RUNNING HEAD: Racial Ideology

Socialization of Racial Ideology by White Parents

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Abstract

Objectives. The ways that White American parents socialize their children to think about and interact with racial outgroups are not well understood. The goals of this study were to explore the degree to which White parents endorse contradictory racial ideologies, and the reasons behind the presence versus absence of parent-child discussions of race-related current events (e.g., Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, or the Charleston church shooting).

Method. We recruited a sample of White parents of children ages 8-12 on Amazon MechanicalTurk (N= 165, 66.1% female, *M*-age = 36.67) and applied a qualitative thematic analysis to their answers to open-ended probes regarding racial discussions with their children.

Results. Results revealed both colorblind and color conscious racial ideology communicated by White parents. Thirty-seven percent of White parents endorsed a mixture of colorblind and color conscious ideology. The majority of parents did not discuss race-related current events with their children; many believed these discussions were either too negative or unnecessary.

Conclusions. The results indicate that White parents have the potential to be agents of change that socialize color conscious beliefs in their children, but many are reinforcing the current system of colorblind indifference to racial inequality.

Public significance statement: This study suggests that some White parents communicate contradictory messages to their children about race and racism. The study also found that most White parents avoided talking about race-related current events with their 8-12-year-old children because they view their children as too young to talk about race, they say the topic hasn't come up, or they think discussing race isn't necessary.

Racial Ideology

The majority of White adults in the United States endorse colorblind ideology – espousing the idea that they do not see race, and that race is not important – a harmful belief that diverts attention away from racial disparities, leads to less awareness of racism, and fosters negative interracial interactions (Plaut et al., 2018). Colorblindness implies that racial inequality is a myth, and it is often used to legitimize systems of oppression and impede progress toward racial equality (Neville et al., 2013). Racial harassment and hate crimes are rising (Pew Research Center, 2016), including incidents perpetrated by youth (Klein, 2018). These troubling trends suggest an urgent need to address colorblindness and racism in American youth, especially for White youth, who are potential perpetrators of racial harassment as well as bystanders who can encourage, tolerate, or challenge racial inequality (Aboud & Fenwick, 1999; Nelson et al., 2011).

The task of teaching White children color conscious beliefs falls, at least in part, on their White parents. Yet, White adults often demonstrate contradictory beliefs, opinions, and actions related to race. Compared to several decades ago, White individuals are far less likely to endorse overt racial prejudice, and more likely to explicitly endorse egalitarian beliefs (Pearson et al., 2009). Yet, egalitarian-minded White people still engage in subtle forms of discrimination, such as preferring White over Black applicants when the qualifications are ambiguous (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000). Furthermore, White individuals anticipate that they will experience emotional distress and want to distance themselves from another White person who engages in overtly racist behavior, but when they actually witness this behavior, they fail to show these responses (Kawakami et al., 2009; Karmali et al., 2017). Thus, White adults' expectations about their feelings and actions related to racism are often in complete opposition to how they actually feel

Racial Ideology

and behave. The current study explores whether White American parents communicate such contradictory messages to their children.

Parents as a Source of Racial Socialization

In families of color, parents play a critical role in the socialization of children's understanding of racial identity and prejudice. Parent ethnic-racial socialization, in turn, contributes to stronger ethnic-racial identity in youth of color (Huguley et al., 2019). Parents of color consider racial socialization to be an essential aspect of their role as parents. This is undoubtedly shaped by the realities of racial inequality; for example, parents' own experiences of discrimination inform their racial socialization practices (McNeil Smith et al., 2016), and parents from different ethnic identities emphasize distinct socialization messages that are relevant to their culture (Priest et al., 2014). For White families – who are shielded by racial privilege – the context, motivations, and prevalence of racial discussions is very different from that of families of color.

Since White parents know their White children will not be targets of racism and have not experienced racism themselves, they may lack the motivation to discuss race with their children. White people tend to avoid talking about race, in general, consider racial topics to be taboo (Plaut et al., 2018), and feel anxious about interracial interactions (Plant & Devine, 2003). White adults are reluctant to use racial labels even when doing so provides an advantage in a given task (Norton, et al., 2006). When White parents avoid racial labels in a task with their children, this effect is amplified in late compared to early childhood (Pauker, et al., 2015), suggesting that internalization of socialization messages about avoiding racial topics are playing a role (Apfelbaum, Pauker, et al., 2008). The desire to avoid appearing racially biased seems to be a strong deterrent against mentioning race (Apfelbaum, Summers, & Norton, 2008). However,

Racial Ideology

some White individuals are willing to openly discuss race and those who do have more positive interracial interactions and friendships (Richeson & Nusbaum, 2004).

Racial socialization in White families is relatively understudied (Loyd & Gaither, 2018; Priest et al., 2014). Explicit racial socialization is rare in majority culture families, in general (Lesane-Brown et al., 2010) and among White parents in particular. White parents' reticence to discuss race with their children is likely shaped by long-standing social norms that define Whiteness as a default identity (Loyd & Gaither, 2018). In two parent-child interaction studies with young children (ages 4-7), most White parents did not mention race at all. Pahlke et al., (2012) found that 91.6% of mother-child dyads made no mention of race, ethnicity, or interracial interactions during a reading task, although 57.3% of mothers made broad, positive comments about the diversity. Vittrup and Holden (2011) gave parents detailed instructions on how to talk about race with their children, but only 10% of the sample reported discussing race in depth.

Parent-report studies have yielded similar results. Although the majority (81%) of White mothers of 4-7-year-olds in Vittrup's (2018) sample indicated that racial discussions are important, only 30% reported actually doing so. Similarly, Zucker and Patterson (2018) found that only 33% of White parents of 8-12-year-olds actively encouraged discussions of race. Qualitative studies in which White parents are interviewed in-depth about racial socialization have also revealed few direct conversations regarding race (Hagerman, 2017; Hamm, 2001; Underhill, 2018). Although based on a small number of studies with small samples, White parents' reticence to discuss race with children is a consistent trend.

Colorblind versus Color Conscious Ideology

When White parents engage in racial discussions, they often communicate colorblind messages that undermine progress toward racial equality. This includes downplaying the

Racial Ideology

importance of race, discouraging discussions of race, or wanting children to not “see” race (Hamm, 2001; Pahlke et al., 2012; Underhill, 2018; Vittrup, 2018; Zucker & Patterson, 2018). Neville et al., (2013) argue that colorblind ideology is a modern form of racism, which can take the form of either color-evasion (claiming to “not see” race) or power evasion (denying that racial inequality is a reality). Colorblind (relative to more color conscious) messaging has been shown to reduce children’s racial bias awareness, which may artificially depress their formal reporting of racial injustice. Furthermore, children who are exposed to colorblind messaging are less likely to perceive an overtly racist incident as racial discrimination (Apfelbaum et al., 2010). Hughes et al. (2006) argue that colorblind messaging might reduce children’s understanding of the societal implications of race. For example, when children who believe race doesn’t matter learn about racial inequality in the real world (e.g., achievement and wage gaps), they may attribute these inequalities to stable characteristics of racial groups, rather than indicators of system racism, essentially reinforcing racist stereotypes (Barr & Neville, 2008; Hughes et al., 2007). Thus, although parents who use colorblind messaging may be well-meaning, this socialization practice may allow explicit forms of bias to persist.

Although much less common, some White parents communicate color conscious racial ideology, which calls attention to and condemns racial inequality and acknowledges the value of racial diversity. Color conscious ideology has multiple forms, such as encouraging children to acknowledge racial prejudice, valuing racial diversity, endorsing equal treatment of different races, and teaching children about how racism occurs in American society (Hagerman, 2014; Perry et al., 2019; Vittrup, 2018). Color conscious ideology directly challenges colorblindness by celebrating racial diversity rather than minimizing it, openly acknowledging rather than denying the impact of race on people’s lives through discrimination and structural racism, and advocating

Racial Ideology

for equal rights and treatment across different racial groups. However, parents often communicate color conscious messages in vague or superficial terms (Pahlke et al., 2012; Vittrup, 2018; Zucker & Patterson, 2018). Hagerman (2017) found that affluent progressive fathers ($n = 8$) socialized antiracist values in their children by encouraging intergroup contact rather than directly discussing these values with their children. Together, limited extant research suggests that although some parents endorse color conscious ideology, they may do so in a way that has little impact on children's developing beliefs.

Mixed Messages?

Building upon prior work, we sought to explore whether parents are sending mixed messages about race – namely, voicing a combination of both colorblind and color conscious ideology– which directly contradict one another. Colorblind ideology denies that race and racism are real or important, whereas color conscious ideology explicitly acknowledges the reality of race and the ways that racism influences people's differing experiences. Extant research has documented both types, but no prior studies of White parents have systematically examined the within-parent overlap between colorblind and color conscious ideology.

There is limited evidence that mixed messages are likely to occur when White parents discuss race. Vittrup (2018) categorized parents as either colorblind (70%) or color conscious (30%) based on their responses, but within the colorblind category, some parents voiced beliefs that also contained sentiments that endorsed equal rights for different races; Zucker & Patterson (2018) report similar examples. Underhill's (2018) qualitative study revealed that some parents taught their children about the value of diversity while also minimizing or denying the reality of racial tension in America. None of these studies systematically explored mixed messages in their analyses.

Racial Ideology

Capturing mixed messages about race is a logical next step and will provide a more accurate picture of White parents' racial socialization. Contradictory messages likely make it difficult for children to understand how parents truly think and feel about race, and the negative aspects of these messages have the potential to undermine or even override any positive messages that parents communicate about race. Failing to take contradictory ideologies into account could obscure our understanding of the information children are receiving and their ensuing impact on children's developing beliefs. Documenting the complexity of messages in White parents' existing patterns of racial socialization is an important first step in efforts to develop evidence-based prevention programs at the family level. This is a particularly timely goal, as current recommendations for how White parents should discuss race and racism with their children have little to no evidence to support them (Scott et al., 2020).

Parent-Child Discussions of Race-related Current Events

An additional goal of this study was to examine White parents' discussion of race-related current events with their children. The prevalence of high-profile news stories related to race has increased in recent years, and social media facilitates the wide dissemination of information regarding race-related current events (Pew Research, 2016). Frequent news coverage of race-related current events could instigate racial discussions in White families, who have reported that race did not come up naturally in conversation with their children (Vittrup, 2018; Underhill, 2018). Black parents are responsive to current events in their parenting; for example, they instructed their children on how to navigate interactions with the police and/or White adults in response to the shootings of Treyvon Martin and Michael Brown (Thomas & Blackmon, 2015; Threfall, 2018). Among White parents, there is limited evidence that reticence to discuss race extends to race-related current events. When asked hypothetical questions about news stories

Racial Ideology

related to race, the vast majority of White parents of 8-12-year-olds reported colorblind and avoidant responses (Zucker & Patterson, 2018). Underhill (2018) found that only a third of White parents discussed the protests in Ferguson, Missouri with their children, and the majority used a colorblind framework. In a prior report, we found that just over a third of parents discussed race-related current events such as the deaths of Black youth and the Charleston shooting (redacted). We believe that the reasons *why* White parents chose to engage in versus avoid talking about such events with their children may provide a unique window into parents' racial beliefs.

The Current Study

The goals of this study were to apply a qualitative approach to examine (a) the extent to which parents communicate mixed messages about race, and (b) the reasons behind the presence or absence of discussions of race-related current events with their children (e.g., Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, or the Charleston shooting). We focus on middle childhood (ages 8-12). By this age, children have an abstract understanding of race (Hughes et al., 2007) and basic knowledge of racial categories and stereotypes (Aboud, 2008). Reluctance to openly acknowledge race becomes more pronounced at this age (Pauker et al., 2015), suggesting that middle childhood is a pivotal time in the development of social norms for racial discussions. In contrast to older youth, parents remain a central source of information about current events during middle childhood (Hagerman, 2016; Lewis, 2003; Underhill, 2018); thus, the messages parents communicate about these events could be particularly impactful during this developmental period.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Racial Ideology

Participants were recruited using Amazon's MechanicalTurk (MTurk). We conducted an anonymous online survey hosted on Qualtrics.com to reduce demand characteristics and increase participants' comfort in sharing their socialization practices regarding race. Recruitment details appear in the supplemental materials. Of the 200 parents who were screened into the study, 165 were White parents (M -age = 36.67) of children ages 8-12. Detailed demographics appear in Table 1. Eligible participants received \$1 after completing the study. Data were collected 14-28 days after the 2015 Charleston, SC church shooting.

After they were screened into the study, parents first listed the ages of each of their children. Parents with more than one child aged 8-12 were instructed to focus on a child that was randomly selected by Qualtrics software. Parents completed other quantitative measures not included in this report (see *redacted*).

The qualitative analysis focused on parents' typed responses to three open-ended questions: (1) "What would you say if your child asked you about race?", (2) "What would you say to your child if you witnessed together an incident in which someone experienced prejudice due to their race?", and (3) "Describe how you have discussed recent current events related to race, such as events related to Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, or the Charleston shooting, with your child. If you have not discussed them, describe why you chose not to do so." We framed the first two questions as hypotheticals to elicit responses about racial socialization ideology even for parents who do not frequently interact with people of color. We developed the third question to examine whether the high-profile current events involving race at the time of the study would elicit racial discussions in White families.

Data Analysis

Racial Ideology

Guided by theoretical perspectives on racial ideology, we conducted a “top-down” thematic analysis of messages White parents communicated to their children about race. We primarily explored underlying ideologies behind parent messages, or latent themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Informed by Braun and Clarke’s (2006) recommendations, the authors first independently reviewed all responses and drafted a list of impressions ideas for codes. Second, we collaboratively developed a coding system to capture the range of racial ideologies present in the data. Third, two undergraduate coders applied this coding system to the data, supervised by a graduate student. After a rigorous training process, coders independently coded a subset of responses to establish reliability. Discrepancies and questions were resolved via discussions between the coders, their supervisor, and the authors, and the coding scheme was subsequently revised as needed. Once coders achieved reliability, all responses were re-coded. Interrater reliabilities were overall excellent, with intraclass coefficients ranging from .72 to 1.00 for all but two codes with very low variability. Coding was inclusive – many comments received multiple codes. Finally, the authors sorted the codes into themes. Reflexivity practices are described in the supplemental materials.

Results

We identified two broad themes: colorblind and color conscious socialization. We then (1) examined responses from parents who communicated a mixture of these two types of messages and (2) explored themes specific to discussions of race-related current events.

A summary of racial socialization themes, percentages, and examples appear in Table 2.

Colorblind Socialization

More than half of parents voiced at least one form of broad colorblind socialization, downplaying the importance or reality of race in our society.

Racial Ideology

Specific colorblind ideology. The most prevalent type of colorblindness was an ideology in which parents made statements that either implicitly or explicitly undermined the value or the reality of race. This typically involved framing race as surface-level or unimportant (e.g., “I explain to her that racial or ethnic differences are superficial and what matters is the kind of person someone is inside.”). A few parents offered a more extreme version of colorblindness, implying that race does not exist or that it should be purposefully ignored (e.g., “I try to teach her not to see color.”). These comments are consistent with Neville et al.’s (2013) conception of “color evasion” forms of colorblindness, in which people view the ability to “not see” race as a strategy toward reducing racial prejudice. One potential consequence of such thinking is the belief that racism is a myth – a theme we also observed.

Denial of racism. Comments that undermined the reality of racism in our society – or denied that racism exists at all – were also present, but less common than specific colorblindness. Several parents argued that racism has been exaggerated in media coverage (e.g., “We discussed how people are far too sensitive about things such as race and how events can be taken out of context and blown out of proportion.”) or that it is a myth (“I told him that I believe that some people like to cry racism for everything and ignore the facts. Only the facts matter.”) These comments are consistent with Neville et al.’s (2013) conception of “power evasion” forms of colorblindness, which are particularly damaging in that they actively contradict the lived experiences of marginalized racial groups and provide White individuals with social cover to ignore racism completely. This disincentivizes taking actions to reduce systemic racial inequality and may even lead to the incorrect belief that public policy gives people of color unfair advantages.

Color Conscious Socialization Messages

Racial Ideology

A majority of parents communicated at least one form of color conscious ideology, which teaches children to prioritize equal rights across racial groups, acknowledge racial disparities and privilege, and celebrate unique cultures.

Endorsing equal treatment. For this theme—present in about half of the sample—parents specifically endorsed equal treatment or rights for different racial groups, stating that different racial groups deserve equal rights, or that treating racial groups differently/denying equal rights to certain groups is wrong.

Many parents voiced this ideology in response to the prompt about witnessing racial prejudice (e.g., “I would tell her that what she witnessed was wrong and only hurtful people act like that and we should accept everyone as equals.”). A few parents voiced things in broader terms (e.g., “I would tell her that everybody is different and the color of your skin is no reason to treat anyone any differently.”). These comments communicate color conscious values by endorsing the idea of racial equality, but they do not inform children that racial discrimination occurs in reality.

Acknowledgement of racism. Another, less prevalent, theme in parents’ color conscious responses were comments that explicitly recognized that racism has not yet been eradicated and still occurs in our society; comments that received this code referred to racial discrimination as a reality (going beyond simply labeling racial discrimination as negative). Many of these comments were brief, such as, “there are people who judge others by their skin color.” However, some parents went into greater detail, providing context for how racism works or where it comes from:

People a lot of times think that black people are criminals or drug users or just bad people just because they look different, and that causes hate, and good people and even kids can be hurt or killed because white people are hateful and afraid and dumb.

Racial Ideology

These parents are teaching their children to recognize that racism still occurs in our society.

Multiculturalism. About a fifth of the sample reported communicating multicultural ideology (which recognizes the importance of racial differences and cultural diversity for our society) but they were often brief and simply acknowledged that different groups exist (e.g., “The world is full of different types of people and even if they are the same color, they may be from different countries.”). A few parents went into more detail and encouraged their children to view racial differences in a positive light:

I would explain to her that everyone is different and some come from different places....People may look different and sound different, but they are all unique and special, and to them, we might look just as unique and different.

Only one parent mentioned specific parenting strategies to socialize multiculturalism: “Start by discussing and reading books with children that showcase diversity. In addition, expose children to cultures outside of their own through classes, or travel, and be intentional about it.”

Mixed messages

Parents’ responses to each of the three prompts were coded on each of the themes described above: colorblind ideology (including colorblindness and denial of racism), and color conscious ideology (including endorsing equal treatment, acknowledgment of racism, and multiculturalism). Thus, each of the three responses provided by each participant could receive up to six codes. To identify mixed messages, we looked for instances in which coders found examples of both colorblind and color conscious ideology either within a parent’s response to a single question, or across the same parent’s answers to different questions. For example, a parent who endorsed denial of racism in response to the first prompt and acknowledgment of racism in response to the second or third prompt would be counted as communicating mixed messages

Racial Ideology

about race; the same would apply if parents voiced both colorblindness and endorsing equal treatment within a single answer. A summary of combined color conscious and colorblind ideologies appears in Table 3.

Nearly all mixed messages involved combining specific colorblindness with some form of color conscious message. A few contradictory messages took the form of specific colorblindness seeping into color conscious sentiments. One parent very clearly voiced both colorblindness and endorsing equal treatment together: “I would tell her race doesn’t matter, and judging someone by how they look, including the color of their skin, is simply wrong.” Another parent began with colorblindness but ended with acknowledgement of racism: “All people are equal and race doesn’t matter. Unfortunately, some people don’t see it that way and sometimes treat other races unfairly.” Both of these comments seem to frame colorblindness as the correct approach.

The majority of mixed messages emerged due to different prompts eliciting distinct types of answers (color conscious versus colorblind). Parents tended to emphasize colorblindness in response to the prompt about race in general, whereas they emphasized endorsing equal treatment in response to the prompt about witnessing racial prejudice. Mixed messages that combined colorblindness with acknowledgment of racism also emerged across these two prompts. A few parents voiced colorblindness in response to the general prompt with acknowledgment of racism in response to the current events prompt. Together, these findings highlight the utility of framing questions about racial socialization in a variety of ways to better capture the nuance in parents’ racial beliefs and racial socialization messages.

Discussions of race-related current events

Racial Ideology

Just over a third of the sample (37%) reported discussing race-related current events such as Trayvon Martin's death and the Charleston church shooting with their children. Many parents gave brief descriptions of these discussions, often labeling events as negative: "Yes, we talked about the shooting, and what an evil event it was." A subset of parents talked about the reasons behind the event, but parents' interpretations of the causes of the events varied widely. Some voiced acknowledgement of racism in their answer, whereas others expressed denial of racism or even explicit racism, such as "Yes, we discussed that blacks are acting irrational and that's how they are."

Reasons for not discussing current events. Far more parents (63%) reported that they did not discuss race-related current events with their children. The reasons parents gave for avoiding these discussions, are summarized in Table 4.

Shielding. The most common reason for avoiding racial discussions was the desire to shield children from negativity, primarily due to age (e.g., "No. These are adult matters. We need to focus on school, family, and friends." A few parents mentioned the violent nature of race-related current events as a reason for avoiding discussions (e.g., "No, a child should not be told about death and murder. Those are adult topics."). For these parents, race-related current events are something from which they needed to shelter their children.

Passive approach. The next most common reason for not discussing race-related current events was a passive parenting approach, in which parents expected external forces to instigate the discussion. When such forces were absent, discussions did not occur. Some relied on situational circumstances: "No, we do not really watch the news." Others referenced their child: "My child is not aware of these." A few parents seemed to be waiting for their child to ask: "They don't ask about it, and it doesn't occur to me to bring it up." These parents did not voice

Racial Ideology

any regret or disappointment that circumstances had not elicited such discussions, suggesting a lack of motivation to discuss race-related current events.

Unnecessary. Finally, a subset of parents who did not discuss events believed that such discussions were unnecessary. One parent seemed surprised we asked the question: “I have not. Why would I bring that up?” These White parents do not seem to view race-related current events as relevant to their families.

Discussion

The goal of this study was to apply a qualitative methodology to gain an in-depth look at contradictory racial ideologies communicated by White parents of children in middle childhood, as well as the reasons why White parents avoid discussing race-related current events with their children. We present evidence that some White parents communicate solely colorblind or color conscious racial ideology in their children, but others communicate a mixture of the two. The majority of parents did not discuss race-related current events with their children; some viewed these discussions as too negative or unnecessary, and some seemed to be waiting for external forces to instigate discussions. These results indicate that White parents have the potential to be agents of change that socialize color conscious beliefs in their children, but a subset are communicating mixed messages that may dampen the positive effects of such beliefs. Furthermore, many White parents appear to be reinforcing the current system of colorblind indifference to racial inequality.

Socialization of Contradictory Racial Ideologies among White Parents

Documenting mixed messages about race communicated by White parents is a novel contribution of this study. At first glance, it appears that color conscious ideology was more common than colorblind ideology. Yet, exploring the overlap between the two reveals a more

Racial Ideology

complicated picture. Approximately a third of White parents voiced mixed messages that combine colorblind and color conscious ideologies. This represents about half of the parents who voiced any color conscious beliefs.

Combining specific colorblind messages (e.g., race does not matter) with some form of color conscious message (particularly endorsing equal treatment or acknowledgement of racism) was by far the most common expression of mixed messages. Colorblindness is pervasive in White American culture, and some view colorblindness as a pathway to interracial harmony (Neville et al., 2013; Plaut et al., 2018). Thus, these parents could be combining colorblindness with color conscious ideology because they believe that colorblindness will lead to racial equality (despite clear evidence to the contrary). Alternatively, White parents who value color consciousness could have employed “strategic colorblindness” (Apfelbaum, Sommers, & Norton, 2008, p. 918) in their responses to avoid the appearance of racial bias, resulting in mixed messages. Assessing parents’ understanding of the actual effects of colorblindness and their beliefs about its utility for race relations would help us understand the reasons behind these mixed messages.

About a third of the sample communicated solely color conscious messages to their children. Some parents made nuanced arguments in favor of color conscious thinking that communicated multicultural values and addressed the history and complexity of racial interactions in the United States. A few parents taught their children about White privilege. Acknowledgement of racism was more common in our sample than denial that racism exists, which is encouraging – yet, it was voiced by less than a third of parents. Teaching children about the realities of racism could be particularly useful from a social justice perspective, as it simultaneously communicates that racial equality is valued, but also that work remains to make it

Racial Ideology

a reality. School-based interventions that teach children about the history and systemic nature of racism are an effective way to reduce racial bias in middle childhood (Hughes et al., 2007).

Exploring whether White parents communicate color conscious ideology in a way that reduces racial bias in their children is a logical next step.

Race-related Current Events

Just over a third of our sample reported discussing race-related current events with their children; declining to discuss race-related current events was by far the modal response. This rate is similar to Underhill's (2018) study, yet somewhat higher than prior studies of racial discussions in general (e.g., Pahlke et al., 2012; Vittrup & Holden, 2001; Vittrup, 2018). Our sample included parents of older children; yet, many still viewed their children as too young for discussions of race-related current events. Sheltering children due to their age or the violent nature of events was the most common reason for not discussing them. This tendency among White parents is problematic because it denies White children accurate information about what minority children their own age are experiencing. In one study, approximately 95% of Black parents reported that they prepared their child for discrimination by early adolescence (Frabutt et al., 2002). Other work has shown that 88% of racial minority early adolescents experienced discrimination at least once, and the majority of these incidents were perpetrated by White children (Pachter et al., 2010). It is possible, and perhaps likely, that White parents and children are unaware of these incidents; however, White parents declining to discuss the events of which they are aware exacerbates their children's ignorance of racial discrimination. Furthermore, White parents who view the murders of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown - who were ages 17 and 18, respectively - as "adult matters" are perpetuating adultification, a form of bias in which

Racial Ideology

Black youth are viewed as more mature than White youth and thus treated more harshly in schools, courts, and other settings (Dancy, 2014).

The second most common reason for not discussing race-related current events was waiting for external factors – such as the topic “coming up” or children asking about them – to elicit discussions. Increased news coverage of racial issues, and the ensuing reactions among adults and peers, could be a catalyst that increases external pressures on White parents to hold these discussions or cause them to come up in conversation more often. Exploring these questions among older youth, who are more likely to consume news stories independently of parents and less likely to be sheltered from violence, is a logical next step for this area of research.

In stark contrast to parents of color, most White parents did not view discussions of race and racism as part of their job as parents. Some parents simply stated that discussing race-related current events was unnecessary. The overall reticence toward race in our data is consistent with research with other White American samples (e.g., Vittrup, 2018; Zucker & Patterson, 2018). This may stem from White parents’ position as a dominant cultural group; rather than seeking to help their children understand and identify with other racial groups, they may instead expect people of other races to assimilate to the dominant (White) culture (Hamm, 2001; Loyd & Gaither, 2018). Our study suggests that White parents are encouraging their children – either actively through colorblind socialization or passively through avoidance and silence – to uphold the status quo. This lack of motivation to challenge racial disparities is perhaps not surprising, as White families directly benefit from racial stratification, which affords them disproportionate access to resources and opportunities. Some parents expressed more damaging views that downplayed race-related current events, blamed the victims of racial discrimination, or criticized

Racial Ideology

people who are concerned about systemic racism. It is important to distinguish potentially well-meaning parents who are avoidant of race or use colorblind messaging from those who mentioned race, but in a way that encourages their child to be racist.

Limitations

Some limitations of this study should be noted. Although anonymous online surveys are useful for exploring White parents' discussions of uncomfortable topics, in-person interviews would provide richer information. MTurk is now widely used in the field, but it has limitations; for example, Mturk participants on average have more experience completing studies than the broader population (Chandler et al., 2019). However, Mturk participants do not significantly differ in the way they respond to studies compared to less naive participants (Hauser et al., 2018; Sprouse, 2011). Ineligible participants may have been screened into the study because they were dishonest in their responses to the demographic questions. Finally, we did not collect data on participants' education level or political orientation, and previous research has shown that MTurk participants are, on average, more educated and liberal-leaning than the American population at large (Hauser et al., 2018).

It is important to note that two of the three provided prompts asked how, if given the opportunity, they *would* discuss race-related current events with their children, whereas the third question asked about actual past behaviors when discussing race-related current events with their child. Even though the scenarios were hypothetical, some parents may have reflected on real conversations, whereas others may have reflected on what they would want to do, if given the opportunity. We believe that, in both circumstances, we are tapping into parents' general racial socialization practices. Incorporating prompts that elicit information about how parents discuss both interpersonal and systemic racism, and how these discussions relate to children's

Racial Ideology

understanding of these distinct forms of racism, would be particularly valuable. Another limitation is that this study did not address how White parents socialize their children to think about Whiteness itself; since White adults often implicitly view Whiteness as normative (Knowles et al., 2014), it would be valuable for future studies to assess ways that White parents encourage this view in their children.

In-person studies of racial discussions between parent-child dyads in real time are sorely needed, as self-reports may be prone to recall or social desirability bias. Understanding how dialogue-based racial socialization fits into a broader picture of other parenting choices (such as choice of neighborhood, school, friend groups, or extracurriculars that do or do not provide opportunities for interracial interactions) is another important goal for future research. This study relied on a single informant in a moderately sized sample. Comparing racial socialization of multiple caregivers or obtaining children's perceptions of racial socialization in larger samples would be valuable. Finally, we were unable to assess how White parents' socialization of racial ideology contributes to children's developing views about race, a critical next step.

Implications

Although a majority of White parents attempt to socialize color conscious ideology in their children, a subset undermines this goal with mixed messages that also include colorblind ideology. White parents who send mixed messages about race may be a group of interest for interventions. These parents clearly need further training about colorblindness and its harmful effects, but they endorse at least some forms of color conscious thinking, providing a useful foundation upon which interventionists may build. Intervening at the family level has the potential to be high impact, as teaching parents about the benefits of teaching their children color conscious ideology – as well as the adverse effects of colorblindness – could also be a pathway

Racial Ideology

to reducing bias in parents themselves. Finally, current events related to race could provide a useful starting point to get discussions going, but also to help families understand the reality of racism in American society.

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Racial Ideology

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Characteristics	Percent of the Sample
Gender Identity	
Female	66.1%
Male	33.9%
Age	
24-29	15.2%
30-39	53.7%
40-49	28.1%
50-63	2.4%
Did not report	.6%
Parental Status	
Biological parents	97%
Other	3%
Marital Status	
Married	73.9%
Single never married	15.2%
Divorced/separated	9.1%
Other	1.8%
Number of children	
1	34.5%
2	41.8%
3	20.6%
4 or more	3.1%
U.S. Census Geographic Region	
South	34.1%
West	26.2%
Northeast	14.6%
Midwest	25%
Did not report	.6%

Table 2

Themes of Racial Ideologies Endorsed by White Parents

Theme	Percentage of parents who endorsed this ideology	Examples
Colorblind	56.4%	
Specific colorblindness	49.7%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I would explain to them that race is nothing but a difference in biological DNA which causes people to have different color skin much like hair or eyes but that we're all human and the same. • I would tell them that the color of a person's skin means nothing and there is no reason to be afraid of them.
Denial of racism	17.6%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We discussed that protesting is good, but it needs to be in the right way. Being violent, destroying property, inciting riots, stealing, looting- all of this is not protesting, it's just bad behavior. We have also discussed in depth problems that face low-income neighborhoods in general, and how a lot of the issues people are protesting about stem more from economic inequality vs. racial [inequality]. • The Charleston shooting was something I discussed because it happened in a church, and we're Catholic and that upset her. She was concerned something similar could happen at her church. I have not discussed the other incidents because I personally feel there were mitigating factors in several of them that went beyond the scope of race, and I don't feel appropriate turning those into racial issues.
Color conscious	69.1%	
Endorsing equal treatment	49.7%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I would tell him that the behavior [racial discrimination] is unacceptable. People should not be judged on their skin color and everyone should be treated with respect irregardless of who they are. • I would say that it is not acceptable to treat someone differently due to their race. I would discuss ways in which people can experience prejudice like this, why it was wrong, and how to avoid doing it themselves.^
Acknowledgment of racism	30.3%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I would tell my child NOT to be color blind because that erases the oppression faced by people of color. I would tell them to acknowledge their white privilege and be the best white ally possible by not speaking over of for people of color. • Yes, my daughter asked me why the police only shoot young black people. I didn't know she had noticed the news so well. I explained that so many cops are wonderful

Racial Ideology

people who will do anything to help but just like with regular people some cops are prejudiced and ignorant just the like people who hate and that they are afraid of people who are different and it makes them misjudge a situation to the point where it becomes harmful or even deadly.

Multiculturalism

18.8%

- I would say there are all kinds of different people in the world and the world is made up of lots of people from different backgrounds.
- Race is a type of culture identity that people belong to just like our family grew up with an English and Irish grandparents we did things differently than a lot of people and other people with other cultures and backgrounds and races do as well and that is what makes us all different and unique and wonderful.

^This response was coded as both endorsing equal treatment and acknowledgement of racism.

Racial Ideology

Table 3

Mixed versus Singular Messages about Race

Theme	Percentage of parents
Color conscious only	33.9%
Colorblind only	21.2%
Neither color conscious nor colorblind	9.7%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Explain to him what happened.” • “I would have a discussion with her.” 	
Mixed color conscious and colorblind	35.2%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific colorblindness and endorsing equal treatment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “Race is not important at all....it matters what is in the inside, not what the color of the person is” ○ “It is wrong to judge someone by it's [sic] color and discriminate them by color. We are all equal.” 	25.4%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific colorblindness and acknowledgement of racism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “Having a different color of skin means just that - the person is different in that way and it doesn't mean anything more than that” ○ “I would explain (somewhat needlessly, as she's pretty aware of such things) that some people (wrongly) think that the color of someone's skin means that they're inferior or less worthy of respect.” 	15%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific colorblindness and multiculturalism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ I would let my child know that there are many different races in the world and that although they are different and may have different beliefs that it doesn't make the person inferior or bad. I would also encourage my child to make friendships with people of different races to learn more about them and see how their race doesn't really matter in the end. 	4.2%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Denial of racism and endorsing equal treatment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ We discussed the riots in Baltimore...We discussed that protesting is good, but it needs to be in the right way. Being violent, destroying property, inciting riots, stealing, looting- all of this is not protesting, it's just bad behavior. We have also discussed in depth problems that face low-income neighborhoods in general, and how a lot of the issues people are protesting about stem more from economic inequality vs racial. We have also discussed how this has led to civil wars throughout history if it is not dealt with. ○ People are people not matter what their color. A person should be judged on their actions, not the way they look. 	4.2%

Racial Ideology

- Denial of racism and multiculturalism 2.4%
 - I'll explain that just like with anything else there are people out there filled with hate and that if it wasn't hate about a skin color it would be about what car they drive or what type of food they eat.
 - That someone's skin color can tell you about where their ancestors come from. That they may have amazing stories in their family about places and people that we've only seen in books or heard about on TV. That skin color is just a part of their history and culture it's another thing that makes us all different and special.
 - Denial of racism and acknowledgement of racism < 1%
 - We discussed the riots in Baltimore. We discussed that while some people of race decided to make wrong choices it was not indicative of said race in general.
 - That what we saw was typical in our society unfortunately and very wrong.
-

Racial Ideology

Table 4

Reasons Parents Did Not Discuss Race-Related Current Events with Their Children

Theme	Percentage [^] of parents who endorsed this ideology	Examples
Shielding	37.5%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My child is too young to fully understand the situation. • I did not, this is too much to handle for my 9 year old daughter at the moment. • No. He's not ready to learn about all of the hate in the world.
Passive approach	27.9%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No, it hasn't come up. • No I have not. I allow my children to bring up the current events that they are interested in learning more about.
Unnecessary	17.3%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No, I did not think it was something she needed to know at the time. • No, because they are not important to me.
No explanation	17.3%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No. • No, we have not discussed it.

[^]Percentages were calculated out of the 104 parents (63% of the total sample) who reported that they had not discussed race-related current events with their children.