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The relationships among racial attitude, racial preference and academic performance in African American children

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THE RELATIONSHIPS AMONG RACIAL ATTITUDE, RACIAL
PREFERENCE AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE
IN AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN

*A THESIS
Presented to the*

*Honors College at Southern University
Baton Rouge, Louisiana*

*In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Honors College Degree*

by

Alberta D. Jones

May 1999

**HONORS COLLEGE
Southern University
Baton Rouge, Louisiana**

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

HONORS THESIS

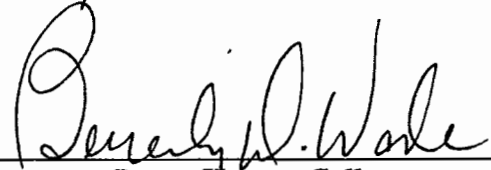
**This is to certify that the Honors Thesis of Alberta D. Jones
has been approved by the examining committee for the thesis
requirement for the Honors College degree in Psychology**



Advisor



Chairman, Honors Advisory Committee



Dean, Honors College

THE RELATIONSHIPS AMONG RACIAL ATTITUDE, RACIAL
PREFERENCE AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE
IN AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN

An Abstract of a Thesis
Presented to the

Honors College at Southern University
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Honors College Degree

by

Alberta D. Jones

May 1999

ABSTRACT

In this study, the racial attitude, racial preference, and academic performance were examined. The purpose of the study was to determine if relationships existed between racial attitude and racial preference, racial attitude and academic performance, and racial preference and academic performance. Racial attitude and racial preference was measured using the Children's Racial Attitude and Racial Preference Test developed by Maxine L. Clark (1996). Teachers provided individual grades in math and reading to determine each child's academic performance. There were 56 African American first-graders from a predominately Black elementary school in this study. The results revealed a statistically significant relationship between racial attitude and racial preference.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author of this thesis wishes to thank all of the persons involved in its completion.

First of thanks to God for the ability to learn. Thanks to all family and friends for support from birth until now.

To Dr. D. Honora and Dr. J. Freeman, thanks for the help in the beginning stages. Much thanks to Dr. R. Rackley for his inspiration, time, support, and dedication to all of the educational endeavors. And a special thanks to Mr. M. Thomas for the motivation to go on when the finish line was near.

This thesis is dedicated to the principal and especially the students who took part in this study. Without them, none of this would be possible

God's blessing to all.

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For over 400 years being Black was viewed as a curse, an undesirable label, and a suffering spot in life. If one could only have a white identity, life would be better. Still today, people continue to feel the same. The attitude is that Whites reap the positive things in life; Blacks must endure the negative. Blacks prefer to be around Whites and shun their own people. These attitudes are passed on to their Black children. The parents do not realize the profound impact their negative attitudes toward self are affecting their children. According to Baldwin (1979), when children experience negative attitudes about their race, they view themselves negatively and may act out aggressively. Thus, there is a need to accurately assess the racial attitudes of Black children and the outcome of this erroneous perception.

Psychologists have used various measures to show the racial attitudes of children. The most popular measure is the doll tests. The pioneers of this study, Clark & Clark (1939,1940) used the doll test specifically to examine racial preference. The results of their research supported the claim that racial prejudice of young Black children led to White preference and Black rejection. That is, Black children preferred to interact and be associated with persons of the European race; they rejected persons and characteristics common to their own Black culture. They also found that racial awareness in children begins around age 3. Even during the Black power movement, research continued to support a White preference in Black children (e. g. Gopaul-McNicol, 1995; Powell-Hopkins & Hopkins, 1985; Taylor, 1966; Teplin, 1976). However, many of the previous researchers did not use a systematic

inquiry to identify reasons why the children viewed the White dolls more positively. It is also important to determine if White preference in Black children is an issue in the dawn of the 21st century.

If racial preference does exist, it is important to identify what factors are related to this phenomenon. Such factors may be racial attitude and academic performance. In 1992, Maxine Clark found racial preference to be related to racial attitudes. In other words, children who had pride in their race and embraced their own values tended to also prefer their own race. Witherspoon, Speight, and Thomas (1997) found that students who embraced African values (strong Black racial attitudes) had higher GPA's. Furthermore, students who felt good about their academic ability also had high GPA's. Finding relationships between racial attitudes and academic performance may lead to a relationship that has not been examined. Racial preference and academic performance may be related. If racial attitudes allow students to feel good about themselves, then it is speculated that students will perform better academically because of their pride in their race.

Racial Attitude

Racial attitude is generally the feelings one has about his or her own race as well as other races. A child with a positive racial attitude will feel good about his or her race. On the other hand, a child with a negative racial attitude does not feel good about his or her race and may have positive feelings toward another race. A child's racial attitude can come from society (how other races view their race) or from one's own race (how other members of a

child's race feel). Using the Racial Identity Attitude Scale (RIAS-B) by Parham and Helms (1981), there are four stages racial attitudes can be classified as: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion, and internalization. Pre-encounter racial attitudes reflect persons denying or devaluing their Blackness. They prefer to think of society as "colorless" or colorblind. Encounter racial attitudes are characterized as an awakening process in which individuals begin to change their racial feelings. Immersion is illustrated when a person identifies his or her racial identity and participates in own race activities. Internalization, the final stage, is the highest level. Individuals feel comfortable with themselves and appreciate their racial heritage. However, the RIAS-B is used to measure racial attitudes of adolescents. M. L. Clark (1996) suggested using the Children's Racial Attitude and Racial Preference test. This test was designed for children in grades 3-6 and grades 1 and 2 if administered individually. The children were classified as having positive own race attitudes or negative own-race attitudes. In other words, children either felt good about their race or felt bad about their race.

Racial Preference

Clark & Clark (1939, 1940) first coined racial preference. It measured a child's preference for his or her race. For instance, a Black preference implies that a Black child prefers to be around and associate with Black people; a White preference suggests he or she wishes to be around and associate with whites.

Burnett and Sisson (1995) suggested that stereotypes of a race influence racial

preference. The researchers, using a doll test, found no support for this hypothesis. However, they did find that racial preference increased with age from 6-9 years. Though it seems the appropriate questions were asked (e. g. Which doll is a nice doll, which doll is good in sports), the children's responses were limited. According to Clark (1996), the doll technique uses a forced-choice format with no response for "no preference". The children had to choose either the Black or White doll. Gopaul-McNicol (1995) addressed this issue in her study of racial identity and racial preference of West Indies children. She used four dolls (two Black and two White) of both sexes as a multiple-choice technique. Yet, children still were not given "no preference" or "I don't know" as optional responses. Consistent with other findings, Gopaul-McNicol did find a White preference in her sample. She also found that there was no difference between the males' and females' racial preference in her study. Contrary to this finding, Plummer (1995) found a difference between girls' and boys' racial attitudes. According to Plummer, females are more likely to display attitudes displaying denial of one's race and not understanding their racial identity than males.

Academic Performance

Academic performance assesses how well a child is performing in school. The common method to measure academic performance is to use students cumulative GPA (Sellers, Chavous, & Cooke, 1998). In the research of Witherspoon & Thomas (1997), they found that high school students with encounter and immersion attitudes were inversely related to GPA. More specifically, students who were experiencing a change in racial feelings and

beginning to identify with their race had lower GPA's. The researchers of this study suggested that Black students view high grades as being White. Therefore, those students with encounter or immersion attitudes take part in fewer "White" activities. The research of Sellers, Chavous, and Cooke (1998) is parallel to Witherspoon and Thomas' study. They found that students with a nationalist ideology, believe Blacks should control their own destiny, generally had lower GPA's. Contrary to this belief, Ward (1990) suggested that Black children who appreciate and identify with their culture would attempt to excel academically due to this being consistent with African ideology.

Past research (Sellers Chavous, & Cooke, 1998; Witherspoon & Thomas, 1997) relating these issues were not successful for many reasons. For instance, Clark & Clark (1939) did not research reasons why a White preference existed in Black children. They suggested that their findings could be a result of the prejudice and inequality of the environment during that time. However, the environment has changed, such as equal opportunities in schools and jobs. Yet a White preference still exists (Powell-Hopkins & Hopkins, 1985). For this reason, academic performance should be considered. Added to the dilemma, the dolls used in their study were not similar enough whereas the only differences in them were skin color and facial features. For example, Clark and Clark (1939, 1940) used a well-groomed manufactured White doll, but they made a Black doll using a piece of coal for the face. Consequently, children's responses may have been due to difference in the overall appearance of the dolls (cleanliness, dress, etc.). With regard to racial attitude and academic performance, very few

have examined this relationship (e.g. Sellers, Chavous, & Cooke, 1998). Of those who did, they only examined such a relationship in high school and college students; no research was found on this issue for elementary students. Furthermore, no research was found that investigated a relationship between racial preference and academic performance.

Purpose of Study

Because past research contained certain limitations, the present research will examine possible relationships among racial attitude, racial preference, and academic performance using different methods. First, the present research will examine if Black children still have a White preference. Unlike previous research, this study will use a systematic inquiry relative to preferences. That is, the children will also have an opportunity to explain their responses. Furthermore, racial attitude levels will be examined to determine whether it is related to racial preference. Finally, academic performance will also be studied to see if it is related to racial attitude, and racial preference.

Hypotheses

Based on the foregoing discussion regarding the relationships among racial attitude, racial preference, and academic performance, the following hypotheses were made:

1. There is a relationship between racial attitude and racial preference.
2. There is a relationship between racial attitude and academic performance.
3. There is a relationship between racial preference and academic performance.

CHAPTER II METHODOLOGY

Participants

The participants of this study consisted of 56 African American first-graders from a Baton Rouge, Louisiana elementary school. There were 27 males and 29 females. The participants ranged in age from 6 to 8 years, average of about 6 years.

Instrumentation

The Children's Racial Attitude and Racial Preference Test. This test was developed by Maxine L. Clark (1996). This 13-item test measured racial attitude and racial preference. The researcher adapted the test by adding two questions, creating a total of 15 items. The original 13-items had a split-half reliability of .57 for racial preference and .79 for racial attitude. The two scores for racial preference and racial attitude had a correlation of .43 and were significant at the .001 probability level (Clark, 1997). Of the 15 items, seven measured racial preference, four positive and three negative attributes. Seven measured racial attitude, and one item measured was used to assess racial self-perception, identifying one's own racial group. Items were presented in storybook form. Students responded by choosing a picture of a Black or White child.

Background questionnaire. This questionnaire, located on the data collection sheets (see Appendix C), was designed to obtain demographic and background information. The following information was obtained: age, gender, amount of time child plays with doll, and kind of doll child has.

Academic performance. Academic performance was measured using each child's math and reading scores. The teachers provided a grade of satisfactory or unsatisfactory for individual classes. (Satisfactory was measured as having a C or better in the subject; grades below C were measured as unsatisfactory.) From the teachers' reports, the two scores were added to obtain a child's total academic performance.

Procedure

Students were interviewed individually by a female experimenter for approximately 10 minutes each. Each experimenter read a standard form of directions to the child. (see Appendix A). During the interview the children were first asked demographic information. Then, the experimenter explained to the child that she would read him or her two stories containing questions about the stories (see Appendix B). After each question the child was told that he or she would be given a chance to respond and explain the response. When the child was posed with a question, the experimenter presented the pictures of two children to choose from. The gender of the child in the picture coincided with the questions except for the question "Which child looks like your racial group". For that question the gender of the child in the picture was the same as the participant. The response and explanation of each question was immediately recorded on the score sheet (see Appendix C). At the end of the story, the child was given an opportunity to ask questions. Children were thanked and given a sticker for their participation. The school principal signed a blanket consent form for all students participating (see Appendix D).

CHAPTER III RESULTS

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson product moment correlations, and t-tests.

The children's racial attitudes and racial preference scores ranged from 0 to 14. The average scores for racial attitude and racial preference were 6.12 and 6.45 with standard deviations of 3.76 and 3.63, respectively (see Table 1 below). Generally, the children were neutral in their racial attitudes. Overall, they demonstrated neither Black nor White racial attitudes. Moreover, they did not show a Black or White preference.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
AGE	56	1	2	1.32	.47
RACIAL ATTITUDE	51	0	14	6.12	3.76
RACIAL PREFERENCE	42	0	14	6.45	3.63

Several correlations were computed using the .05 probability level to determine statistically significant results. There was a statistically significant correlation between racial attitude and racial preference. This finding supported the previous hypothesis that there would be a relationship between racial attitude and racial preference. It had a significant positive correlation ($r=.561$, $p=.01$; see Table 2 below).

Table 2

Correlation between Racial Attitude and Racial Preference

Variable	r	p
Racial Attitude	.561	.01

In other words, a child's racial attitude score tended to increase as the child's racial preference score increased. The remainder of the previous hypotheses that there would be relationships between racial attitude and academic performance and between racial preference and academic performance were not supported. There was no statistically significant correlation for a relationship between racial attitude and academic performance or between racial preference and academic performance. These findings neither confirm nor deny the hypotheses that there are relationships between racial attitude and racial preference and between racial preference and academic performance. An additional correlation was computed to determine if the kinds of dolls children play with are related to their racial attitude or racial preference. These findings were also inconclusive.

Final analyses were conducted using t-tests to compare gender and age groups regarding racial attitude and racial preference. There was no statistically significant difference between males and females in racial attitude or racial preference. Neither was there a statistically significant difference between children age 6 and children over age 6.

CHAPTER IV DISCUSSION

Based on the foregoing discussion, it can be concluded that the African American first-graders did not show a Black or White preference. Two possible reasons are suggested. First, the advancements in society such as equal opportunities in education and decreasing stereotypes have resulted in a decline of racial preference. Another suggestion is that the children's racial preference may not be stable. Although Clark & Clark (1939, 1940) found that racial awareness developed around age 3, Burnett & Sisson (1995) suggested that racial preference changes between the age of 6-10 years. These researchers found that children's racial preference changed from no preference at the age of 6 to a Black preference around age nine (9).

The results further concluded that racial attitude and racial preference are related. This finding supports previous research of authors such as M. L. Clark (1996). In other words, children who had positive attitudes about their race usually preferred people of their race. However, no other relationships among racial attitude, racial preference, and academic performance were found. As Witherspoon & Thomas (1997) suggested, this may be due to Black children viewing high grades as being "White". Another suggestion is that academic performance is independent of racial attitude and racial preference in Black children. Therefore, no relationships would be found. Furthermore, no differences were found in age or gender in regards to racial attitude and racial preference. These findings may have been found due to little variety in age. The participants' age ranged between 6 to 8 years.

Although there was almost an equal number of males and females (27 males and 29 females), gender differences may not be prominent at this age. Both males and females may be victimized by society's views. According to the Social Looking Glass theory of Baldwin (1979), Black children internalize society's views that being Black is negative. As a result, all Black children will have similar racial attitudes and racial preference.

Limitations

There were a few shortcomings in this study. A convenience sampling technique was used. This means the sample was not necessarily representative of the population of African American first-graders. The sample of the present research was taken from a majority Black elementary school. Children in a predominately White or culturally diverse schools were not include. Therefore, it is difficult to determine if the results obtained from this study can be applied to the population. The reliability for the racial preference measure was determined using split-half reliability. In other words, the items within the test were correlated together.

It still does not reveal if the measure is consistent with previously accepted tests. The pictures used in the study could have been another factor that influenced the results. When a child was asked why they made a choice, some children reported they based their decisions on the child's clothing color in the picture. In addition, children of a lighter complexion stated that the White children were closer to their skin color. Therefore, they chose the White children in the pictures as their responses to questions about family and friends (e.g. Which child would you like her to adopt?). From this information, it can be inferred that the children

were focusing more on the color of the child in the picture but not necessarily the race.

Future Implications

For future research in this area, several steps should be taken. First, a sample should be more representative of the population. The sample should include children from a predominately White, an equally mixed, and a predominately Black elementary school. The study should obtain the proposed sample using a sampling technique such as proportionate sampling. Using this technique will ensure that the sample is representative in type of school such as public and private as well as majority Black or White. Secondly, the pictures used as possible responses should be more identical. The only features that should be different are skin color, facial features, and hair texture. Using children of more than two skin colors is also recommended. Furthermore, it is suggested that a longitudinal or cross-sectional study be conducted. Since racial preference changes as a child gets older, one of these methods would not only show this change but also tell if a relationship between racial attitude and racial preference persists. In addition, children's academic performance may be related to racial attitude and academic performance once a child is older. Another suggestion is to use a more reliable measure. A measure with a reliability of .80 or higher is suggested. Perhaps using separate measures for racial attitude and racial preference will result in more accurate results.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A
Standardized Directions for Experimenter to Read

JOHN B. CADE LIBRARY
ARCHIVES DEPARTMENT

READ THIS FIRST: Hi, my name is _____. Today I am going to read you two stories. First I need to ask you a few questions about yourself. (Write the child's name at the top of the paper and ask the background questions.)

Are you ready for the stories? In each story, there are a few questions for you to answer. After you answer the question, tell why you chose the answer. Do you have any questions? Now I will read the first story.

AFTER READING THE STORIES, SAY THIS: Thank you for answering my questions. Do you want to ask me something before you go back to class? Here is a sticker for your help. Now I will take you back to class.

Appendix B
Stories Containing the Questions

A DAY AT SCHOOL

One morning you and your friends are walking to class. You decide to go to the bathroom first. When you get to the door a boy jumps in front of you and blocks the door. Which boy do you think picks on kids?

Since you can't get in the bathroom, you decide to get a drink of water. At the water fountain, a girl won't let you get any water. She keeps drinking water so you can't get to the fountain. Which girl is mean?

You decide to just go on to class. When you get to class you remember you left your colors at home. A girl in your class tells you that you can take turns using hers. Which girl plays fair?

When you are coloring you see a lot of children wanting to play with a boy. Which boy do you think has many friends?

You want to play with him, too. All of you decide to play jump rope. You ask a girl to turn the rope. She says no because she is tired. Which girl do you think is lazy?

Since the girl won't turn the rope, you ask the boy standing behind her. He says yes. He likes to play with other children. Which boy do you think plays with other children?

You decide to play on the swings. You see a child that looks like you. Which child looks most like your racial group?

Another child at the swings tells you that he/she has good grades and acts good in class. Which child is a good student?

A DAY OUT WITH MOM

You and your mother are leaving the grocery store. You have a lot of bags to carry. Two boys ask you if you need help carrying the groceries. Which boy would you like to help carry your groceries?

You tell the boy he can help you. He talks to your mother about you working at the grocery store. But first you must see if you like the manager. Which lady would you like to work for?

The lady says you can start tomorrow. Your mother says its okay, but you will have to walk to the store after school. You agree to ask a policeman for help if you get lost. If these boys were policemen, which one would you like to walk you home?

Driving home your mother says she has a surprise, she wants to adopt a child. Which child would you like her to adopt?

To celebrate a new brother or sister, you can have a party. If you invited all of your friends, which child would you invite to your party?

Your mother also says you can invite a teacher. If these children were teachers, which school teacher would you like to invite?

Before the party, you have to pair up with a child to play games with. Which child would you like to play with?

Appendix C
Data Collection Sheets

Tell Us A Little About Yourself

Directions: Answer the following questions about your background as honestly as possible. Thank you for answering the questions.

How old are you? _____

Sex: M _____ F _____

How often do you play with dolls?

Every day _____ Once a week _____ Once a few times a month _____
 Less than once a month _____ Never _____

What kind(s) of doll(s) do you have at home? Black _____ White _____ Both _____

Which Child Do You Like?

Directions: Looking at the pictures in front of you, indicate which person fits each question. Briefly tell why you chose it. Thank you for answering each question.

Questions (Racial Attitude)	Don't Know	White	Black	Reason Selected
Which boy do you think picks on kids?				
Which girl is mean?				
Which girl do you think plays fair?				
Which girl do you think is lazy?				
Which boy do you think plays with other children?				
Which child looks most like your racial group?				
Which child is a good student?				

Questions (Racial Preference)	Black	White	Don't Know	Reason Selected
Which man would you like to help carry his groceries?				
Which lady would you like to work for?				
If you were lost, which policeman would you like to walk you home?				
If your mother was going to adopt a baby, which baby would you like her to adopt?				
If you were having a party at your house and invited all of your friends, which child would you invite to your party?				
Which school teacher would you like to invite to dinner?				
Which girl/boy would you like to play with?				

Appendix D
Blanket Consent Form

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY AND
REHABILITATION COUNSELING PROGRAM
(504) 771-2990
(504) 771-2082 Fax

November 16, 1998

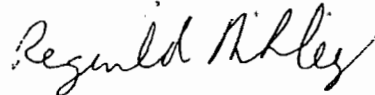
Mr. Lee Dixon
Principal
Polk Elementary School
408 East Polk
Baton Rouge, LA 70802

Dear Principal Dixon:

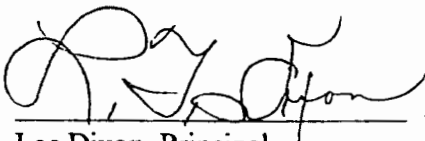
Per our conversation, I am respectfully requesting your permission to allow five of my students to visit Polk Elementary School this week. Ms. Alberta Jones will be the facilitator of this group. The students are interested in working with young children. Ms. Jones is currently working on a class project. One of her requirements for the project is that she has to visit a classroom and observe and interact with children. She needs to interact with 50 first graders for her project.

I would appreciate if you allow my students to visit your school and fulfill her objectives for her class. If you have any questions concerning this matter, please feel free to contact me at (225) 771-2990. If you approve of this request, please sign below. A favorable consideration regarding this request would be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,



Reginald Rackley, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor



Lee Dixon, Principal

Approval

Alberta D. Jones
7624 Maplewood Dr.
Baton Rouge, LA 70812
(225) 356-3891
E-mail: ajones@su.jags.subr.edu

EDUCATION

Southern University and A & M College
Baton Rouge, LA
Pending Degree: B. S., Psychology
Overall GPA: 3.8
Psychology GPA: 3.9

OBJECTIVE

To gain adequate knowledge and experience that will help in my future career as a school psychologist.

EXPERIENCE

1999 School Psychology Intern

Jetson Correctional Center for Youth/Scenic High School
Baton Rouge, LA

Responsibilities include administering the Street Survival Skills Questionnaire (SSSQ), conducting student interviews, reviewing re-evaluations, and assisting the school psychologist with other tasks

1997- Currently Clerical Assistant
Special School District #1-Department of Education
Baton Rouge, LA

Responsibilities include filing and organizing personnel files; typing, faxing, and mailing documents; answering the telephone; and other clerical duties

1996-Currently Psychology Researcher

Department of Psychology
Southern University and A & M College
Baton Rouge, LA

Responsibilities include developing testing instruments, conducting research, analyzing data, and presenting research in conferences

1998 Research Participant

Student Research Opportunities Program

University of Iowa

Iowa City, IA

Responsibilities included conducting and presenting a research project, writing a research paper, and assisting in other laboratory studies

1996-1998 Job Coach

Upliftd, Inc./Supported Employment Agency

Baton Rouge, LA

Responsibilities included assessing the job performance of clients, meeting the transportation needs of clients, and providing written reports of clients' performance

1997 Student Participant

Nubian Pre-Doctoral Academy

Louisiana State University

Baton Rouge, LA

Responsibilities included participating in graduate school preparatory courses, attending graduate school seminars, and conducting and presenting a research project

1996 Tutor

Baton Rouge, LA

Responsibilities included assisting child with homework and helping child to be motivated to learn

1996 Research Participant

Student Research Experience Program

University of Iowa

Iowa City, IA

Responsibilities included assisting in laboratory work such as coding and entering data, recording parent-child sessions, and typing documents

ACTIVITIES

Psi Chi National Honor Society

Golden Key National Honor Society

Honor Students Association

Psychology and Rehabilitation Club
Union Governing Board
Association of Women Students

SKILLS

Proficient in Word Perfect, Microsoft Word, Excel, and Power Point; Ability to compute and analyze statistical computations; Experience in using SPSSX statistics program

RELATED COURSES

Psychological Testing - Experimental Psychology
Educational Psychology - Advanced Statistics
Abnormal Psychology - Introduction to Education
Psychology of Learning - Developmental Psychology
Psychology of the African American Child

APPROVAL OF SCHOLARLY DISSEMINATION

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