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Implicit Racial Identity of Russian Schoolchildren at the Commitment Stage

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Abstract

Introduction. The conditions of the transitivity in today's social space, the interpenetration of different cultures, and the value of racial identity in racially heterogeneous societies such as Russian society, which historically represents two races (Caucasian and Mongoloid), explain the importance of studying racial identity. This study represents the first contribution to issues of implicit racial identity in Russian children. The authors introduce the concept of the commitment stage as a manifestation of interest in other groups, regardless of the consciousness or implicitness of individual identity. The theory of social identity and social categorization by G. Tajfel, J. Turner and the commitment approach in the models of the formation of racial identity by Yu. V. Stavropol'skii and J. Marcia provided a conceptual basis for this study.

Methods. The research is based on an experiment with preferences. The respondents were offered photographs of faces of Caucasian, Mongoloid, and Equatorial races of different genders. They had to choose a partner for interaction in personal or social spheres. The number of choices and the number of categories used by the subjects during the experiment were calculated. Statistical tests and a one-way ANOVA were used.

Results. This section contains data from the experimental study. The sample comprised of 290 individual participants (four age subgroups) aged 7–11 years. There were no significant differences among age subgroups (grades 1, 2, 3, and 4) in terms of racial preferences. Gender effects racial preferences. The leading factor influencing preferences when choosing a partner for interaction by photographic images is his/her gender (same- vs. opposite-gender individuals).

Discussion. The authors interpret the results of choosing a partner for interaction as an indication of implicit identity and note that the criterion of 'racial identity' has an insignificant impact on the process of social categorization by Russian primary schoolchildren. Russian schoolchildren are interested in interacting with children of all races, that is, their implicit racial identity is at the commitment stage.

Keywords

identity, racial identity, implicit identity, in-group, commitment, social categorization, primary schoolchild, group favoritism, identity dynamics, gender differences

Highlights

- ▶ Racial implicit identity does not undergo pronounced age-related changes in Russian children at 7–11 years of age.
- ▶ The structure of Russian children's implicit identity does not contain the criterion of 'racial identity' as the basis for social categorization.
- ▶ Russian children aged 7–11 are at the commitment stage. They are actively interested in interacting with their peers – representatives of different races.
- ▶ The gender factor is important for racial implicit identity in 7–11-year-old children, which determines their preferences of partners of different races for various types of interaction (by photographic images).

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Introduction

In this study, we are based on the theory of social identity and social categorization, developed by G. Tajfel, who generalized the study of the processes of in-group and out-group categorization (Tajfel, 1970; Turner, 2010). Social identity is defined as a part of an individual's self-esteem that results from his/her awareness of belonging to one (or more) social group, as well as an emotional attitude towards this belonging (Tajfel, 1982). Studies of in-group categorization have identified the phenomena of in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination (Tajfel, 1970), which manifest themselves in preferences of in-group representatives and rejection of out-group ones for joint activities.

The construction of social identity involves both conscious social representations and unconscious implicit foundations of identity, which manifest themselves in behavior (Dasgupta, 2013). The explicitness/implicitness of identity is determined by the degree of an individual's awareness of his/her own uniqueness, autonomy, differentiation of emotional and cognitive components of identity and manifest itself in active and to varying degrees conscious participation in activities of in-groups. The personal and social levels of the spaces of explicit and implicit identity are distinguished (Stavropol'skii, 2009).

The issues of social identity, based on the 'race' construct, are among the most relevant in the dynamics of today's processes of globalization of life. Race is a category created or socially constructed to distinguish a group of people on the basis of physical characteristics. Despite scientific evidence to the contrary, humans have got into the habit of considering races as natural and separate constructs. In fact, variations in human are not important for life activities, except for the social sphere (Hud-Aleem & Countryman, 2008). Being the basic anthropological parameter of identity, race is often not in the zone of consciousness, because this parameter is closely associated with socio- and ethno-cultural implicit manifestations of identity, which ensures its place in the 'blind' zone of social categorization, especially where society is racially reconcilable and conflict-free due to the historical features of its development.

The request for a theoretical understanding of the phenomenon of racial identity is stimulated by the processes of transitivity of the today's social space, the commonality of information resources, leading to the escalation of social successes and social problems as well. In the English-language psychological literature racial identity is often considered in terms of discrimination, stereotyping, and the degree of an individual's closeness to a minority culture (Neville, Heppner, & Wang, 1997; Dutton, Singer, & Devlin, 1998; Taylor, 2014; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014; Hindley & Edwards, 2017).

Cognitive social psychology conducts experimental research on the effects of dual or multiple identities on emotional well-being (Coard, Breland, & Raskin, 2001), stress tolerance (Neville et al., 1997; Hindley & Edwards, 2017; Williams, Duque, Wetterneck, Chapman, & DeLapp, 2018), adaptation when changing the country of residence (Berry, 2005), intragroup and intergroup relationships (Tajfel, 1982), and academic success in the case of schoolchildren or students (Hoffman & Lowitzki, 2005).

Numerous empirical studies have suggested various models for the development of racial identity. These models are applied in psychotherapy, education, family, and organization to understand how individuals function in a community. In a review article Hud-Aleem & Countryman (2008) present the following most important models: (a) the models associated with the dynamics and stages of dual (biracial) identity (Carlos Poston, 1990); (b) the model of conscious choice by Rockquemore & Laszloffy (2003); (c) the model of cultural assimilation/acclulturation by Nadal (2011) and Helms (2019); (d) the model related to the stages of the universal and unique nature of identity formation (Hoffman & Lowitzki, 2005), etc.

The presented models interpret racial identity as a dynamic construct based on socio- and ethnocultural foundations with a universal formation algorithm based on the mechanism of interiorization (Vygotskii, 1982), assimilation of the meanings of the reference group and culture, followed by their acceptance/rejection and the search for new groups and cultures as sources of identification categories. The formation of racial identity is carried out in the process of everyday interactions and challenges that individuals face.

Using the example of the formation of racial identity based on the completeness of an individual's assimilation of the culture of a racial minority, Cross (1991) distinguishes the stages of acceptance/binding, awakening/immersion, collision, and indifference. In a modified version of this model by W. E. Cross, Jr., the process of formation of racial identity contains the following three stages: pre-encounter, immersion-emersion, and internalization (Cross, 1991). In the models of racial identity by D. R. Atkinson, G. Morten, S. Sue and racial and cultural identity, the development process includes the following stages: 'coherence', 'dissonance', 'resistance', 'introspection', 'integrative awareness' (Sue, 1998; Okazaki & Sue, 2016). The result is the acceptance of individual cultural uniqueness in the system of values in a multicultural society.

The key construct for the substantiation of the process of the formation of racial identity is the concept of 'commitment' (derived from the English term 'commitment' – duty, obligation, contract, decision, choice, and intention). In the socio-psychological approach to the analysis of the phenomenon of racial identity, commitment is considered as involvement, which indicates willingness for identification choice at the level of motivational and meaning intentions and behavior. This willingness is based on an internal obligation to the reference social group and the courage of decision-making. J. Marcia considers commitment to be a differentiating characteristic of the presence/absence of identification with a social group (Marcia, Waterman, Matteson, Archer, & Orlofsky, 1993). At the commitment stage, interest and sensitivity to other cultures and races appear as a result of accepting individual racial and ethnic identity as positive. English-language

scientific publications present a methodology for studying racial identity and empirical data. Meanwhile, this issue is insufficiently developed in Russian-language psychological publications. Therefore, in our theoretical analysis, we mainly focus on English-language studies.

In a racially diverse society, the process of commitment entails the processes of involvement in the culture of racial majority and the formation of racial implicit identity. Under today's civilizational challenges, accompanied by the interpenetration of cultures, meeting with representatives of other races leads to an alternative choice of the value of racial diversity vs. racist attitudes, if it causes anxiety and concern. Our *aim* is to examine the racial implicit identity of Russian schoolchildren at the commitment stage.

Methods

The research method was an experiment on the social categorization of racial preferences determined by implicit racial identity. The stimulus material consisted of color photographs of faces of boys and girls aged 7–11 years (up to the shoulder girdle, full face) of the Caucasian (CR), Mongoloid (MR) and Equatorial (ER) types. The set contained 18 photos, 6 for each race (3 girls and 3 boys). The respondents could view all the photos simultaneously. They were asked to choose a partner for interaction by answering the questions of personal and social blocks (PB, SB) with 8 questions in each block. The number of elections was unlimited. The number of categories that a child could use in the experiment ranged from 1 (if he/she chose, for example, only MR girls) to 6 (if he/she chose girls and boys of all three races).

The number of questions was determined by the time a subject spent in searching for answers, in accordance with the age norms of perception and thinking. The examination procedure took 9–11 minutes. To reduce the effect of focusing on a specific topic, questions were asked from personal and social blocks by turn. The content of the questions was evaluated by a group of professional psychologists. Therefore, the subjects could carry out social categorization on the basis of 'types of activity' (play, work, study, and communication).

The PB questions relate to interaction with Another in personal space, in the sphere of direct bodily contact, providing Another with an object that has a deep personal meaning for the subject. Examples of the PB questions: "Who would you like to live with in a two-person tent on a camping trip? Who would you like to play the guide with?" The SB questions relate to the sphere of distant interaction with Another in play, entertainment, and study. Examples of the SB questions: "Who would you like to go to play on the court with? Who would you like to invite for your birthday?"

The experiment was carried out in a separate room (familiar to children) in an individual mode. The presentation of the stimulus materials was preceded by several indirect questions aimed at obtaining a subject's primary idea about the experience of direct perception or communication with representatives of another race and ethnic culture (e.g., "Do you like to travel?" and "Have you been abroad?"). All the answers, as well as emotional and verbal manifestations during the examination, were recorded in individual protocols.

To assess the differentiation of social categorization, we calculated the following indices of the number of choices of photographic images by race and gender: (a) the total number, (b) the number of choices for the PB and the SB, (c) number of choices of the same-gender and the opposite-gender partners, and (d) the number of choices for groups of boys and girls.

Results

The study involved schoolchildren in grades 1–4 (7–11-years old) of a comprehensive school, where they studied several subjects in English. All respondents were Russian-speaking representatives of Caucasian race. The table presents the distribution of respondents by grades and genders (Table 1).

Subgroup	1st grade	2nd grade	3rd grade	4th grade	Total
Boys	42	24	34	20	124
Girls	46	34	46	40	166
Total	88	58	80	60	290

We proceeded on the assumption that the dynamics of racial preferences will be observed in children during between 7–8 and 10–11 years of age.

In total, the participants in the experiment made 1415 choices. Half of the choices were in favor of CR representatives. The remaining choices were almost evenly distributed between MR and ER representatives (Table 2).

Group	Race			Total	Children, n	χ^2 (emp)	Significance level, p
	CR	MR	ER				
1st grade	55.1	24.5	20.4	100.0	92	305.8	$p \leq 0.0001$
2nd grade	49.4	25.1	25.5	100.0	58	105.3	$p \leq 0.0001$
3rd grade	49.8	25.8	25.2	100.0	80	148.6	$p \leq 0.0001$
4th grade	50.8	25.2	24.0	100.0	60	128.6	$p \leq 0.0001$
Total	55.1	24.5	20.4	100.0	290	672.2	$p \leq 0.0001$

The χ^2 criterion was used to assess the significance of the statistical 'shift' of preferences towards CR. Comparison of the obtained empirical distribution of racial preference frequencies with theoretical frequencies showed significant differences from a uniform distribution.

Table 2 shows the values of the empirical χ^2 criterion and significance levels (for our calculation method $\chi^2_{cr} = 13.8$, $p < 0.001$).

We obtained similar results in our study for personal and social preferences. The assessment of the influence of the age factor on racial preferences was carried out additionally using a one-way ANOVA, developed by R. Fisher. We tested the working hypotheses about the influence of age on the preferences of boys (a) when boys choose boys or girls in the PB and the SB and (b) when girls choose boys or girls in the PB and the SB. In each case, there was hypothesis H_0 about the absence of the effect of age on racial preferences.

The next stage in the study was to test the hypothesis about the influence of the gender factor on racial preferences. A one-way ANOVA was carried for the number of choices of photographic images of the CR, MR, and ER faces. We found no effect of the gender factor on the preferences of the CR and MR photographs ($F_{CR} = 2.4$ and $F_{MR} = 5.25 < F_{cr} = 5.99$). A one-way ANOVA revealed the difference in the racial preferences of girls and boys in only one case – in relation to Equatorial race (Fig. 1). Compared to boys, girls are much more favourably disposed towards ER ($F_{emp} = 11.4 > F_{cr} = 5.99$; $p = 0.015$).

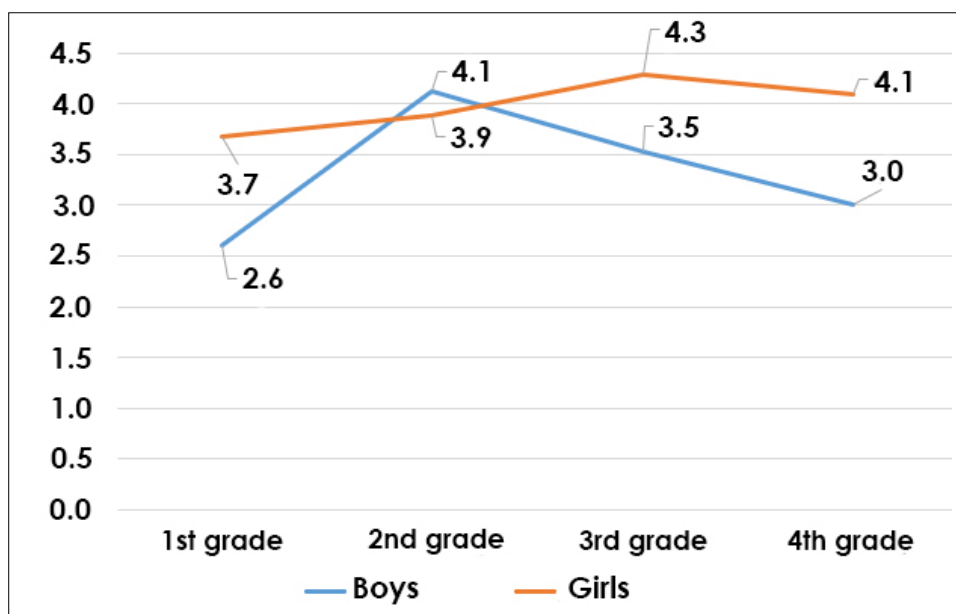
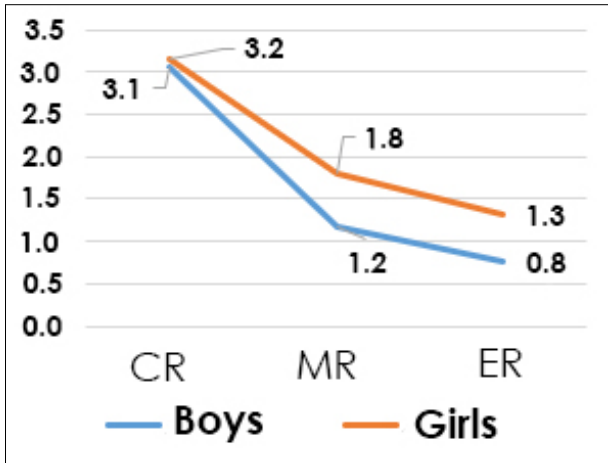
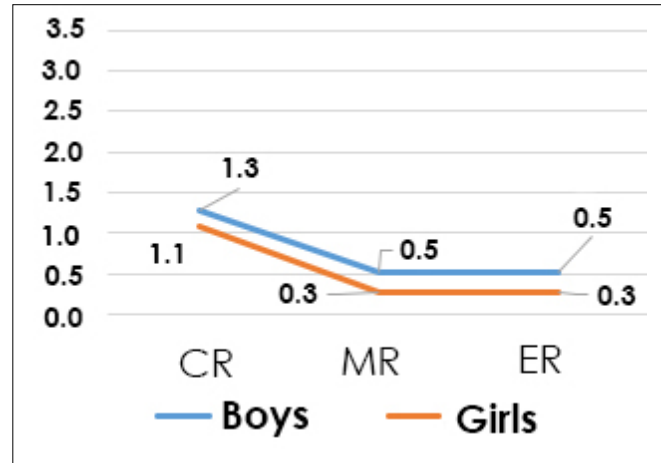


Figure 1. The average number of choices of photographic images representing individuals of Equatorial race (ER) by boys and girls of different ages

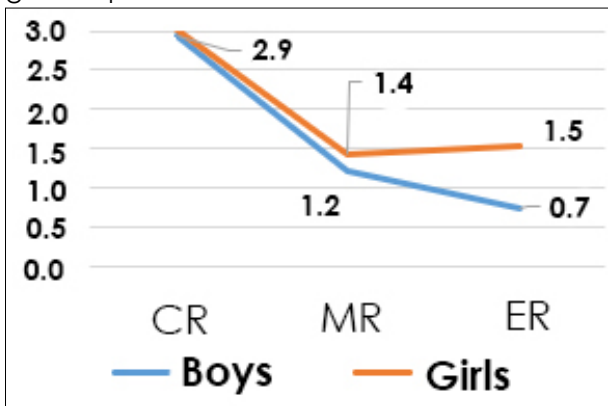
We analyzed the influence of gender on social categorization for each age group, considering the preferences of partners of the same and opposite gender. Significant differences were found between boys and girls in the frequency of choices of photographic images of the opposite-gender individuals of different races (two-way ANOVA; $p = 0.004$). Girls are significantly less likely to choose photographs of boys than vice versa. This trend is observed in both personal and social blocks of interaction. Descending number of choices was as follows: CR, MR, and ER. This trend was observed in each age group. Figure 2 shows the preferences for photographic images of partners of the same and opposite gender among the 1st grade children.



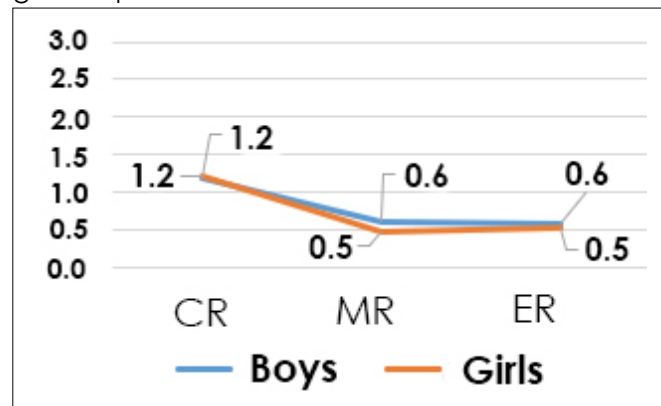
(a) PB (personal block). Choice of the same-gender partner



(b) PB (personal block). Choice of the opposite-gender partner



(c) SB (social block). Choice of the same-gender partner



(d) PB (social block). Choice of the opposite-gender partner

Figure 2. Choices of photographic images of partners of the same and opposite gender among the 1st grade children

Legend: the graphs show the average number of choices of photographic images of individuals of Caucasian (CR), Mongoloid (MR), and Equatorial (ER) races. Personal block and social block represent 12 different interaction situations.

The next stage in the study was to analyze the differentiation of social categorization by race and gender in the groups of boys. The respondents differed in their tendency to choose the same photographic image when answering different questions (only girls, only boys, only one race, or all the races).

The number of categories of photographic images that a child chose characterizes his/her cognitive simplicity/complexity, i.e., the tendency to perceive and interpret the world around him in a simplified form or in a complex one, striving for diversity (Kholodnaya, 2000). The preference of three or more categories indicates the subjects' intention of social activity, flexibility of thinking in the process of social categorization when choosing an in-group. Choosing from 1–2 categories

of photographic images is an indicator of rigidity, cognitive simplicity, or tendencies for intra-group favoritism and out-group hostility (Turner, Brown, & Tajfel, 1979).

The results indicated that, on average, 4.0 % of the subjects chose 1–2 categories out of 6 possible. Figures 3 and 4 show the diversity/narrowness of social categorization in choosing a partner for interaction in groups of boys and girls.

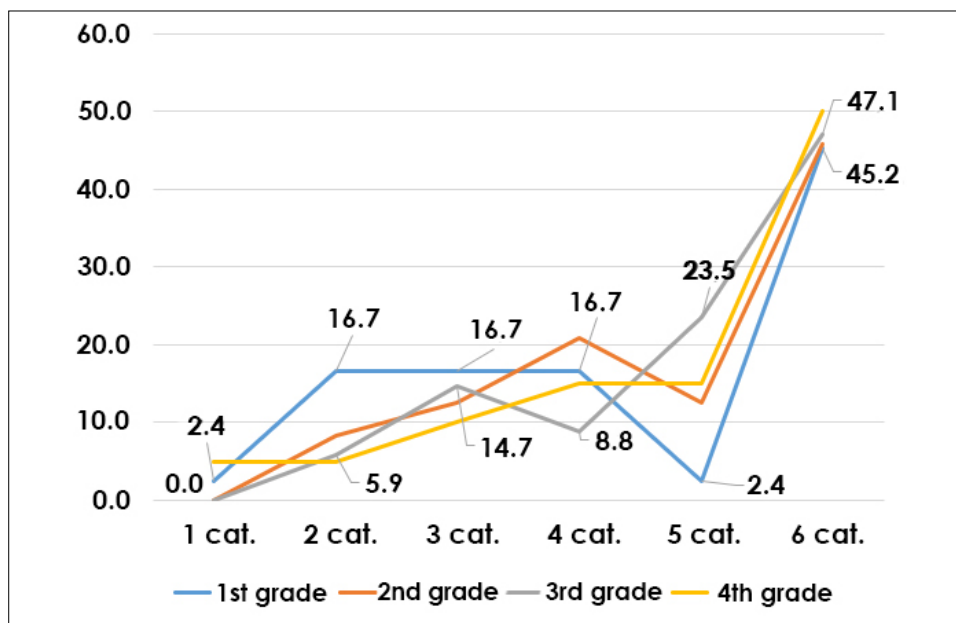


Figure 3. Choices of photographic images of different categories by boys in grades 1–4 (% of the number of boys in each grade)

Legend: on the graph, the number of categories of all the choices made is designated as '1 cat.', i.e., a respondent preferred a partner of the same gender and race for all the interactions; '6 cat.' a respondent preferred partners of both genders and all three races. Grades 1 and 3 are numbered for easy orientation.

The way the boys chose the categories of the photographic images was typical for all the examined grades. The use of categories distributed as follows: rare choice of one category – 2.4–5.0 %; choice of two categories – from 5.0–5.09 to 16.7 %; choice of three categories – 10.0–16.7 %; choice of four categories – 8.8–20.8 %; choice of five categories – 2.4–23.5 %. About half of all boys (45.2–50.0 %) chose six categories of photographic images. Only 1.8 % of boys demonstrated the tendency to group favoritism, i.e., a rigid choice of representatives of their gender and their race.

The way girls chose the partners of different categories of gender and race was also quite typical for all the examined grades. In each grade, an approximately equal number of girls preferred two (from 2.2–5.0 to 6.5 %) or three categories (14.7–17.5 %). Two girls in the 2nd grade (1.5 % of all girls) chose only CR girls for different types of interaction.

Most girls in each grade chose their partners from four or more categorical groups. The use of categories distributed as follows: choice of four categories – from 20.6 to 42.5 %; choice of five categories – from 8.8 to 23.9 %; and choice of six categories – from 20.0 to 50.0 %. In the

4th grade, there was a distribution of choices of partners from different categories. The maximum number of girls (42.5 %) chose representatives of only four categories; these were always girls (CR, MR, and ER), and rare choices of boys of CR (1–5 choices) and MR (0–2 choices) out of six possible ones (1–3 choices). The 2nd-grade girls showed interest in partners of all six categories.

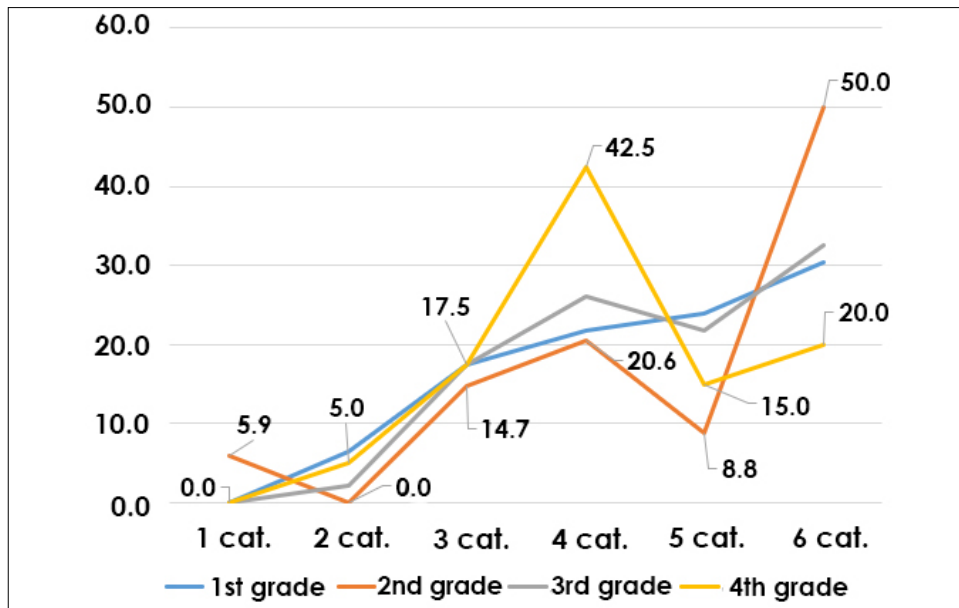


Figure 4. Choices of photographic images of different categories by girls in grades 1–4 (% of the number of girls in each grade)

Legend: on the graph, the number of categories of all the choices made is designated as '1 cat.', i.e., a respondent preferred a partner of the same gender and race for all the interactions; '6 cat.' a respondent preferred partners of both genders and all three races. Grades 2 and 4 are numbered for easy orientation.

Comparison of the obtained data on the choices of boys and girls clearly indicate that starting from the 1st grade boys demonstrate the persistent desire to be included in the in-group of persons differing in their gender and race. Girls show restraint and are oriented towards a limited number of individuals. In each grade there are several girls and boys who are wary of those of the opposite gender or race.

Discussion

The analysis of racial implicit identity in Russian schoolchildren at the commitment stage showed several patterns of social categorization. We defined implicit identity by the subjects' inclination to possible in-group relationships with individuals of the same or opposite gender and race. According to the concept of social categorization by G. Tajfel and J. Turner, in most cases of joint activities in the personal and social spheres, individuals prefer the 'same' representative of the in-group, with whom they built relationships at the stage of commitment (Turner, Brown, & Tajfel, 1979). This tendency enables us to interpret the choices in the conducted experiment as an indication of the implicitly inherent identity of the study participants.

In fact, about half of the respondents choose representatives of Caucasian race for various spheres of interaction. The other half of choices was almost evenly distributed between Mongoloid and Equatorial races. Does this result indicate a tendency towards alienation of representatives of other races and their attribution to an out-group? We have come to a paradoxical conclusion. The experimental conditions of choice can be understood differently – a child chooses either MR or not MR. In general, of all the offered categories the subjects made a 50/50 choice of the “same” and “not the same” races, making an almost equal choice of a partner of the same (CR) and other (MR, ER) races. This indicates the absence of the criterion of ‘racial identity’ in the structure of implicit identity in children of the studied age. Numerous studies of racial and ethnic identity conducted by Anan'eva & Tovuu (2019) in Russian samples, show that the race and ethnicity of the perceived individuals did not significantly affect the correctness of their understanding, in contrast to the gender of both the subjects and the persons depicted. Various studies of Russian primary school students' identity indicate the absence of the category of ‘race’ in self-categorization (Shakurova, 2007; Andreeva, 2011; Gudzovskaya & Shpuntova, 2016; Kuzmin, 2017). Gender and family are the most typical components in the configuration of their social identity (Kuzmin, 2017). The mention of racial and ethnic identity is much more common in schools and groups mixed on these grounds (Dutton et al., 1998).

The almost equal distribution of partner choices (25 % for each) between MR and ER demonstrates that, the desire to interact with peers of other races in various activities in personal and social spheres of communication is equally important to Russian children aged 7–11 years. This may be a result of children's assimilation of the positive racial implicit identity of their parents. The racial preferences of children, based on implicit identity, implicitly contain information about ‘default’ attitudes in the surrounding world of adults. This is consistent with findings of Huguley, Wang, Vasquez, & Guo (2019), Kickett-Tucker (2009) on the impact of positive racial parental identity on children's identity and with data from Dasgupta (2013), indicating that implicit attitudes, stereotypes, and preferences are the result of passive involvement.

Our results may also indicate the prevalence of a collectivist cognitive orientation in Russian society, which determines a holistic thinking, when the main attention is paid to the integral field of ethnic and racial groups, based on similarities, the search and identification of unifying elements (Nisbett, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2001). The predominant cognitive orientation is an implicit condition for passive involvement in the system of social values and their uncritical assimilation. Thus, children assimilate that the surrounding adults ‘bear’ in themselves. Similar data were obtained in the study of students' ethnic identity (Myshkina, 2014). An increase in ethnic self-esteem in an experiment leads to an increase in the frequency of using positive assessments of representatives of another ethnic group (Wu, Outley, & Matarrita-Cascante, 2019).

We did not find the age dynamics of racial implicit identity in the period of active socialization of children from 7–8 to 10–11 years old. This is consistent with the research of G. Tajfel, who wrote that numerous evidences show that children learn the hierarchy of assessments of various groups prevailing in their society early enough; this order remains rather stable. This relates not only to the assessment of groups that they contact in everyday life, such as racial groups in a mixed environment, but also to racial groups from other countries (Tajfel, 1982). The longitudinal study by Gudzovskaya & Shpuntova (2016), conducted in a sample of subjects aged from 7 to 25, also empirically established that the configuration of identity in its cognitive representation is rather stable in terms of the structure of the main social components.

The analysis of the influence of the gender factor on racial preferences, and, consequently, on implicit racial identity, showed the following patterns. Girls and boys do not differ in their choices of photographic images representing individuals of Caucasian and Mongoloid races. At the same time, there was a difference in the frequency of categorization of representatives of Equatorial race as members of their own in-group. Girls are significantly more likely to choose the ER representatives than boys. In most cases girls and boys choose representatives of the same gender. Representatives of the opposite gender are chosen much less frequently (on average, in one third of cases). Compared to girls aged 7–11 years, boys of the same age tend to include individuals of the opposite gender (regardless of race) in the in-group. This is consistent with the findings of Kuzmin (2017) indicating compared to girls, boys are characterized by more pronounced ethnic component.

Among girls and boys, there are 1–2 % of those who choose only one category of partners – individuals of the same gender and race. Such a choice may indicate the disturbed relationships of these children in their class and can be used as a prognostic methodological tool for detecting children in need of increased psychological and pedagogical attention. This idea requires further research.

Some outliers and the identified characteristics of the distribution of gender and racial preferences for each grade and gender group may be explained by the factor of influence of the teacher and the educational environment. The identified intra-group differences between children of the same age represent another direction for further research. In addition, future studies may consider the factors of the language of communication and subjective physical attractiveness of the children represented in the photographs.

The findings of the experimental work enable us to draw the following conclusions.

The experiment carried out in a sample of children aged 7–11 years from four age groups revealed the characteristics of social categorization when they referred photographs of peers of different races and different genders in different hypothetical situations of interaction.

In the process of active socialization of children aged 7–11 years, the age dynamics of racial implicit identity does not undergo pronounced changes. In half of the experimental situations, Russian children choose representatives of the same race, in another half – representatives of other races. The choices between representatives of Mongoloid and Equatorial races are distributed almost evenly.

The structure of implicit identity of Russian children aged 7–11 years does not contain the criterion of 'racial identity' as the basis for social categorization. Children of this age are at the commitment stage. They are actively interested in interacting with their peers, regardless of their race.

For Russian children aged 7–11 years, the desire to interact with peers of other races in various activities in the personal and social spheres of communication is equally important.

The gender factor influences racial preferences and, consequently, the implicit racial identity of children aged 7–11 years. Girls are significantly more likely to include representatives of Equatorial race in the ingroup. Boys are more likely to include a wider range of categories, differing in gender and race, in the in-group.

The transitivity of today's socio-cultural space may determine future dynamic changes in the manifestations of racial implicit identity.

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A. A. Gudzovskaya wrote the literature overview, worked with English-language sources, analyzed and interpreted empirical results, designed graphic illustrations, and discussed the methodology and conclusions of the study.

M. S. Myshkina suggested the research idea, designed the experiment, collected the data, analyzed the empirical results, carried out a critical revision of the content, and wrote the literature overview.

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