”* *“How cooperative do you perceive this child to be in this scenario?”* Participants were able to select a response from 1 – 5, 1 being the most positive selection for each question, and 5 being the least positive for each question.

Three forced choice questions were used to conclude the vignette: *“Which one of these children would be the most cooperative;”* *Which one of these children would be the most aggressive;”* *“Which one of these children would be the most patient?”* Participants were forced to select one response: “Black boy; Black girl; White boy; or White girl.” They were then instructed to provide a brief written response to explain their selection.

Data Analyses – Quantitative Data

SPSS Statistics 27 was used to complete the data analyses. Descriptive analyses were performed to examine and clean the data as needed. Please refer to Table 1 for further details on each hypothesis, the variables included and the statistical tests used.

Study Hypotheses, Variables, and Statistical Tests Used

Table 1.

Study Hypotheses, Variables, and Statistical Tests Used

Hypothesis	Variables	Statistical test used
1. As respondents report increased perceptions of racial respect, the perceived differences in behaviors observed between Black and White children when responding to the vignette will decrease.	IV; racial respect DV: ECE professionals' perception of children	Hierarchical regression
2. As respondents report lower scores of racial respect, respondents' perceptions of Black children's cooperation and patience will be lower, while perceptions of aggression will be higher.	IV: racial respect DV: ECE professionals' perception of children	Paired samples t-test
3. Perceptions of racial respect will be lower for respondents who identify as teachers as opposed to leadership roles (directors, ELC professionals).	IV: professional roles DV: racial respect	Independent samples t-test
4. Respondents' perceptions of racial respect will be higher as length of time in the field increases.	IV: years of experience DV: racial respect	One-way ANOVA

Due to the various subscales included in the AARS measure, a hierarchical regression analysis was used to examine the first hypothesis (*Hypothesis 1: As respondents report increased perceptions of racial respect, the perceived differences in behaviors observed between Black and White children when responding to the vignette will decrease*). A power analysis was initially completed to determine if the proposed sample size was appropriate to observe the effects of interest in this study. For the desired regression analysis, it was determined that a sample size of $N=82$ would provide adequate power (80%) to detect moderate effects ($r = |.30|$) at the $\alpha = .05$ level. And, in order to detect modest effects ($r = |.20|$) at the $\alpha = .05$ level, a sample size of $N=191$ would provide adequate power (80%). While this study's sample size is small, it was determined this parametric test would be the most appropriate test considering the sample size meets the minimum required sample size. This statistical test is also considered more robust and therefore decreases the likelihood of error.

Keeping this study's small sample size in mind, paired-samples t-tests were used to examine the second hypothesis (*Hypothesis 2: As respondents report lower scores of racial respect, respondents' perceptions of Black children's cooperation and patience will be lower, while perceptions of aggression will be higher*). Paired samples t-tests can be utilized when attempting to measure a participant's response to different questions that are rated on the same scale (for example, assessing participants' responses to boys versus girls; Pallant, 2016).

An independent samples t-test was used to examine the third hypothesis (*Hypothesis 3: Perceptions of racial respect will be lower for respondents who identify as teachers as opposed to leadership roles (directors, ELC professionals)*). This test is used to compare the mean scores of two groups and is used with smaller sample sizes. This parametric test also more robustly

accounts for assumption violations that might be missed if opting for the Mann-Whitney U Test, the non-parametric alternative to the t-test.

A one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) was performed to examine the fourth hypothesis (*Hypothesis 4: Respondents' perceptions of racial respect will be higher as length of time in the field increases*). For the desired ANOVA, it was determined that a sample size of N=180 (60/group) would provide adequate power (80%) to detect moderate effects ($f = .25$) at the $\alpha = .05$ level. Sample size was considered, and while small, it met the minimum required size for one-way ANOVA to be used appropriately (Pallant 2016). This test was also determined to be most appropriate for its robust capacity to account for various assumption violations that a non-parametric test, such as the Kruskal-Wallis test, is not as powerfully able to detect (Norman, 2010). In the event of any statistically significant findings from this test, this author was prepared to run additional tests to confirm no assumptions were violated and that means were in fact significantly different.

Descriptive statistics were run to determine which child was perceived as “most cooperative,” “most patient,” or “most aggressive.”

Data Analysis – Qualitative Data

Three forced choice questions were used to conclude the vignette: “*Which one of these children would be the most cooperative;*” “*Which one of these children would be the most aggressive;*” “*Which one of these children would be the most patient?*” Participants were forced to select one of the four responses: “Black boy; Black girl; White boy; or White girl.”

Participants were then instructed to provide a brief written response to explain their selection. A conventional content analysis was completed on the brief responses that participants provided to explain their reasoning for their selection using the constant comparison method. This method was most appropriate for this author’s purposes, as the aim was to identify and make meaning of

participants' responses in an inductive manner. A line-by-line review of all responses was completed. Responses ranged in length from just three words to about thirty words. Examples of these responses are provided in the results section (Table 5).

This method was used to further contextualize survey findings related to child perceptions. Upon initial review, this author began organizing responses by the frequency in which the same or similar reported reasoning for selecting a child was provided. Frequent same or similar responses were noted as themes. Once themes were identified, this author grouped each response based on their theme in a data matrix. These groups of responses were then further organized and contextualized by race and gender.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent. The IRB Social-Behavioral Adult Consent template was used to create and provide an informed consent form to potential participants prior to accessing this study's survey. If the potential participant did not consent to participating in the study (consent was indicated by clicking the appropriate button on the online survey), the individual was directed to the end of the study and thanked for their interest in participating. This author was available via email to provide further information to prospective participants as needed.

Positionality. This author identifies as a Black woman and is a licensed psychotherapist who has specialized in infant and family mental health and community-based interventions with families and children for the past six years. During this time, this author has professionally collaborated as an infant and early childhood mental health consultant to various ECE centers and providers. Additionally, this author resides in the community she works and collaborates. This author is an expert in these various areas, and also as a fellow community member and neighbor in her community. This author previously organized a community of practice made up

of the demographic this study centers. The intimate insight obtained from the various experiences and relationships cultivated over the past six years also informs this study.

This chapter described the methods applied to this study throughout March and April of 2022. Chapter four will detail the results for the following hypotheses that were examined:

- 1. As respondents report increased perceptions of racial respect, the perceived differences in behaviors observed between Black and White children when responding to the vignette will decrease;*
- 2. As respondents report lower scores of racial respect, respondents' perceptions of Black children's cooperation and patience will be lower, while perceptions of aggression will be higher;*
- 3. Perceptions of racial respect will be lower for respondents who identify as teachers as opposed to leadership roles (directors, ELC professionals); and*
- 4. Respondents' perceptions of racial respect will be higher as length of time in the field increases.*

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Sample and Demographics

This sample was made up of 33 women and 1 man. Most participants identified as direct service providers (32.4%), which consisted of early childhood psychotherapists, developmental interventionists, and a clinical program director). Twenty-one percent of participants identified as Early Learning Coalition (ELC) professionals and 11.8% identified as ECE teachers. Most participants reported having 5 or more years of experience in the field (79.4%). See Table 2 (included below) for more sociodemographic details of this sample.

Sociodemographic Characteristics of Survey Participants

Table 2.

Sociodemographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable	N (N=34)	% of Sample
Race		
Black	34	100
Gender		
Female	33	97
Male	1	3
Professional Position		
ECE Teacher	4	11.8
ECE Program Director	2	5.9
Direct Service Provider	11	32.4
ELC Professional	7	20.6
Other ECE Professional	5	14.7
Former ECE Professional	5	14.7
Years of Experience		
≤ 4 years	6	17.6
5-9 years	13	38.2
≥ 10 years	14	41.2
Work Setting		
Center-based care	1	2.9
Home-based care	12	35.3
Not in childcare setting	18	52.9
Hours per week w/ children		
≤ 20 hours	18	58.1
≥ 20 hours	13	41.9

African American Respect Scale-Women/Men (AARS-W/M)

The average score on the AARS for this study's sample was 2.51 (SD=.21). This measure's scale ranged from 1-4, with 1 reflecting the lowest level of racial respect and 4 reflecting the highest level. AARS scores overall reflected a more neutral level of racial respect and leaned positively.

Child Perceptions Vignette

The average score on the vignette for this study's sample was 3.80 (SD=.32). This measure's scale ranged from 1-5, with 1 reflecting the most positive perception of the child of interest and 5 reflecting the most negative perception. Child perception scores overall tended to lean more negatively, although perceptions of the Black children were slightly more positive (M=3.78; SD=.36; White children: M=3.81; SD=.38).

Hypothesis #1: As respondents report increased perceptions of racial respect, the perceived differences in behaviors observed between Black and White children when responding to the vignette will decrease.

AARS scores reflected neutral levels of racial respect overall among this sample while child perceptions leaned more negative. There was no significant difference in perceptions of Black and White children. A hierarchical regression was utilized to examine the impact on child perceptions based on each subscale of the AARS (societal; family; peers). The societal subscale was inputted as the initial predictor variable and was found to be statistically insignificant ($p > .05$). The R² value of .01 that was reflected in this regression model indicated that 99% of the variance in participants' child perceptions cannot be attributed to racial respect levels within the context of the societal domain. The family subscale was inputted next and yielded an R² of .06; therefore, 94% of the variance in participants' child perceptions cannot be attributed to racial

respect levels within the context of the societal and family domain. Lastly, after inputting the peers domain, it was determined that 92% of the variance in participants' child perceptions cannot be attributed to racial respect levels within the context of societal, family, or peers domains of the AARS measure. No significant relationship was observed between the subscales and child perceptions were determined. R squares were small and this is likely due to this study's small sample size.

Hypothesis #2: As respondents report lower scores of racial respect, respondents' perceptions of Black children's cooperation and patience will be lower, while perceptions of aggression will be higher.

Paired-samples t-tests were utilized to examine this hypothesis. The following questions were used to guide these analyses: What is the impact of race alone on child perceptions? What is the impact of gender alone on child perceptions? What is the impact of race on child perceptions when children are boys/girls? What is the impact of gender on child perceptions when children Black/White? Participants' scores reflected neutral levels of racial respect overall. There was no significant impact of race alone on child perceptions ($t = .396$, $df = 30$, $p = .70$); no significant impact of gender alone on child perceptions ($t = .460$, $df = 30$, $p = .65$); no significant impact of gender on child perceptions when children were White ($t = 1.508$, $df = 30$, $p = .14$); and no significant impact of race on child perceptions when children were boys or girls, although significance was close to being reached in both of these instances (Boys: $t = 1.848$, $df = 30$, $p = .07$.; Girls: $t = 1.957$, $df = 30$, $p = .06$). Gender did have a statistically significant impact on child perceptions when children were Black ($t = 2.808$, $df = 30$, $*p = .01$). That is, with reported neutral levels of racial respect, Black boys were perceived significantly more negatively than Black girls. Please see table 3 (included below).

Paired-Samples T-Test Results

Table 3.

Paired-Samples T-Test Results

	Mean Difference	t	df	Sig(2- tailed)
Pair 1				
Perception Black/White Children	.03	.396	30	.70
Pair 2				
Perception Girls/Boys	.03	.460	30	.65
Pair 3				
Perception Black Girls/Boys	.22	2.808	30	.01*
Pair 4				
Perception White Girls/Boys	.16	1.508	30	.14
Pair 5				
Perception Black/White Boys	.16	1.848	30	.07
Pair 6				
Perception of Black/White Girls	.22	1.957	30	.06

*Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)

Hypothesis #3: Perceptions of racial respect will be lower for respondents who identify as teachers as opposed to leadership roles (directors, ELC professionals).

A one-way ANOVA was initially used to compare levels of racial respect among ECE professionals that identified as ECE teachers; ECE program directors; direct service providers (therapist, early interventionists, clinical program director); ELC professionals; self-identified independent contractors (school psychologist; developmental assessors; ECE consultant); or former ECE professionals. However, due to the limited sample size and even more limited and uneven number of professionals in each professional category, an independent samples t-test was performed instead. This test is most appropriate for smaller sample sizes, as there is no minimum sample size required, and to compare two groups as opposed to more than two groups, as attempted with the one-way ANOVA. This parametric test is also robust enough to account for

potential sample violations; the use of a non-parametric test would increase the margin of error, as non-parametric tests are not as powerful.

In order to conduct the t-test, ECE teachers and ECE program directors were collapsed into one EC group (N=6) and then compared to the group of ELC professionals (N=7). This author focused on these two specific groups in efforts to best address the hypothesis, as teachers made up the majority of their group and could now only be compared to one specific group assumed to be in a position with more power than teachers. When an independent samples t-test was completed to compare racial respect scores, no significant difference in scores was found for the ECE group (M = 2.57, SD = .24) and ELC group (M = 2.41, SD = .23; $t(11) = 1.18$, $p = .26$, two-tailed). The magnitude of the differences in the means was small (Cohen's $d = .24$).

Hypothesis #4: Respondents' perceptions of racial respect will be higher as length of time in the field increases.

A one-way ANOVA was used to compare levels of racial respect to reported years of experience in the field: 4 years of less of experience; 5-9 years of experience; and 10 or more years of experience in the field. There was no significant effect of racial respect on the three categories reflecting years of experience in the field at the $p < .05$ level [$F(2, 30) = .543$, $p = .586$]. That is, racial respect was not observed to be significantly lower (or higher) based on years of experience in the field. Please see Table 4 (included below).

ANOVA Results - AARS Scores

Table 4.

ANOVA Results - AARS Scores

Years of Experience	Participants	M	SD
≤ 4 years	6	2.59	.17
5-9 years	13	2.48	.21
≥ 10 years	14	2.52	.23

Qualitative Analysis

Descriptive statistics were run to determine which child was perceived as “most cooperative,” “most patient,” or “most aggressive.” The Black girl was perceived to be the most cooperative and was selected by 19 of 29 total respondents. The Black boy was perceived to be the most patient and selected by 10 of 27 total respondents. Finally, the White girl was perceived to be the most aggressive and selected by 10 of 24 total respondents. A total of 24 respondents provided a brief response to justify their selection for which child was “most cooperative.” A total of 24 respondents provided a brief response to justify their selection for which child was “most patient.” A total of 23 respondents provided a brief response to justify their selection for which child was “most aggressive.” There was a total of 71 brief responses.

Four primary themes were identified upon review of participants’ qualitative responses to why they selected a particular child as “most cooperative,” “most patient,” or “most aggressive:” *1) relying on societal biases to settle on a decision; 2) conscious/explicit refusal to select an option, as it would be a bias decision versus an informed and objective one; 3) selection of child based on participant’s own racial/gender identity and levels of respect expected from child as a result of that racial/gender identity; and 4) use of objective factors in vignette photos to inform decision.*

While the majority of responses were provided with consideration of objective characteristics from the vignette photos, the Black children were perceived most positively. The theme of selecting a child based on the participant's own racial/gender identity and levels of respect expected from child as a result of that racial/gender identity was present in 11 of 71 total responses. Relying on societal biases to settle on a decision was present in 10 of 71 total responses. Lastly, the explicit refusal to select a child was present in 5 of 71 responses. 10 responses did not fit into any of the four identified themes, but also did not share commonalities to create a fifth theme; insufficient details were provided among some of these responses as well, which made it impossible to organize into any themes. Please see Table 5 (included below) for examples of each theme.

Themes and Participant Responses

Table 5.

Themes and Participant Responses

Relying on societal biases to settle on a decision.	Conscious/explicit refusal to select an option, as it would be a bias decision versus an informed and objective one.	Selection of child based on participant’s own racial/gendered identity and levels of respect expected from child as a result of that racial/gendered identity.	Use of objective factors in vignette photos to inform decision.
<p><i>“[White boys] learn from an early age that they are superior and likes to assert that in their role.”</i> -Psychologist, 10+ years of experience</p> <p><i>“Based on society I chose the black boy.”</i> -Direct Service Provider, 5-9 years of experience</p> <p><i>“Black males are viewed as aggressive in society along with the Black girl.”</i> -ECE Program Director, 10+ years of experience</p>	<p><i>“You are asking me to stereotype. I cannot make such a decision without more knowledge of the children.”</i> -ELC Professional, 10+ years of experience</p> <p><i>“I’m unable to decide as those faces were all sweet”</i> -Equity Professional, 10+ years of experience</p> <p><i>“Can’t tell.”</i> - Former ECE Professional, ≤ 4 years of experience</p>	<p><i>“I chose Black girl because I am a Black woman. I honestly do not believe we can determine from a picture who would be most cooperative”</i> -Direct Service Provider, 4-9 years of experience</p> <p><i>“Girls are more patient, in my opinion”</i> (selected Black girl). -Former ECE Professional, ≤ 4 years of experience</p>	<p><i>“His body language appears to be patiently waiting.”</i> -ELC Professional, 5-9 years of experience</p> <p><i>“The little Black girl is observing her peers.”</i>- Psychotherapist, 5-9 years of experience</p> <p><i>“From the picture he looks like he’s being patient, waiting for the other child to get done with a toy. He seems very engaged.”</i>-ECE Teacher, 5-9 years of experience</p> <p><i>“He seems to have less toys in front of him which indicates he is sharing. I would have preferred to select an unsure option because it’s difficult to infer base on the picture.”</i> -ELC Professional, 5-9 years of experience</p>

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This cross-sectional study explored the relationship between racial respect and perceptions of Black children among Black ECE professionals. The following hypotheses were examined: 1) *As respondents report increased perceptions of racial respect, the perceived differences in behaviors observed between Black and White children when responding to the vignette will decrease;* 2) *As respondents report lower scores of racial respect, respondents' perceptions of Black children's cooperation and patience will be lower, while perceptions of aggression will be higher;* 3) *Perceptions of racial respect will be lower for respondents who identify as teachers as opposed to leadership roles (directors, ELC professionals);* and 4) *Respondents' perceptions of racial respect will be higher as length of time in the field increases.*

Within the context of this small sample size, a variety of findings are worth highlighting. Overall, participants reported a neutral level of racial respect that leans slightly positive and a neutral perception of the children in the vignette that leans slightly negative. Perceptions of Black children were slightly more positive, but not significantly different from perceptions of White children. Furthermore, when examining perceptions of children by race *and* gender, it was found that Black girls were *perceived* the most positively overall, and particularly when compared to Black boys. Perceptions of Black girls were significantly more positive than perceptions of Black boys. This is consistent with various findings in early childhood research in which such negative perceptions of Black boys result in higher rates of reprimand, suspension, and expulsion (Giordano et al., 2020, Petras et al., 2011; Gilliam et al., 2016; Rashid, 2009).

Further context was provided through the qualitative responses given when participants were instructed to justify their selection of a child being “*most cooperative*,” “*most patient*,” and “*most aggressive*.” Expressions such as, “*I chose Black girl because I am a Black woman. I honestly do not believe we can determine from a picture who would be most cooperative* (Direct Service Provider; 4-9 years of experience);” and “*just a guess*” (ELC Professional; 4-9 years of experience), while also selecting the Black girl as most cooperative, provided a potentially more nuanced reasoning of such selections. This sample consisted of 33 Black women out of 34 total participants. Such responses that appeared in the data relatively consistently shed some light on factors that potentially impact perceptions of Black children which then impact educational and behavioral outcomes for these children. For instance, this sample of Black women tended to perceive the Black girl in the vignette most positively, even when they attempted to remain objective in their responses.

One factor that seemed to contribute to this outcome was the phenomenon of some Black women seeing themselves to some extent in the Black girl and the assumption that the Black girl would potentially see herself in them and therefore increase the likelihood of respect and “cooperative” behavior from the child to the adult. In a study looking at adolescent Black girls’ perceptions of teacher discrimination and its relationship to rates of discipline, it was found that higher rates of discipline were positively correlated with the child’s perception of teacher discrimination. Conversely, when these children felt a greater sense of belonging in their school environment, they reported less perceived teacher discrimination and also experienced less disciplinary actions at school (Butler-Barnes et al., 2020). While the teacher’s race was not a variable that was examined in the cited study, its findings further illuminate the significance of

the relationship quality between a child and their caregiver and the implications of a child feeling accepted or rejected as a result of that caregiver's perceptions.

These sentiments reflect more general findings in the early childhood literature around the significance of quality of relationships and interactions between adult and child in the early childhood setting. The more positively one perceives the other (adult to child, and child to adult), the more positive one can expect developmental and behavioral outcomes to be for the child. For example, when examining the relationship between depression levels of ECE teachers and behavioral outcomes of their students, Kwon and colleagues (2019) found a small but notable association between these two variables. Teachers who reported the most depression symptoms tended to also report having more students with behavioral challenges in their care. Such findings could be understood in two significant ways. The first would be that teachers with a higher prevalence of depression symptoms *perceived* more of their students in negative ways as result of experiencing such a depressive state (Francis, 2014); or alternatively, the students of more depressed teachers were in fact experiencing higher rates of behavioral challenges as a result of presumed lower quality relationships and interactions with their teachers who were experiencing such depressive symptoms (Kwon et al., 2019). Similar considerations could be made as it relates to levels of racial respect and the impact it might have on perceptions of Black children and their behavioral and mental health outcomes as a result.

This sample of predominantly Black women tended to perceive Black boys the least positively among the children observed when completing the first portion of the vignette items measuring child perceptions. While White children were selected more frequently as “most aggressive” when asked, those who selected the Black boy in this scenario justified their choice by stating, “*Based on society I chose the black boy*” (Direct Service Provider, 5-9 years of

experience),” or, “*Black males are viewed as aggressive in society along with the Black girl*” (ECE Program Director, 10+ years of experience). The latter sentiment potentially reflects that although one acknowledges what external perceptions of Black children are, when making a choice, one will still perceive the representation least like them most negatively. That is, while this particular Black woman acknowledged the dominant negative societal perception of all Black children, she selected the Black boy as “most aggressive” over the Black girl.

This speaks to concerns expressed over time in the field around not only promoting a racial match (that is, when Black children are taught by Black educators) as it relates to enhancing educational and behavioral outcomes for Black children, but also emphasizing a gender match for Black boys in particular who are otherwise predominantly taught by White women throughout their academic trajectory (Spiegelman, 2020; Rashid 2009; Pabon et al., 2011). The presence of more male Black ECE professionals could potentially mean more positive perceptions of Black boys, which would likely positively impact the quality of relationships and interactions Black boys experience in ECE settings. Such improved experiences for Black boys could ultimately lead to improved educational, developmental, and behavioral health outcomes.

Although it was hypothesized that levels of racial respect would be lower among teachers as opposed to those participants in leadership roles, it was observed that teachers generally scored highest on the AARS measure. This author hypothesized racial respect would be lower among teachers versus other ECE professionals, and particularly ELC professionals, due to reported assumptions from ECE professionals in the field that ELC professionals are paid better, have access to more health and education resources, and are generally in a position of power in their roles in ECE compared to teachers. However, all of these variables differ depending on the

specific position an ELC professional holds. That is, if an ELC professional is not in an explicit leadership role (e.g., director, manager, supervisor), they are likely experiencing very similar circumstances to ECE teachers, just in their unique organizational contexts. Ultimately, the sample was too small to make any definitive conclusions of findings. Overall, there was not a significant difference in levels of racial respect based on professional roles.

There was also no significant relationship found between levels of racial respect and reported years of experience in the field. It was observed that racial respect scores were higher for those with the least amount of time in the field, at about four years or less. Those who reported five to nine years in the field reported slight lower scores than participants with less experience. Racial respect tended to increase again for participants with the most experience in the field, but not surpassing scores of those with the least amount of experience in the field. While these findings are not significant and are derived from a small sample size, one might speculate the notion of levels of racial respect decreasing over time in the ECE field, factors that might contribute to this occurrence, and implications of lower levels of racial respect possessed among Black ECE professionals, as there is no literature surrounding these topics at this time.

Study Limitations

As stated earlier, a power analysis was completed to determine the appropriate sample size to most adequately observe the effects of interest in this study. The sample fell well short of that due to recruitment challenges. However, after consulting with a statistician, the study's sample size was large enough (N=34) to adequately run the tests utilized, and yielded a statistically significant finding; while the finding is statistically significant at a p value of .01, the sample was too underpowered overall and other findings should be considered cautiously (J. Beckstead, personal communication, June 9, 2022; Pallant, 2016; Norman, 2010). Therefore, this

study's findings should be read and considered with caution. In addition to a small sample size, participants were not equally represented among gender, professional role, years of experience in the field, or geographic location. In addition, this study was the lack of representation of Black *teachers* within this sample.

Another noteworthy limitation of this study is that participants varied in the amount of time they spent in the presence of children over the course of a week depending on their professional role. Participants also varied in how many children overall they were in the presence of over the course of a week. Stronger control for these factors would likely yield more confirmatory findings.

Future Research

There is limited research related to the construct of racial respect overall. More examination of the construct in general is necessary. Furthermore, more examination of racial respect and its potential relationship to various outcomes in the ECE field within the context of Black ECE professionals and Black students could be beneficial. As discussed in general, racial respect has been found to be related to more prosocial behaviors and outcomes among the Black population. Findings from this study indicate a potential relationship between Black women's more positive levels of racial respect and their more positive perceptions of Black girls within the ECE context. Further examination of this potential relationship could lead to the development of more interventions that center race and gender in more sophisticated ways when conceptualizing issues and solutions in education and behavioral health among Black adult and child populations.

Various factors such as rates of pay, access to higher education and professional development and access to quality health care, including mental health care that is competent in racial justice, could be related to Black ECE professionals' level of racial respect. However, further examination of a more direct link between these variables among Black ECE professionals in particular and various outcomes of their Black students as it relates to Black ECE professionals' quality of relationships with them (e.g., disciplinary, academic, developmental and health outcomes) would be beneficial. Examination of these variables not only center the need to improve the quality of care for Black children in ECE, but also centers how conditions must improve for Black ECE professionals themselves in efforts to improve outcomes for Black children.

The racialized *and* gender findings in this study beg the question of whether Black men in the ECE field might possess significantly more positive perceptions of Black boys in similar ways that Black women in this study perceived Black girls. The ways in which Black men might come to such conclusions related to their perceptions of Black boys, and Black children, in general, also warrants further exploration. Findings from such studies could provide further empirical support used to incentivize the field to seek out more Black men to fill ECE teaching roles, especially, but ECE roles overall. A significant portion of such efforts would include destigmatizing the presence of men in general, and Black men specifically in the ECE field, and instead fostering a trust and confidence in their capacities to safely and effectively teach and care for children. Black male teachers in particular reportedly not only desire to be “role models” in the educational space for Black boys, but to also establish their epistemologies and reconstruct care and education of Black boys and Black children overall, via their epistemological lens (Pabon et al., 2011).

As previously mentioned, quality relationships between a child and adult tend to be related to healthier educational and behavioral health outcomes. This relationship then contributes to various health outcomes for children and tends to be related to how positively an adult perceives the child. There is a gap in the literature as it relates to the presence and experiences of Black ECE professionals outside of Black female teachers. A more nuanced exploration of the dynamics mentioned above among Black children and *all* kinds of Black ECE professionals who engage with these children could provide more innovative methods of intervention in efforts to effectively impact various behavioral and public health outcomes for this population.

Implications for Behavioral Health and Public Health

First and foremost, this study serves as a necessary example of conceptualizing a topic in a way that centers Black populations and epistemologies. Childcare and early childhood education are already a stigmatized and marginally respected field. The added racialized context that Black ECE professionals are subjected to deserves acknowledgement and examination. Addressing the research questions and hypotheses posed in this study contribute to a more intricate understanding of how Black children's behavioral health outcomes are potentially adversely impacted by the levels of racial respect their Black teachers and other Black ECE professionals possess.

The public health field acknowledges racism and its vestiges as a “serious threat” to various physical and behavioral health outcomes (CDC, 2021). The findings of this study would further emphasize the need to invest in more critical understandings and explorations of phenomena at the ECE level that can be effectively transformed if appropriately identified, increasing the likelihood of improved health, educational, and economic outcomes and quality of

life in general over a child's lifespan. Better understanding the construct of racial respect within the context of Black children's health outcomes, and within the context of health outcomes for Black populations overall would provide even more support for a critical imagining of what reparations could look like at a local or even national scale in this country, as higher scores of racial respect have been found to be linked to more prosocial behaviors and positive health outcomes (Briggs et al., 2015; Degruy et al., 2005).

Understanding how negative perceptions of Black students are linked to Black ECE professionals' level of racial respect provides a port of entry for behavioral health interventions targeted toward *both* the teacher and child, as well as targeted toward both ECE professionals and child. Such interventions would be rooted in an acknowledgement and processing of systemic oppressions as opposed to singling out Black children and pathologizing behaviors that are likely responses to ruptured teacher/student and ruptured ECE professionals/student relationships. Keeping this racialized context in mind, behavioral health interventions would then also be expected to center White supremacy and systemic oppressions as roots of various symptomology in more fundamental ways. Various factors such as rates of pay and systems of organizational hierarchy and power and their implications must also be further examined in efforts to improve professional and student outcomes among Black populations and among the ECE field overall.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to explore the potential relationship between Black ECE professionals' reported levels of racial respect and their perceptions of Black ECE students. This study's sample is underpowered and its findings should be cautiously considered. However, the concepts and findings of this study encourage a more complex examination of racism and its

implications within the ECE context. More nuanced and innovative ways of exploring such phenomena expands our capacity to imagine and develop more effective and relevant interventions.

This study also highlights circumstances for both the ECE professional and the Black children in their care and therefore promotes a more systemic approach to the issues this population faces within the ECE context. Findings in this study not only potentially provide further support for the necessity of Black ECE teachers and professionals in the field, but for the necessity of Black *male* ECE teachers and professionals in particular.

As efforts continue to be made to recruit more Black male ECE teachers and professionals, more attention should be placed on the ways in which Black female ECE professionals perceive and engage with the Black boys in their care. Careful and intentional evaluation and mindful reflections of how Black boys are engaged with compared to Black girls is necessary to identify disparities potentially present in their ECE settings. Then it is possible to actively work to challenge and dismantle such harmful perceptions and behavior toward Black boys, in particular, and Black children altogether. Overall, much more can be gleaned from the construct of racial respect and serves as an opportunity for Black populations and our epistemologies to be centered in intervention design and implementation in ways that Black populations deem necessary.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Demographic Survey Items

Demographic Survey Items

Race: _____

Gender: _____

Professional position: Teacher _____; Program Director _____; Direct Service Provider _____;
Early Learning Coalition Professional _____;
Other (Please input title)_____

Zip code of workplace: _____

If working in a childcare setting, is this setting: center-based _____; or home-based _____

Years of experience in early childhood field: 4 years or less _____; 5-9 years _____; 10 years or more _____

Age group you care for: Infants _____; Toddlers _____; Preschoolers _____; All age groups _____

About how many children are you in the presence of over the span of 1 week? _____

About how many hours per week do you spend in the presence of children? _____

Appendix B: African American Respect Scale-Men (AARS-M) Scale Items

This measure can be found included in the following journal article:

Briggs, H., Kothari, B., Briggs, A., Bank, L., DeGruy, J. (2015). Racial respect: Initial testing and validation of the racial respect scale for adult African Americans. *Journal of the Society for Social Work & Research*, (6)2, 269-303. <http://dx.doi.org/0.1086/681625>.

Appendix C: African American Respect Scale-Women (AARS-W) Scale Items

This measure can be found included in the following journal article:

Briggs, H., Kothari, B., Briggs, A., Bank, L., DeGruy, J. (2015). Racial respect: Initial testing and validation of the racial respect scale for adult African Americans. *Journal of the Society for Social Work & Research*, (6)2, 269-303. <http://dx.doi.org/0.1086/681625>.

Appendix D: Recruitment Script

Recruitment Script

If you are age 18 or older, identify as Black or African American, and work as an early childhood educator or teacher, program director, direct service provider, such as a therapist to children birth to five years of age, professional with the Early Learning Coalition (ELC), or any other kind of early childhood professional who engages with children birth to five years of age, we would like to invite you to participate in a study where we are seeking to explore how perceptions of self and how others perceive you impact relationships, and how various professional roles impact perceptions of self in the early childhood field. This study also seeks to explore your insights on children's behaviors. This study would require that you complete one 15-minute survey online. Thank you for your time and participation!

Appendix E: Consent Form

Consent Form

Informed Consent to Participate in Research Involving Minimal Risk

Information to Consider Before Taking Part in this Research Study

Title: Examining the Relationship between Racial Respect among Black Early Childhood Professionals and their Perceptions of Black Children

Study # _____

Overview: You are being asked to take part in a research study. The information in this document should help you to decide if you would like to participate. The sections in this Overview provide the basic information about the study. More detailed information is provided in the remainder of the document.

Study Staff: This study is being led by Kayla Nembhard, a Master of Science in Public Health student, at the University of South Florida. This person is called the Principal Investigator. Other approved research staff may act on behalf of the Principal Investigator.

Study Details: This study is being conducted at the University of South Florida. This study seeks to explore the following research questions: 1.) What is the relationship between racial respect and Black ECE professionals' perceptions of Black children? And 2.) Might the relationship between racial respect and perceptions of Black children change based on professional role/position, and length of time working in the ECE field? This will be done by asking you to complete a **X**-minute survey online.

Subjects: You are being asked to take part because you identify as a Black or African American individual who is an early childhood education (ECE) professional (teacher, ECE director, direct service provider, or Early Learning Coalition (ELC) provider) who currently works in the ECE field, is English-speaking and engages with children birth to five years of age.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to participate and may stop your participation at any time. There will be no penalties or loss of benefits or opportunities if you do not participate or decide to stop once you start.

Benefits, Compensation, and Risk: We do not know if you will receive any benefit from your participation. There is no cost to participate. There is no monetary compensation. This research is considered minimal risk. Minimal risk means that study risks are the same as the risks you face in daily life.

Confidentiality: Even if we publish the findings from this study, we will keep your study information private and confidential. Anyone with the authority to look at your records must keep them confidential.

Appendix E: Consent Form (con't)

Why are you being asked to take part?

We would like to learn more about the relationship between racial respect and perceptions of Black early childhood students. You are being asked to take part because you identify as a Black or African American individual who is an early childhood education (ECE) professional (teacher, ECE director, direct service provider, or Early Learning Coalition (ELC) provider) who currently works in the ECE field, is English-speaking and engages with children birth to five years of age. Findings from this study will inform various behavioral and public health interventions in the future for this population.

Study Procedures:

You will be taken to an online platform to complete a survey which should take approximately **X** minutes to complete. During the study you will be asked to respond to a series of questions. If you miss a question, you will be reminded to respond to that question.

Total Number of Subjects

About 100 individuals will take part in this study.

Alternatives / Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal

You do not have to participate in this research study.

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study.

Benefits

We are unsure if you will receive any benefits by taking part in this research study.

Risks or Discomfort

This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

Compensation

No monetary compensation will be provided.

Costs

It will not cost you anything to take part in the study.

Appendix E: Consent Form (con't)

Privacy and Confidentiality

We will do our best to keep your records private and confidential. We cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. Certain people may need to see your study records. These individuals include:

- The research team, including the Principal Investigator and all other research staff.
- Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study. For example, individuals who provide oversight on this study may need to look at your records. This is done to make sure that we are doing the study in the right way. They also need to make sure that we are protecting your rights and your safety.
- Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates this research. This includes: the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP).
- The USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and its related staff who have oversight responsibilities for this study, and staff in USF Research Integrity and Compliance.

If completing an online survey, it is possible, although unlikely, that unauthorized individuals could gain access to your responses. Confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. No guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet. However, your participation in this online survey involves risks similar to a person's everyday use of the Internet. If you complete and submit an anonymous survey and later request your data be withdrawn, this may or may not be possible as the researcher may be unable to extract anonymous data from the database.

You can get the answers to your questions, concerns, or complaints.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, email Kayla Nembhard at kenmbhar@usf.edu. If you have questions about your rights, complaints, or issues as a person taking part in this study, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638 or contact by email at RSCH-IRB@usf.edu.

You are encouraged to save or print a copy of this page for your records.

Consent to Take Part in Research

By choosing the appropriate button below, I am consenting to take part in this research study.

Appendix F: IRB Exempt Approval Letter



EXEMPT DETERMINATION

March 14, 2022
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Dear Kayla Nembhard:

On 3/12/2022, the IRB reviewed and approved the following protocol:

Application Type:	Initial Study
IRB ID:	STUDY003957
Review Type:	Exempt 2
Title:	Examining the Relationship between Racial Respect among Black Early Childhood Professionals and their Perceptions of Black Children
Protocol:	• IRB_Protocol_Nembhard_Updated3_10.docx;

The IRB determined that this protocol meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review.

In conducting this protocol, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Please note, as per USF policy, once the exempt determination is made, the application is closed in BullsIRB. This does not limit your ability to conduct the research. Any proposed or anticipated change to the study design that was previously declared exempt from IRB oversight must be submitted to the IRB as a new study prior to initiation of the change. However, administrative changes, including changes in research personnel, do not warrant a modification or new application.

Ongoing IRB review and approval by this organization is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities impact the exempt determination, please submit a new request to the IRB for a determination.

Institutional Review Boards / Research Integrity & Compliance

FWA No. 00001669

University of South Florida / 3702 Spectrum Blvd., Suite 165 / Tampa, FL 33612 / 813-974-5638

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