



Journal of Social Issues, Vol. 75, No. 4, 2019, pp. 1035–1056
doi: 10.1111/josi.12348

This article is part of the Special Issue “Research on Race and Racism,”
Andrea L. Miller, Chadly Stern and Helen A. Neville (Special Issue Editors).
For a full listing of Special Issue papers, see: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/josi.2019.75.issue-2/issuetoc>.

Bias Awareness Predicts Color Conscious Racial Socialization Methods among White Parents

Sylvia P. Perry*

Northwestern University

Allison L. Skinner

Northwestern University and University of Georgia

Jamie L. Abaied

University of Vermont

The majority of White parents in the United States are uncomfortable discussing race with their children and tend to avoid it. When they do discuss race with their children, they often take a color blind approach—in which they emphasize a belief that race does not matter—instead of a color conscious approach—in which they acknowledge race-related issues. In the current study, we sought to explore the individual difference factors that may be associated with White American parents’ racial socialization practices. Results indicated that parents’ racial bias awareness was associated with greater willingness to discuss race with their children, increased color consciousness, and decreased color blindness; when statistically controlling for their racial attitudes, motivations to respond without prejudice, and interracial contact. The potential impacts of bias awareness interventions on White parents’ racial socialization behaviors are discussed.

Despite their tendency to endorse egalitarianism (Dovidio, 2009; Dovidio, Gaertner, & Pearson, 2017), the majority of White individuals in the United States continue to show evidence of implicit negative attitudes toward Black individuals (Xu, Nosek, & Greenwald, 2014). These attitudes have been linked to negative intergroup outcomes, including subtle forms of prejudice (Dovidio, Kawakami,

*Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Sylvia Perry, 2029 Sheridan Rd., Evanston, IL 60208 [e-mail: sylvia.perry@northwestern.edu].

The authors thank Wesley Ameden, Caroline Trevarrow, and James Wages for coding the data; and Adilene Osnaya for reviewing a draft of the manuscript.

& Gaertner, 2002; Greenwald, Poehlman, Uhlmann, & Banaji, 2009) and racial disparities (Kovera, 2019). Although willingness to recognize (their own and systemic) bias has been shown to be one of the strongest predictors of increased intergroup empathy and reduced prejudice (Monteith & Mark, 2009; Monteith, Mark, & Ashburn-Nardo, 2010; Ozier, Taylor, & Murphy, 2019; Nelson, Adams, & Salter, 2013), most White individuals are uncomfortable even discussing race and racism (Pauker, Apfelbaum, & Spitzer, 2015) or using racial labels (Karmali, Kawakami, Vaccarino, Williams, Phills, & Friesen, 2019), and tend to avoid it (Apfelbaum, Sommers, & Norton, 2008).

White adults are particularly likely to avoid these topics in conversation with their children. For example, in one study, only 10% of White parents reported having in-depth, race-related discussions with their children, even when instructed to do so (Vittrup & Holden, 2011); this avoidance of race discussions seems to occur even among parents who think that discussing race is important (Pahlke, Bigler, & Suizzo, 2012). For example, although the majority (81%) of White parents in a recent study thought that it was important to discuss race with their children, 70% indicated that they had *never* explicitly done so (Vittrup, 2018). Moreover, in instances in which White parents do discuss race with their children, they often take a *color blind* approach—in which they emphasize a belief that race does not matter—instead of a *color conscious* approach—in which they acknowledge and address race-related issues (Pahlke et al., 2012; Vittrup, 2018). Given that color conscious racial socialization methods are predictive of reduced racial bias in White children (Hughes, Bigler, & Levy, 2007; Katz, 2003; Vittrup & Holden, 2011), understanding the mechanisms that may be associated with White parents' willingness to discuss race-related events and acknowledge racism with their White children is important. In the current study, we explore the individual difference factors that may be associated with White parents' willingness to take a color conscious approach to conversations with their children.

Potential Predictors of Parental Racial Socialization

Evidence suggests that the extent to which parents are aware of and concerned about their own racially biased tendencies (i.e., bias awareness; Perry, Murphy, & Dovidio, 2015a) may explain unique variance in their willingness to discuss racism with their children, as well as the content of those discussions. Bias awareness has been linked to White individuals' willingness to internalize feedback about their racial biases and acknowledge that subtly (and not just blatantly) racially biased behaviors are a form of racism (Perry et al., 2015a). Given that bias-aware people more readily recognize and acknowledge racial biases (Perry et al., 2015a), White parents who are higher in bias awareness may be more likely to engage in explicit racial socialization with their children. That is, highly bias-aware parents

may be more likely to discuss race with their children, and do so in a way that acknowledges racism without denying or downplaying it.

Beyond bias awareness, prior intergroup relations research suggests that there are a number of additional individual difference factors that might explain significant variability in whether White parents discuss race with their children, and the approach that they choose to take during the discussions they do have. These factors include White individuals' attitudes toward racial minorities (Dovidio et al., 2017), the quality and quantity of contact that they have with racial minorities (Brown & Hewstone, 2005), their motivations to be nonprejudiced (Devine, Plant, Amodio, Harmon-Jones, & Vance, 2002; Plant & Devine, 1998), and their perceptions of and concerns about interacting with racial minorities (Plant & Devine, 2003; Stephan & Stephan, 1985; Trawalter & Richeson, 2008). Specifically, as factors associated with negative intergroup relations (e.g., interracial anxiety) increase, we expect that White parents will be less likely to discuss race with and acknowledge racism to their children, and more likely to deny or downplay racism. In contrast, as factors that have been associated with positive intergroup relations (e.g., interracial friendships) increase, we expect that White parents will be more likely to discuss race with and acknowledge racism to their children, and less likely to deny or downplay racism. In the following section, we discuss what is already known about racial socialization in White American families.

Racial Socialization in White American Families

Relative to the racial socialization literature on racial minority families, research investigating how White American families approach racial socialization is scarce (Hamm, 2001; Hughes et al., 2006). This disparity can largely be attributed to the fact that majority race families engage in much less explicit racial socialization than minority race families (Brown, Tanner-Smith, Lesane-Brown, & Ezell, 2007; Lesane-Brown, Brown, Tanner-Smith, & Bruce, 2010). Results of a large representative survey of families ($N > 18,000$) in the United States indicated that the majority of White families (56%) never or almost never engage in any explicit racial or ethnic socialization (Lesane-Brown et al., 2010). Although these findings indicate that a substantial percentage (44%) of White parents does engage in at least some racial or ethnic socialization, this survey was focused on discussions about the child's own racial or ethnic heritage. Given that this survey was limited to personal cultural socialization, it is unclear whether or how these numbers relate to discussions of race and other aspects of racial socialization within the cultural context.

Studies that have examined White parents' socialization about race and racial issues in society indicate that rates of socialization are much lower than 44% (Pahlke et al., 2012; Vittrup & Holden, 2011). Pahlke et al., 2012 investigated explicit racial socialization among White American mothers and their young (4- to 6-year-old) children, finding that in an experimental setting, most

mothers (95%) avoided explicitly discussing race with their children while reading a diversity-themed story. Moreover, many mothers reported that they had never engaged in conversations about race with their children. Pahlke and colleagues used a modified scale of the racial socialization dimensions developed by Hughes and Chen (1997) to investigate the content of parents' explicit racial socialization messages. They found that all dimensions of racial socialization were relatively rare among White parents, yet those who did engage in explicit racial socialization were most likely to talk about egalitarianism and the history of other groups (cultural socialization). White parents reported that they almost never discussed the other measured dimensions of racial socialization (preparation for bias and discrimination against others) with their children. Vittrup and Holden (2011) found that 65% of White mothers and 42% of White fathers of the young (5- to 7-year-old) children in their sample reported at least some discussion of race-related issues with their children. However, these percentages were cut in half (33% of mothers, 20% of fathers) when parents were asked whether these conversations explicitly involved discussion of skin color, racial labels, stereotypes, or discrimination. Similar to the findings of Pahlke and colleagues, Vittrup and Holden found that nearly half (48%) of parents' racial discussions were related to egalitarianism (e.g., equality, valuing what is on the inside over external qualities). Only about 20% of explicitly race-related conversations involved the promotion of nondiscrimination. Least common, parents reported some race-related discussion about the languages and traditions of other cultures (16%) and historical events related to race (8%).

Vittrup and Holden (2011) also attempted to experimentally test the effect of explicit racial socialization on White children's racial attitudes. In the experimental conditions, White American parents were asked to engage in several in-depth conversations about race with their young children and/or play selected race-related television programs for their children over the course of a week. Review of parental compliance data indicated that, as instructed, parents in the video conditions played all of the videos for their children. However, in the discussion conditions only 10% of parents actually engaged in the in-depth race-related discussions requested by researchers. These findings illustrate White parents' reluctance to engage in race-related discussion with their children. In support, Hamm's (2001) qualitative analysis of American parents' attitudes toward explicit racial socialization indicated that many White parents advocate a color blind approach to racial socialization and defer to schools for all other types of racial socialization. However, data from large cross-sectional samples indicate that when there is an increased percentage of racial minority students at a child's school, the likelihood of racial socialization among White families goes up (Brown et al., 2007; Hughes, Witherspoon, Rivas-Drake, & West-Bey, 2009).

In sum, most evidence suggests that racial majority parents generally avoid race-related conversations with their children (e.g., Pahlke et al., 2012; Vittrup & Holden, 2011). Moreover, under most circumstances racial majority parents prefer

to rely on society (e.g., school, television) to provide explicit education about race (Hamm, 2001; Vittrup & Holden, 2011).

Outcomes Associated with Color Conscious Racial Socialization

Evidence indicates that color conscious racial socialization, which acknowledges race and racism, improves attitudes toward racial outgroups (Katz, 2003; Vittrup & Holden, 2011). Katz and colleagues investigated predictors of racial bias longitudinally in a racially mixed (50% White American, 50% African American) sample of American children (Katz, 2003; Katz & Barrett, 1997). Children with the highest racial bias at age 3 had parents who focused more on same-race (relative to other race) targets while exploring diversity-themed picture books with their children. Katz and colleagues also found that racial bias at age 6 was predicted by explicit racial socialization at age 3, such that parents who explicitly discussed race had children with the least racial bias. Moreover, there is experimental evidence indicating that explicit racial socialization reduces racial bias. Vittrup and Holden (2011) found that despite the weak compliance of parent participants who were randomly assigned to discuss race at home with their child, the racial socialization manipulation influenced children's racial attitudes. After the racial socialization intervention, children in the race discussion condition showed significantly more positive attitudes toward Black people than children in the control group. Although others have failed to identify a relationship between explicit racial socialization and children's racial attitudes (Pahlke et al., 2012), this has largely been attributed to the exceedingly low base rates of racial socialization among White American parents.

Although egalitarianism is generally seen as a positive orientation in the psychological literature, in the racial socialization literature, it tends to be associated with the color blind approach to race, such that equality messages often tend to be paired with color blind messages (e.g., "skin color does not matter, you should treat everyone equally"). Experimental evidence demonstrates that color blind racial socialization reduces awareness of racial bias (Apfelbaum, Pauker, Sommers, & Ambady, 2010) and some scholars have argued that racial color blindness leads to ignorance about the societal implications of race (Hughes et al., 2006). Consequently, children who are socialized with egalitarianism may be more likely to internalize racial biases and stereotypes (e.g., Hughes & Chen, 1999). Outcomes associated with egalitarian racial socialization in the home have not been investigated among racial majority children. Yet, there is experimental evidence of the impact of color blind racial socialization. Racial majority children (8- to 11-year-old) who were primed with the color blind approach to race had more difficulty identifying and reporting racial bias to teachers than those who were not primed with color blind ideology (Apfelbaum et al., 2010). This suggests that

parents' color blind racial socialization messages may reduce awareness of racial bias among children.

The Current Study

Consistent with recent calls to identify the factors that motivate White American parents to engage in racial socialization with their children (Loyd & Gaither, 2018), we examined the relation between parental individual differences and the racial socialization messages they provide to their children. We focused on the parents of middle childhood aged children (8- to 12-year-old) for several reasons. First, by this age, children have developed an abstract understanding of the concept of race (Hughes, Bigler, & Levy, 2007). Second, prior work has revealed that children in middle childhood are capable of engaging in rich discussions with their parents regarding challenging issues, such as how they cope with stress (Abaied & Stanger, 2017), which suggests that parents and children have the capacity for potentially engaging in challenging discussions about race. Finally, by this age we reasoned that most parents would have had opportunities to discuss race and racism with their child. We examined the extent to which individual differences in: (i) racial prejudice, interracial anxiety, and motivations to respond without prejudice; (ii) interracial contact and interracial friendships; and (iii) White parents' racial bias awareness predicted their racial socialization practices. Specifically, we explored the extent to which the aforementioned factors uniquely contributed to White parents' self-reported discussions of recent race-related events with their children, acknowledgement of societal racism in a hypothetical conversation with their child, and denial of societal racism in a hypothetical conversation with their child.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Participants were recruited online through Amazon's MechanicalTurk (MTurk) to complete a survey that was securely hosted on Qualtrics.com in exchange for \$1.00. Our target sample size was ($N = 150$), but we recruited a total sample of 200 with the expectation that only 75–80% of respondents would identify as White. The resulting sample included 168 White parents (66% female, ages 24–63, $M_{\text{age}} = 36.62$, 97% biological parents) who had children between 8- and 12-years-old. A sensitivity power analysis indicated that we had 80% power to detect a correlation of $r = .21$.

First, parents were asked to list the ages of each of their children. If parents had only one child in the target age range of 8–12, they were instructed to focus on this child when answering questions in the survey. If parents had more than one

child aged 8–12, parents were instructed to focus on a child who was randomly selected by Qualtrics software.

Measures

Individual difference measures. Parents first reported their and their child's interracial contact by listing their and their child's 10 closest friends, respectively, then (on a separate page) categorizing those friends by racial group (e.g., White, Black, etc.). This technique was used to reduce social desirability concerns. Additionally, parents indicated the frequency of their contact with Black people on a 5-point scale (1 = *never*, 5 = *all of the time*). Due to the low number of participants who indicated having (or their children having) more than one Black friend (16% of parents, 13% of children), the intergroup contact variables were dichotomized (1 = one or more Black friends, 0 = no Black friends). Thirty-six percent of the parents and 33.5% of the children in the sample had one or more Black friends.

After answering questions regarding their discussions about race (see below), parents answered questions assessing their bias awareness (e.g., even though I know it is not appropriate, I sometimes feel that I hold unconscious negative attitudes toward Blacks; 4 items, $\alpha = .79$; Perry et al., 2015a), internal and external motivations to respond without prejudice (5 items, $\alpha = .87$; 4 items, $\alpha = .85$; Plant & Devine, 1998), interracial anxiety (4 items, $\alpha = .87$; Plant & Devine, 2003), and explicit prejudice (via a feeling thermometer; Kinder & Drake, 2009). These last five measures were presented in random order.

Parent-child discussions of race. Parents responded 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." Responses to each question were coded independently for acknowledgement of racism on a scale of 0 (does not acknowledge racism), 1 (subtly acknowledges racism, e.g., "some races are treated differently than other races"), or 2 (overtly acknowledges racism, e.g., "some people think that the color of someone's skin means they are inferior") and denial of racism on a scale of 0 (does not deny racism), 1 (subtly denies the reality of racism, e.g., "some people [who say racism is an issue] are just ignorant and do not know any better"), or 2 (blatantly denies reality of racism, e.g., "some people like to cry racism for everything and ignore the facts"). Using methods previously employed in similar studies (e.g., Pahlke et al., 2012), scores were then summed across the three questions to provide an overall score with a potential range of 0–6. In addition, parents' answers to the third question

received a binary code of 0 (did not discuss) or 1 (did discuss). Reliability based on 20% double coding was excellent for acknowledgement (intraclass correlation coefficient [ICC] = .89) and did/did not discuss (ICC = .94). Variability in denial of racism was extremely low for question 1, with nearly all participants receiving a score of zero; this led to an ICC value of approximately zero despite near-perfect agreement between coders. However, the ICC for questions 2 and 3 combined was .93 (indicating high agreement between coders). Thirty-six percent of the sample indicated that they had discussed current events related to race with their children.

Results

Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations among variables appear in Table 1. We used a hierarchical logistic regression model to predict whether or not parents reported discussing racial current events with their children, which was coded as a dichotomous variable (yes vs. no). We had initially intended to use linear regression to analyze the data on parent acknowledgement and denial of racism; however, inspection of the distribution of these outcomes indicated that they were highly positively skewed. To accommodate the observed distribution, we conducted Poisson regressions, which are presented in Table 3. The predictors were the same across all regression models: Block 1 included parent gender (coded as 0 = male, 1 = female); Block 2 included internal motivations (IMS) and external motivations (EMS) to respond without prejudice, interracial anxiety, and warmth toward Black people as predictor variables; Block 3 included frequency of parents' contact with Black people and dummy-coded variables indicating whether or not parents and children had any Black friends (0 = no Black friends, 1 = some Black friends); and Block 4 included bias awareness. This method allowed us to test (1) the extent to which each group of factors explained unique variance in each outcome, (2) whether intergroup contact explained unique variance in each outcome when controlling for intergroup attitudes and motivations to respond without prejudice, and (3) whether bias awareness explained unique variance in each outcome when controlling for all other factors.

Discussions of Racial Current Events

The results of the logistic regression predicting whether or not parents reported discussing racial current events with their children (0 = did not report discussing race, 1 = did report discussing race) appear in Table 2. In Block 1, parent gender was a significant predictor such that mothers were more likely than fathers to report discussing racial current events with their child; this effect became nonsignificant in all subsequent blocks. Across all blocks in which they were included, increased IMS was associated with a greater likelihood of discussing racial current events with their children, whereas increased EMS predicted a lower

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Bias awareness	—	-.14	.43***	.67***	-.14	-.21**	-.32***	-.01	.00	.05	-.16*	-.12
2. Internal motivation to respond without prejudice		—	-.10	-.18*	.49***	.25***	.12	.19*	.20**	.27**	-.08	.33
3. External motivation to respond without prejudice			—	.51***	-.18*	-.06	-.20**	.06	-.23**	.01	-.09	-.24
4. Interracial anxiety				—	-.29***	-.21**	-.23**	.01	-.11	-.07	-.07	-.19
5. Warmth toward Black people (feelings thermometer)					—	.21**	.17*	.10	.05	.15	.03	.36
6. Parent contact with Black people						—	.43***	.31***	.10	.08	.04	.07
7. Parent Black friends (0 = none, 1 = 1 or more)							—	.33***	.07	.15*	-.14	.12
8. Child Black friends (0 = none, 1 = 1 or more)								—	-.01	.17*	-.14	.003
9. Discussion of racial current events (0 = no, 1 = yes)									—	.22**	.18*	.20
10. Acknowledgment of racism										—	-.16*	.10
11. Denial of racism											—	-.15
12. Gender (male = 0, female = 1)												—
<i>M</i>	2.93	5.62	3.27	2.49	72.32	3.35	.36	.34	.36	.40	.19	.66
<i>SD</i>	1.36	1.37	1.56	1.34	26.96	1.10	.48	.47	.48	.75	.44	.48
<i>Observed Min</i>	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Observed Max</i>	6	7	7	6.67	100	5	1	1	1	5	2	1

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 2. Logistic Regression Predicting Presence of Parent Discussions of Racial Current Events

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	Odds Ratio [95% CI]	Chi-square (df)	ΔR^2	Odds Ratio [95% CI]	Chi-square (df)	ΔR^2	Odds Ratio [95% CI]	Chi-square (df)	ΔR^2	Odds Ratio [95% CI]	Chi-square (df)	ΔR^2
Parent gender	2.84* [1.35, 5.96]	8.32 (1)*	.05	2.136 [.94, 4.85]	11.54 (4)*	.11	2.20 [.96, 5.05]	1.67 (3)	.12	2.18 [.94, 5.06]	4.51 (1)*	.15
Internal motivation to respond without prejudice				1.41* [1.04, 1.93]			1.40* [1.02, 1.93]			1.44* [1.04, 2.00]		
External motivation to respond without prejudice				.71* [.54, .94]			.70* [.53, .93]			.67** [.50, .89]		
Interracial anxiety				1.12 [.81, 1.54]			1.17 [.84, 1.63]			.93 [.63, 1.38]		
Warmth toward Black people				.99 [.97, 1.01]			.99 [.98, 1.01]			.99 [.97, 1.01]		

(continued)

Table 2. Continued

Parent contact with Black People	1.24 [.86, 1.79]	1.24 [.85, 1.80]
Parent Black friends (0 = none, 1 = 1 or more)	1.03 [.46, 2.32]	1.28 [.51, 2.98]
Child Black friends (0 = none, 1 = 1 or more)	.75 [.33, 1.67]	.71 [.31, 1.61]
Bias aware- ness		1.47* [1.03, 2.11]

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 3. Poisson Regressions Predicting Parent Acknowledgement and Denial of Racism

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	Odds Ratio [95% CI]	Chi-Square (df)		Odds Ratio [95% CI]	Chi-Square (df)		Odds Ratio [95% CI]	Chi-Square (df)		Odds Ratio [95% CI]	Chi-Square (df)	
Gender	.65 [.38, 1.12]	2.55 (1)		.87 [.49, 1.58] 1.67*** [1.26, 2.24]	23.34 (5)***		.92 [.50, 1.67] 1.65** [1.23, 2.22]	29.02 (8)		.98 [.54, 1.79] 1.67* [1.24, 2.26]	34.57 (9)	
Internal motivation to respond without prejudice												
External motivation to respond without prejudice				1.07 [.91, 1.26]			1.09 [.92, 1.30]			1.04 [.88, 1.24]		
Interracial anxiety				.96 [.78, 1.19] 1.00 [.99, 1.08]			.96 [.78, 1.18] 1.00 [.99, 1.02] .89 [.68, 1.17] .64 [.36, 1.14]			.82 [.64, 1.04] 1.00 [.99, 1.01] .87 [.67, 1.14] .51* [.28, .93]		
Warmth toward Black people												
Parent contact with Black people												
Parent Black friends (0 = none, 1 = 1 or more)												
Child Black friends (0 = none, 1 = 1 or more)							.69 [.40, 1.20]			.72 [.42, 1.23]		
Bias awareness										1.33* [1.05, 1.68]		

(continued)

Table 3. Continued

Outcome: Denial of Racism	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Odds Ratio [95% CI]	Chi-square (df)	Odds Ratio [95% CI]	Chi-square (df)	Odds Ratio [95% CI]	Chi-square (df)
Gender	1.95 [.97, 3.89]	3.49(1)	2.41* [1.12, 5.19]	8.16(5)	2.48* [1.14, 5.41]	12.09 (8)
Internal motivation to respond without prejudice			.88 [.67,1.16]		.91 [.69, 1.20]	.85 [.64, 1.14]
External motivation to respond without prejudice			.86 [.66, 1.13]		.88* [.67, 1.16]	.87 [.66, 1.16]
Interracial anxiety			.92 [.66, 1.29]		.95 [.67, 1.37]	1.23 [.80, 1.90]
Warmth toward Black people			1.01 [.99, 1.03]		1.01 [.99, 1.03]	1.01 [.99, 1.03]
Parent contact with Black people					1.10 [.77, 1.59]	1.06 [.73, 1.52]
Parent Black friends (0 = none, 1 = 1 or more)					.81 [.36, 1.84]	.93 [.40, 2.14]
Child Black friends (0 = none, 1 = 1 or more)					2.40 [.95, 6.05]	2.24 [.88, 5.70]
Bias awareness					.63* [.45, .98]	.63* [.45, .98]

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

likelihood of reporting such discussions. In the final block, for each one unit increase in IMS, parents were 44% more likely to discuss race with their children, and for each one unit increase in EMS, parents were 30% less likely to discuss race with their children. The effects of interracial anxiety and warmth toward Black people predicting racial discussions were nonsignificant in all blocks in which they were included. In addition, the effects of family interracial contact predicting racial discussions were nonsignificant in all blocks in which they were included. Consistent with hypotheses, when controlling for all other variables, higher levels of parental bias awareness predicted a higher likelihood of discussing racial current events with their children. For each one unit increase in bias awareness, parents were 47% more likely to discuss race with their children.

Acknowledgement of Racism

Parent gender was unrelated to acknowledgement of racism across all blocks. As hypothesized, greater IMS was associated with higher levels of acknowledgement of racism across all blocks in which it was included. For every unit increase in IMS, parents were 67% more likely to show an increase in acknowledging racism. EMS, interracial anxiety, and warmth toward Black people were nonsignificant across all blocks in which they were included. Children's and parents' friendships were nonsignificant in all blocks in which they were included; however, parents' interracial friendships were significantly associated with acknowledgement of racism in the final block. The rate of acknowledging racism was 49% lower for parents who had zero Black friends than parents who had one or more Black friends. Consistent with hypotheses, greater bias awareness was associated with greater acknowledgement of racism when controlling for all other variables. For each unit increase in bias awareness, there was a 33% increase in the rate of acknowledging racism.

Denial of Racism

The effect of parent gender was nonsignificant in the first block and significant in all other blocks, such that the rate of denying racism was 2.42 times greater among fathers than it was among mothers. The regressions predicting denial of racism revealed no significant effects for IMS, EMS, interracial anxiety, or warmth toward Black people; and no significant effects for family interracial contact in all blocks in which they were included. Consistent with hypotheses, greater bias awareness was associated with lower denial of racism, such that, for each unit increase in bias awareness there was a 37% decrease in denial of racism.

Discussion

The goal of the current study was to examine the extent to which individual differences in White American parents' racial bias awareness, attitudes, and contact were associated with their self-reported conversations about race with their children. Specifically, we sought to test the role of (i) racial prejudice, interracial anxiety, and (internal and external) motivations to respond without prejudice; (ii) interracial contact and interracial friendships; and (iii) racial bias awareness, as they related to the racial socialization practices they use with their children. Consistent with hypotheses, results indicated that White parents with higher racial bias awareness were more likely to discuss race with their children and tended to engage in more color conscious racial socialization with their children. That is, when controlling for racial attitudes, motivations to respond without prejudice, and intergroup contact, parents who were more aware of and concerned about their own racially biased tendencies were more likely to discuss race and racism with their children, demonstrated greater acknowledgment of racism, and were less likely to deny racism in their self-reported conversations with their children. Interestingly, although parents' internal and external motivations to respond without prejudice explained unique variance in color conscious socialization methods (e.g., saying yes to discussing race-related current events and acknowledging racism), bias awareness was the only predictor to explain unique variance in behaviors associated with color blind socialization methods. That is, bias awareness was negatively associated with parents using language denying racism, whereas the other factors did not explain additional variance in this tendency.

Beyond racial bias awareness, we found that parents who were more internally motivated to respond without prejudice reported a greater likelihood of discussing race with their children and acknowledging racism during these discussions. External motivation to respond without prejudice was also associated with parents' racial socialization—parents with greater external motivation to respond without prejudice were less likely to report that they had discussed race or racial current events with their child. One possible interpretation of this is that parents with high internal motivation to respond without prejudice accurately recognize that providing color conscious racial socialization to their child can reduce his or her racial biases. In contrast, parents who are externally motivated to respond without prejudice may fear that any mention of race may make them look racist (Apfelbaum et al., 2008). In addition, these parents may worry that increasing their children's awareness and acknowledgement of race will actually make their child more racist (Vittrup, 2018).

Interestingly, most of the other individual difference variables we examined did not account for additional variance in parents' self-reported racial socialization approaches. For instance, parents' interracial anxiety and warmth toward Black people showed no association with their racial socialization approach. Thus, White

American parents' racial attitudes and feelings toward Black people in and of themselves may not be particularly relevant to how parents explicitly socialize their children about race. Rather, the current findings suggest that it is parents' awareness of their own racial attitudes and biases and their concerns about responding without prejudice that are associated with parents talking to their children about race and acknowledging racial biases in society.

Although intergroup contact has previously been associated with positive racial attitudes (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), within our study, interracial contact was not uniquely associated with parents' willingness to engage in racial socialization, with one exception. Parents whose children had one or more Black friends were more likely to acknowledge racism. Our findings also provide evidence that White parents who have Black friends and whose children have Black friends tend to show more internal motivation to respond without prejudice, yet it is unknown whether parents' racial attitudes lead children to develop more diverse friendships or children's diverse friendships increase parents' internal motivations to respond without prejudice (or both), or whether an entirely different factor explains this association.

We also found that approximately 36% of White American parents reported that they had discussed recent racially charged events with their children. Although this means that only a minority of White parents indicated that they had these discussions with their children, this is still high relative to the percentages reported in previous studies (Pahlke et al., 2012; Vittrup & Holden, 2011). A number of factors may contribute to the larger proportion of parents providing racial socialization in the current study. First, in this study parents reported on racial socialization of their 8- to 12-year-old child, whereas previous work has focused on socialization of children in preschool and early elementary years. Previous work indicates that parents may feel more comfortable discussing racial topics with older children (Vittrup, 2018). Another potential contributor is the approach used to measure racial socialization; previous work has examined parents' racial socialization within specific contexts (e.g., during a lab session) or limited time period (within a specific 1-week period), whereas in the current study parents were asked if they had *ever* spoken with their child about race-related incidents. The fact that parents self-reported socialization may have also influenced the measured prevalence of racial socialization. To the extent that providing racial socialization is perceived by parents as a socially desirable behavior, there may be a tendency to exaggerate the racial socialization they have provided to their child.

Prior work has shown little evidence of overlap between the racial attitudes of parents and their children, which has been speculated to be a result of the lack of explicit conversations about race in most White families (Skinner & Meltzoff, 2019; Vittrup, 2018). Thus, although parents in the current study reported fairly positive attitudes toward Black people, their children may have little knowledge of their parents' attitudes in the absence of explicit conversations about race. Given

that color consciousness seems to be associated with reduced bias and increased awareness of racial inequality (Bonam, Vinodharen, Coleman, & Salter, 2019; Nelson et al., 2013), it is important to consider the factors that may promote color conscious parental racial socialization. This work sheds light on the factors associated with color conscious racial socialization in White American families.

Although follow-up work is needed to determine whether bias awareness causally influences racial socialization approaches, the findings reported here have potential implications for interventions and policies designed to reduce racial biases and discrimination in childhood. Prior work indicates that it is possible to increase individuals' awareness of their own racial biases (Monteith et al., 2010). Thus, it is possible that bias awareness interventions with parents could be used as a means of promoting and facilitating color conscious racial socialization among White parents, ultimately increasing children's awareness of and concern about racial biases. It is important to note that, consistent with previously published research findings (Perry, Dovidio, Murphy, & van Ryn, 2015b), bias awareness was positively associated with interracial anxiety. In addition, it was negatively related to parents' interracial friendships. Previous research has suggested that the relation between bias awareness and interracial anxiety may exist because those who are higher in awareness may also be more concerned about appearing to be prejudiced when interacting with racial minorities. This may be an even greater concern among parents who have fewer Black friends. Thus, it is possible that an intervention increasing awareness might also increase some parents' concerns about how they would perform in future interracial interactions.

Additional work is needed to examine whether a bias awareness intervention like the one examined here could be effective, but interventions with parents have the potential to be highly fruitful. Previous research indicates that one-shot intervention methods generally fail to sustain changes in racial attitudes over time (Lai et al., 2016), yet one-shot interventions that target judgment and decision making can persist for months (Morewedge et al., 2015). Thus, a one-shot intervention with parents (targeting their awareness of biases and approach to racial socialization) could potentially have a long-term impact on how they think about and approach racial socialization with their children. Therefore, through repeated conversations between parents and children over time, this could potentially have long-term impacts on the racial attitudes and biases of White children. This type of intervention strategy would also impact racial attitudes while they are still in the process of developing, which have been referred to as an optimal time for intervention (Lee, Quinn, & Heyman, 2017). Moreover, this approach would maximize the impact of interventions, such that training one parent on how to engage in racial socialization, has the potential to impact the racial attitudes of several children. Future work that examines possible interventions of this kind and how they could be implemented with parents, will be an important next step in this line of work.

Limitations

One limitation of the current study is that we did not assess the quality of (parents' or children') contact (e.g., the nature and closeness of their interracial friendships). Although our primary measures of intergroup contact (i.e., number of Black friends, frequency of contact) are consistent with previous work that has assessed intergroup contact as a covariate (e.g., Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998), we recognize that much research on intergroup contact suggests that the quality of the contact is also important to consider (Cameron, Rutland, Hossain, & Petley, 2011; Gaither & Sommers, 2013; Skinner, & Meltzoff, 2019). Moreover, given that people's self-reports about their explicit negative attitudes toward various social groups are influenced by social desirability concerns, it is possible that more indirect, or implicit, measures may tell a different story about the relation between racial attitudes and socialization (Greenwald et al., 1998).

Another limitation of this study is that we did not get children's perspectives. These data are one sided in that we were only able to assess parents' perceptions and recall of race-related conversations, but it is possible that children's perceptions and memory of those conversations may differ. We were also not able to get at the frequency of such conversations in the current study. The frequency with which parents engage in conversations about race may vary with regard to the individual difference variables measured here and may have important implications for the impact that these conversations have on their children. It is also important to note that data were collected during a specific period in time, following highly publicized race-related events (data collection occurred within 14–28 days of the 2015 church shooting in Charleston, South Carolina). Although, to some extent, this provides a novel and unique context in which we can assess these questions, it is possible that race discussions were particularly salient for some parents at this time. In particular, parents who were bias aware or internally motivated to respond without prejudice may have been particularly likely to discuss race with their children because of their personal motivations and pre-existing self-awareness. Thus, the salience of race in this particular time period may have increased the link between bias awareness and color conscious racial socialization. In addition, both the outcomes (e.g., discussing Trayvon Martin) and the individual difference measures primarily focused on parents' experiences with and willingness to discuss race in the context of Black individuals. It is possible that if the focus was shifted to discussions about racism, in general, we would find different outcomes.

Conclusion

This work represents an important step in better understanding racial socialization in White American families and the factors associated with parental racial socialization, which has recently been highlighted as an important gap in the

research literature (Loyd & Gaither, 2018). In spite of the clear relevance of race and racial divides in current U.S. society, most White parents avoid discussing race with their children. By not socializing their children about race, White parents may be unintentionally setting their children up to be ignorant to the racial biases and inequalities that persist in current society. Moreover, by failing to discuss race with their children, racial majority parents may be implicitly endorsing the negative racial messages children are exposed to from society.

References

- Abaied, J. L., & Stanger, S. B. (2017). Observed parent socialization of coping predicts social adjustment in middle childhood. *Journal of Family Psychology*, *31*, 958–964. <https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0000342>
- Apfelbaum, E. P., Pauker, K., Sommers, S. R., & Ambady, N. (2010). In blind pursuit of racial equality? *Psychological Science*, *21*, 1587–1592. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797610384741>
- Apfelbaum, E. P., Sommers, S. R., & Norton, M. I. (2008). Seeing race and seeming racist? Evaluating strategic colorblindness in social interaction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *95*, 918–932.
- Bonam, C. M., Vinodharen, N. D., Coleman, B. R., & Salter, P. (2019). Ignoring history, denying racism: Mounting evidence for the Marley hypothesis and epistemologies of ignorance. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, *10*, 257–265. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550617751583>
- Brown, R., & Hewstone, M. (2005). An integrative theory of intergroup contact. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, *37*, 255–343. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601\(05\)37005-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(05)37005-5)
- Brown, T. N., Tanner-Smith, E. E., Lesane-Brown, C. L., & Ezell, M. E. (2007). Child, parent, and situational correlates of familial ethnic/race socialization. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *69*, 14–25. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2006.00340.x>
- Cameron, L., Rutland, A., Hossain, R., & Petley, R. (2011). When and why does extended contact work? The role of high quality direct contact and group norms in the development of positive ethnic intergroup attitudes amongst children. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, *14*, 193–206. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430210390535>
- Devine, P. G., Plant, E. A., Amodio, D. M., Harmon-Jones, E., & Vance, S. L. (2002). The regulation of explicit and implicit race bias: The role of motivations to respond without prejudice. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *82*, 835–848. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.82.5.835>
- Dovidio, J. F. (2009). Racial bias, unspoken but heard. *Science*, *326*, 1641–1642. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1184231>
- Dovidio, J. F., Gaertner, S. L., & Pearson, A. R. (2017). Aversive racism and contemporary bias. In C. G. Sibley & F. K. Barlow (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of the psychology of prejudice* (pp. 267–294). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316161579.012>
- Dovidio, J. F., Kawakami, K., & Gaertner, S. L. (2002). Implicit and explicit prejudice and interracial interaction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *82*, 62–68. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.82.1.62>
- Gaither, S. E., & Sommers, S. R. (2013). Living with an other-race roommate shapes Whites' behavior in subsequent diverse settings. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *49*, 272–276. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2012.10.020>
- Greenwald, A. G., McGhee, D. E., & Schwartz, J. L. (1998). Measuring individual differences in implicit cognition: The implicit association test. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *74*, 1464–1480. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.74.6.1464>
- Greenwald, A. G., Poehlman, T. A., Uhlmann, E. L., & Banaji, M. R. (2009). Understanding and using the Implicit Association Test: III. Meta-analysis of predictive validity. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *97*, 17–41. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0015575>

- Hamm, J. V. (2001). Barriers and bridges to positive cross-ethnic relations: African American and White parent socialization beliefs and practices. *Youth & Society*, 33, 62–98. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X01033001003>
- Hughes, J., Bigler, R., & Levy, S. (2007). Consequences of learning about historical racism among European American and African American children. *Child Development*, 78, 1689–1705. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2007.01096.x>
- Hughes, D., & Chen, L. (1997). When and what parents tell children about race: An examination of race-related socialization among African American families. *Applied Developmental Science*, 1, 200–214. https://doi.org/10.1207/s1532480xads0104_4
- Hughes, D., & Chen, L. (1999). The nature of parents' race-related communications to children: A developmental perspective. In L. Balter & C. S. Tamis-LeMonda (Eds.), *Child psychology: A handbook of contemporary issues* (pp. 467–490). Philadelphia, PA: Psychology Press/Taylor & Francis.
- Hughes, D., Rodriguez, J., Smith, E. P., Johnson, D. J., Stevenson, H. C., & Spicer, P. (2006). Parents' ethnic-racial socialization practices: A review of research and directions for future study. *Developmental Psychology*, 42, 747–770. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.42.5.747>
- Hughes, D., Witherspoon, D., Rivas-Drake, D., & West-Bey, N. (2009). Received ethnic-racial socialization messages and youths' academic and behavioral outcomes: Examining the mediating role of ethnic identity and self-esteem. *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 15, 112–124. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0015509>
- Karmali, F., Kawakami, K., & Vaccarino, E., Williams, A., Phills, C., & Friesen, J. P. (2019). I don't see race (or conflict): Strategic descriptions of ambiguous negative intergroup contexts. *Journal of Social Issues*, 75, 1002–1034.
- Katz, P. A. (2003). Racists or tolerant multiculturalists? How do they begin? *The American Psychologist*, 58, 897–909. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.58.11.897>
- Katz, P. A., & Barrett, M. (1997). *Predictors of children's intergroup attitudes*. Paper presented at the American Psychological Association Symposium on the Development of Prejudice in Children and Adolescents, Chicago, IL.
- Kinder, D. R., & Drake, K. W. (2009). Myrdal's prediction. *Political Psychology*, 30, 539–568. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2009.00714.x>
- Kovera, M. B. (2019). Racial disparities in the criminal justice system: Prevalence, causes, and a search for solutions. *Journal of Social Issues*, 75, 1139–1164.
- Lai, C. K., Skinner, A. L., Cooley, E., Murrar, S., Brauer, M., Devos, T., . . . Nosek, B. A. (2016). Reducing implicit racial preferences: II. Intervention effectiveness across time. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 145, 1001–1016. <https://doi.org/10.1037/xge0000179>
- Lee, K., Quinn, P. C., & Heyman, G. D. (2017). Rethinking the emergence and development of implicit racial bias: A perceptual-social linkage hypothesis. In E. Turiel, N. Budwig, & P. Zelazo (Eds.), *New perspectives on human development* (pp. 27–46). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Lesane-Brown, C. L., Brown, T. N., Tanner-Smith, E. E., & Bruce, M. A. (2010). Negotiating boundaries and bonds: Frequency of young children's socialization to their ethnic/racial heritage. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 41, 457–464. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022109359688>
- Loyd, A. B., & Gaither, S. E. (2018). Racial/ethnic socialization for White youth: What we know and future directions. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 59, 54–64. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2018.05.004>
- Monteith, M. J., & Mark, A. Y. (2009). The self-regulation of prejudice. *Handbook of prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination*, 507–523.
- Monteith, M. J., Mark, A. Y., & Ashburn-Nardo, L. (2010). The self-regulation of prejudice: Toward understanding its lived character. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 13, 183–200. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430209353633>
- Morewedge, C. K., Yoon, H., Scopelliti, I., Symborski, C. W., Korris, J. H., & Kassam, K. S. (2015). Debiasing decisions: Improved decision making with a single training intervention. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 2, 129–140. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2372732215600886>

- Nelson, J. C., Adams, G., & Salter, P. S. (2013). The Marley hypothesis: Denial of racism reflects ignorance of history. *Psychological Science*, 24, 213–218. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797612451466>
- Ozier, E. M., Taylor, V. J., & Murph, M. C. (2019). The cognitive effects of experiencing and observing subtle racial discrimination. *Journal of Social Issues*, 75, 1087–1115.
- Pahlke, E., Bigler, R. S., & Suizzo, M.-A. (2012). Relations between colorblind socialization and children's racial bias: Evidence from European American mothers and their preschool children. *Child Development*, 83, 1164–1179. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2012.01770.x>
- Pauker, K., Apfelbaum, E. P., & Spitzer, B. (2015). When societal norms and social identity collide: The race talk dilemma for racial minority children. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 6, 887–895. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550615598379>
- Perry, S. P., Murphy, M. C., & Dovidio, J. F. (2015a). Modern prejudice: Subtle, but unconscious? The role of bias awareness in Whites' perceptions of personal and others' biases. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 61, 64–78. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2015.06.007>
- Perry, S. P., Dovidio, J. F., Murphy, M. C., & Van Ryn, M. (2015b). The joint effect of bias awareness and self-reported prejudice on intergroup anxiety and intentions for intergroup contact. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 21, 89–96.
- Pettigrew, T. F., & Tropp, L. R. (2006). A meta-analytic test of intergroup contact theory. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90, 751–783.
- Plant, E. A., & Devine, P. G. (1998). Internal and external motivation to respond without prejudice. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75, 811–832. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.75.3.811>
- Plant, E. A., & Devine, P. G. (2003). The antecedents and implications of interracial anxiety. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 29, 790–801. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167203252880>
- Skinner, A. L., & Meltzoff, A. N. (2019). Childhood experiences and intergroup biases among children. *Social Issues and Policy Review*, 12, 211–240. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sipr.12054>
- Stephan, W. G., & Stephan, C. W. (1985). Intergroup anxiety. *Journal of Social Issues*, 41, 157–175. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1985.tb01134.x>
- Trawalter, S., & Richeson, J. A. (2008). Let's talk about race, baby! When Whites' and Blacks' interracial contact experiences diverge. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 44, 1214–1217. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1985.tb01134.x>
- Vittrup, B. (2018). Color blind or color conscious? White American mothers' approaches to racial socialization. *Journal of Family Issues*, 39, 668–692. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X16676858>
- Vittrup, B., & Holden, G. W. (2011). Exploring the impact of educational television and parent-child discussions on children's racial attitudes. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, 11, 82–104. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1530-2415.2010.01223.x>
- Xu, K., Nosek, B., & Greenwald, A. G. (2014). Psychology data from the race Implicit Association Test on the Project Implicit Demo website. *Journal of Open Psychology Data*, 2(1), e3. <https://doi.org/10.5334/jopd.ac>

SYLVIA P. PERRY is an assistant professor of psychology and medical social sciences (by courtesy), and an Institute for Policy Research Faculty Associate at Northwestern University. She received her PhD in psychology from the University of Illinois at Chicago. Through her research she seeks to understand how we can reduce intergroup biases, and how people cope with experiences of stigma and discrimination.

ALLISON L. SKINNER is an Assistant Professor at the University of Georgia. She completed her PhD in experimental psychology at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln in 2015 and was a postdoctoral research associate at Northwestern University from 2017–2019. Her research examines how prejudice is

established, maintained, and facilitated through situational cues in our social environments (e.g., nonverbal messages) present in everyday life. Her primary line of work focuses on the role of nonverbal signals in creating social attitudes and biases among children and adults.

JAMIE L. ABAIED is an associate professor of psychology at the University of Vermont. She received her BA in Psychology from Hamilton College and her PhD in Developmental Psychology at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Her research explores aspects of raising children that pose unique challenges to parents such as teaching children to cope with stress, parenting of emerging adults (ages 18–27), and discussing race and prejudice.