

# Investigating the Influence of Dyadic Conversations about Racial Incidents on White American Parents' and Children's Implicit Attitudes

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To be presented at SRCD, 2020

## **Abstract**

Prejudicial attitudes against Black American children emerge among White American children as early as 4-years-old (Hilliard & Liben, 2010; Renno & Shutts, 2015). Little is known about the factors that contribute to White children's racial biases, however, children's social environment and the cues that they pick up on in that environment may be a particularly important predictor (Skinner & Meltzoff, 2019). The limited research on racial socialization in White American families suggests that White parents rarely engage in explicit racial conversations with their children (e.g., Perry, Skinner, Abaied, 2019; Zucker & Patterson, 2018), despite the fact it may be beneficial (Hughes, Bigler, & Levy, 2007). With the current work, we sought to challenge these avoidant tendencies by prompting parents to discuss racially biased incidents with their children in the lab. We explored three primary questions: (1) How correlated are parents' and children's implicit negative attitudes toward Black people prior to engaging in conversation about racial incidents, (2) do they more closely align after the conversation, and (3) do parents' and children's implicit negative attitudes toward Black people reduce after discussing racial incidents, together?

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## Participants and Design

We recruited 79 White identifying parents (93.7% mothers) and their 8-12-year old White children ( $M_{age} 8.97$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ; 51.9% girls) from the Chicago metropolitan area. Three children did not complete the post-IAT-measure, thus, the final  $N$  was 76. Before coming into the lab, parents completed a demographic pre-measure. After the consent process in the lab, parents and children independently completed several, age-appropriate measures, including the Adult and Child Implicit Association Tests (IAT; Greenwald, Nosek, & Banaji 2003; Newheiser & Olson, 2012), respectively, which assessed their implicit racial (Black-White) attitudes. IAT-scores were coded such that higher values indicate more pro-White bias. The parent-child dyads then reunited and participated in a semi-structured discussion in response to animated videos depicting Black and White children engaging in neutral interactions, or a White child exhibiting subtle or blatant bias toward a Black child (See Figure 1).

Following the discussion, parents and children were independently asked to complete a set of post-measures, including another IAT, in separate rooms.



Tiffany thinks that all Black kids are dumb. The other day when the teacher wasn't looking, she called Casey stupid.

Please take the next few minutes to talk out loud about this video. Here are some things we would like you to talk about. Feel free to replay the video if you need to.

1. Do you think that there was something wrong with Tiffany's behavior?
2. How do you think Tiffany's behavior made Casey feel? How would you feel if you were Casey?
3. Why do you think Tiffany did what she did?
4. Do you think Tiffany's behavior was prejudiced? *Prejudice is when someone has a negative opinion of someone because of the group they belong to.*

## Results

Correlation analyses revealed a non-significant correlation between parents' and children's pre-discussion IAT D-scores  $r = .04$ , but they reached statistical significance after the discussion,  $r = .30$ , suggesting that parents' and children's implicit attitudes toward Black individuals more closely aligned after talking about racially biased incidents (see Figure 2; correlations figure). Both parents' ( $M_{pre} = 0.51$ ,  $SD = 0.42$ ,  $M_{post} = 0.36$ ,  $SD = 0.49$ ,  $t(75) = 4.57$ ,  $p = .003$ ) and children's

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IAT D-scores ( $M_{pre}=0.42$ ,  $SD=0.36$ ,  $M_{post}=0.19$ ,  $SD=0.30$ ,  $t(75)=4.57$ ,  $p<.001$ ) reduced after discussing racially biased incidents, together.

Figure 1. Video still frame with prompts.

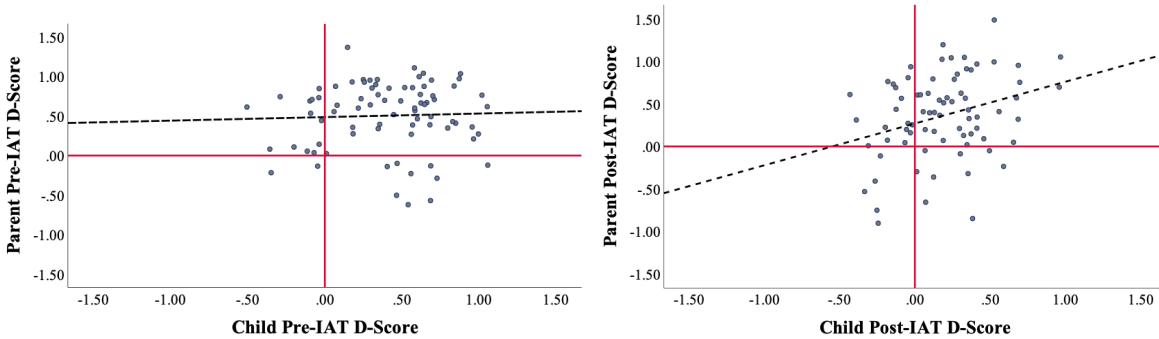


Figure 2: Correlations between parent and child D-scores at pre-test and post-test.

These findings suggest that, when White parents and their children have explicit conversation about racially biased incidents, their attitudes may synchronize and their negative implicit racial attitudes toward Black people may reduce, on average. Implications and potential predictors of these outcomes will be discussed.