



ATTITUDES TOWARD NEGROES AS
REFLECTED IN THE PICTURE PREFERENCES
OF INSTITUTIONALIZED WHITE MORONS

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George Riley Ashman
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This is to certify that the

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ATTITUDES TOWARDS NEGROES AS REFLECTED
IN THE PICTURE PREFERENCES
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ATTITUDES TOWARD NEGROES AS REFLECTED IN THE PICTURE
PREFERENCES OF INSTITUTIONALIZED WHITE MORONS

By

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CHAPTER I

HISTORY AND STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

That the Negro occupies a generally inferior position in the social matrix of our particular society is recognized by the scientist and lay person alike. Thus, the chance of any particular individual Negro achieving a position of leadership and respect in any group made up of both Negro and White individuals seems rather slim and is noteworthy when it occurs. The chance of a number of Negroes achieving a position of dominance in such a mixed group seems to be much slimmer still and even more noteworthy. Such a phenomenon does appear to exist, however, and has been observed by the writer and others. The study of this phenomenon is the subject of this thesis.

It was observed by the writer, while working among institutionalized mental defectives, that the Negro defectives appeared to enjoy a favorable social position in relation to the white patient. The Negroes enjoyed equality with the whites in general and in some cases becoming leaders in color mixed groups. This situation seemed particularly outstanding among the female defectives. In some cases the positive attitude of the white female toward the Negro female seemed to be one of admiration with various gifts and favours being offered to the latter by the white girls. Similar observations among defective girls have been made by Abel (1,2,3).

An explanation for the foregoing observations seems possible from three standpoints. First of all, it may be considered that defectives are relatively unprejudiced against Negroes due to their lack

of ability to learn these prejudices, concomitant with their general lack of learning ability. However, lack of prejudice would not account for the social position of the Negroes. Secondly, as pointed out by Abel (2) the caste-like system of the community functions much less rigidly among inmates in an institution. Hence, the Negro may express his pent-up feelings of frustration by developing attitudes of superiority toward whites who are no longer in a position more favorable than his own. A third explanation for the phenomenon as observed among females is that, as Abel (2) has suggested, the Negro girls are sexually attractive to the white girls. The sexual attractiveness of the Negro girls, according to Abel (2), is a product of their aggressiveness and dominance which the white girls interpret as "maleness." She also states that the attractiveness of the Negro girls is further enhanced by their "uninhibited emotional expressions and some of their physical characteristics."

It was felt by the writer that if an objective technique for studying the preference or non-preference of Negro boys and girls were applied to various groups of mental defectives and controls in the normal population, it should reveal the extent to which the phenomenon exists and might furthermore reveal some factors related to it.

Review of the Literature

As mentioned earlier, observations similar to the author's have been made and reported by Abel (1,2,3). In studying institutionalized Negro and white defective girls, she found that only the Negroes became outstanding leaders and that the caste-like color system was not enforced. She further observed that the Negro girls tended to be sexually attractive to the white girls. This she explains on the basis of the masculinity of the Negro girls. The aggressiveness, she contends, is due to the unaccustomed equal footing with the whites. The leadership of the Negro girls is thus felt to be a product of these two factors; the sexual attractiveness and aggressiveness. Abel and Kinder (4) had previously stated that aggressiveness in adolescent girls is admired by their female peers.

In one of the papers referred to above, Abel (2) reported the results of a study designed to test the hypothesis that, among institutionalized sub-normal girls, the Negro girls would show dominant behavior over the white girls in a controlled experimental setting. The experiments consisted of presenting such problems as estimating the quantity of loose pearls in a dish to groups consisting of a Negro girl and one or two white partners. The members of each group were matched for C. A. within one year and for I. Q. within five points, and, as far as possible for length of institutionalization. The criterion for dominance within a group was essentially one member controlling the answers within the groups. Using the above criteria, it was found as follows:

The Negro girls imposed their judgement upon the white girls about twice as frequently as the white girls succeeded in having the Negro girls accept their opinion The dominance of the Negro is reduced only if there is a discrepancy in length of institutionalization between the partners of three years or more. The Negro girls show marked dominance over white girls under the conditions of our experimental settings. (p. 436)

Hays (6), in a recent paper, reported on the relationship between mental level and friend selection among institutionalized defective girls. This investigation involved the voting of the subjects on such questions as, "Who in this building is your best friend?" He found that in comparing Negro and white subjects that, "choices of white subjects went almost exclusively to other white subjects." He offered as an explanation for the discrepancy between his and Abel's findings the fact that the mean C. A. of the group in his study is only 14.02 years and the mean C. A. of the Negro segment of this above group is only 12.66 years whereas Abel's subjects were all 14 years or older. He therefore suggested that sexual attraction is somewhat untenable as an explanation for expected acceptance within his groups as they contained a large percentage of prepubescent girls, both Negro and white. Furthermore, he suggested regional differences in racial attitudes might account for the difference in findings.

The Problem Redefined

A review of the literature reveals that to date there has been no report of an attempt to compare relative preference shown by the female white defectives for the Negro girls with the Negro-white preference of the normal white girls. In addition, information seems lacking concerning how other defective groups such as males and older females compare in their Negro-white preferences with similar normal groups and the female adolescent defectives.

The problem undertaken in this study, therefore, was to measure the picture preferences of white mental defectives and comparable groups, in order to attempt to answer the following questions:

(1) Do white mental defectives prefer Negro pictures to pictures of whites?

(2) Do the mental defectives show a higher level of preference for Negro pictures than do normals of similar chronological age, mental age, and institutional status?

CHAPTER II

MATERIALS AND PROCEDURE

Rationale for Materials

It was felt that in selecting a technique for measuring attitudes in the defective children, care should be taken that the method be as simple as possible due to the limited intelligence of the subjects. Furthermore, it was deemed necessary to simplify the method of responding to the experimental stimuli to a point where the examiner could be reasonably certain that instructions were understood. A further criterion for measurement with defectives is that the method be as non-verbal as possible.

On the basis of the foregoing, the logical choice of stimulus materials was photographs of Negro and white boys and girls. As Jahoda et al (8) state, photographs are ideal for the study of attitudes of children with limited literacy. They point out that verbal comprehension is needed only to the extent of the general test instructions. Furthermore, reading ability is not required. They feel that photographs also are desirable because of their high interest value.

Horowitz (7) used a series of Negro and white photographs in studying the development of attitudes toward Negroes in pre-adolescent school boys. He utilized a "show me" technique where the subjects were asked such questions as; "Show me all those you want to sit next to you on a streetcar." He also had the boys pick out the one they liked best, next best etc. He found that this technique appeared to yield more

discriminating reactions from the boys than did verbal instruments. Furthermore, he found that the results of the "show me" technique showed a high degree of relationship with his subject's actual behavioral biases toward Negroes.

One important assumption underlying the use of photographs such as these, in studying attitudes, is that all photographs are of approximately equal attractiveness. Great care was necessary in the selection of the photographs to insure that, within reasonable limits, the pleasantness of facial expression is equal, that the pose is standard, and that style of clothing is not unusual. It was felt that a bust photograph would help equalize the stimulus value of the pictures. A final factor in the selection of the photographs was that they be of a standard age group and as close to the chronological age of the adolescent experimental subjects as possible.

EXAMPLE OF STIMULUS MATERIAL USED
IN THIS STUDY - MALE PHOTOGRAPHS



Source of the Materials

Twenty photographs, ten of Negroes and ten of whites, were selected from among several hundred of the year book pictures of a sophomore high school class.

The ten Negro pictures were equally divided as to sex -- five of males and five of females. The same division was made with the pictures of the white members of the high school class.

The pictures were combined into two groups for test presentation. The first was a group of males consisting of the five male Negro members and the five male white members. The second group was of female pictures in similar racial combination.

The pictures were of standard size and were placed in two rows of five each. They were numbered from one to ten and the Negro and white photographs were mixed randomly.

These two sets of pictures were then reproduced as arranged above on two projector slides. This allowed the experimenter to present the photographs to all of the members of the non-defective individual groups at one time. The experimental set of boys' photographs may be found on the following page.

Subjects and Procedure

The characteristics of the various groups utilized in this study are shown in Table 1. The adolescent mental defectives making up groups A and B were chosen from among the patients of The Fort Wayne, Indiana State School, a state institution for the training and care of the mentally deficient. The criteria for the selection of these subjects in addition to those criteria shown in Table 1 included freedom from psychosis and absence of any serious sensory defects. All subjects in this study were white.

Two adolescent groups of older white defectives were obtained from the Fort Wayne institution. These groups (C and D) had been institutionalized for a longer period of time than the younger groups (A and B).

The normal, non-institutionalized subjects (groups E, F, G and H) were from the Dearborn (Michigan) public school system. No psychometric data were available on these subjects, but it seems reasonable to assume that their mean mental level was approximately average. The subjects in groups G and H (normal adolescents) were selected in order to compare their picture preferences with those of the mentally defectives of the same chronological age. Groups E and F (normal preadolescents) were chosen in order to compare their preferences with those of defectives of a similar mental age.

An additional group of subjects was obtained from the Boys Vocational School in Lansing, Michigan — a state institution for the training of delinquents. These subjects of normal intelligence were selected for the purposes of comparing their picture preferences with the preferences

of similarly institutionalized defectives. It should be pointed out that this control is not ideal as the delinquent boys had been institutionalized for a shorter period of time (Mean 1.8 years) than had been the comparable mental defective group (Mean 3.3 years).

The experimental procedure consisted of showing the two sets of photographs, one set at a time, to the members of the various groups. In the case of the mental defectives, the stimulus material was shown to each of the individual group members separately. For the remaining groups, the sets of photographs were projected onto a screen and the members responded simultaneously. The experimental instructions were as follows for the defectives: "See all of these pictures? I want you to look at all of them carefully and then point to the one you like the best." The subject's response was then recorded and he was instructed to pick out the one he liked next best. After the second response was recorded, the subject was finally instructed to pick out the one he liked next best to the first two. The instructions for the non-defective groups were similar, except that the subjects were asked to write down the numbers of their choices rather than to point them out and they were cautioned to arrive at their choices individually.

Every subject thus made a total of six out of twenty possible choices, three of their choices being of male pictures and three of females. As every group was made up of twenty subjects, the total choices for any one group was 120 pictures out of a possible 400.

The rationale for presenting the stimuli to each individual separately among the defectives and having them point out rather than write

down their choices was again to simplify the situation as much as possible for them. Unfortunately, it was not possible to duplicate this procedure in the other groups due to certain time and physical limitations. However, it seems doubtful that any systematic errors were thus introduced which would render the choices of the two groups incomparable.

TABLE I
RELEVANT CHARACTERISTICS OF THE VARIOUS GROUPS EMPLOYED IN THIS STUDY

Group	N	C.A. Range	Mean C.A.	I.Q. Range	Mean I.Q.	Mean Years of Institu- tionalization
A Male Adolescent Defectives	20	14-19	16.6	51-66	56.2	3.1
B Female Adolescent Defectives	20	13-18	16.3	52-65	55.4	3.5
C Male Old Defectives	20	24-42	30.1	50-66	58.1	7.9
D Female Old Defectives	20	22-36	28.7	53-64	57.6	9.3
E Preadolescent Males	20	8-9	8.4	No Data	* Average	---
F Female Preadolescent Normals	20	8-10	8.6	No Data	* Average	---
G Male Adolescent Normals	20	15-17	16.9	No Data	* Average	---
H Female Adolescent Normals	20	15-18	16.6	No Data	* Average	---
I Institutionalized male delinquents	20	14-16	15.8	95-105	102.3	1.8

* No psychometric data available. Normal intelligence assumed.

Statistical Treatment of the Data

In order to measure the relative preference for Negro photographs between the various defective and normal groups, the following statistical comparisons were made, holding certain experimental variables constant:

1. Groups A and B (the adolescent defectives) with G and H (the adolescent normals) holding chronological age constant.
2. Groups A and B (the adolescent defectives) with E and F (the preadolescent normals) holding mental age constant.
3. Groups A (the male adolescent defectives) with I (the institutionalized male delinquents) holding institutionalization constant.

The crucial variable in these comparisons mentioned above is mental status (defective vs. normal).

In addition to the above, the following group comparisons were made:

4. Group G (the normal male adolescents) with I (the male institutionalized delinquents) to ascertain the differential effect of institutionalization on their preferences for Negro pictures, holding intellectual level constant.
5. Groups A and B (the young adolescent defectives) with C and D (the older defectives) in an attempt to determine the effect that the differences in the length of institutionalization had on the mental defective's preference for Negro photographs.
6. All male groups with all female groups to measure the reliability of the differences in preferences between the two sexes.

The graphic representation of the data revealed incidentally some sizable differences between certain groups. Two final comparisons were consequently made to test the significance of these differences. These were:

7. The choices of male Negro pictures on the part of all male subjects as compared with the choices of all female subjects of Negro pictures representing sex.
8. Groups E and F (preadolescent normals) with the remaining groups (all adolescent groups plus the adult defectives).

In all cases, the comparisons were made for choices of male photographs and female photographs separately.

The statistic applied for comparative purposes was chi square using a two by two contingency table as described by Edwards (5). The cells were divided into white vs. Negro choices for the two groups or sets of groups being compared. All choices (1st, 2nd and 3rd) were treated equally for statistical purposes. The number of Negro or white choices were merely summated for each subject.

Critique of Methodology

Certain methodological difficulties arose in the course of the study that led to the employment of a seemingly questionable procedure. By anticipating and enumerating some of the questions, we may forestall much criticism.

Already mentioned was the fact that the actual experimental procedure differed somewhat between the defective and normal groups. However, if the pictures had been shown to the defectives in a group situation, as was the case with the normals, it might have complicated the situation to the point where an error of misunderstanding would have achieved some prominence. Thus, the method used while experimentally inexact was felt to be the most advantageous.

Another criticism which might be raised is that the selection of white children from the Dearborn school system was questionable, as this community bars Negroes from residence and thus is possibly an atypical population in terms of racial attitudes. An examination of the data showed no significant differences, however, between the normal adolescent boys from Dearborn and the group of delinquent boys.

One major omission in this study was a group of institutionalized non-defective girls which in the light of the results would be of great interest for comparative purposes. Such a group was not available for this study. Similarly, a group of young institutionalized normals similar to the Dearborn grade school children would likewise be valuable for comparative purposes, but again, these groups were not available for this purpose.

Another factor requiring consideration is as follows. It would be foolhardy to assume that a "choice of photograph" technique such as was used in this study is a direct measure of such a diffuse and complex attribute as an attitude, nor would we be so brash as to consider it an adequate measure of relative prejudice against the Negro. However at least part of the variance which is associated with the selection of Negro vs. white photographs would seem to be logically related to the variance associated with the actual rejection of, or positive behavior toward, Negroes and whites in social interaction. To this extent, then, the techniques employed would seem to at least partially reflect implicit or explicit positive or negative feelings toward real people. Certainly, a racial concept in photographic form is no further removed from its empirical referent than is the word Negro.

The major shortcoming of this experimental design is essentially the same that one generally encounters in practically most research on social phenomena, i.e. the multitude of uncontrollable, complex variables. This difficulty makes it hazardous to attribute some experimental results to that factor which characterizes the group in the mind of the experimenter. It is with this in mind that the author offers his interpretations of the experimental findings.

CHAPTER III

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

General Findings

The results of this study are shown statistically in Table II, Table III, and Table IV, and graphically in Figures 1, 2 and 3.

Table II shows the raw frequencies with which male and female Negro photographs were chosen as preferred by all groups. It is immediately evident that all groups were greatly biased in favor of the white photographs, as within the group showing the greatest preference for Negroes the Negro choices did not exceed twenty-five choices out of the one hundred and twenty preferred photographs. The significance of this proportion is at the 1 percent level of confidence with a t value of 6.00.

Table III and Table IV present the chi square values for all of the statistical comparisons between groups. These comparisons in Table III test the difference in Negro photo preferences of the mentally defectives and groups of comparable C.A.; M.A.; and institutionalization. The chi square values fall below significance in all cases. Hence, mental defectives do not seem to differ in their Negro-white picture preferences than do comparable persons of normal intelligence.

As shown in Table IV, no significant difference was obtained in comparing group G (normal adolescent males) with group I (institutionalized delinquent males) and groups A and B (young mental defectives) with groups C and D (older mental defectives).

The graphs in Figures 1 and 2 indicate that all of the various groups had greater preference for Negro photographs of the same sex as the subjects. As shown in Table IV, statistical analysis of this relationship reveals that the male subjects chose Negro male photos with greater frequency than did female subjects. The chi square value for this difference is 7.23, which is significant at the 1 percent level of confidence. Similarly, in choosing Negro female photos, the female subjects showed a greater number of preferences than did the male subjects. The chi square value of this difference is 14.52. This again is significant at the 1 percent level of confidence.

An inspection of Figure 3 shows that the youngest normals (groups E and F) showed much less preference for Negro photographs than did the remaining group. When a statistical comparison between the incidence of selection of Negro pictures in the two youngest groups was made with the incidence in all remaining groups, a chi square value of 5.96 is obtained. This figure indicates a significance of the difference at the 2 percent level of confidence.

Additional data, not included in the tables, is brought to light in the following paragraphs.

While it has been demonstrated that the several groups tended to show greater preference for Negro photographs of the same sex, this sex preference was much more marked in the female subjects than in the male subjects. When the frequencies of the white females choosing female Negro photographs is compared with the frequencies of male groups choosing male Negro photographs, a chi square of 6.05 for the difference between the frequencies was obtained. This value is significant at the 2 percent level of confidence.

TABLE II

FREQUENCIES WITH WHICH WHITE AND NEGRO PHOTOGRAPHS OF MALES AND FEMALES WERE CHOSEN AS PREFERRED BY ALL EXPERIMENTAL AND CONTROL GROUPS								
Group	Male Photographs		Female Photographs		Total Photographs			
	White	Negro	White	Negro	White	Negro		
A Male Adolescent Defectives	50	10	52	8	102	18		
B Female Adolescent Defectives	54	6	43	17	97	23		
C Male Old Defectives	47	13	52	8	99	21		
D Female Old Defectives	54	6	45	15	99	21		
E Preadolescent Normals	52	8	55	5	107	13		
F Female Preadolescent Normals	57	3	50	10	107	13		
G Male Adolescent Normals	51	9	50	10	101	19		
H Female Adolescent Normals	54	6	41	19	95	25		
I Institutionalized male delinquents	50	10	53	7	103	17		

TABLE III

STATISTICAL COMPARISONS BETWEEN THE MENTAL DEFECTIVE AND
NORMAL GROUPS WITH RESPECT TO THEIR PREFERENCES OF MALE AND FEMALE NEGRO PICTURES

Groups	% Male Negro Photos Chosen	* Chi Square	Signifi- cance	% Female Negro Photos Chosen	* Chi Square	Signifi- cance
Adolescent Defectives	13.3	0.036	N.S.	20.8	1.004	N.S.
Adolescent Normals	12.5			24.2		
Adolescent Defectives	13.3	1.004	N.S.	20.8	3.00	N.S.
Preadoles- cent Nor- mals	9.2			12.5		
Male Adolescent Defectives	16.7	0.000	N.S.	13.3	0.076	N.S.
Institution- alized de- linquent	16.7			11.7		

* One degree of freedom.

TABLE IV
STATISTICAL COMPARISONS OF THE PREFERENCES OF NEGRO
PICTURES RELATED TO THE FACTORS OF SEX AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION

Groups	% Male Negro Photos Chosen	* Chi Square	Signifi- cance	% Female Negro Photos Chosen	* Chi Square	Signifi- cance
Male Adolescent Normals	15.0	0.062	N.S.	16.7	0.618	N.S.
vs. Institution- alized de- linquents	16.7			12.5		
All Males	16.7	7.23	1% level	12.7	14.520	1% level
vs. All Females	10.4			29.6		

* One degree of freedom.

FIGURE 1
GRAPH SHOWING RELATIVE FREQUENCIES FOR THE VARIOUS
GROUPS IN CHOOSING MALE NEGRO PHOTOGRAPHS AS PREFERRED

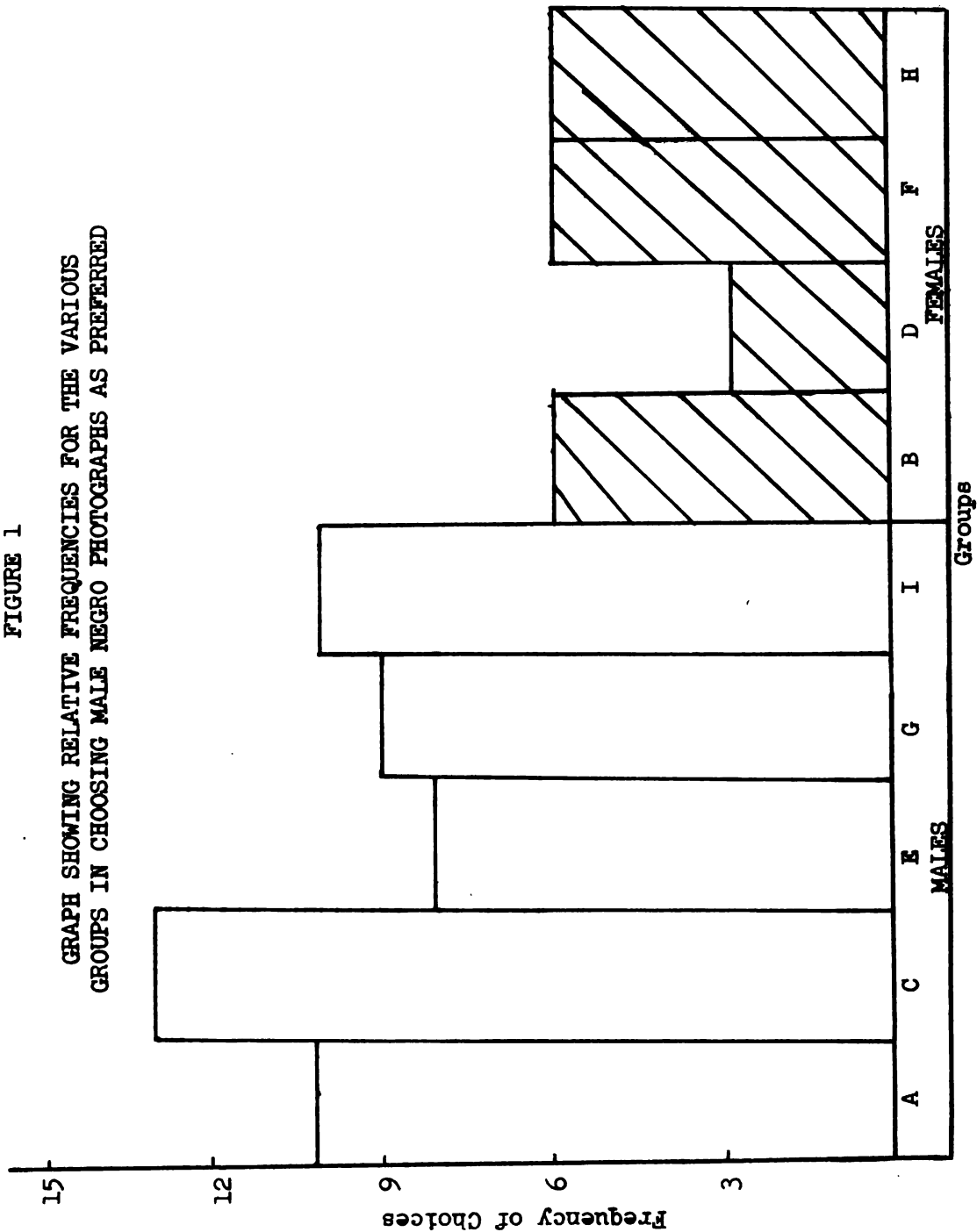


FIGURE 2

GRAPH SHOWING THE RELATIVE FREQUENCIES FOR THE VARIOUS GROUPS IN CHOOSING FEMALE NEGRO PHOTOGRAPHS AS PREFERRED

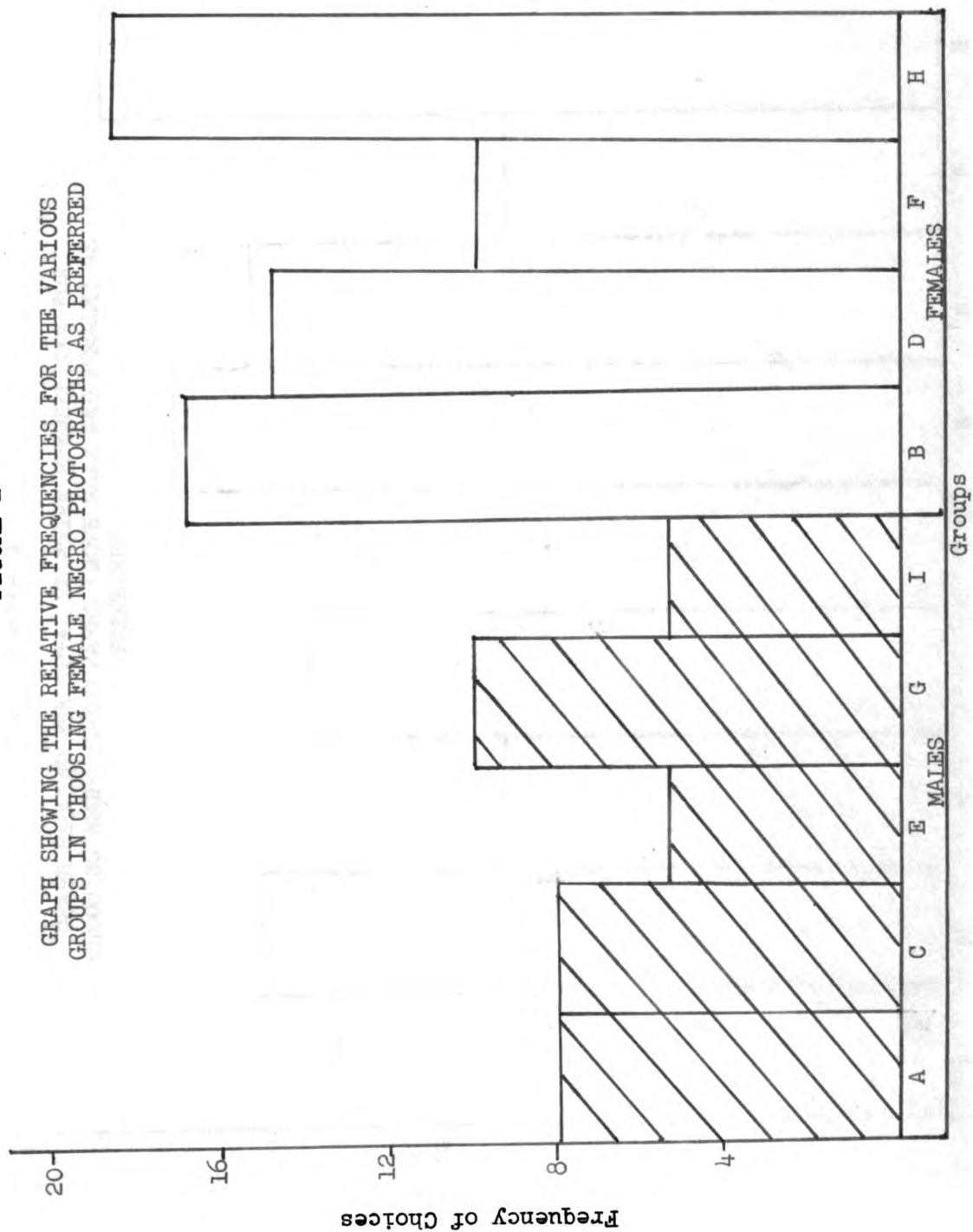
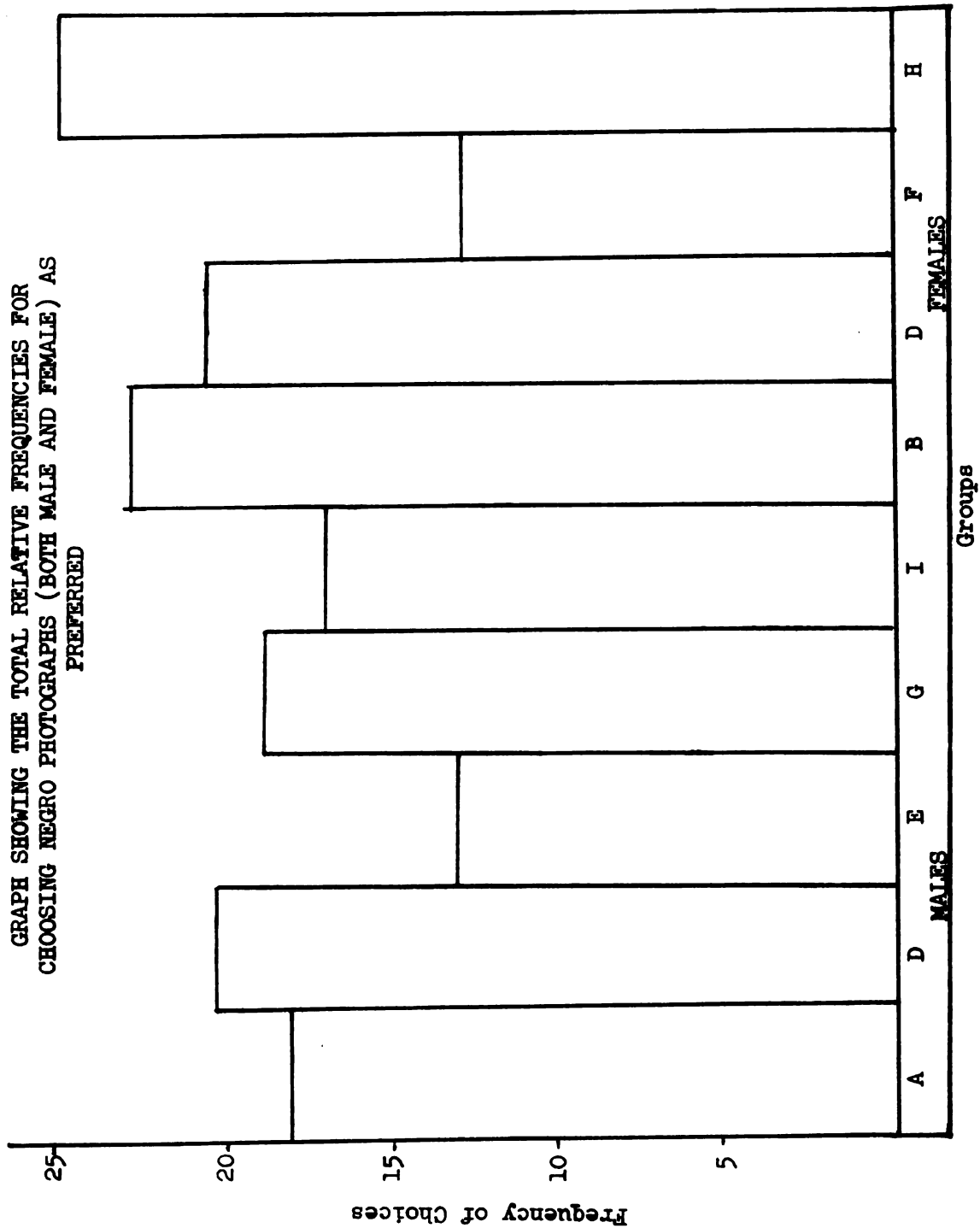


FIGURE 3

GRAPH SHOWING THE TOTAL RELATIVE FREQUENCIES FOR
CHOOSING NEGRO PHOTOGRAPHS (BOTH MALE AND FEMALE) AS
PREFERRED



Discussion of Results

The finding that there is essentially no difference between the preference shown for Negro photographs, between the mentally defective and the normal groups, suggests that the observed leadership of the Negro in an institution is a function of much more than any positive feelings toward them on the part of the white patient. Perhaps the explanation that the Negro is more aggressive in this setting and thus achieves leadership through his aggression is a more tenable explanation of his social position in light of these findings.

As mentioned before, the phenomenon of social dominance of the Negro was more noticeable among the females than the males in the institution. In this regard it is interesting to note that all of the female white groups in this study show significantly greater preference for Negro photographs of females than do all of the male groups for male photographs. This would suggest that some special variable or variables were present in producing these relatively positive feelings.

This "special attraction" is equally outstanding among the normal adolescent girls, the older defective females, and the female adolescent defectives. It is not as prominent, however, among the preadolescent normal girls. This discrepancy is similar to that found in the lack of Negro preferences among the prepubescent white defective females in Hays' (6) study and those preferences observed among adolescent white female defectives in Abel's (1,2,3) studies where the Negro females are preferred as sex partners. The special attraction among the female groups for the Negro female, as reflected in their picture preferences,

may have a sexual basis. However, further investigation of this phenomenon would be necessary before such an interpretation would have any validity.

The finding that the younger group showed significantly less preference for Negro photos than the remaining groups suggests an interesting hypothesis concerning the development of racial attitudes. From the findings obtained, it would appear that the non-preference shown toward Negroes does not increase from prepubescence to adolescence. Moreover, it tends to become modified and lessened in the later age period. This may be a function of increasing social awareness and more complete social integration. This area would seem to be a fruitful one for further investigation.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

General Summary

The purpose of this study was to attempt to isolate the variables which would account for an observed, unique leadership position of the Negro patient in an institution for the mentally defective. This was attempted by measuring the picture preferences of the white defectives in choosing between Negro and white photographs, and comparing these preferences with normal control groups. These several normal groups were matched with the defectives for one of the following variables, one at a time: chronological age, mental age, and institutionalization.

The method used to determine picture preferences was to have all of the subjects choose the three most liked pictures from among a group of both five white and five Negro male photographs and a similarly mixed group of female photographs. Every attempt was made to standardize the photographs which were of adolescent high school students.

The picture choices were divided into white and Negro and the various experimental and control groups were compared statistically by a 2 by 2 chi square table. The Negro and white choices were treated equally regardless of ranking. All preferences were merely summated for any subject.

Conclusions

A statistical analysis of the relative preference of Negro photographs shown by the various white defective and normal groups and an interpretation of these results lead to the following conclusions:

1. All groups show a marked bias against the Negro photographs.
2. There is no essential difference between the preference for Negro photographs among the defectives and normal groups of the same chronological age, mental age, or under institutionalized conditions.
3. The white subjects show a significantly greater preference for Negro photographs of the same rather than the opposite sex.
4. This sex preference is significantly greater for the female subjects than the male subjects suggesting a "special attraction" for the Negro female within the female groups.
5. The younger children showed significantly less preference for Negro photos than did the remaining groups suggesting less acceptance of the Negro among them.
6. The observed leadership position of the Negro patient in the mental defective institution does not seem to be based on any unique positive feelings toward the Negro on the part of the white patients. This leadership may be based on factors not tapped in the present study.

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