Barbie and her effects on children and young Mexicans' choices: A preliminary study of the natives' identity

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Abstract

The effects of sex, age and order on racial identification, preferences and stereotypes were measured in this study. Three hundred and fifty eight participants from the Mexican Gulf Coast were divided by age and sex. Two age groups: four and five years old and nineteen and twenty years old, and two sex groups consisted of one hundred and seventy six women and one hundred and eighty two men. An instrument with the image of three dolls were presented to them: the prototype Barbie doll, the Barbie Mexican doll and the Anabella doll. Previously, a replica of the Kenneth and Kenneth study1 was made in Mexico in which it was found that Mexican children prefer to play with white dolls and attribute characteristics such as evil to black puppets CONAPRED.2 In this study, differences in racial identification were found according to the age of the participants. On the other hand, the wrist that most liked the participants is the prototype Barbie, was chosen by 44% of the sample studied.

Introduction

Although throughout centuries the Mexican history of social relations has been colored by the color of the skin, this same fact has been the source of public denial.[3] A major cause of this development has been the conquest that this country has experienced since the early 15th century. While most of the countries in the world have experienced invasions, which involved taking away their resources, some of them experienced the conquest which not only consists on taking away resources but also altering the mind of the invaded. It takes place when the invaded becomes fully acculturated and accepts his inferiority in front of the invader, in this particular case even racial inferiority. In the conquest not only the conquerors perceived the subordinate as inferior, but the subordinates themselves accept it. Departing from Fanon's proposition on colonization effects, in this study, three aspects will be addressed: racial identification, preferences and stereotypes. At present, biologists, geneticists and physical anthropologists have concluded that, from the biological point of view, races do not exist.[4] However; races are a social construct in which we attribute certain characteristics to a group of people. Races, racial categories and racial ideologies are those that elaborate social constructions by resorting to the particular aspects of phenotypic variation that were transformed into vital signifiers of difference during European colonial encounters with other cultures.[5] Previous studies have been made to know what we associate these categories with and how our preferences and decisions are impacted by them. However, there is not much information regarding the Mexican case. The problem of racial identification is related to the problem of the origin of racial attitudes in children. Research has been done in the United States to explain how this phenomenon occurs with black and white children.[1]

On the other hand, according to the theory of social identity[6,7] people can maintain their "self-esteem" in part, by identifying with certain groups by believing that these groups to which they belong are better than others.

Furthermore, a replica of Clark and Mamie Kenneth study[1] was recently made in Mexico, where it was found that Mexican children prefer white dolls over black dolls.[2] This surprised the Mexican government authorities and for that reason, they brought to the market a new doll with Latin characteristics. With this, it aims to combat racial discrimination in the country; the image of this doll is used in this study.

For this study it is necessary to know what racial consciousness is and how it is formed. It is defined in a primary sense, as an awareness of itself as belonging to a specific group that differs from other groups by obvious observable physical characteristics, which are generally accepted as racial characteristics[1]. Additionally, human beings, as a form of organization of information, create categories that allow us to attribute characteristics to certain objects just by seeing them. This happens the same way when we categorize ourselves. The social categorization of individuals in groups is the way in which individuals save time and effort by simplifying and ordering perceptions and judgments.[8]

One form of this social categorization are racial stereotypes. These are learned at the age of three or four and even two, according to Plous.[9] From an early age, people realize that society tends to classify people by many factors, one of them is {skin color. And this one, is associated with different characteristics as ambiguous as bad or good. These categorizations can be inherited from the family and transmitted from generation to generation. Stereotypes are like an exaggerated belief associated with a category, whose function is to justify (rationalize) our behavior in relation to that category.[8]

Stereotypes, like other generalizations, serve as mental shortcuts and are probably more applied when people are busy or distracted. Stereotypes can be activated by quickly seeing an image or a word related to a stereotyped group and can influence attitudes and behavior.[9]

Method

Participants and settings

Participants were randomly selected from elementary and college levels from areas described by official Government Agency identified as INEGI[10] as living overall in 62.2% below poverty level and 70% with no social security.[11]

Given that children socialization and identity acquisition occurs as early as 4 years old, and that acculturation by external agents where individuals have already developed their identity is more clearly shown at college level, the samples of this preliminary study were selected from these groups. Three hundred and fifty-eight people participated in two different age ranges. In each age group there were 179 participants. The first group was made up of children of 4 and 5 years of age, and the second, by university students of 19 and 20 years of age. The participants were from the city the coast of the Mexican Gulf. The children of 4 and 5 years were found in a park and two children's gardens in the city center. On the other hand, the participation of 19 and 20 year-old students from 3 different public universities was requested.

As a quasi-hypothesis and stemming from the contribution of Fanon[12] in his book of the White Skins and White Masks which states that

Every colonized people—in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality—finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle.

Thus, we depart from this to explore to what extent this Fanon's proposition is fulfilled in the case of the samples selected to explore the conquest effects as it is measured by choices of white, brunet, or black dolls as Clark and Mamie[1] did it with the study of Black children and their identity formation. We are adding to these, for the purpose of comparison an older group to explore whether the schooling changes or not their attitudes.

Instrument and Procedure

Participants were shown three 30x20 cm cards that contained the image of three different dolls. The first image has the doll presented to the market recently by the National Council to Prevent Discrimination (CONAPRED), the doll is called "Anabella". The second image represents the prototypical doll "Barbie". Finally, the last image is of a Barbie doll model with clothes typically known as Mexican, the "Mexican Barbie". The image of the instrument is shown in Figure 1:

Figure 1: In picture A the doll "Anabella" is shown, in the center is the doll "Barbie" and in the letter C there is the "Mexican Barbie".

In picture A the doll "Anabella" is shown, in the center is the doll "Barbie" and in the letter C there is the "Mexican Barbie".

In the experimental situation, the subjects were instructed to perform a series of choices items choosing one of the images for each item and giving them to the experimenter:

1. Give me the image of the doll that you like the most.

2. Give me the image of the doll that looks like a good person.

3. Give me the image of the doll that looks like a bad person

4. Give me the image of the doll with a nice skin color

5. Give me the image of the doll that looks like a white person

6. Give me the image of the doll that looks like a brunette

7. Give me the image of the doll that is intelligent

8. Give me the image of the doll that is silly.

9. Give me the image of the doll that is rich

10. Give me the image of the doll that is poor

11. Give me the image of the doll that knows how to cook

12. Give me the image of the doll that you think looks more like you

Items 1 through 4 were designed to reveal the racial preferences of the participants; Items 5 and 6 indicate the knowledge of "racial differences"; Items 7 to 11 indicate racial stereotypes; and Items 12 shows racial self-identification.

The order of the Items was taking into consideration the observations of Kenneth and Kenneth.[1] They found in a preliminary investigation that it was very clear that once the children had identified themselves with the doll of color (for the case of their study) they had a marked tendency to indicate preference for this doll and it was not necessarily a genuine expression of your current preference, but a reflection of the ego involved. This possible distortion in the data was controlled only by asking the participants to indicate their preferences first and then to identify themselves as one of the dolls.

On the other hand, the order in which the dolls were presented was considered to avoid having an effect on the responses of the participants for this variable. Therefore, they were presented in six different types of order:

1. Barbie-Mexican Barbie-Anabella

2. Barbie- Anabella- Mexican Barbie

3. Mexican Barbie- Barbie- Anabella

4. Mexican Barbie- Anabella- Barbie

5. Anabella- Barbie- Mexican Barbie

6. Anabella- Barbie Mexican- Barbie

Results

The effects of three variables were analyzed: sex, age and the order in which the dolls were presented in the identification, preferences and racial stereotypes. Regarding sex, there were no great differences in racial identification: in both groups the Barbie doll was chosen as the white person (78.97% women and 68.13% men). Regarding racial preferences, the biggest sex differences were in the question about the wrist that has a "nice skin color"; men chose Barbie (47.25%) and women Barbie Mexicana (43.18%). On racial stereotypes, 40.65% men think that Barbie is more intelligent while 33.52% of women think it; 38.06% of the women indicated that the Mexican Barbie is the smartest. Women think that Barbie is the dumbest (40.90%) while 38.40% of men chose Anabella for that question.

Using Chi Square age differences were shown to be significantly different (p. 000) in racial identification were found, since 44% of the children did not identify Barbie as the white doll while only 7% had that difficulty in the group of 19 and 20 years. In racial self-identification 47% of children identified with Barbie while 45% did

with Barbie Mexicana. In the racial preference 61% of the children chose Barbie while only 43% of the youngsters did; 51% of children indicated that Barbie is "the good person" while only 7% of young people made this choice; 14% of children chose Barbie as "the bad person" in contrast to 46% of the young people who made the same choice and; 57% of the children indicated that the Barbie doll had a nice skin color while only 32% of the youngsters made this choice (the least chosen wrist for this question was Anabella for both groups, 16 and 12% respectively).

In terms of racial stereotypes, 48% of children think that Barbie is the smart doll while only 26% of young people think so, in this group 41% chose the Mexican Barbie as the smartest. As the dumbest, 49% of the children chose Anabella while 59% of the youth chose Barbie. Both groups agree that Barbie is the wealthiest (53% of children and 86% of young people) while 44% of children chose Anabella as the poorest and 60% of young people to Barbie Mexicana. 53% of the children indicated that Barbie is the one who knows how to cook and 83% of the youths pointed to the Mexican Barbie. Finally, no effect of the order in which the dolls were presented in the participants' responses was found.

Discussion

The results in the section of racial identification could be affected in the sample of participants of four and five years of age due to some delay in the cognitive and even socio-emotional development of the children. This was observed during the task application: some children answered randomly, others looked before and after choosing an option waiting for the approval of the experimenter. There were also some cases in which the participants responded that the same doll was dark and white, intelligent and silly. The assessment could be improved by including other age samples.

A final observation of this study deserves attention. The color of the skin of the participants could be controlled. And yet, given that the context (Whites were not available) from which the samples were selected. Additionally, the skin color variable of those participating in this experimental task could be controlled for future studies. There was a difficulty in this study to find participants with characteristics of white persons, therefore these data were not included in the analysis.

Conflicts of interest

The authors state and acknowledge that there are no conflicts of interest on any of the issues involved in this research.

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shared their experiences of discrimination based on color of the skin who strengthened the statement attributed to Confucius: There where there is education, there is no discrimination.

Disclaimers

The authors are the sole responsible persons for the statements of this article and acknowledge that there is no responsibility on the part of our educational institutions.

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