"Oppression is as American as Apple Pie": Learning About and Confronting Whiteness, Privilege, and Oppression

Special series: Dismantling Systems of Racism and Oppression during Adolescence

Racial Socialization Messages in White Parents' Discussions of Current Events Involving Racism With Their Adolescents

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This study presents a thematic analysis of socialization messages about race and racism in White parents' reports of their discussions with adolescents about current events involving racism (e.g., police brutality toward Black Americans). Two samples of White parents of primarily White adolescents ages 14–17 were recruited online in September 2019 (Study 1, $N = 123$) and June 2020 (Study 2, $N = 104$). Key themes included color-conscious messages, color-blind messages, endorsing equal treatment, and references to Whiteness. Rates of discussion in 2020 (79–81%) were double that of 2019 (40.2–43.4%). However, color-conscious messages were less common in 2020 compared to 2019, and references to Whiteness were rare in 2020. Color-blind messages were similarly prevalent across both studies.
Key words: race – parenting – adolescence – socialization – Whiteness – color-blind racial ideology

A small but growing number of studies have revealed that racial discussions are rare among White families (Abaied & Perry, 2021; Hagerman, 2017; Pahlke et al., 2012; Underhill, 2018; Vittrup & Holden, 2011; Vittrup, 2018; Zucker & Patterson, 2018). In recent years, however, scholars have identified an urgent need to understand how being a member of a racially dominant group in a society comprised of systems that perpetuate White supremacy influences the development of White youth, particularly given the rise of overt White nationalism since the 2016 presidential election (Seaton et al., 2018). Parent–child discussions have been identified as one context in which youth learn about race and racism and a promising avenue for racial justice research, but these discussions remain understudied (Perry et al., 2021; Umaña-Taylor & Hill, 2020). Research on racial discussions within

White families is particularly lacking during adolescence, which represents a salient period for ethnic-racial identity development (Rogers et al., 2020; Rivas-Drake et al., 2014) and for youth's growing understanding of systemic inequality (Flanagan et al., 2014). Thus, the current study examines how White parents report communicating socialization messages about racism and Whiteness to their adolescents (most of whom identify solely as White) when discussing current events involving racism (i.e., events related to White supremacism and police violence targeting Black Americans).

Theoretical Models of Color-Blind and Color-Conscious Racial Ideology

In order to conceptualize the socialization messages that White parents communicate about race and racism, we drew from two theoretical perspectives

on color-blind racial ideology (CBRI): those proposed by Neville et al. (2000, 2013) and Bonilla-Silva (2017). Neville et al. (2013) focus on two primary types of CBRI, drawing from Frankenberg (1993): color evasion and power evasion. Color evasion de-emphasizes racial differences and emphasizes racial sameness. This often takes the form of preferring to view people as individuals rather than as members of racial groups or advocating against considering race as a factor by which people should be judged (Neville et al., 2000, 2013). By downplaying the importance of race, color evasion provides a means for White people to maintain an egalitarian, nonprejudiced self-concept (Plaut et al., 2018). Color evasion is sometimes strategically employed when White people fear the appearance of racial bias (Apfelbaum et al., 2008). In contrast, power evasion involves "the denial, minimization, and/or distortion" of racism in all its forms (Neville et al., 2013, p. 458). Power evasion includes denial of (1) blatant interpersonal racism (viewing racism as a thing of the past), (2) institutional/structural racism (denying that policies and practices systematically disadvantage racial minorities, or believing they give racial minorities an unfair advantage), and (3) White privilege (refuting the notion that White people have unearned advantages based on their race; Neville et al., 2013). Both Neville et al. (2013) and Bonilla-Silva (2017) argue that power evasion represents a modern expression of racism that is especially insidious, as it provides White people with a framework to ignore racism and maintain their own privilege and power. Racial ideologies that refute CBRI have been referred to in the literature as "color-conscious" (e.g., Neville et al., 2013; Vittrup, 2018). For example, multiculturalism messages actively refute color evasion by highlighting and celebrating racial and cultural diversity, and communications in which people openly acknowledge and condemn racism refute power evasion (Neville et al., 2013).

White individuals often posit that CBRI, particularly color evasion, is a pathway to reducing racial bias, yet ample empirical evidence demonstrates the opposite. CBRI actually reduces the likelihood of noticing and identifying racism and predicts more negative interracial interactions (for reviews, see Apfelbaum et al., 2010; Plaut et al., 2018). Power evasion in particular is associated with higher levels of racial bias (Poteat & Spanierman, 2012; Yi & Todd, 2021). In contrast, conversations in which White adults explicitly discuss race or the history of racism with White children have been linked to decreased racial bias. In one longitudinal study,

White 3-year-olds whose White parents engaged in explicit racial socialization showed less anti-Black/pro-White racial bias by age six (Katz, 2003). Vittrup and Holden (2011) found that when White children's White parents mentioned race while they viewed videos with together, their child showed more positive attitudes toward Black people. Additionally, when White teachers discussed the history of racism endured by Black individuals at the hands of White individuals, with White elementary schoolaged children, the children were more likely to value racial fairness, show greater empathy toward Black people, and endorse more counter-stereotypic beliefs, relative to a condition in which racial discrimination was not referenced (Hughes et al., 2007). Thus, it is critical to identify the extent to which White parents endorse color-blind and color-conscious socialization messages.

Racial Socialization Messages in White Families

According to socialization theory, parents are one of many sources of information from which youth learn how to understand and participate in society, and this transmission of information is a dynamic process in which youth are active participants (Maccoby, 2015; Smetana, & Villalobos, 2009). Socialization messages represent the knowledge, beliefs, and practices that various socializers (e.g., parents) impart to youth, either directly or indirectly. Key themes in racial socialization messages among parents of color include teaching knowledge and pride regarding the family's unique cultural heritage and preparing children to anticipate, understand, and respond to racism (Huguley et al., 2019). A meta-analysis of 102 studies demonstrates that racial socialization has protective effects for children of color across a wide variety of adjustment outcomes (Wang et al., 2020).

The context of racial socialization is fundamentally different for White families compared to families of color. Whereas parents of color must prepare their children for experiences of both interpersonal and systemic racism, White parents and their children are beneficiaries of systemic White privilege. As a result, White parents—many of whom were taught by adults in their own lives to avoid the topic of race—are much less motivated to discuss race and racism with their children. Indeed, the limited work on discussions of race and racism in White families, which focuses on parents of children in early-to-middle childhood, suggests that the majority of White parents avoid having these conversations (Abaied & Perry, 2021; Pahlke

et al., 2012; Vittrup, 2018; Vittrup & Holden, 2011; Zucker & Patterson, 2018). This pattern appears to hold even when highly visible race-related current events occur within the family's community. Ferguson et al. (2021) found that, in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder, less than half of a sample of White mothers in Minneapolis, MN discussed events related to George Floyd's death with their child. The most common reasons that White parents cite for avoiding racial discussions include shielding children from the harsh realities of racism (Abaied & Perry, 2021; Pahlke et al., 2012; Vittrup & Holden, 2011) and fearing that racial discussions will actually increase children's racial prejudice (Vittrup, 2018). In addition, many parents report that they have not discussed racism because their child has not asked them about it (Abaied & Perry, 2021). Together, these reasons all suggest that White parents are often motivated to avoid discussing race with their children.

Among the minority of White parents who do report discussing race with their children, their socialization messages include many examples of CBRI, including color evasion and power evasion (Abaied & Perry, 2021; Ferguson et al., 2021; Hamm, 2001; Pahlke et al., 2012; Underhill, 2018; Vittrup, 2018; Zucker & Patterson, 2018). For example, 70% of mothers of 4–7-year-olds in Vittrup's (2018) study voiced various forms of color evasion; many stated that race does not matter, and some even voiced a desire to raise their children to be blind to race. In a sample of White parents of 8–12-year-olds, Abaied and Perry (2021) found that 50% voiced color evasion and 18% endorsed power evasion (i.e., denying the reality of racism). About 60% of Zucker and Patterson's (2018) sample of White parents of 8–12-year-olds consistently endorsed CBRI across their responses; this included forms of color evasion (downplaying the importance of race) and power evasion (voicing skepticism about the reality of racism). Perhaps the most extreme example of the prevalence of CBRI is Pahlke et al.'s (2012) finding, in which 94% of White parent–preschooler dyads made no mention of race or diversity during a book-reading task. Thus, CBRI tends to be the most common socialization message across these studies.

Another socialization message that has emerged within the White racial socialization literature is egalitarianism, defined as advocating for equal rights and treatment of different groups. There is some disagreement in the literature regarding whether egalitarianism is an aspect of CBRI, color-conscious messaging, or somewhere in between.

Vittrup (2018) found that parents noted egalitarianism as a reason for not needing to discuss race with their children, and Ferguson et al. (2021) found that egalitarian socialization messages voiced by White mothers tended to de-emphasize race—these approaches are consistent with CBRI. Yet, the term "egalitarianism" has been applied differently across studies. Zucker and Patterson (2018) refer to statements that people *are* equal regardless of race as "colorblind egalitarianism," but these comments did not necessarily mention how people should be *treated*, and are thus more consistent with color evasion. Pahlke et al. (2021) refer to parent messages that encourage appreciation of diversity (a color-conscious approach) as egalitarian, but these messages did not mention equal treatment. Abaied and Perry (2021) found that half of White parents of children ages 8–12 endorsed treating different groups equally, and parents were equally likely to combine endorsing equal treatment with either color-blind messages (color evasion) or color-conscious messages (openly acknowledging racism). Thus, based on available evidence, endorsing equal treatment does not fall neatly into either color-blind or color-conscious frameworks. Yet, given its prominence in the White racial socialization literature, we aimed to examine the degree to which White parents of adolescents endorse equal treatment of different groups in their racial discussions.

Color-conscious socialization messages are also present in White parents' racial discussions, although to a lesser degree compared to endorsing equal treatment and color-blind socialization messages. Vittrup and Holden (2011), for example, found that 33% of mothers and 20% of fathers of 4–7-year-olds had color-conscious focused conversations, which included discussions of racial stereotypes or discrimination. Similarly, 30% of Vittrup's (2018) sample of White parents of 4–7-year-olds endorsed color-conscious messages such as acknowledging racial inequality and multiculturalism (i.e., celebrating diversity and seeking to educate their children about other cultures). Abaied and Perry (2021) found that 30% of White parents of 8–12-year-olds explicitly acknowledged the reality of racism and 19% endorsed multiculturalism in their descriptions of racial discussions with their children. Zucker and Patterson (2018) observed that 40.6% of White parents of 8–12-year-olds included at least one color-conscious message (e.g., encouraging open discussion of race, acknowledging racism) in their responses to prompts about hypothetical vignettes (e.g., overhearing a racial slur). In sum, although racial discussions in White

families tend to be more color-blind than color-conscious, a sizeable minority of White parents communicate color-conscious messages to their children, at least in early-to-middle childhood.

Together, research to date suggests that White parents of youth in early-to-middle childhood are much more likely to avoid race than discuss it, and the few who discuss race with their children emphasize rather than challenge CBRI. We know very little, however, about White parents' socialization messages regarding race beyond middle childhood. Liao et al. (2017) observed that parent openness to diversity was associated with more appreciation of diversity and less CBRI in college students, providing promising preliminary evidence that parent racial socialization may have an impact on youth racial attitudes in late adolescence. However, in order to gain a comprehensive picture of racial socialization messages communicated by White parents, we must also explore ways that White parents encourage adolescents to understand Whiteness.

Another limitation of the extant research is a failure to directly scrutinize the ways that White parents encourage youth to think about Whiteness and White privilege. The origins of Whiteness as a racial category can be traced to efforts to systematically disadvantage Black workers (Schooley et al., 2019); thus, notions of Whiteness were purposefully built around the idea of Whites individuals' inherent superiority in service of White supremacy. White privilege, in turn, refers to the unearned benefits, advantages, protections, and opportunities that are afforded to White people based on their race (Spanierman et al., 2013). Studying Whiteness and making White individuals aware of the historical implications of their identity have been identified as an avenue for social justice efforts against White supremacy (Schooley et al., 2019). Yet, little attention has been paid to how White parents help their children to understand Whiteness. We argue that, because all racial socialization messages take place in and are shaped by a society built around White supremacy, empirical investigations must also examine socialization of Whiteness, specifically. Thus, an additional goal of this study was to explore the degree to which White parents of adolescents incorporate Whiteness into their racial socialization messages.

Parent Socialization Messages in Mid-Adolescence

We focused on racial discussions during mid-adolescence for multiple reasons. First, no studies of which we are aware have focused on how White parents discuss race or racism with their mid-adolescent children, leaving a substantial gap in scientific knowledge of this socialization process. Second, adolescence is a logical time to explore racial discussions in families; unlike younger children, adolescents' cognitive development renders them capable of engaging in nuanced discussions about abstract, complex topics such as race, politics, and systemic inequality (Flanagan et al., 2014; McIntosh et al., 2007; Smetana, & Villalobos, 2009). Third, middle-to-late adolescence is a particularly salient period for ethnic-racial identity development (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014; Rogers et al., 2020), making discussions of race potentially important for this age group. Although mid-adolescence is a developmental phase in which adolescents shift to spending more time with peers and less time with family, parents continue to play an important role in adolescents' lives (Kerr et al., 2003), and parent socialization is predictive of a variety of outcomes in adolescence even when considered in combination with peer relationships (Allen et al., 2018; Festa & Ginsburg, 2011; Roisman et al., 2009). Furthermore, a meta-analysis revealed that the effects of parent racial socialization for youth of color were actually strongest in high school compared to middle and elementary school (Wang et al., 2020). Therefore, to expand upon prior work, we focused on White parents of adolescents aged 14–17.

Current Events Involving Racism

We focused on socialization messages in the context of discussions of current events involving racism. There is promising evidence that current events involving racism provide a useful framework for empirical investigations of racial socialization messages in White families (Abaied & Perry, 2021; Underhill, 2018). First, adolescents are aware of and capable of discussing current events with their parents. According to Common Sense Media, nearly half of teenagers feel that it is important to follow the news, and a majority tend to rely on their parents as a source of news (Robb, 2017). In a recent study, a sample of 7th graders in Charlottesville, VA, were highly aware of the 2017 Unite the Right rally, and 74% reported that they had discussed the event with their parent(s) (Williams et al., 2021). Second, current events may be an important instigator of racial discussions in families. Black parents incorporate current events into their racial socialization; for example, in the aftermath of the shootings of Michael Brown in 2014

and Treyvon Martin in 2012, Black parents reported teaching their children how to interact with White adults, especially White police, in order to maintain their child's safety (Thomas & Blackmon, 2015; Threlfall, 2018). White parents have a much different relationship to such current events, as racism does not directly place them or their children in danger. However, prior work indicates that approximately a third of parents discussed events such as the 2015 mass church shooting in Charleston, South Carolina (Abaied & Perry, 2021) and the Ferguson protests in 2014 after the shooting of Michael Brown (Underhill, 2018). White parents tend to report that family discussions of race do not arise naturally (Vittrup, 2018); increasing news coverage might provide external instigation of such conversations, particularly in families with adolescents, who have more independent access to the news. Finally, discussing current events with families is associated with a better understanding of systemic economic inequality and higher civic engagement among adolescents (Flanagan et al., 2014; McIntosh et al., 2007), suggesting that such discussions are an important context for socialization.

Overview of the Current Study

In the current qualitative study, we applied a thematic analysis, using Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach, to identify the racial socialization messages reported by White parents of adolescents aged 14–17 in two samples in the United States. We asked parents to report on their conversations about current events involving racism that received prominent news coverage at the time of each study, including current events related to White supremacy, police brutality toward Black Americans, and Black Lives Matter protests.

In our thematic analysis, we aimed to explore the forms of color-blind and color-conscious racial ideology present in parent racial socialization messages, guided by Neville et al. (2013) and Bonilla-Silva's (2017) theoretical models. We also examined endorsing equal treatment, a socialization message that has emerged in prior investigations of White parents. Finally, we sought to explore messages that parents communicated about Whiteness. To supplement this qualitative approach, we also examined the rates at which White parents reported discussing current events involving racism with their adolescents, as well as the prevalence of different types of racial socialization messages in their responses. We provide this

quantitative information to contextualize our qualitative analysis and to facilitate comparison with prior quantitative studies of racial socialization in White families.

GENERAL METHOD

Participants and Procedure

In Study 1, 123 White American parents of adolescents aged 14–17 were recruited on Prolific Academic in September 2019. Parents identified their adolescents as solely White (96%) or as both White and one other race (2.4% White/Latinx, 0.8% White/Black, 0.8% White/Asian). Interested participants read the following study description: "In this study, you will answer questions about your attitudes toward, and interactions with, various social groups. You will then answer questions about how you discuss various social groups and current events with your child." Participants were screened for eligibility based on identifying as White, currently living in the United States, and having at least one child aged 14–17. All parents included in this analysis identified solely as White. Parents first provided demographic information and reported on their feelings toward, contact with, and friendships with members of racial outgroups. Parents then reported on their current events discussions with their adolescents. In Study 2, 104 American parents who identified solely as White were recruited via Qualtrics Panels in June 2020. Most identified their adolescents as solely White (95%); the remainder were White/Latinx (1%), White/Black/Latinx (1%), Asian (1%), Black (1%), or Latinx (1%). Screening criteria and procedures were the same as that of Study 1. Demographic information for both samples appears in Table 1.

Measures

Demographic information. Parents reported age, gender identity, and racial identity for themselves and their adolescent; marital status, yearly family income, highest education attained, and political beliefs on a scale of 1 = *Very Conservative* to 7 = *Very Liberal* (see Table 1).

Current event discussions. Parents responded to a series of structured prompts about current events that were prominent in the news at the time of each study and that clearly involved race and racism. In Study 1, which took place in September

TABLE 1
Participant Demographics

Characteristics	Percent of Study 1 Sample	Percent of Study 2 Sample
Parent gender		
Female	64.52	54.80
Male	35.00	45.20
Nonbinary	0.80	0.00
Adolescent gender		
Female	38.2%	51.9%
Male	61.8%	46.2%
Nonbinary	0%	1.9%
Adolescent race		
White	96%	95%
Multiracial	4%	2%
Asian	0%	1%
Black	0%	1%
Latinx	0%	1%
Parent age		
20–29	0.80	6.54
30–39	37.40	25.96
40–49	52.03	41.34
50–59	7.31	25.00
63–75	0.80	2.88
Did not report	1.60	0.96
Parental status		
Biological parent	91.10	92.30
Step-parent	5.70	3.80
Adoptive parent	3.30	2.90
Grandparent with guardianship status	0.00	1.00
Marital status		
Married	73.20	70.20
Engaged	4.10	2.90
Single never married	6.50	11.50
Divorced/separated	13.80	14.40
Widowed	2.40	1.00
Yearly income		
Less than $20,000	5.70	5.70
$20,000–$39,999	22.00	14.40
$40,000–$59,999	13.00	13.50
$60,000–$79,999	16.30	22.10
$80,000–$99,999	9.00	12.50
$100,000 or more	34.20	31.70
Highest education completed		
Less than high school	0.80	13.50
High school	10.60	16.30
Some college	26.00	7.70
2-year degree	16.30	29.80
4-year degree	23.60	3.80
Professional degree	1.60	0.00
Master's or Doctorate	21.20	28.80
Daily contact with Black people		
Never	1.60	2.90
Rarely	26.00	12.50
Sometimes	32.50	37.50
Often	26.00	25.50
All of the time	13.80	22.10
Political affiliation		
Very conservative	4.90	26.00

TABLE 1 (Contd.)
Participant Demographics

Characteristics	Percent of Study 1 Sample	Percent of Study 2 Sample
Moderately conservative	22.00	13.50
Somewhat conservative	13.80	16.30
Centrist	13.00	18.30
Somewhat liberal	14.60	8.70
Moderately liberal	17.10	6.70
Very liberal	11.40	8.70
Other	3.30	1.90

2019, parents were asked about "Current events involving police brutality against Black youth" and "Current events related to White supremacism in America." Both topics received frequent news coverage throughout the summer of 2019, when protests occurred in New York City, Pittsburgh, and Sacramento after the acquittal of police officers who killed Eric Garner, Antwon Rose, and Stephan Clark, respectively. In addition, news outlets were reporting on the rise of White nationalist groups in the United States, and large public gatherings of White supremacists took place in cities such as Portland, Oregon.

In Study 2, which took place in June 2020, parents responded to structured prompts about "the May/June 2020 protests against police brutality toward Black Americans" and "the recent deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, or other Black Americans killed by police." In June 2020, these events were receiving daily national and local news coverage. The Black Lives Matter protests of 2020 (also referred to as the George Floyd protests) were a series of public demonstrations against police violence toward Black Americans. Protests begin in Minneapolis, MN, and eventually expanded into a nationwide movement that some have estimated to be the largest in US history (Buchanan et al., 2020). In the prompt about the deaths of Black Americans killed by police, we mentioned by name three individuals whose deaths were mentioned most frequently in national news: Ahmaud Arbery (killed in Georgia by two White civilians while jogging), Breonna Taylor (killed in her home in Louisville, Kentucky by White police officers), and George Floyd (killed by police officer Derek Chauvin while in custody for suspected use of counterfeit currency in Minneapolis, Minnesota).

For each of the two events in each study, parents first indicated whether or not they had

discussed the events with their child. Parents who selected "yes" were asked to describe their conversations with their child about the events. Parents who selected "no" were asked (1) why they had not discussed the events, and (2) what they would say if their child asked about the events. This allowed us to gain information based on either actual or hypothetical discussions. In Study 2, when parents indicated that they had discussed an event, they were then asked "How did your most recent conversation with your child about the [event] start?" and were given the option to answer "my child brought it up", "I brought it up", or "Another reason (please describe)".

For exploratory purposes, we also included questions about parents' racial attitudes and interracial contact; descriptive statistics and correlations are reported in Supplemental Materials.

RESULTS

Overview of Qualitative Analysis

Parent responses to the open-ended questions were double coded by pairs of coders who discussed and resolved discrepancies in consultation with the first author. Reliabilities calculated prior to discussion generally indicated high levels of interrater agreement (Study 1 average ICC = .92, range .51–1.00; 89% of ICCs were above .70; Study 2 average ICC = .94, range .49–1.00; 91% of ICCs were above .70). We conducted a top-down thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), guided by prior research on racial ideologies (Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Neville et al. 2013). We focused on latent themes, namely the underlying socialization messages expressed by parents in their responses. The first author and second author collaboratively developed a coding scheme to capture racial socialization messages, as well as reasons why parents did not discuss current events involving racism, adapted from Abaied and Perry (2021). In addition, new codes for references to Whiteness were developed for the current study. Throughout the results, we provide direct quotes from parents as originally typed in the online survey, with only obvious typos and capitalization errors corrected.

Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

The research team engaged in reflexivity exercises to scrutinize how their social identities may have influenced their interpretations of parent responses. Each team member reflected upon their social identity in relation to that of the participants (who were White) as well as that of the social groups affected by the current events mentioned in the prompts (e.g., Black youth). Thus, the two most salient axes of identity were one's race and one's status as a parent versus non-parent. The first author identifies as a White parent, the second author identifies as a Black parent, the third author identifies as a Middle-Eastern non-parent, and the fourth author identifies as a Latina non-parent. All undergraduate coders identify as non-parents; one identifies as biracial, and the remainder identify as White.

Rates of Discussion of Current Events Involving Racism

In Study 1, when asked whether or not they had discussed each event with their child, 40.2% of parents reported discussing police brutality against Black youth, and 43.4% of parents reported discussing White supremacy in America. In Study 2, 79% of parents reported that they had discussed the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests and 81% of parents reported that they had discussed the deaths of Black Americans killed by police. These are double the rates observed in Study 1 and in prior research cited above. In Study 2, we also asked how conversations started. Of the parents who reported discussing the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, 42.7% indicated that their child instigated the conversation, 47.6% indicated that they brought it up themselves, and 9.8% indicated that the conversation began after seeing it on television or the internet. Among parents who reported discussing the deaths of Black Americans killed by police, 48.9% reported that their child brought it up, 40.5% indicated that they brought it up themselves, and 10.1% reported discussing these events after hearing about them on television or the internet.

Racial Socialization Messages

We identified six themes of racial socialization messages. We situated these six themes within three broader themes: Color-conscious messages, Color-blind messages, and other messages of interest that were not consistent with either color-conscious or color-blind ideology. The prevalence of each theme appears in Table 2.

Color-conscious socialization messages. Acknowledging racism. The sole form of color-

TABLE 2
Racial Socialization Messages Endorsed Among Parents Who Did vs. Did Not Discuss Current Events Involving Racism

	Study 1: 2019					Study 2: 2020				
	Total	Police Brutality Against Black Youth		White Supremacy in America		Total	May/June Protests Against Police Brutality Toward Black Americans		Deaths of Black Americans Killed by Police	
Was the event discussed?		Yes	No	Yes	No		Yes	No	Yes	No
	N = 123	n = 54	n = 69	n = 58	n = 64	N = 104	n = 82	n = 22	n = 79	n = 25
Color conscious messages										
Acknowledging racism	54.5%	57.4%	31.9%	31%	25%	26.9%	23.2%	9.1%	15.2%	8.0%
Color-blind messages										
Color evasion	4.9%	0.0%	1.4%	3.4%	4.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Power evasion	34.1%	3.3%	43.5%	5.2%	25%	27.9%	20.7%	27.3%	16.5%	16%
Other messages										
Endorsing equal treatment	19.5%	5.6%	8.7%	19%	10.9%	12.5%	12.2%	4.5%	3.8%	0.0%
References to Whiteness	35.8%	18.5%	4.3%	12.1%	7.8%	6.7%	7.3%	0.0%	2.5%	0.0%

conscious socialization message we identified in parent responses was acknowledging racism. This theme included comments that openly address the reality of racism in America, either by acknowledging that some people hold racist views or by discussing ways that people experience racism.

Study 1. In Study 1, 54.5% of parents endorsed acknowledging racism. Acknowledging racism was about twice as common in response to the prompt about police brutality compared to the prompt about White supremacism. One way that parents acknowledged racism was to point out ways that Black people experience racism; this often occurred in response to the prompt about police brutality. Some parents offered brief descriptions of the ways that police treat Black youth differently from White youth, such as "I have told him how police treat Black people differently than White people" or "There are several incidents of police brutality in our country these days especially against the Black youth which is very sad to see and hear." A few parents went a bit further and mentioned that police brutality against Black youth is nothing new: "We talked about police shootings and how decades of prejudice have caused violence" or "I explained that it is part of a long history of power struggle and also that it is not new and is more recently publicized because of the internet." In response to the prompt about White supremacism, mentioning people's experiences of racism were rare and quite vague, such as "I would explain to her what White supremacism is, and why it's so harmful and dangerous to our country and people

of color, as well as the history it has in the united states" and "I tell them there are hateful people who do horrible things to others based on the color of their skin, their belief system, and what they value."

Some parents acknowledged that others hold racist views without connecting it to the lived experience of Black people. In response to the prompt about police brutality, one parent said "We discussed about (sic) what they saw on the news or in a documentary & how some people are racist and think they are above the law which they are not!!" Another parent suggested that racist beliefs may be implicit: "I would acknowledge that police officers are human beings who have faults, but not all police officers are good at their jobs, and that people have biases they may not even be consciously aware of."

When discussing events related to White supremacism, many parents condemned it outright, with comments such as "I openly tell my daughter that these people are hateful and ignorant and that their beliefs are ridiculous and illogical" or "Basically, I just let him know that White people aren't any better than anyone else because they are White. And anyone who thinks so is an idiot."

One parent tried to explain the motivations of White supremacists:

We have talked about how hatred and racism is born out of fear. In the case of White supremacy, we have talked about this fear is related to a loss of status, a loss of a way of

life that I imagine it's preferable, and perhaps a loss of income or jobs to who they perceive to be the enemy.A few parents invoked history in their explanation:

> It is truly sad that, in this day and age, there is even a single person who holds these views, let alone that the movement is ascendent. The reason it is still around is because the history of slavery has never been properly dealt with and spoke aloud. Germany has dealt with their past and so has South Africa. In America though, we are still in denial.

One parent specifically mentioned Donald Trump as encouraging White supremacy:

> I have explained to my child the culture that is created that allows White supremacism to begin to flourish and to become more prevalent within our culture. I have also tried to show 'cause and effect' with statements made by President Trump and subsequent events that then occur.

Although these comments do acknowledge that some people hold racist beliefs, it is not clear from these comments whether these parents believe that people ever act on their beliefs.

Study 2. The prevalence of acknowledging racism in Study 2 was about half that of Study 1 (26.9%). Some of these comments briefly mentioned racial inequality as an explanation for why the protests were happening, such as "People are protesting because of the mistreatment of Black people in America" or "I explained to her that it is not as safe for minorities as it is for Whites in the USA and people were sick of that." A few parents mentioned the history of racism as a way of contextualizing the 2020 protests, such as "The latest protests against police violence toward African Americans didn't appear out of nowhere. They're rooted in generations of injustice and systemic racism." This same parent emphasized that George Floyd was far from the only Black American to be murdered by police:

> The message from protesters around the United States is that George Floyd is the latest addition to a grim roster of African Americans to be killed by police. In demonstration after demonstration, protesters are carrying signs that include the names of other Blacks

whose lives ended violently in encounters with police.

Very few parents in the 2020 sample acknowledged that some people hold racist views. The few parents who did acknowledge that others hold racist view failed to make connections to the lived experiences of Black people. One parent said "I told my son that the police are racists." Another parent vaguely referenced bias based on "heritage" instead of race: "not everyone in this world has respect for others just because they are of different heritage." Another parent said of their child, "He is in favor of the protests because he hates racism."

Color-blind socialization messages. *Color evasion.* Statements that downplayed the importance of race or implied that race does not matter without mentioning equal treatment or equal rights were coded as color evasion.

Study 1. Statements of color evasion were rare in Study 1, occurring among only six parents (4.9%). A few parents emphasized sameness (e.g., "We know everyone is the same and race is no reason to kill anyone," "We don't place a large emphasis on their [sic] being races or classes or anything else which tries to categorize or separate people. People are all people."). Others made statements that seemed to direct adolescents' attention or interpretation of events away from race, such as "Race is not important. A Godly love for all people is what's important."

Study 2. Color evasion was completely absent from parent responses in Study 2.

Power evasion and explicit racism. Power evasion included comments that downplayed or outright refuted the reality of racism in America. Explicit racism included comments that overtly endorsed racist beliefs. All instances of explicit racism co-occurred with power evasion; thus, we present these themes together.

Study 1. Power evasion emerged in about a third of the sample (34.1%). These comments were most common among parents who had not discussed the events with their child, particularly in response to the prompt about police brutality against Black youth. A few parents brushed off police brutality as something that was not happening in their community and thus not worth discussing with their adolescent (e.g., "This is not something that happens where we live," "We live in an area where it's not a problem."). Others made brief comments that downplayed the role that race was playing in police brutality, such as

"We talked about police brutality toward the public in general" or implied that police may not have been at fault: "That if it is true that it's not acceptable, but that we don't always know every side of a story and shouldn't make rush[sic] judgements before knowing all of the facts." Some parents seemed hesitant to be critical of police officers, with comments such as "Police brutality is an awful thing, but the majority of police officers are respectable." A few parents seemed to be firmly on the side of police officers, and made claims of reverse racism, with comments such as "It's hard to have an honest discussion about police brutality when police officers are being shot while sipping coffee," "This is a lie they are treated better than White people," or, "In our hometown is quite the opposite and it's Blacks against police with the police receiving the brutality." All of these comments downplay the scope of systemic racism in American policing.

Power evasion among parents who had discussed White supremacism tended to focus on racist beliefs rather than systemic racism. Some parents argued that Black Americans are also racist: "There are people on both sides that hate other people", "[We] talked about White and Black supremacists and how badly they are affecting our country." A few who had not discussed White supremacism indicated that they did not think it existed (e.g., "Because it is a play being put on by the media and the powers that be. Antifa is a terrorist organization in my opinion," "I would say that it doesn't really exist anymore in America and that it is only a tiny fraction of the population that believe that way."). One parent seemed to think White supremacists were entitled to their actions: "It's a free country and people can do what they want."

Five parents incorporated racist comments into their power evasion. This included aspects of victim blaming, such as "When you pull a gun on a cop or attack a cop, they have to protect themselves. Stop breaking the law and then whining about your race. No one cares," and "Because when you break the law, you go to jail. You do not pass go. You do not collect $200." One parent who combined power evasion and racism expressed distrust in the media:

Its lies based in media not covering the entire truth. In reality there's more Black on Black crime. Vandals select officers that were by chance filmed abusing Black people. The media does not tell the entire truth as well as

other incidents and the Black youth they don't tell the entire story - what they did to get in trouble with the law.

The only instances of explicit racism that were expressed independently of power evasion were two endorsements of White supremacism among parents who reported they had discussed the issue with their children: "We are native and we have power" and "In America Whites are the superior of all things." These two parents appear to be actively socializing their children to endorse White supremacism.

Study 2. Skepticism or outright disbelief that racism exists was expressed by about a quarter (27.9%) of the sample in Study 2, and took a variety of forms. A common message that emerged in response to the 2020 protests in particular was an emphasis on looting and rioting. We interpret this as power evasion in that it redirects attention away from the racial injustice that the protests are addressing and instead places disproportionate emphasis on the negative behavior of a small minority of individuals. This was often expressed as chastising the protestors (e.g., "I understood and agreed with the peaceful protests but that the rioting was uncalled for."). Similarly, some parents claimed that rioting was counter to the protestors' goals: "riots and looting completely distracted from the BLM movement." Many parents coupled these sentiments with some sort of statement supporting the protests, such as "what happened to George Floyd was appalling!! But I do not think the solution to this is rioting," and "protest is good, looting is not."

Another way that White parents downplayed the reality of racism was by expressing skepticism about the scope of systemic racism in policing. Many parents expressed positive sentiments about the police who murdered Black individuals (e.g., "the police were wrong – perhaps – as I do not believe we know the whole stories and never will") or the police in general, with comments such as, "most police are good people," and "not all cops are bad." One parent completely refuted the idea that the police had purposefully killed Black Americans, saying "I told them it's an accident."

Every instance of explicit racism in Study 2 was coupled with power evasion. This was often communicated as victim-blaming, in which parents suggested that police brutality against Black Americans was deserved. This was evident in comments such as, "Some of these deaths were justified if we want a civil society. Others were an abuse of power, but not everything can be attributed to

racism," "Floyd is by no means an INNOCENT victim as if no crime was committed there would have been no interaction," and "if you do right you do not have to worry about the police doing things like this." These examples both downplay the scope of systemic racism in police and the lived experience of Black people who are the victims of police brutality.

Other instances of power evasion were much more extreme, in which parents refuted the existence of systemic racism and voiced explicit racism:

> These were not racist in any manner, the news won't tell you about all the wonderful police of all colors killed since these Black lives were killed by the police, though any death by police is awful it happens to all races sadly more then it should, but violence is not the answer, but liberals are like vampires and will suck the soul of America away completely until everything is destroyed to get their way. [They are] a bunch of cry babies and evil to the core.

> I discussed the difference between protesting and these current riots. I expressed how these riots are based on a falsehood that there is injustice towards Black people in America. My child already seemed to understand it is the opposite effect. It appears there is more crime and problems caused by the Black community, hence bringing forth the alleged injustice they speak of. I informed my daughter that the Black community, according to its own accounts, lacks serious education and these current riots show that fact.

One parent used the phrase "I am not a racist" while expressing both denial that systemic racism exists in our society and explicitly racist views about Black Americans:

> Expressed that there is no brutality. There is only deserved treatment for how the person arrested behaves. I explained that no one is really fooled by this sharade [sic] being acted out. This is a lack of adherence to authority and decades of hating police in the Black community. It [is] insulting for the claim to be that police are any bit a problem. I am not racist, but it is clear that dominating crime,

means the Black community causes more problems than any other group/race.

Other socialization messages. Two additional themes in parent responses that did not represent examples of color-conscious or color-blind socialization messages but were of interest in the current study included endorsing equal treatment and references to Whiteness.

Endorsing equal treatment. This theme involved parents specifically advocating for equal rights, protections, or treatment of people of different races, or indicating that some racial groups being denied equal rights is unacceptable.

Study 1. Endorsing equal treatment was voiced by approximately 20% of the sample in Study 1. This typically took the form of labeling differential treatment due to race as wrong, with comments such as "It is wrong for any person to prejudge another based on race," "No one should be persecuted because of the color of their skin," and "That White supremacy is ridiculous. No race is greater than another." A few parents mentioned equal treatment for reasons other than race, such as "No one person—race, religion, gender, nationality—is better than the other" or simply advocated for equal treatment overall: "I would tell him that all people should be treated the same."

Study 2. Just over 12% of the sample in Study 2 expressed the view that people from different racial groups should be treated the same. Some parents expressed it in general terms, such as "I told him to not be racist ever in his life, always be equal to everyone" and "We conversed about the fact that all people deserve to be treated equally." Others specifically addressed treatment of Black people, such as "She stated that Black people should not be treated any differently than anyone else and I said she was exactly right." One parent simply said, "Black Lives Matter." All of the parents in Study 2 who endorsed equal treatment of racial groups indicated that they had discussed the deaths of Black Americans killed by police. This theme was completely absent among parents who had not discussed these events.

References to whiteness. We also examined the ways that parents incorporated Whiteness into their reports of racial discussions. Some (but not all) comments that mentioned Whiteness in some way also communicated another racial socialization message (such as acknowledgement of racism or

power evasion) and were coded as such; this overlap is noted throughout.

Study 1. About a third (35.8%) of parents made a reference to Whiteness in their responses. Parents specifically referring to themselves or their child as White was extremely rare in Study 1, emerging only among two parents who had discussed police brutality against Black youth with their children. One parent seemed to think that the danger of police brutality extended to her adolescent despite them being White:

> I'm scared of it even with my kid being White. I tell my kid to do EXACTLY as a cop says, no matter how wrong you think they are. Your life is not worth losing over a toy gun. Our family has distrust of law enforcement because of how they treat people.

Another parent referenced their own Whiteness in a response that openly acknowledged racism:

> We've certainly discussed racial inequality in the justice system from several perspectives. I admitted to my son that I (a small town, White girl that grew up in Alaska) was pretty blind to this issue for a lot of my life. I think it's important to let your kids know that you aren't perfect, but you can change and evolve if you have an open heart and mind and are willing to listen and be respectful towards others.

Other references to Whiteness occurred when parents were voicing power evasion. Among parents who did not discuss police brutality, one mentioned Whiteness when indicating why they had not discussed it: "This is a lie they are treated better than White people" and repeated this sentiment when asked what they would say if their adolescent asked about it: "They know that this is not true, that Blacks are treated better than White people." Another parent mentioned the racial makeup of their town: "I am still not altogether certain how I feel about the situation. Also, the area where I live is predominantly Caucasian, and it is unfortunately easier to not think about or consider it only as something which happens somewhere else." In both of these examples, parents are mentioning Whiteness to distance themselves from the reality of police brutality against Black youth without actually connecting it to their child's White identity.

A few parents referenced Whiteness in response to the prompt about White supremacy. Two

parents refuted the idea that White people are superior to others: "White people are not superior to any race even though they might think they are," and "[That] the White race has imposed itself as a superior race before others, regardless of their ideology, has been the worst thing about racism in recent years." Two parents invoked reverse racism, which was also coded as power evasion: "It's the White people that is being discriminated against," and "[We] talked about White and Black supremacists and how badly they are affecting our country." These comments refer to Whiteness as a racial category and challenge the notion of White superiority, but they do not directly connect it to themselves or their child.

A small number of parents mentioned Whiteness when describing differential treatment of Black youth, such as, "I shared with her videos that have been on the news, and explained to her the statistics about how Black youth and other people of color are treated more unfairly than White people," or "I explained that Black people are stopped by police more often than White people." Others went a bit further and specifically labeled this disproportionate treatment as morally wrong, with comments such as, "How heinous it is that law enforcement uses stereotypes when responding to a call or a traffic stop, and how Black people are treated very differently than White people," and "We talked about how difficult it is for young Black men in the US to be treated the same as a young White male." None of these parents mentioned themselves or their child receiving differential treatment based on race.

Study 2. Overt references to Whiteness were less prevalent in Study 2 (6.7%) compared to Study 1. Virtually no references to Whiteness of any kind emerged among parents who reported that they had not discussed the Black Lives Matter protests or the deaths of Black Americans killed by police. Only two parents referred to themselves or their child as White. One parent described their limited ability to teach their child about racial diversity while living in a predominantly White town:

> We have already discussed police brutality against all races, and against BIPOC before May because we live in a very White town. I love the town that we live in and my husband makes good money here but I fear the damage that it does to my children because they aren't exposed to diversity so I try to have conversations to make them aware of things that go on in the world. Of course

theirs [sic] only so much you can teach a White boy without him living it himself.

The other parent who referenced their family's White identity had a very different reaction: "We supported the protests, but not the violence and felt quite concerned about our safety as White people and fear for family members that are in law enforcement." This parent claims to be supportive of the protests, but their answer is critical of the protestors and ultimately centralizes themselves instead.

A few parents labeled Whiteness in other ways. In response to the prompt regarding the 2020 protests, one parent said, "I was raised in an all White community and my son is aware of this. He knows right from wrong." Another parent mentioned Whiteness in a very extreme form of power evasion that claims reverse racism toward White people:

Police treat all colors the same, White, Black, Hispanic and so on, they kill all colors and can over use their power at times with all people, the liberals just want people to believe it is only against Blacks, and most shootings involving Blacks and all colors come from something called resisting, and fighting the officers...so now the liberals are going after White people, even though most of them are White, to promote fighting in the streets to punish White people who voted for the greatest president in history Donald Trump.

Only two parents overly mentioned that White people are less likely than Black people to be targeted by the police due to their race. One mentioned Whiteness as a way of explaining why the protests were happening: "I explained to her that it is not as safe for minorities as it is for Whites in the USA and people were sick of that." This same parent took a similar approach to explaining the deaths of Black Americans killed by police: "I told her that police were more likely to take extreme actions against minorities than Whites." Another indicated that the family had made some effort to educate themselves as a result of the protests: "We have watched several really good videos explaining why Black people have fewer opportunities than White people have. I think it was an eye opener for her." These responses describe ways that Whiteness can be protective, albeit in a brief and limited fashion, and without linking the idea of Whiteness back to themselves or their child.

Reasons for not discussing current events involving racism. We also examined parent responses to the question asking why they had not discussed each event. We coded the reasons parents gave for not discussing each event based on themes previously identified by Abaied and Perry (2021); in addition, we identified new reasons that had not been identified in prior research. Prevalence of the reasons why parents did not discuss each event appears in Table 3.

Study 1. The most frequent reason why White parents did not discuss current events involving racism was a passive approach, in which parents

TABLE 3
Reasons Why White Parents Did Not Discuss Current Events Involving Racism

	Police Brutality Against Black Youth (2019) n = 68	White Supremacism in America (2019) n = 64	May/June Protests Against Police Brutality Toward Black Americans (2020) n = 22	Deaths of Black Americans Killed by Police (2020) n = 25
Sheltering from negativity	2.9%	3.1%	4.5%	12%
Adolescent has not asked/it has not come up	54.4%	40.6%	13.6%	20%
Unnecessary/do not want to	25%	31.3%	40.9%	36%
Unsure/uninformed	2.9%	10.9%	18.2%	16%
Too difficult	4.4%	0%	4.5%	4%
Other	13.2%	7.8%	9.1%	0%
No reason provided	0.8%	0%	9.1%	12%

Note. Percentages may add up to more than 100 due to a small number of parents voicing more than one reason for not discussing an event.

reported that the topic had not arisen in conversation, (e.g., "Because it never came up," and "It has never come up in conversation between us.") or that their child had not asked them about it (e.g., "He has never asked me directly; he has heard about it at school and received better information there."). The second most frequent reason was viewing the conversation as unnecessary or irrelevant to their family, with comments such as, "It wasn't necessary," or "Not needed." Some parents mentioned their location as justification (e.g., "This is not an issue in the area where I live," and "This is not something that happens where we live.").

Study 2. Similar to Study 1, few parents mentioned needing to shelter their children; however, in contrast to Study 1, the modal reason was viewing such discussions as unnecessary (e.g., "Not relevant to me or my family"), followed by a passive approach in which the topic had not come up in conversation and/or their adolescent had not asked them about it (e.g., "He hasn't asked," "It hasn't been brought up").

Comments containing no racial socialization messages.   *Study 1.*   A minority (13.8%) of parents made comments that did not contain any type of racial socialization message. These comments tended to be quite brief (e.g., "nothing, have to do some research first") or vague (e.g., "in my family we are to open about different situations"). A few parents gave longer answers that did not contain any racial socialization messages, such as, "He has seen on the news about this and it upsets him. He doesn't understand why this is happening and just wants everyone to get along with each other."

Study 2.   Compared to Study 1, far more parents in Study 2 (42.3%) did not voice any racial socialization message in their responses. Many of these responses were terse or vague (e.g., "we talked at length", "It was sad"). Some parents said they discussed events but did not describe those conversations, with responses such as, 'We talked about why things like this happen and what should be done", and "Talked about why George Floyd was dead". Others focused on their child's reactions and feelings (e.g., "he just asked why there is so much violence and why people just can't get along"). A few came closer to offering socialization messages about the police, but did not actually mention race (e.g., "Police were wrong for killing innocent people" and "Talked about police brutality and need for reform").

DISCUSSION

This study is the first to examine parent reports of their socialization messages about race, racism, and Whiteness in the context of discussions of current events involving racism—including police violence targeting Black Americans and White supremacy—with their adolescent children. White parents of adolescents reported communicating color-conscious messages that acknowledged the reality of racism, but they also reported color-blind messages, which included potentially damaging, inaccurate views of racism. In addition, very few parents connected current events related to racism with Whiteness, particularly in 2020. Furthermore, compared to 2019, rates of discussion were higher, but color conscious messages were lower in 2020. The number of parents who communicated no clear messages about race or racism in their responses was also much higher in 2020 compared to 2019. These unique samples, recruited in 2019 and 2020, respectively, allowed us to document White parents' perspectives on their own racial socialization practices in the context of a cultural shift in the public discourse about race in America.

2019 Vs. 2020: Talking More and Saying Less

Results indicated a clear cohort difference in the rate of racial discussions of current events. Discussions were twice as common in 2020 compared to 2019, suggesting that the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020 may have pushed more White families into openly discussing current events involving racism with their adolescents. One possible reason for this could be the shifting paradigms regarding how racism is discussed in media outlets. Media coverage about protests has historically been framed in a negative context, often being portrayed through the perspective of social and economic disruptions (Di Cicco, 2010). This pattern has been observed in relation to deaths of Black Americans and resulting protests prior to 2020 (Leopold & Bell, 2017). During the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020, coverage was prolific across a variety of mediums, which ensured that the protests remained at the forefront of conversations about racial inequality, and may have also shifted public opinion about racism; polling in June 2020 revealed that 76% of Americans, and 71% of White Americans, labeled racism as a substantial problem in America, a rate much higher compared to polling done in 2015 (Russonello, 2020) and in 2017 (Cohen et al., 2017). The 2020 Black Lives Matter protests

also included far more White participants than prior movements (Harmon & Tavernese, 2020), providing another indicator that the events of the spring 2020 may have pushed more White Americans to confront the reality of racism in America and become involved in social justice actions.

It is critical to note, however, that although rates of discussion were higher in 2020 than in 2019, color-conscious socialization messages were less frequent in 2020 than in 2019. Specifically, in 2020, acknowledging racism was half as common as in 2019. This is particularly striking given that the focus of the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020, which were ongoing when the data in Study 2 were collected, was raising awareness about systemic racism. Furthermore, the percentage of the sample who communicated no clear racial socialization messages at all was much larger in 2020 compared to 2019. Together, these findings present a pattern in which White parents surveyed in 2020 were talking more about racism in the news, but saying less in the answers they provided to us about racism itself—and less about the reality of racism, in particular—than the parents surveyed in 2019. Thus, although the high rates of discussion in 2020 may appear, at first, to indicate progress toward racial justice, the content of these discussions suggests otherwise.

Demographic differences between the two samples could also have contributed to cohort differences in racial discussions. Compared to Study 1, the Study 2 sample was more gender-balanced and slightly older, more educated, higher in income, more frequently in contact with Black people, and more politically conservative. Although the effects are small, exploratory quantitative analyses (reported in the Supplemental Materials) suggest that factors such as political beliefs and racial attitudes may be particularly likely to be associated with racial socialization messages (for example, both positive attitudes toward Black individuals and political liberalism are associated with more acknowledgment of racism and less power evasion). Ferguson et al. (2021) found that parents who were more politically liberal and more engaged in multiculturalism were more likely to report discussing current events involving racism (specifically events related to George Floyd's murder). Future work should continue to investigate the extent to which these factors not only predict the kinds of discussions that White parents have with their adolescents, but also whether they predict shifts in their willingness to discuss race and racism over time.

Color-Blind and Color-Conscious Messages

Our data suggest that White parents vary substantially in terms of how they approach discussions of racism. Both samples contained at least some White parents who were clearly capable of using current events involving racism as an opportunity to teach their children to recognize racism when it happens, to view racism as something that is important to understand, and to connect current events to the history of racial inequality in America. However, our data also suggest that an alarming number of White parents appear to question the legitimacy of concerns about racism; in fact, some reported openly encouraging their children to hold racist views or not take seriously the threat of White supremacists.

Power evasion stood out as the most frequent form of CBRI voiced by parents in our samples. Many expressions of power evasion questioned the legitimacy of the Black Lives Matter protests or implied that Black Americans killed by police are not "innocent." The prominence of power evasion in our study echoes Cohen et al.'s (2017) survey of White young adults, which revealed that although a majority of White young adults see racism as an important problem in American society, about half believe that discrimination against Whites and discrimination against racial minorities are similarly prevalent, and about half view White nationalist groups similarly to Black Lives Matter groups. Another common example of power evasion was hesitance to support protestors of police violence, often accompanied by referring to rioting or looting rather than the protest itself. This trend echoes Cohen et al.'s (2017) findings, in which White young adults were more likely than young adults of color to hold negative views toward the Black Lives Matter movement. These examples of power evasion (i.e., emphasizing rioting or looting, placing the fault on the victims rather than the perpetrators of racial violence) also contain elements of cultural racism, a central frame of CBRI in which presumed negative behaviors are attributed to stable cultural practices of racial groups (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). The cultural racism frame provides a way to express racism without assigning racist views or actions to any individual or system (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). Thus, when White parents apply power evasion and cultural racism to criticize peaceful protests and justify violent treatment of Black people at the hands of police, they are reframing current events in a way that absolves White people from culpability in racial injustice.

The patterns of racial socialization messages found in these two samples of White parents of 14–17-year-olds differed substantially from some of the patterns observed in past research. Color evasion was particularly low in this study, present among <6 % of White parents in Study 1 and virtually none in Study 2. In contrast, color evasion was endorsed by half of White parents of 8–12-year-olds in Abaied and Perry's (2021) sample and three-quarters of Zucker and Patterson's (2018) sample. We also observed much higher rates of power evasion and racist language compared to Abaied and Perry (2021). Other studies of parent–child discussions of race with younger children (e.g., Pahlke et al., 2012; Vittrup, 2018; Zucker & Patterson, 2018) did not mention explicit racism in their data analysis. It is possible that the recent political climate may have led to greater ideological polarization in relation to race. Political science and survey research indicates a growing divide between political extremes, coupled with increasing negative, hostile views of political outgroups (Iyengar & Krupenkin, 2018; Pew Research, 2019). Those who already valued racial equality could have reduced their use of color-blind language, whereas those who were already skeptical about racism (or who held racist views) may have shifted to more extreme beliefs or become more comfortable with openly expressing racism. It is also possible that our prompts about current events involving racism, rather than questions about race in general, were less likely to elicit color evasion than prompts used in prior studies.

Another possible explanation for our contrasting findings is that past work has focused on racial socialization messages directed toward children aged 12 or younger. For example, both Abaied and Perry (2021) and Zucker and Patterson (2018) focused on parents of children ages 8–12, and Underhill's (2018) work on how White parents discussed the Ferguson protests with their children focused on children aged 3–10. Other work has investigated racial socialization within early childhood (e.g., Pahlke et al., 2012; Vittrup, 2018). Although our samples provide a window into how White parents discuss racial current events, it is possible that there is something fundamentally different about parents' approach to these conversations with 14–17-year-olds. Parents of youth this age, who were much less likely than parents of younger children to report shielding their children from racial discussions, may feel more comfortable expressing negativity about current events involving racism to older youth.

Why Do White Parents Avoid Discussing Current Events Involving Racism?

Parents' reasons for not discussing current events involving racism were also revealing. In contrast to Abaied and Perry's (2021) findings among parents of 8–12-year-olds (data collected in 2015), very few parents of 14–17-year-olds indicated that their child was too young or needed to be protected from discussions about racism. Instead, the modal response was a passive approach in which parents seemed to be waiting for external factors, such as their child asking, to initiate the discussion. In addition, many parents, particularly in 2019, made clear that they viewed racial current events as irrelevant to their families. Thus, our results indicate that White parents who avoid discussing current events involving racism do so because they do not view such discussions as an integral part of their job as parents. This detachment from race is consistent with Forman's (2004) construct of racial apathy, defined as "indifference toward societal racial and ethnic inequality and lack of engagement with race-related social issues." (p. 44). Racial apathy among White adolescents has increased over time, and its demographic correlates are highly similar to those of explicit racial prejudice (Forman & Lewis, 2015). The racial apathy literature would suggest that not simply caring about racism could account for White parents' apparent lack of motivation to bring up racial discussions.

We were also interested in understanding what instigated racial discussions and added a direct question to this effect in Study 2. Adolescents were slightly more likely to instigate racial discussions than parents, and just a few parents reported that racial discussions were instigated by media coverage. This suggests that in some families, adolescents are playing an active role by starting conversions about race and racism. It is possible that parents could be over-reporting their own initiative; furthermore, parents who did not discuss current events involving racism could have refused or ignored adolescents' attempts to broch the topic. Gaining adolescents' perspective on how these discussions unfold is a critical next step.

Socialization Messages About Whiteness: More Silence Than Substance

In this study, we were hoping to capture ways that White parents use current events involving racism to socialize Whiteness, given the notable dearth of work in this area and recent calls for additional

research addressing racial socialization in White youth (Schooley et al., 2019; Seaton et al., 2018; Umaña-Taylor, & Hill, 2020). Yet, the overwhelming majority of parents in our two samples did not incorporate Whiteness into their discussions of current events involving racism. References to Whiteness were particularly rare among parents who did not discuss the events. Although just over half of parents acknowledged the racism involved in current events related to police brutality against Black youth and White supremacism in Study 1, they did not discuss these events in relation to their own or their child's Whiteness. References to Whiteness were lower in Study 2, likely because we did not prompt parents to discuss White supremacism. Importantly, references to Whiteness tended to be brief and surface-level. Overall, our results indicate that parents are not exploring the meaning of current events involving racism in terms of White racial identity.

These findings are consistent with extant theory and research demonstrating that, for many White people, race is not a central feature of their identity (Helms, 2003; Knowles et al., 2014). Parents' acknowledgment of racism tended not to emphasize the unearned privilege their own race affords them; in other words, rather than explaining how White youth are protected from racism due to their race, parents tended to focus on the adverse experiences of victims of racism. Hamm (2001) observed a similar pattern, wherein White parents reported a need for their children to understand the experiences of Black Americans, but not their own Whiteness. This is in stark contrast to research with parents of color, who report that helping their adolescents to develop a positive ethnic–racial identity is a central theme in their racial discussions (for a review, see Hughes et al., 2006). White parents instead have the privilege of ignoring Whiteness as a racial identity.

Limitations

Although our study has several strengths, some limitations should be taken into account and addressed in future research. Assessing racial socialization at a single time point within each study and comparing separate cohorts allowed us to replicate our assessment of racial socialization messages in two independent samples, but it prevented us from exploring within-parent change over time. Given social desirability concerns, collecting anonymous online data may have allowed parents to feel more comfortable expressing controversial views; however, online data collection limited the scope of questions we could ask and prevented us from asking follow-up questions to obtain more detailed information. Parent answers were often vague or difficult to interpret, which may have inflated the number of responses that did not receive any codes for racial socialization messages. Another limitation is reliance on parents as a single informant; incorporating adolescent perspectives on racial conversations with parents is a critical next step. Although our samples incorporated families across a range of demographic indicators, they were not nationally representative. Finally, our focus on current events involving racism toward Black people detracted from our ability to tap into parent messages specifically related to Whiteness.

Future Directions

A clear next step is to identify intervention points that will help to redirect White parents toward more color-conscious conversations (Perry et al., 2021, 2022). Our results indicate that at least some White parents are capable of acknowledging both the current reality and the long-standing history of racism in the context of current events. White parents who are skeptical about the reality of racism (or who hold racist views) will be very difficult to reach; however, White parents who communicate mixed messages about race or who had little to say about race may be open to additional guidance, and they may benefit from interventions that encourage richer, deeper discussions of the history of racism, White privilege, and White identity. However, we also must consider how impactful parent–child conversations can be within the broader context of the family. Hagerman (2018) argues that parent choices about the family's contexts—including neighborhoods, schools, organizations, and social circles—play a more powerful role in perpetuating CBRI perspectives in children than any active socialization on the parent's part, and only by giving up some of this structural advantage can White parents truly hope to raise truly color-conscious children. Ultimately, the impact of racial discussions in White families is an empirical question. We posit that even if the impact of family conversations on adolescent racial attitudes and beliefs is small, such conversations are much more targetable for intervention than attempting to shift structural contexts of families. Intervention science should be applied to refine and improve the impact of family

conversations over time; interventions targeting parent–child discussions of sexual health provide a promising precedent for this approach (for a review, see Coakley et al., 2017). Family interventions have the additional benefits of taking place within an established caregiver–child relationship and targeting multiple generations at once (Perry et al., 2022). But before interventions can be designed, tested, and implemented, we must understand the problem we are solving. This study provides an important early step in the road to developing data-driven and appropriately targeted family interventions.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

Appendix S1 Supplement materials.