Three-month-old infants form categories based on perceptual similarity (Quinn & Eimas, 1996), and by age 1, form conceptual categories, grouping items based on deep properties, rather than superficial appearance. Using the sequential-touching (ST) task, Mandler, Bauer, & McDonough (1991) showed that 2-year-olds differentiate global-level categories. In ST, children play with a set of toys for 2-minutes while the experimenter records the order in which they touch the toys. Children demonstrate categorization by touching items from one category (e.g., animals) before touching items from the other category (e.g., vehicles). While many studies have examined global-level categorization, few have explored within category contrasts (e.g., gender, Levy, 1999). Here we ask whether age, gender, and race are equally salient in children's categorization of humans.

Children were randomly assigned to experimental or control groups before participation. Children complete the ST task twice, separated by a brief exposure where the experimenter demonstrates a homogeneous or heterogeneous grouping. For ST, nine dolls (Asian, Black, and White each with an adult-female, adult-male, and gender-neutral infant) are presented for two minutes of undirected play for each ST task where touches are recorded with the exposure task in between.

Data collection is complete (n=27). Chi-square analyses reveal that AGE was the most salient dimension, as children's initial groupings (first three objects touched) were most likely to be homogeneous in age at both pretest ($X^2(3) = 14.33$, $p = .002$, two-tailed) and posttest ($X^2(2) = 13.56$, $p = .001$, two-tailed). Frequencies of grouping along the various dimensions did not vary by subject gender or experimental group (all X^2s < 5.99, all ps > .05, two-tailed).

When given a chance to group along the dimensions of age, gender, or race, children's spontaneous groupings were overwhelmingly based on age, showing that gender and race are not highly salient to children in preschool.

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