



A Pure World

BY JOY BAUM

EVERYBODY LOVES BABIES — ESPECIALLY KELLY MADOLE.

While in graduate school, one of Dr. Madole's professors had a grant to do infant research, and asked her to work on the project. After beginning the project, she realized she had found her niche. "I remember thinking, this is what I love doing," Dr. Madole said. "These were kids that couldn't talk, yet I felt I was getting a much cleaner message of what's going on, of the pure world in their mind."

Dr. Madole's research focuses on cognitive developmental changes and how these changes impact the way that infants, children, and adults organize the world. Her main goal is to develop a unified theoretical approach to understanding the development of



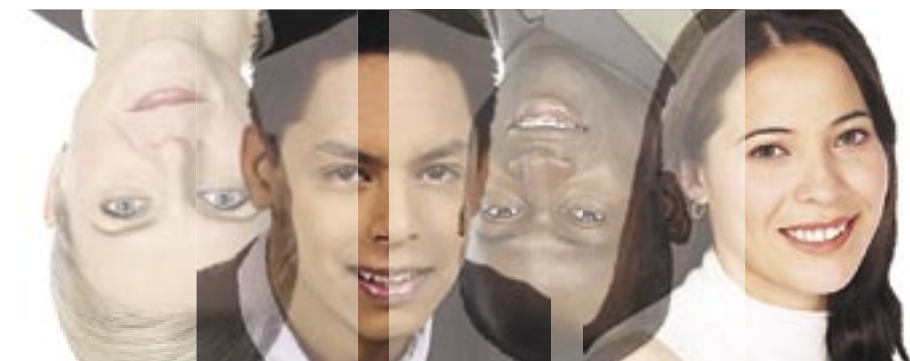
Kelly Madole

categorization. The two main areas she has studied are object categorization and social categorization.

One of her most recent object categorization studies was an infant

study on eighteen-month-olds to determine whether certain colors were seen as gender specific. The infants were allowed to choose different colors of toys to play with. The male colors were "camouflage," brown, and navy blue. The female colors were lavender, pink, and purple.

"We had some very interesting results," Dr. Madole said. "We looked at which toys children chose to play with and how long they played with them. We found that girls didn't seem to care about the color of the toys they played with but boys were more likely to pick a "girl-color" toy and to play with it longer. This was surprising to us. However, we know from previous studies that parents are more likely to enforce sex-stereotypical play in boys



than in girls. So it may be that these boys chose the toys that were more novel; the toys that their parents are less likely to provide for them." The project won an Honorable Mention at the Kentucky Psychological Association Convention.

In her latest research, she is studying social categorization, which she believes stems from object categorization. In one project, elementary school age children were shown pictures of many faces of different races, and asked to identify and remember them.

"The results of this study were also somewhat surprising," she said. "We know that adults have more difficulty recognizing and remembering faces of other races than faces of their own race. However, in our sample, elementary school-aged children remembered faces of other races better than faces of their own race. In addition, when they see a group of faces of their own race, they very quickly recognize if one face is of a different race. So it looks like racial differences are something that children are interested in, but in a different way than for adults." The study was presented at the Conference on Human Development.

Dr. Madole explained, "I'm looking at how older children make sense of racial groups. Does that mean anything to them, and how do they think that it matters? The underlying mechanism is dividing the world into categories, so I went from object categories to people categories. I think it's very important we talk to children about these categories. We have a real bias to think that if children express certain things about racial groups, it must have been because children were raised in a bad home. Maybe it just comes out of the child trying to figure out what the world is about. What might be seen as racism in an adult is really just curiosity in a child."



Tyler Doan is given eight dolls varying in race, sex and age and asked to "put the ones that belong together in the same basket." Dr. Madole looks at which category seems to be most important to children when grouping people and asks them to try to think of other ways to group them in order to see the flexibility of their categories.

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She hopes her research could lead to diversity training for children in the school system. "This is an issue that has always been skirted around," she said.

Madole has been at Western Kentucky University since 1999. She received her bachelor of arts in behavioral sciences from Rice University, and her doctorate in developmental psychology from the University of Texas. She taught at Pennsylvania State University for seven years before coming to Western. "I liked the balance of teaching and research that Western Kentucky University offers.

I really like working with students," she said.

Dr. Madole involves many undergraduate and graduate students in her work. Seven of the students were funded by a grant through National Science Foundation, Research Experiences for Undergraduates, an eight-week summer program. She has also mentored ten undergraduate and graduate independent study students in the last five years. This year she won the faculty award for research and creativity in the college of education and behavioral sciences.

Her research has been published

in several highly regarded publications relevant to her field. "The future of infant categorization research: A process-oriented approach" was published in *Child Development* in 2000, and her most recent work was published in 2003 in *Early Category and Concept Development*.

"I do not know if I have ever met someone as interested and competent in the area of research," wrote Rachel Ezell, a current graduate student. "Dr. Madole appears to have an internal drive leading her always toward learning and discovering more."