

COLOR CONNOTATIONS AND SELF-CONCEPT
IN BLACK PRESCHOOLERS

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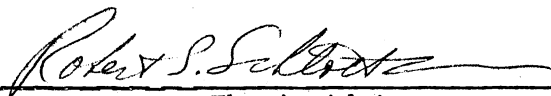
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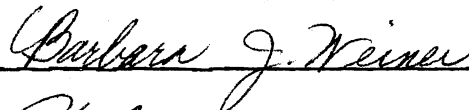
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In American society, white has always exemplified "purity" and goodness, whereas black has connoted evil and bad. This phenomena is portrayed in our language usage. It is also seen in the movies and on television programs. The heroes wear white clothes and ride white horses. Not only do heroes wear white but so do brides as a symbol of purity. The villians wear black clothes and ride black horses. The widows wear black which is a symbol of death and sorrow.

In religion, these same dichotomies exist. Angels are portrayed as good and always appear in white. Witches are portrayed as bad and are always depicted wearing black. Sins are black and one gets washed "whiter than snow" when he repents.

When Americans brought over the first slaves, they were thought to be possessed by devils because they were black. White became the symbol of beauty and black became the symbol of savagery, filth and ugliness. Later black people began to assess self-esteem, positive self-concept and worth in the community according to the color of the skin. Those blacks that possessed skin color closer to that of the white majority were given more respect and status within the community. The blacks who were at the other extreme were given little of anything. The lighter blacks were not only given the reign in the black community but they were also more mobile than darker blacks. This shows the

importance of color in this society.

The language has words or phrases which give negative definitions like "blackmail", the "black sheep", "a black cloud over my head", "black magic", and "black hearted" are a few. Have these things in this society influenced the young?

Many prominent psychologists feel that there are consequences for the black child in internalizing the unfavorable racial attitudes of the larger society into his own makeup. Bronfenbrenner (1967) stated that the black child feels powerless and feels worthless. At the core of this sense of inferiority is the awareness of being black. Black children, from the age of three, begin to prefer white skin to black and to think of black as ugly, unwanted and bad. They also begin to think of themselves in negative terms. It has been noted that black children learn by age three that skin color is important, that white is desired and black is to be regretted.

The purpose of this investigation was to probe further into the question of what effects these negative definitions of black have on the children in this society. This was done by using children with high and low self-concepts to determine if the self-concept of these black children had any effect on how they would perceive the colors "black" and "white".

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Color Connotation in Preschool Children

Presently, there have been two types of studies done with regard to racial color. There have been those that have been used to assess self-esteem and self-concept, as well as one's attitude toward their racial group. The second, more recent type are those that have been used in color connotation studies. These studies have been conducted to determine what effects the "white is good" and "black is evil" phenomena has had, if any, on racial groups.

One of the foremost studies using color to study race awareness was done by Morland (1958). In this study, it was shown that black preschool children prefer to play with whites. On racial self-identification, the white preschoolers were more likely to acknowledge that they looked like one of the white children than the black subjects were to say that they looked-like one of the black children. About one-half of the black children said they would rather be one of the black children, while three-fourths of the whites would rather be one of the white children. Morland concluded, since black subjects tended to prefer and to identify with members of the other race, that this can mean that the overall effect of American society on very young children has been to influence them to develop a "bias" for whites. American society as it is teaches that it is better to be white than black.

Thus young blacks learn to prefer and to identify with the dominant race. On the basis of these results, he suggests that as the socio-cultural milieu in America changes, awareness will change. He further suggests that when the mass media start to use different races in advertisements, dramatic performances and the like on the same basis, a new image of "Negroes" in American society should emerge.

Ward and Braun (1972) investigated the interrelation of self-esteem and racial preferences in black children. They tested the following hypotheses: First, those subjects with lower self-concepts will be more out-group oriented than those with higher self-concepts. Second, they felt that middle class children would make more white preferences than low class children. Third, they felt that a significant difference would be found between boys and girls in their choice of the black and white puppets on each of the racial preference statements. That black males would show greater white preferences than would black females. They administered the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Test to assess self-esteem and used an adaptation from the Clark and Clark (1952) dolls test to assess racial preference. The experimenters used 60 black children between the ages of seven and eight. They demonstrated a relationship between self-esteem and racial preference. Those who made more black color preferences had higher self-concept scores than those subjects who made fewer black preferences. However, the hypothesis that middle class children would make more white preferences than lower class children was not supported and there was no significant sex differences.

Storm (1970) found that black children showed greater distortion of race image than did white children. The black children also made

significantly more frequent "other race" friendship selections than did white children. Her findings were similar to those of earlier studies.

The previous studies have been concerned primarily with using color as a determinant of racial awareness, racial acceptance, racial preference, and racial recognition. However, these studies do not deal specifically with how blacks come to feel inferior to and to reject their own race which in essence is rejecting the color black and accepting the color white. There have been such studies done which do deal with color connotations.

Williams (1964) did a study to explore systematically the connotative meanings of color names of white and black college students. His study showed that black and white subjects perceived the color name "white" as more positive in evaluative meaning than the color name "black". This study seems to have spurred many more in this realm.

Renninger and Williams (1966) conducted another study with color connotations and racial awareness. They did their study with 129 white children from Winston-Salem, North Carolina. The children ranged in age from three to five years old and from average to better than average socioeconomic backgrounds to below average backgrounds. They asked the children questions about black and white objects presented on picturecards to determine the degree of the subjects awareness of the connotative meanings of black and white. The experimenters also used a picture puzzle for determining the subjects degree of racial awareness. A child was said to be "aware" of race if he could correctly identify both "white" and "Negro" or "colored" persons during

a puzzle interview. The results of their study showed that white children learn the evaluative meanings of black as bad and white as good during their preschool years. They felt that race awareness is also developing at this time. The study concludes that it would also seem logical that these meanings could generalize to groups of people designated as white and black.

Stabler, Johnson, Berke, and Baker (1969) used a completely different approach than did anyone in previous studies. They used black and white boxes instead of pictures of black and white children as the earlier studies had done. The children were shown 40 objects one at a time such as a rubber snake, a nickel, plastic vomit, a lollipop, a spider, a harmonica, a ring, bubble gum, and a cigarette butt. They first had to evaluate the "goodness" of the object by placing it in front of either a painted smiling face or the painted frowning face. In the second part of the study, they were asked which of two boxes, a black one and a white one, contained the object they had previously seen. Only 22 objects which had elicited a clear evaluation response from the children were used in the second part of the study. The subjects usually guessed that the "good" things such as the lollipop, nickel, bubble gum, comb, and the yo-yo were in the white box and the "bad" things such as the rubber snake, plastic skull, scorpion, crawfish, and rat were contained in the black box. Black children and white children responded alike, yet the black children associated white with good and black with bad less consistently.

Stabler, Johnson, and Jordan (1971) changed the procedures somewhat to link their findings with self-concept. They used the statements coming from black and white boxes. The statements were negative and

positive statements. The positive and negative statements came from the speakers. The children were asked which speaker the statement came from. Here once again color made a difference. The children chose the white speaker as the source of positive statements more often than the black box. Black children selected the white box more frequently as the source of the negative statements than the white children. Statements most frequently associated with the white box were "I am good", "I like myself", and "I'm glad I'm here". Those significantly associated with the black box were "I am stupid" and "I am the loser". However, when they were asked in a post interview which box they liked the most, 81% of the white children referred to the white box and 52% of the black children pointed to the black box.

In another study, Farber and Schmeidler (1971), both black and white subjects were used. The subjects were seventh graders in a Bronx junior high school. Subjects were requested to make "line drawings" (a single line that expresses the meaning and feelings evoked by a stimulus word) and semantic differential responses to seven color names, including black and white. The results from this study tended to replicate Williams (1964) findings for white but not for blacks, which implies that white attitudes tend to be the same regardless of the region of the country and that their attitudes have changed little since the 1960's. The differences between the blacks in this study and the Williams study suggest that blacks are becoming more positive toward the color black.

Stabler and Johnson (cited by Williams and Stabler, 1973) replicated the black box study and found that race of the experimenter was important. It influenced the black children's responses. When a

white female experimenter was replaced by a black female experimenter, the black children heard more negative self-statements coming from the white box.

Another of their studies, Stabler and Jordan (cited by Williams and Stabler, 1973) was done with three boxes, the standard black and white boxes and a neutral color box, either green or orange. The children were to guess which of the three boxes contained the prize for them. Fifty percent of the time the black children guessed the white box contained the prize, twenty-five percent of the time they guessed the green or orange box. While the white children guessed the white box sixty percent of the time, ten percent of the time they guessed the black box. They guessed the orange box or the green box thirty percent of the time.

CHAPTER III

PROBLEM

Most of the studies done in the past have dealt with black and white children and with the differences between these two groups. However, at this time there are no studies of color connotation in black children who differ in self-concept. Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to establish whether or not there is some relationship between intragroup self-concept and the way black children perceive the colors black and white. This was done by giving the black children the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale. The subjects were placed into two groups (high or low self-concept) according to their scores on this test. Both groups were later placed in the second half of the investigation at which time the color connotations procedure used by Stabler, Johnson, Berke, and Baker (1969) was employed to determine if intragroup self-concept is related to the way black children perceive the colors black and white.

It was hypothesized that those black children with low self-concepts would perceive the black box more often as containing the "bad" objects and the white box more often as containing the "good" objects. Conversely, it was hypothesized that black children with high self-concepts would perceive the black box as more often containing the "good" objects and the white box more often as containing the "bad" objects.

CHAPTER IV

METHOD

Subjects

Forty black boy and girl preschoolers from the Ardmore preschool ages five and six were given the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale. The subjects were divided at the median into two groups, a low self-concept group and a high self-concept group with an equal number of boys and girls in each group. Table 1 gives the means and ranges of scores for high and low self-concept boys and girls.

Materials

The Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale (The Way I Feel About Myself) is a self-report instrument designed for children. It is a scale that was designed primarily for research on the development of children's self attitudes and correlates of these attitudes. The items are written as simple declarative statements, e.g., "I am a happy person". At least half of the statements are negative in content in order to reduce effects of acquiescence, but negative terms such as "don't" were avoided as much as possible, in order to reduce confusion of a double negative. The scale is an 80 item scale which takes 15 to 20 minutes to administer. However, there are no time limits. It must be administered orally and individually for children.

TABLE I
MEANS AND RANGES OF SCORES FOR HIGH AND LOW
SELF-CONCEPT BOYS AND GIRLS

	Boys		Girls	
	Mean	Range	Mean	Range
High SC	63.4	52-73	64.8	54.76
Low SC	41.3	35-46	41.6	39-46

in preschool (see Appendix A for additional information). There were 38 objects such as a spider, bubble gum, a cigarette butt, etc. (see Appendix B) used in the present study. These objects are similar to the ones used in the Stabler, Johnson, Berke, and Baker (1969) study and were chosen because of their perceived positive or negative affect quality. In addition, there were two 6" x 7" x 9" green wooden boxes, one with a yellow smiling face pasted on one of its sides, and one with a yellow frowning face. Two additional 6" x 7" x 9" wooden boxes, one black and one white, were used. The latter boxes were nailed closed and contained an assortment of objects inside so that the objects would tumble freely when the boxes were rotated.

Procedure

The study was divided into two parts. Each child was tested individually on two separate occasions. In the first part, each child was presented with 38 objects one at a time. The children were asked to indicate their judgment of the objects by placing them either in the box with the painted smiling face or the box with the painted frowning face. Weights were assigned to the objects according to the responses of the subjects. If a subject spontaneously placed an object before the smiling or frowning face, it was scored +2 or -2, respectively. If the experimenter had to question the child about the positive or negative affect quality, the object was scored +1 or -1. Finally, if a child changed his mind about a judgment, the object was scored as 0. The experimenter added three points to each score to facilitate statistical analysis. Therefore, a score of 1 represented a very negative evaluation, a score of 2 represented a negative evalua-

tion, 3 represented a neutral evaluation, 4 a positive evaluation, and 5 a very positive evaluation. Objects were eliminated or retained according to their position on this scale. If their average value over all subjects was greater than 2.80 but less than 3.20 they were eliminated. Objects were also eliminated if significant differences between boys and girls, or between high and low self-concept groups, in the "goodness" rating of that object were found. A 2x2 analysis of variance (self-concept by sex) was performed on the ratings obtained from each object and the .10 level of significance was used. From these procedures 13 "good" and 9 "bad" objects were retained (see Appendix C).

Approximately 1 or 2 days later, the children were tested individually in the second part of the study. The black and white boxes were placed on a table before the child. The experimenter said to each child:

I would like to play a guessing game with you. Each of these boxes has a number of things in them (experimenter turns each box several times to provide auditory cues to the child). There are different things in each box. Tell me which box has one just like this (the experimenter holds up the objects one at a time).

All 38 objects were used in the second part of the study, but only those that met the above criteria were included in the statistical analysis. After each child's responses, the experimenter said "okay" with minimal affect. After testing, the child was given a lollipop and asked not to discuss the game with the other children.

Design

The percentage of "good" objects and the percentage of "bad" objects placed in the black box was obtained for each child. The data were then analyzed by means of a 2x2x2 analysis of variance with

repeated measures on the object value factor. The factors that were involved were self-concept (high or low), sex, and object value ("good" or "bad"). The basic score involved was the proportion of "good" objects and "bad" objects placed in the black box by each subject.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The means and standard deviations for subjects in each of the groups are shown in Table II, and results of the analysis of variance are presented in Table III. It can be seen that there was a significant interaction between self-concept, sex, and object value ($F=7.796$, $df.=1/36$, $P<.01$). Since it is difficult to determine what the three-way interaction means, tests of simple main effects were performed in which differences between the percentage of positive objects and the percentage of negative objects placed in the black box were compared for high self-concept boys, low self-concept boys, high self-concept girls, and low self-concept girls (Table IV). For low self-concept girls, the percentage of negative objects placed in the black box was significantly greater than the percentage of positive objects placed in the black box ($F=4.287$, $df.=1/36$, $P<.05$).

A major assumption of the present study is that black children would generalize the color black to black American and the color white to Caucasian and that their attitudes toward these races would be indicated by their decision. The procedure used in the present study involved the use of black and white boxes and was adopted from the Stabler, Johnson, Berke, and Baker (1969) study. It was designed to provide a structured yet disguised measure of the children's attitude toward race. It was therefore hypothesized that black children with

TABLE II
 PERCENTAGE OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE OBJECTS
 BEING PLACED IN THE BLACK BOX FOR HIGH
 SELF-CONCEPT (HSC) AND LOW SELF-
 CONCEPT SUBJECTS (LSC)

		Positive		Negative	
		Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Boys	HSC	50.02	15.067	55.56	18.894
	LSC	65.39	23.000	54.45	21.237
Girls	HSC	55.36	25.826	46.67	24.454
	LSC	43.09	19.235	57.78	18.735

TABLE III
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE SUMMARY TABLE

Source	df	MS	F
Between subjects	39		
Sex (A)	1	633.45	1.642
Self-concept (B)	1	214.35	.5556
AB	1	320.97	.8320
Error between	36	385.77	
Within subjects	40		
Goodness value (C)	1	.44	.0018
AC	1	162.41	.6453
BC	1	59.59	.2368
ABC	1	1961.99	7.796*
Error within	36	251.66	

*P<.01

TABLE IV
SIMPLE MAIN EFFECTS SUMMARY TABLE

Source	SS	df	MS	F
Goodness value for high self-concept females	377.9	1	377.9	1.50
Goodness value for low self-concept females	1078.8	1	1078.8	4.287*
Goodness value for high self-concept males	153.29	1	153.29	.60911
Goodness value for low self-concept males	598.42	1	598.42	2.378
B x Subj. within grp.		36	251.66	

* $P < .05$

high self-concepts would view the color black as more positive than white, while black children with low self-concepts would respond in the reverse direction. These hypotheses were only partially confirmed. For low self-concept girls, the data was significant in the predicted direction in that they placed a lower percentage of positive objects in the black box. For high self-concept girls, the differences were not statistically significant although they were in the predicted direction. These findings are consistent with those of Ward and Braun (1972) in which children who made greater black preferences tended to have higher self-concepts than those who made fewer black preferences. According to these investigators, personal pride is essentially the expression of group pride. It appears that the low self-concept girls in the present study do not express self-love and consequently do not express pride for their group. Females generally are more likely to rely on environmental cues (are more field dependent) than males (Witkin, Lewis, Hertzman, Machover, Meissner, and Wapner (1954), but it may be that this tendency is more likely to be found in low self-concept girls. Logically, it would seem that girls who view themselves negatively would be more likely to respond to general societal expectations and would more likely conform to the stereotypic conceptions of black as "bad". However, it is difficult to say at this time whether these children have a negative feeling toward the black racial group and therefore experience negative feelings toward themselves or vice versa.

The result for boys did not support the hypothesis. In the present study, the high self-concept boys tended to place more negative objects in the black box and more positive objects in the white box,

although the differences were not statistically significant. For low self-concept boys the mean differences were in the reverse direction, but were also non-significant. The fact that the results for boys tended in a direction opposite to prediction suggests a need for future research in this area.

Although it is felt that future research can focus on the possible differences within the boy group, there may have been some factors in the present study that could have contributed to these findings. The self-concept measure that was used may not have been an adequate measure for preschool children, thus not giving a true picture of the self-concept. The construct, self-concept, at this early age may not be stable enough to use as a factor and thus caused the findings to be as earlier stated. Also, the teachers report that the girls tended to be "smarter" than the boys used in this study. This may be an important factor, since a certain amount of intelligence was required to be able to comprehend the self-concept scale as well as to follow the directions on the color connotations test.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY

Twenty black male and twenty black female subjects were used to investigate the relationship between self-concept and the perception of the colors black and white. All 40 subjects were given the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale (The Way I Feel About Myself). This scale was used to assess self-concept of the subjects. They were divided into 4 groups according to their scores on the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale. The subjects were divided into high self-concept males, high self-concept females, low self-concept males, and low self-concept females.

The subjects were later brought back for an evaluation of objects. The subjects were seated facing the experimenter. Each subject was brought in individually. They were presented with 38 objects one at a time. Each child indicated their judgment of an object by placing the object either in a box painted with a smiling face, or a box painted with a frowning face.

Weights were assigned to the objects according to the responses of the subjects. Later a black box and a white box were placed on a table and each child was asked to determine which box contained the object placed before him. After this part of the test, each subject was given a lollipop and told not to talk to anyone about what had happened during the testing.

The data were analyzed by a 2x2x2 analysis of variance with repeated measures on the object value factor. A significant interaction effect was found and a simple main effect test was performed.

It was found that the percentage of negative objects placed in the black box was significantly greater than the percentage of positive objects placed in the black box for low self-concept girls. No significant differences were found for high self-concept girls, high self-concept boys, or low self-concept boys. The findings in this study are difficult to interpret at this time because of their nature and the lack of previous studies of this type.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY TEST INFORMATION

The Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale was standardized on 4 third-grade classes, 4 sixth-grade classes, and 4 tenth-grade classes in a large school system. A cross section of socioeconomic levels was represented by choosing several different elementary schools within the community. Bright, slow and average classes participated from the high school. This group had a 140-item scale administered to them.

The statements were classified by three judges into two groups, adequate (high) or inadequate (low) self-concept. At this time repetitive items which were included to estimate consistency were eliminated, and the Lie scale was set aside to be scored separately. One hundred of the items were left (95 of which were classified and thus leaving 5 which were kept, yet their direction was not determined).

The scoring for this sample showed no significant sex differences. No significant differences were found for children in the third and tenth grades, but children in the sixth grade obtained significantly lower scores than children in the other grades. Split-half reliability was estimated using the data obtained from the original standardization group. The Kuder-Richardson Formula 21 was employed and coefficients ranging from .78 to .93 were obtained for different grades.

The Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale has been shown to

have content validity and construct validity. The test constructors tried to build content validity into the scale by defining the universe to be measured as the areas about which children reported qualities they liked or disliked about themselves. The construct validity study was conducted during the initial standardization. The scale was administered to 88 institutionalized adolescent females with a mean age of 16.8 and a mean I.Q. of 70. They scored lower than the normal females of the same chronological age or normals of the same mental age. Other studies showed that the lowered scores of the female retardates arose from the fact that they were institutionalized rather than from mental retardation per se. This is suggested by Mayer (1965) who reported normal mean scores for his Special Education classes. Institutionalized retardates manifested significantly more negative self-attitudes than non-institutionalized retardates in the Gorlow, Butler, and Guthrie (1963) study.

APPENDIX B

LIST OF OBJECTS USED IN TEST

1. band-aid
2. dog
3. watch
4. comb
5. car
6. lollipop
7. green creepy crawler
8. bracelet
9. gun
10. worm
11. rat
12. knife
13. airplane
14. yellow spider
15. nickel
16. marble
17. matches
18. snake
19. pencil
20. caps
21. lizard
22. octopus
23. plastic toilet
24. ring
25. necklace
26. scissors
27. cigarette butt
28. razor blade
29. skull
30. tin can (crushed)
31. dirty tissue
32. yo-yo
33. harmonica
34. flower
35. dice
36. bubble gum
37. balloon
38. trophy

APPENDIX C

MEAN RATING AND F VALUES GIVEN OBJECTS

BY SUBJECTS

Objects	Boys		Girls		SC	F value	
	HSC	LSC	HSC	LSC		Sex	Sex x SC
1. dog	34	44	26	38	3.463*	1.402	.0286
2. snake	30	26	22	22	.099	.891	.099
3. nickel	50	34	50	45	8.119***	2.228	2.228
4. lollipop	50	38	46	50	2.133	2.133	8.533
5. skull	22	26	14	19	.655	1.820	.008
6. bracelet	46	42	30	38	.1273	3.185*	1.1465
7. gun	46	37	22	26	.213	10.355	1.427
8. car	46	38	34	46	.1429	.1429	3.5714*
9. tin can	26	27	22	22	.005	.513	.008
10. watch	50	44	34	46	.3233	1.7606	2.9105*
11. yellow spider	26	30	14	19	.6195	4.0456*	.0076
12. green crawler	26	30	14	18	.486	4.38**	0.0000
13. octopus	26	42	18	23	2.149	1.204	.1999
14. balloon	42	46	47	50	.9169	1.557	.0187
15. knife	46	38	30	30	.4494	4.0495*	.4494
16. scissors	26	26	26	25	.0054	.0054	.0081
17. necklace	42	45	42	42	.0887	.0887	.0887
18. toilet	50	42	38	30	2.319	5.217**	0.0000
19. yo-yo	50	42	46	42	2.16	.24	.24
20. airplane	50	46	34	38	0.000	6.000	.6667
21. cigarette butt	17	23	20	17	.010	.0101	.093
22. harmonica	50	46	38	46	.231	2.08	2.08
23. caps	42	30	30	30	.891	.891	.891
24. razor blade	26	27	22	27	.2696	.1198	.1198
25. marble	42	34	31	34	.1615	.7819	.7819
26. matches	30	26	26	22	.3285	.3285	0.0000
27. ring	46	41	45	42	.724	0.000	.045
28. band-aid	46	34	40	35	5.870**	.504	.507
29. pencil	42	34	42	34	1.798	0.000	0.000
30. tissue	26	30	25	19	.0261	.0399	.6527
31. flower	46	42	46	34	2.48	.6201	.6201
32. dice	37	37	42	38	.2330	.2330	.0865
33. trophy	46	42	42	42	.1581	.1581	.1581
34. worm	34	30	18	22	0.0000	3.7700	.4188
35. comb	50	38	38	43	.507	.507	2.9777
36. bubble gum	46	46	42	38	.1639	1.475	.1639
37. rat	38	30	18	26	0.000	3.770*	1.675
38. lizard	30	26	26	22	.2968	.4915	.0073

*P<.10

**P<.05

***P<.01

VITA ^γ

Vyckye Louise Cox

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: COLOR CONNOTATIONS AND SELF-CONCEPT IN BLACK PRESCHOOLERS

Major Field: Psychology

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