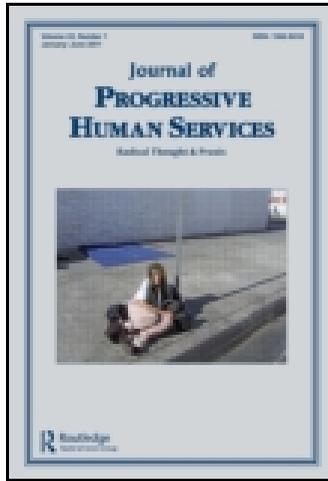


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“We Put It in Terms of Not-Nice”: White Antiracists and Parenting

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“We Put It in Terms of Not-Nice”: White Antiracists and Parenting

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This qualitative study explored how White parents who identify as antiracist apply antiracism principles to parenting their White children. Participants discussed how they attempt to incorporate antiracism values into their parenting, their children’s racial awareness, and the impact of race and racism on their children. Our findings indicate significant inconsistencies between antiracist values and parenting practices. The main difference between antiracist White parents and nonantiracist-identified White parents was awareness. Although antiracist White parents overall conveyed an awareness of racism as a system of unearned privileges, there was minimal modeling of antiracist action.

KEYWORDS *antiracism, Whiteness, colorblindness, children, race, parenting, education*

A foundational principle in the antiracist literature is that White antiracism requires an ongoing process of: understanding White privilege and supremacy; challenging colorblindness; countering internalized White superiority; being an ally to people of Color; being accountable to people of Color; and engaging in meaningful action against racism at a personal, interpersonal, and community level (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006; Raible, 2009). This process entails a critical analysis of the forces of racial socialization and their manifestations in one’s own life. There are various sites of entry into this analysis, including schooling, media, economics, family, and geography. This study focuses on the family as one primary site of racial socialization and, thus, a primary site for interrupting racism.

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There has been little written about antiracist child rearing in general, and White antiracist parenting in particular. Our aim was to explore how Whites who identify as antiracists and who are also parents of White children apply antiracism principles to their parenting. Specifically, how do White parents who identify themselves as antiracist socialize their children with these values and practices? Our findings indicate significant inconsistencies between the values of White parents who identify as antiracist and their parenting practices. These inconsistencies manifested most clearly through patterns in neighborhood and school choice and in denial of their children's racial knowledge. We found that the main difference between antiracist White parents and nonantiracist identified White parents was one of awareness. Antiracist White parents overall were aware of racism as a system of oppression that conferred unearned privileges, and they conveyed this awareness to their children, but there was minimal modeling of antiracist action.

Although mainstream definitions of racism are typically some variation of individual race prejudice, which anyone across any race can have, Whiteness scholars define racism as encompassing economic, political, social, and cultural structures, actions, and beliefs that systematize and perpetuate an unequal distribution of privileges, resources, and power between White people and people of Color (Hilliard, 1992). In the United States, this unequal distribution benefits Whites and disadvantages people of Color overall and at the group level (although individual Whites may be against racism, they still benefit from this system). *Whiteness* refers to the specific dimensions of racism that serve to elevate White people over people of Color.

Frankenberg (1997) defines Whiteness as multidimensional: "Whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a 'standpoint,' a place from which White people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, 'whiteness' refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed" (p. 1). Race is conceptualized as a constellation of processes and practices rather than as an isolated entity. These processes and practices include basic rights, values, beliefs, perspectives, and experiences that are purported to be commonly shared by all but that are actually afforded in any consistent way only to White people. Thus to name Whiteness is to refer to a set of relations that are historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced and that are intrinsically linked to dynamic relations of racial domination (Akintunde, 1999; DiAngelo, 2006; Dyer, 1997; Frankenberg, 1997; Lipsitz, 1995; Roediger, 2008).

Antiracist educators—like Whiteness theorists—conceptualize racism as a multilayered, multidimensional, ongoing, adaptive process that functions to maintain, reinforce, reproduce, normalize, and render invisible White power and privilege. Antiracist education deliberately goes beyond the "celebrating differences" approach common to much diversity training and centers the analysis on the social, cultural, and institutional powers that so profoundly shape the meanings and outcomes of racial difference (Sensory &

DiAngelo, 2012). Racism is recognized as being embedded in all aspects of society and the socialization process; no one who is born into and raised in Western culture can escape being socialized to participate in these relations (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). Antiracist education seeks to interrupt these relations of inequality by educating people to identify, name, and challenge the norms, patterns, traditions, structures, and institutions that keep racism and White supremacy in place. A key aspect of this education process is to raise the awareness of White people about what racism is and how it works. To accomplish this, the dominant conceptualization of racism as isolated to individual acts that only some (bad) individuals do, rather than as a system we are all enmeshed in, must be countered (DiAngelo, 2012; Trepagnier, 2010).

WHITE PARENTING AND COLORBLINDNESS

Much of the contemporary writing about racism includes discussions of the phenomenon of colorblindness—the assertion that one doesn't see color or that “we are all human,” and thus race has no significance. Although there is no biological race as we understand it, race as a social idea has profound significance and impacts every aspect of our lives. This impact includes where we are most likely to live, which schools we will attend, who our friends and partners will be, what careers we will have, how much money we will earn, how much education we will have, how healthy we will be, and even how long we can expect to live (Adelman, 2003). Yet colorblind ideology is prominent among White Americans, many of whom consider themselves to be politically progressive (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Wise, 2010). Bonilla-Silva (2006) describes colorblind racism as a modern version of the Jim Crow era of the 1960s and 1970s, and “the main force behind contemporary inequality . . . it is as effective as slavery and Jim Crow in maintaining the racial status quo” (p. 272). This is one of the most inherently racist consequences of colorblindness; if institutional racism does not account for disparity, personal shortcomings become the de facto cause. Colorblindness—as a discourse that is ubiquitous in mainstream culture—is also highly evident among White parents (Johnson & Shapiro, 2003; Park, 2010; VanAusdale & Feagin, 2001). For example, Tatum (1997) discusses how colorblindness is evoked when she addresses parent groups, wherein White parents often contend with pride that their children are colorblind and offer as evidence a story of friendship with a child of Color whose race has never been mentioned. Yet Tatum identifies the legacy of silencing children around race and notes that Whites often refer to someone as *Black* in hushed tones that imply there is something wrong with such an identification.

Johnson and Shapiro (2003) explicate colorblindness in a research study in which they interviewed approximately 200 White families in Boston,

St. Louis, and Los Angeles about their school and neighborhood choices. Although the parents consistently opened their discussions with the claim that race does not matter, as the interviews continued it became clear that race powerfully informed their decisions. Some of the content was overtly racist while some was coded by terms such as “good” (White) schools or neighborhoods versus bad ones. Johnson and Shapiro conclude that despite the widespread popularity of color blindness, race was a primary factor, if not *the* primary factor, in determining White decisions concerning community and school choice.

CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND RACIAL ATTITUDES

Although there is some disagreement in the literature about the degree of complexity in children’s racial understandings, it is well established that children do notice racial distinctions and recognize that it is taboo (at least among Whites) to talk about them (Tatum, 1997; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). Further, there is a small number of compelling studies that indicate children’s racial knowledge is much more sophisticated than is commonly thought.

Monteiro, de França, and Rodrigues (2009) examined White children’s expressions of racial prejudice under differing conditions. They hypothesized that children older than seven would express less prejudice if an antiracist norm were present. The antiracist norm was created by the presence of a White researcher who, they hypothesized, would create—just by virtue of her or his presence in the room—the expectation that racial bias or discrimination should not be shown. They tested 283 White children aged 6 to 7 and 9 to 10 years old who performed a task of money allocation to White and Black target children. They were tested with and without the presence of a White researcher to create more or less salience of the antiracist norm. They found that the 6- to 7-year-old children discriminated against the Black target in both conditions, and the 9- to 10-year-old children discriminated against the Black children only when the antiracist norm was not salient (Monteiro et al., 2009). This is significant because it indicates that the older children clearly had racial prejudice but repressed blatant expressions of it under certain social conditions; bias does not decline with the ages of the children but rather, their ability to self-regulate according to social cues increases.

Earlier studies conducted by Kenneth and Mamie Clark (1939, 1950) illustrate that children internalize society’s racial hierarchy very early. They found that by age 3, Black children had begun to internalize a sense that they were inferior to Whites; by age 7, this sense was firmly in place. They conducted their studies by asking the children to choose which doll they preferred, a White doll or a Black doll. Their questions included, “Give me the doll that you like to play with”; “Give me the doll that looks bad”; and

“Give me the doll that is a nice color.” The majority of the children preferred the White doll to the Black doll, and this preference was stable regardless of whether they lived in the North or South of the United States, although northern children had a more definite preference for White skin. Similar studies have been informally conducted in both Black and White children in recent years with the same results. When asked why the Black doll looks bad, both White and Black children consistently attributed it to the doll’s Blackness.

In conclusion, the research indicates that children are aware of race and that they internalize both implicit and explicit messages about race from their environments. Thus, children are more aware that racial difference has social meaning than they are often given credit for. Children’s early awareness of racial difference lends itself well to providing them with guidance about racism and other forms of oppression. However, this opportunity is lost through the tendency for White parents and teachers to identify children as racially naïve or colorblind, framing the discussion in terms of interpersonal differences rather than an unequal power structure that benefits Whites. This study assumed that White parents who self-identify as antiracist are more likely to understand this distinction and that they provide guidance in antiracist principles and practices to their children. Thus, this study sought to identify how they provide this guidance.

METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted as an exploratory qualitative study of the experiences, practices, and values of White people who identify as antiracist, and how these influence their parenting of White children. This study attempts to shed light on what antiracism means to White people in the United States. Those who claim to identify with it and how they attempt to incorporate antiracism into their parenting. Of particular interest was how these parents’ child-rearing practices compared to current antiracism theory and literature. As a qualitative study with 20 participants, this research does not represent White antiracist parents as a whole. However it will offer insight into families within the White antiracism movement and, it is hoped, encourage future directions for research.

Sample

The data were collected through individual interviews and consist of the narrative responses of 20 White Americans who identify as antiracist and are the parents of White children. The interviews lasted 30 to 105 minutes each; 1,222 minutes of audio data were collected in total on a digital recorder. The inclusion criteria for this study were that the individuals identify their primary racial identity as White; that they identify as antiracist; that they were over

the age of 18 and English speaking; and that they have at least one child over the age of three whose primary racial identity is also White. The sample included 18 people who identified as female and 2 who identified as male, with an age range of 30 to 58. The majority of participants had had middle-class upbringings and currently identified as middle class, and they reported a variety of sexual orientations, religious backgrounds, and current religions.

Data Collection

Participants were recruited through organizations in the Seattle area where we anticipated White people with antiracism values would likely be. This included a local university, community colleges, and organizing collectives involved in racial equity or social justice work. We made contacts within these organizations and advertised the study via poster and e-mail list-serve. Recruitment was snowballing and ongoing. As participants were interviewed, they were encouraged to forward the recruitment e-mail to others who might qualify for the study.

Once a participant responded to recruitment efforts by e-mail or phone, inclusion criteria were verified, and for those who met the criteria, in-person interview sessions were scheduled. No one who met the criteria and responded before the deadline was excluded. This served to strengthen the validity of this small sample and to include as many perspectives as possible. Informed consent was obtained, and participants were informed that participation was voluntary and they could refuse to answer any questions. The researcher used a structured interview guide starting with demographic questions then open-ended questions related to the research objectives.

These open-ended questions included asking participants to define what antiracism means to them, as well questions about their childhood experiences regarding race and racism and the racial makeup of their friendship circles, neighborhoods, and schools. These were followed-up by questions about how participants attempt to incorporate antiracist values into their parenting, how they conceptualize the racial awareness of their children, and how they feel race and racism impact their children. Participants were also asked about the racial makeup of their children's friendship circles, neighborhoods, and schools. Audio data were transcribed by the researcher, and identifying information, such as names and places, was removed. Participants were given a \$30 gift card to a local bookstore as an honorarium.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed by grouping responses and identifying major themes. Responses to each question by an individual participant were coded into categories based on what was mentioned or discussed, such as White privilege, institutional racism, reverse racism, colorblindness, tracking within schools, slavery, and talking about skin color. Coding was initiated with the first

transcript and was refined to accommodate subsequent data as they were collected. The variety and prevalence of coded categories across participants were reviewed and reported, including patterns and anomalies.

Many themes surfaced across multiple interviews, including colorblindness, school program choices, gentrification, economic privilege, valuing diversity, activism, degree of awareness of Whiteness, and underestimating the sophistication of children's racial understanding. Because of the limits of this article, we selected for discussion the themes that arose most frequently, directly addressed the research question, and/or were discussed in antiracism literature. Quotations are used to illustrate salient themes. Graphs and percentages provide descriptive information in order to provide a clear picture of the sample. These do not make claims about the behaviors and attitudes of antiracist parents in general.

Findings

HOW DOES BEING AN ANTIRACIST WHITE PERSON INFLUENCE YOUR PARENTING?

All participants stated that their antiracism values influenced their parenting, but how they influenced it varied greatly. The themes cited most frequently were choice of school and neighborhood. Also mentioned were choice of books, toys and media, exposure to parents' antiracism, and discussions about various aspects of race and racism.

Six participants (30%) discussed living in a primarily White neighborhood either before they had children or early in their children's lives and then moving to a racially diverse neighborhood so their children would have exposure to people of Color. Many parents spoke with pride about the diversity of their neighborhoods. However, these participants also spontaneously discussed gentrification. Several who had lived in their neighborhoods for many years acknowledged that their neighborhood had once been inhabited primarily by people of Color, but now families of Color were moving out, and more Whites were moving in.

Of the 20 participants, only 4 (20%) indicated that they had lived in their diverse neighborhood when its inhabitants were primarily people of Color. The 13 who cited racial diversity as a reason for moving to their neighborhoods did so once the wave of gentrification had already begun; these parents were aware that the neighborhood they bought into would continue to become whiter. This was framed as an unfortunate occurrence, and none indicated whether or not they were motivated by this knowledge when they bought their homes.

SCHOOL CHOICE AND RACIAL MAKEUP OF SCHOOL AND PROGRAM

As illustrated in [Figure 1](#), 13 of 20 parents (65%) interviewed mentioned that school choice was directly influenced by their antiracism values, and

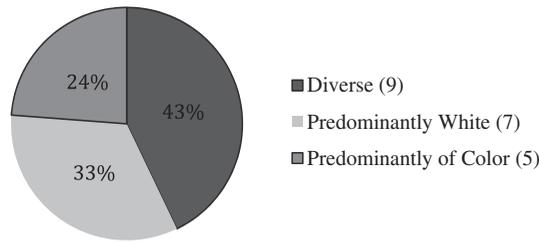


FIGURE 1 Racial makeup of children's schools.

several important themes emerged in the parents' discussions of schools. Participants were not asked about the type of schools their children attended, however, all participants spontaneously discussed it. Of the 20 parents, 15 (75%) reported that their children were in public schools, and 5 reported their children were in private schools, including Waldorf, private elementary, home, or Montessori. Nine parents reported that their children went to diverse schools. However, their definition of diverse is unknown in terms of the actual racial makeup of the schools. Additionally, of the participants who reported that their children attended diverse schools, the children tended to be in the whiter honors, alternative, or Montessori programs.

Five of the 20 parents (25%) reported that their children were in a school program that included almost all children of Color (see Figure 2). Of the 5 with children in programs that included predominately children of Color, 4 (80%) of them had their children enrolled in schools that were majority Asian, including two Asian-language immersion programs. It is noteworthy that 4 participants (20%) of the sample felt comfortable having their children in programs with majority Asian children, but only 1 (5%) of 20 parents stated that they sent their children to school programs that were majority Black or Latino.

THE USE OF BOOKS, MEDIA, TOYS, AND MUSIC

Of 20 participants, 11 (55%) mentioned the use of books when trying to instill antiracism values. Two parents (10%) also described going to the

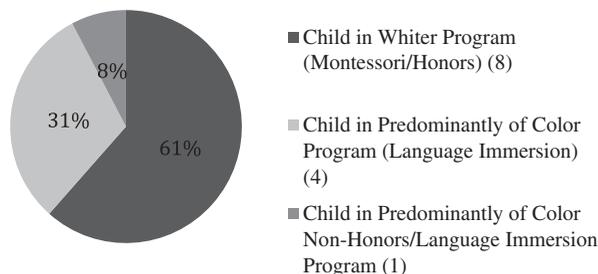


FIGURE 2 Racial makeup of children's programs within diverse schools.

public library in the neighborhood with their children and expressed that they valued the diversity of the staff and patrons of the library. Five of the participants (25%) mentioned media as one way antiracism and parenting intersect, selecting specific shows for their children to watch because they had characters of Color or of various cultural backgrounds.

Two parents talked about the subliminal racial messaging their sons receive from toys. For example:

Leanne: . . . it's sort of like the Playmobil version of history . . . it's mostly about Western Europeans' interactions with other cultures. . . . We won't let him get some of the themes, like ancient Rome where people were quite horrible to one another . . . and so he learns about slavery in a context like that, it's not fun, it's real, and it's the legacy of millions and millions of Americans.

Both of these parents reported they still purchase Playmobils for their children, in spite of their reservations. One parent stated that she limited the television and movies her children were exposed to because of the racist content in the mainstream media, and one stated that she allowed her teenage child to watch television but asks her to analyze what she watches and points out images of White supremacy and racism.

TALKING ABOUT SKIN COLOR

Seven of 20 of participants (35%) mentioned talking about skin color as a way they implemented antiracism in their children's lives. This was one of the top four themes brought up by the parents in this study. Many used books or mentioned activities in their children's school in which they talked about skin color and diversity, especially for children of elementary school age. For example, Willa describes conversations about skin color with her 3- and 5-year-old children:

My kids would comment on . . . that brown guy I've never shushed them, because I remember being shushed for saying Black, like that's a bad word or something. . . . We would talk about . . . their skin, and I would never say it's White or Black, but I would say it's kind of pinkish, whitish, yellowish, brownish" We're Christians, so we talk a lot about how God made people all different colors . . . and when they started noticing differences, I would point them out as just you know, my purse is black . . . just a fact, not carrying any weight other than what it is.

Wendy also discussed skin color with her 3-year-old child:

Well, we've already had a discussion about skin. She's the one that brought it up. At three, she's just very tuned in. And she said, "What is that Black woman doing?" . . . So we just started talking about, "You

noticed she has brown skin?” You know, “What color is your skin? What color is my skin, what color is teacher’s?” . . . I’ve been trying to do that pretty regularly, and then I’ve been really trying to have books that have brown children, so that it’s not just, you know, White characters in her books. . . .

Wendy and Willa are examples of a more colorblind approach. Wendy repeatedly stated that her daughter was “only 3 years old” during the interview, implying there was not much antiracism work to do with her yet.

Stephanie approached skin color differently, stressing Whiteness and privilege instead of difference:

We had the *mala* on our wrists with white beads, and I was able to teach her, when she was in middle childhood, that when she looked at it, it was a reminder that she was White, because it was the only thing to remind her, every day. . . . She has this language and she understands White privilege. . . . I think the most important thing for my daughters to know is . . . to say something as a White person in all White situations, just speak up, whenever there is racism.

Unlike most of the parents, Stephanie names racism often and directly, encourages her daughter to speak up, and mentions the importance of allyship.

EXPOSURE TO ANTIRACISM ACTIVISM THROUGH SCHOOL AND PARENTS’ WORK

Six of the 20 participants (30%) mentioned engaging in antiracism within their children’s schools. Examples of the type of antiracist work they did was organizing parents’ groups to address issues of racism and unexamined privilege and to promote diversity within the schools, working against under-resourced schools’ closures and collaborating with teachers to address incidents of racism. Here Maria describes what she did in her children’s school:

In the grade school they went to I was co-facilitator of an antiracist group of parents and teachers Their mission statement said something about racial justice or diversity or something, but in reality . . . the disproportionality in outcomes for kids of Color at that school were still the same, so how playing a leadership role, co-facilitating with a woman of Color, and really trying to get to a point where it’s not just “blah blah blah” but *really* trying to turn that . . . into a different reality.

Five of the 20 parents (25%) mentioned that their children were exposed to their antiracism work, either because antiracism was part of

their jobs or because they engaged in antiracism work voluntarily in their community, or both.

TALKING ABOUT RACISM

When asked how they incorporate antiracism into their childrearing, many of the participants described talking to their kids about racism. Five of 20 parents (25%) described teaching their children anti-oppression frameworks or explaining to them how to analyze systems of power and privilege in order to understand the racialized world around them. Six of 20 (30%) stated that they discussed incidents of racism in their children's lives. Several of the parents with young children mentioned struggling to find the right words or to discuss racism in an age-appropriate way. The quote used in this study's title, "We put it in terms of not nice," was one father's approach to discussing racism with his child. Willa's comments represent another example of this:

My son has learned a lot in his classroom, so he'll come home and give us facts, and we'll turn around and say, "You know when Grammy and Grampy were kids, they didn't get to go to school with Black kids, they only went to school with people who were their color! What do you think about that?" I wonder if we are erring too far on the side of "back then" that's what people did, and isn't that silly, and not being as aware of what we do today, but, I think for kids, we're keeping it simple. So we've talked about MLK, and Medgar Evers . . . because of people like them, standing up for what they believed, now you get to go to school with . . . , and he has a bunch of little friends that I'll name off by name.

Like many of the parents, Willa questioned her approach, in this case wondering if she focuses too much on "back then."

DISCUSSIONS ABOUT SLAVERY

Three of the parents spontaneously brought up discussing slavery. However, there was a significant range in how they approached it. For example Lila, who grew up in the South and is the mother of a four-year-old girl, reflects on her own upbringing and what she is trying to do differently for her child:

We were White, so we didn't need to discuss the racism, we didn't need to discuss slavery. Which every now and then, that's already come up with my daughter and I've tried to explain, "At one point people thought it was okay to own other people." . . . It was a long time ago, and then it was different. And that it was a different part of the country, but at one point, people thought they could tell other people what to do . . . and you had to do it, or else somebody could hurt you. But at the same time, I can't make it too scary of a concept.

Lila, while trying to keep her explanation simple and developmentally appropriate, does not name race. Later in the interview, Lila passionately expresses more thoughts about slavery from an exclusively White perspective on the Civil War:

The Civil War—not all about slavery—primarily economics. And trying to explain that that’s one of the reasons why it wasn’t about, “Oh you took my slaves from me” but it was, “You took my only means of supporting my family away” and that . . . that still hits hard to this day in that area. You know? Families were just left devastated.

Rachelle, a community organizer, also mentioned trying to explain slavery to her young son while teaching him about race and ethnicity:

So I got this book on talking about race and culture, and where people came from and where he came from, from Ireland and England, and we would start using a map talking about different children, and the teachers . . . and it was in some ways, maybe easier because a lot of the teachers and kids actually came from those countries. But when we got to African Americans, I was like, “Okay, we’ve got to say more about this” because people didn’t come by choice. So . . . one day when he was like four or four and a half, . . . and we hit on the Middle Passage, and you know, I thought, “What am I doing to my kid? I’m talking to my four-year-old about slave ships?” And then I would turn it back on him and say, “What do you think about that? Does that sound like a fair thing to you?”

Like many parents interviewed here, Rachelle worries that talking openly and directly about racism will be harmful to her White child. And as many parents did, she ends by giving him the option of considering whether racism—and in this case slavery—is fair or not.

All of the parents who independently brought up slavery expressed that they found it challenging to strike the balance of providing truthful information in a way that they perceived to be developmentally appropriate.

HOW AWARE OF RACE AND RACISM DO YOU THINK YOUR CHILD IS?

As can be seen in [Figure 3](#), the majority of parents believed that their children were not aware of racism or were only minimally aware. However, five parents (25%), all of whom had children aged 10 or older, stated that their children were “very aware” of race and racism. For example, Laura states:

I think she’s very aware of it, really aware of it. . . . When she was in fourth grade she made this newspaper . . . and she had some articles in there about racism, so yeah, she was already thinking about it and articulating it then, but really it wasn’t until she was in high school that I

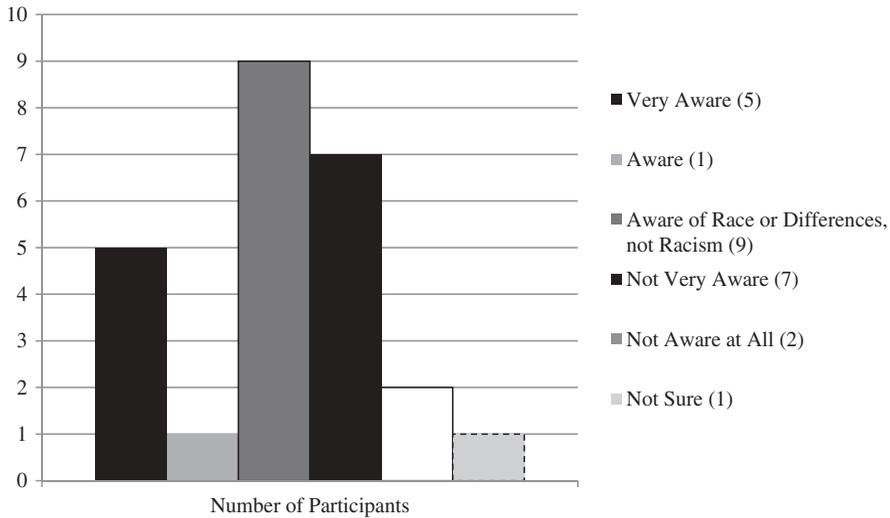


FIGURE 3 How aware of race or racism is your child?

feel like she was able to . . . really get it. I feel like she's really using the analysis now, she can articulate that.

Similar to Laura, one other parent stated that her older child had integrated antiracist values into her life. At the same time, these parents did not mention discussing the racism that their children had internalized or indicate that they were engaged in an ongoing process of self-reflection; their focus in answering this question was on their children's speaking out about other people's racism.

Themes

WHITE CHILDREN EXPRESSING RACISM AGAINST BLACK CHILDREN

Several participants gave examples of times their children had expressed that they didn't like Black children or thought they were mean or bad. One parent—Leanne—discussed her son's statement about African American boys in his public school elementary class:

There are a few Black kids, not very many in that school, mostly African immigrants but some American Black, and uh (sigh), Tom hasn't made particular friends with them, and he says, "They're mean," and so I started thinking about how Black kids are suspended more, and get in trouble for being boisterous in the classroom, and how much of that is teacher perception and how much of that is student behavior. Because I don't think Tom is making stuff up, he's too little to be doing that stuff.

Although Leanne is aware of some of the ways racism impacts the educational experience of Black elementary school children, she still suspects that the Black kids may actually be acting out more than other children—rather than responding to their environment or being discriminated against. She doesn't mention the possibility that racism informs why Tom perceives the same behavior by the Black boys in his class as being more aggressive.

Willa also commented on her three-year-old daughter's negative statement about a Black child in her school:

My three-year-old said something a few weeks ago like, "I don't like that kid because he's brown," and my husband and I were freaked out, and we were trying not to react too much, but we'd be like, "Why? What do you mean? Daddy's kinda pinkish, and I'm kinda yellowish, what do you think about that?" But she gets there's some kind of cultural difference there. I don't know why for her that means she doesn't like them. But we're trying to work with that.

In keeping with the assumption of racial innocence in children, Willa states that she doesn't understand why her daughter would have these feelings. She also doesn't question what might be going on in the classroom environment as a whole.

WHITE CHILDREN INTERNALIZING ENTITLEMENT OR SUPERIORITY

Several of the parents gave examples of their White sons' being given some sort of "special status" or being treated well. Jana told a poignant story about her son, Aiden, who is in a Mandarin immersion program. He is the only White child in the class, which is otherwise attended by Chinese and Korean American students:

This is the *Chinese Weekly*, and they took out a full-page ad and of course they put the one White child's picture . . . God . . . it almost made me feel guilty, like why did you pick my one kid? . . . It made me feel like . . . I don't know . . . he was singled-out because of his race and because she [the teacher] feels like that's what people want to see. . . ."

Jana shared two more examples of Aiden's experiences in school, involving the school Christmas program:

They make him Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer . . . so then all the other kids were the other reindeer, and then he was Santa, in the second part too. And then they had some sort-of baby Jesus, and he was baby Jesus.

In one final example, Jana shared a picture from Aiden's yearbook, in which Aiden has on a pair of fake reading glasses and is next to a Chinese girl. The caption says, "Follow me, I can read for you." Jana states they call him "Dr. Wilson" and while she acknowledges that he is a good reader, she wonders why the teachers in the school think he can teach the other children. She is uncomfortable with the idea that her son has been given a special status but has not discussed her discomfort with the teachers. In an environment run by women of Color, she is surprised her son would be treated better than the other children.

Jana was not the only parent who mentioned the portrayal of Christian figures impacting the sense of self of a White son. Leanne shared an example of her son's expressing White supremacy:

I remember we were walking right near here down the street, and he said something about God being White. Well first of all, we're not a religious household, we don't talk about God, he probably hears it from friends, or relatives, but *God being White?* And I lit into him, like where did you get this?! You know, when Jesus is pictured, he's almost always White and he extrapolated from that.

Many parents talked about their White children as being particularly intelligent. Leanne described Tom's experiences in school, which are similar to those described by Jana:

Tom, he's smart, he tested into the APP programs. We've known ever since he was very little that he's bright and he's socially adept too, which is a nice combination. And he's pretty. So Tom's the golden child . . . he has been on the front page of the city paper . . . he's picked, partly because he's White . . . There are Asian kids in his class too, but they'll never get picked. Because he's pretty and he has blond hair (sigh). I haven't wanted to say, "You're just getting the attention because you're White" because it's much more than that.

Although both Leanne and Jana recognize that their sons are receiving White privilege, neither mother has taken steps to address this in their children's schools.

GENTRIFICATION

Gentrification was another theme that arose spontaneously in the data. The majority of participants—65%—stated that neighborhood choice was an aspect of integrating antiracism values into their parenting, and many of them cited it first, indicating that it is the primary way in which they identify their antiracism values in practice. Of 20, 14 (70%) stated they currently lived

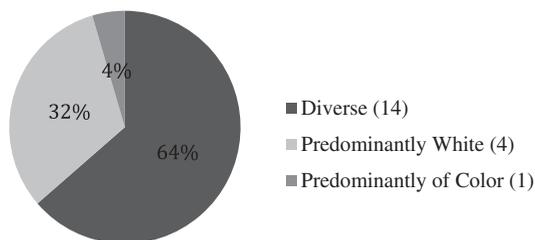


FIGURE 4 Racial make-up of children's neighborhoods.

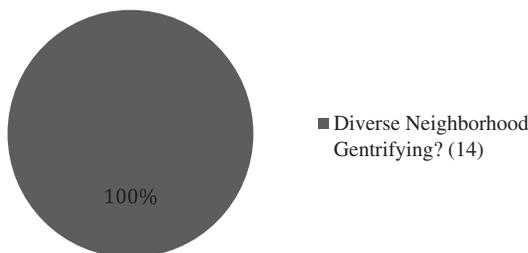


FIGURE 5 Gentrification.

in diverse neighborhoods (see [Figure 4](#)). All parents who described living in diverse neighborhoods were in areas of the city that are gentrifying (see [Figure 5](#)). Lila was one such parent:

I like where we are, we're actually a very diverse neighborhood, although really it's a lot of gay White men (laughs).

Lila's contradiction between stating her neighborhood is diverse and then stating that it's really a lot of gay White men illustrates the difficulty in assessing Whites' perceptions regarding racial diversity. Jess described her neighborhood this way:

Our neighborhood is very clearly White . . . not entirely but primarily and culturally it's like White middle-class, um But then it's like three blocks down the street is primarily African American, you know? It's only three blocks, right? but it feels like a very far distance . . . the places we go are the other places in the area that are still primarily White and . . . so the larger neighborhood is actually pretty racially diverse, but there's a way that we're able to choose to stay in a very White part of that neighborhood.

These parents identify how segregation manifests within the context of diverse neighborhoods. Three participants also specifically mentioned the zip code of their neighborhoods, and two of them made the point that it was the most diverse zip code in the country. However, this zip code is steadily

gentrifying as many Black-owned businesses are being driven out. The narratives here support the data that show there is a trend for Whites to seek out these neighborhoods and co-opt them rather than integrate themselves into the community and patronize businesses owned by people of Color.

WOMEN OF COLOR AND EARLY CHILDCARE

Several participants brought up having a childcare worker in their home or noted racism in the behavior of other White parents' choices for childcare and early childhood education. One mother simply noted that she had a "mother's helper" from Mexico for one year to teach her child Spanish. Here, Nora wonders about the potential impact of having an au pair who is a woman of Color:

Our recent au pair, she was from Brazil . . . they really saw her as a family member On the other hand . . . she did a lot of work around the house . . . and I didn't want them to think like, you know, "We're all White, and this Asian girl . . . I can tell her what to do and she does our laundry." I didn't want them to define race that way. And they probably didn't, but I made sure she wasn't the only one doing the laundry. We all had a lot of work to do around the house.

Rachelle described her observations of the White parents in her son's school program:

We chose a daycare center that was run by a nonprofit for refugee women. And a lot of other White parents were choosing it for infant and toddler care. . . . About half his class was White kids and as the kids moved up beyond the toddler program to the preschool, all except two other White families moved their kids to different preschools I have the sense that for many of the other White folks . . . taking care of a baby or toddler, they saw it as a perfectly appropriate role for women of Color. . . . But the point at which they saw their kids as needing to be *learning* and needing to be in an academic environment . . . a couple parents said, "Well I want to make sure my kid speaks English properly" and "Well, you know, they won't get the right kind of preparation for kindergarten and things." And . . . even . . . with all the work I've done, it was one of those stunning moments for me.

Rachelle observes that White parents—even those she assumes hold antiracist values—still enact racist relations with women of Color whom they see as qualified to care for but not to teach their children.

DISCUSSION

This research shows that White parents who identify with antiracism values are almost universally contradicting their value system in significant ways. The most noteworthy contradictions that we will discuss here were related to school choice and denial of their children's racial awareness.

School and Neighborhood Choices

The majority of parents stated that they chose a school based on diversity. However, most also spontaneously discussed the racial makeup of their children's programs within the school, and these programs tended to be whiter and included many more middle- to upper-income families. The "school within a school" phenomenon is well known; honors programs are often completely different from mainstream school programs, which are typically under-resourced and taught by inexperienced teachers, which amounts to de facto segregation (Oakes, 2008).

Johnson and Shapiro (2003) showed that "average" White parents' school and neighborhood decisions were based on race and served to secure education and economic advantages for their children. In terms of neighborhood choice, the antiracist White parents interviewed here differed from the non-antiracist-identifying parents in Johnson and Shapiro's study in that they espoused pro-diversity values and chose to live in neighborhoods with people of Color. Yet, as they note:

Ultimately, no matter how conflicted they are, the end result is the same. White families choose to live in, and are rewarded for living in, White neighborhoods. . . . The social structure rewards White families for perpetuating segregation through their racialized decisions. (pp. 182–183)

For many of the parents interviewed here, neighborhood choice was stated as the main way they incorporated antiracism values into their parenting. Still, there weren't any who reported that their neighborhoods were predominantly inhabited by people of Color; most were diverse neighborhoods that were gentrifying. While they stated that ideally, they wanted a school that was both diverse and "good," the perceived quality of the program trumped racial diversity almost exclusively—and quality was consistently associated with race. There were a few rare examples in which the parents in this study identified school environments that included predominantly children of Color to be high or higher in quality than the whiter programs, but several of these parents expressed concern that their White children would have negative experiences and/or lose their academic edge in a "traditional" (aka non-Montessori, non-honors) and less White environment. Thus they avoided these academically strong programs.

These parents' choices happen within a highly inequitable context, and in this context, they have options their counterparts with less race and class privilege do not. On one hand, despite having race (and for the most part, class) privilege, these parents are going against the White norms in that they generally teach their children about racism, talk about White privilege, sometimes model activism for them in their schools or their communities, and in some cases are highly involved in work for racial justice. On the other hand, they want to ensure privilege for their children, and their antiracism work—where it occurs—does not challenge their own children's racial advantages.

Some parents commented that institutional racism and tracking were in place in their schools and expressed concern about programs' being skewed along race and class lines as a result. The group that was concerned with racial disparities in their children's schools struggled more with the decision about whether or not they should enroll their children in the non-honors or traditional programs in which the majority of the children were of Color. However, whether or not the parent felt conflicted about the decision, virtually all of them chose to place their children in the programs that were considered "better" academically (even if the better program was also whiter). Most did not think it was possible for the non-honors program to be of high quality, yet it was unclear what they based this assessment on (however, coded racism is inherent in White discourses about schools as being "good" or "bad" based largely on the mere presence of students of Color in any significant numbers). Some of these parents discussed the alternative programs as a "better fit" for their children; the concept of *fit* may signify White middle- or upper-class cultural values or norms (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012).

Several parents acknowledged that being middle or upper-middle class, they could remove their children at any time and place them into private schools. Teresa described her son Darren's experience in a predominately Black after-school program, and her response:

He never used race, like he never said, "Mommy I don't like it here," but often, like when I'd go pick him up, he'd be alone on the playground, playing by himself. 'Cause a lot of the kids were older, playing kickball and a lot of other really physical games, and you know, he was a kindergarten. For me, I really wanted him in the program because it was so diverse. But the quality of the program wasn't good enough for me to feel good about the second year. I'm like, I can't really do this to my child for the sake of getting him exposed to diversity. . . . I didn't tell him why I was taking him out, I just said, "We're gonna get a nanny now."

Teresa was not atypical in her expression of valuing diversity while being unwilling to let her child struggle with the social difficulties of being

in the minority. Shayla talked openly about the contradiction between her antiracism values and her school choices:

I looked for co-ops that had some racial and socioeconomic diversity and there is some in the one we went to, but they're certainly White-dominated places. I made sure to check and make sure that there were African American kids in those classes, and there were, but it certainly wasn't the regular classes at the school, which were almost all African American, and I wasn't willing to go there. Not because of it being all African American, in fact that would be a great experience for Elijah, but it didn't have a reputation for being a program that was good for those kids, never mind my kid . . . and so I've been thinking about moving my son into the contemporary program. . . . So I really struggled with that, right? Do I move him because I want him to have that experience of being not in the majority, as a male, as a White male, and learning from an African American woman in particular, in a historically Black neighborhood? We have gentrification in the area I live in, so all the people like me are looking for "Where's the safe place to send my child?" So I want to be able to say, "The contemporary program is a really good program, and we want everybody to be in every program, please send your kids!" But how can I do that if my kid isn't in it?

Further intensifying Shayla's internal conflict about program choice, her husband and other family members don't understand why she would even consider the main program.

It is also worthy of note that Shayla consulted the school principal (a White woman) about moving her child into the contemporary program, and the principal told her not to do it.

Maria also clearly described the contradictions between her own values and behaviors around school choice:

We live in a really diverse neighborhood, more diverse when we moved in than it is now, but . . . our neighborhood middle school, it just really felt . . . like a prison or something. . . . You're welcomed by signs on the window that say things like, "3 Tardies = Suspension and 3 Suspensions = Expulsion." I want my kids to be excited about learning, not feeling like it's punishment. So, . . . it was clear that it was like, "God this is not what I want my kids to be exposed to," and so I visit a bunch of other middle schools around the city. . . . The best was actually in (a White neighborhood) and so, lo-and-behold, it's not a very diverse middle school, and so *trying* to balance You know that mama bear kicks in. And for me as a parent who was trying to be cognizantly antiracist, it becomes really complicated, where it feels like there's a choice between sort of a "good" education, versus a "sucky" education that's more diverse. As a White middle-class parent . . . in the middle of trying to change the system, you're also a part of the system.

Five parents described engaging in antiracism activism within their children's schools. Some had worked to fight the closure of the under-resourced neighborhood school their children attended, others worked with parents of Color to push for racial equity within their schools. Many described reaching out to parents of Color to try to create relationships across racial and class lines. All of these activities are the self-reports of White parents; how the parents of Color they interacted with felt about their efforts is unknown. The majority of the narratives are more consistent with aversive racism—the type of racism well-intentioned, educated, progressive people are more likely to enact (Hodson, Dovidio, & Gaertner, 2004). Aversive racism exists under the surface of consciousness because it conflicts with consciously held beliefs of equality and justice among racial groups. This form of racism allows Whites with progressive identities to enact racist practices while still maintaining that identity. For example, the pride expressed in choice of neighborhood (“the most diverse zip code in the country”), yet the maintenance of racial separation within that neighborhood.

Denial of Children's Racial Awareness

A significant number of parents (45%) reported that they do not believe that their children notice difference, or notice it only minimally or have not yet assigned value to it. In fact, parents of younger children tended to express pleasure in their assessment that their children were not aware of race and racism; several stated that they were very happy or “loved it.” For example, Lila said this about her three-year-old daughter:

Right now, most of this is just floating over her head, and I don't know how much to really draw attention to it yet. I like the fact that she is still not—it's not a thing to her, I don't think she's even identifying people as being of different races and ethnicities, I think she's just figuring, “Oh this person's my friend,” and I'm very happy about that.

At the same time, and often within the same response, parents reported that their children *have* noticed racial differences and *have* assigned a lesser value to people of Color. Thus they are in active denial of the racial awareness and racism their children exhibit. Further compounding this denial is that many of the parents—and all of those who brought up the issue of slavery in the interviews—worried about discussing racism in a developmentally appropriate way. This worry is significant because in their false belief that children are racially unaware, their assessment of what is developmentally appropriate is necessarily skewed. Thus, these parents are ill equipped to address the racism of their children.

Anti-Black Tendencies

Of particular concern are the anti-Black tendencies that emerged in the data. Parents who believed that their children were not aware of race also provided clear evidence that their children had absorbed racism toward Blacks, and when parents described adverse experiences their children had with race, they usually involved a Black child. In addition to the examples discussed earlier, Rachele shared her five-year-old son's comments:

They opened up a new classroom, and it ended up being like four African American kids in that classroom, and there hadn't been any other African American kids at this school . . . and my son came home, like talking trash about some of the African American kids and saying things like, "I don't like those kids," and I would push and say, "Let's talk about why you don't like them." . . . And he was probably four at the time, and what he could articulate is, "I don't like their hair . . . they don't look like me or any of my friends."

After this incident, Rachele took action at home and met with her son's teacher to talk about her observations and help to promote anti-bias curricula in the program. However, she stated that she couldn't imagine admitting "even to politicized friends" that her son had expressed explicit racism. It is of note that her shame kept her from sharing the comment with her antiracist-identified White friends. Antiracism principles hold that all White people (including children) internalize racism and it must be acknowledged and then addressed. Thus Rachele lost the opportunity to model to other parents in her community the power of racist conditioning on children and ways to handle such an incident when it occurs.

The presence of anti-Black sentiment was suggested in several other ways, including the preference for and increased comfort with people of Asian heritage over African Americans; the specifically anti-Black comments children made; the reality that even when living in racially mixed neighborhoods, most parents did not integrate with Black neighbors or businesses; and when parents suggested that "reverse racism" had occurred, it was always between their children and Black children. Very few parents commented on the anti-Black racism that emerged throughout the data, and most seemed to deny it completely. This is in keeping with research that shows that on the continuum of racism, Blacks are on the bottom in the White mind (Baron & Banaji, 2006).

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the contradictions between the self-identity of White parents as antiracist and their actual practices, we recommend the following. First, awareness must be raised within the community of White antiracist parents

about how many of their behaviors reinforce—rather than challenge—White supremacy. Given the courage it takes to identify as antiracist, we are hopeful that if these parents were more aware of the concrete manifestations of their racial privilege—particularly in the area of school and program choices—it is possible that they might act in a different way. As Farley and Frey (1994) state, we must lessen the “gap between attitude and behavior” (p. 40). What this might mean is that rather than simply ensuring their children are in a school or program they view as being of good quality or desirable, White parents challenge the school systems that perpetuate racial and economic inequalities. They could do so by keeping their children in mainstream programs in city schools. In collaboration with parents, administrators, and educators of Color, they could work to improve these programs while demanding that all children have access to high-quality public education. This would yield multiple positive outcomes: change in the school systems; modeling allyship for their White children; teaching by action rather than words; and building authentic cross-racial relationships in their communities.

In addition to awareness of their own behavior and modeling through action, White parents must be educated about the degree to which young children internalize messages about race. The trend in research over the past two decades indicates that children are vastly more sophisticated in their awareness of race than most Americans want to believe (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006; Quintana, 2008, Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). The parents interviewed here supported this research. Further, there is a growing body of research demonstrating that both White children and children of Color internalize the dominant ideology of White as superior (DiAngelo, 2012). Just saying “everyone is equal” is not enough to address this internalization, as evidenced by the anti-Black sentiment that emerged in the data. With this understanding, parents may prepare themselves to talk openly and honestly about the history of and current manifestations of racism with their White children. Allport’s (1979) seminal work on the nature of prejudice specified four conditions for optimal intergroup relations: equal group status within the situation, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and authority support. Efforts toward neighborhood and school integration could open these conversations and address many of Allport’s conditions.

CONCLUSIONS

The most hopeful finding concerned parents with older children. These children’s friendship choices were reportedly “out of the dominant culture box” and included diversity in ability, religion, race, size, sexual orientation, and income. Parents reported that these teens were aware of racism and Whiteness and engaged in antiracist action. However clumsy or inconsistent their parents’ antiracist attempts, these children appear to have a cognizance of White racism that their parents did not have until much later.

This awareness translated into specific changes in behavior that were not typical for mainstream Whites. For example, one child chose racism as a research topic, another was using racial diversity as a measure of value when choosing colleges, and most were reported to speak up about racism in general. It may be significant that all of the parents who talked about their teens' awareness were themselves involved in organizing. This suggests that seeing parents live in accordance with values (rather than just espousing them) may be the most effective antiracist parenting strategy.

However, with a few exceptions, the main difference between parents who identify as antiracist Whites and average White parents could be distilled down to *awareness* of White privilege and racism. White Americans as a whole tend to have very little awareness of their own race and don't see racism as a serious social problem (DiAngelo, 2012; Wise, 2010). Thus, compared to average White Americans, most (but not all) of the parents interviewed here were taking intentional action to socialize their children to recognize and name difference. Yet the vast majority relied solely on addressing racism at an individual or interpersonal level. Only a few parents demonstrated a deep understanding of how embedded racism is in the structure of U.S. society and sought to convey to their children this understanding and the actions required to change it. Perhaps the most disturbing finding was how much racism—and racism against Blacks in particular—the children had already absorbed. This is especially problematic in the face of the majority of parents' denials of their children's racial awareness. Further, hardly any of those who had a more sophisticated understanding of these dynamics took action against them.

Returning to the antiracist principles that opened this study—an ongoing process of understanding White privilege and supremacy; challenging colorblindness; countering internalized White superiority; being an ally to people of Color; being accountable to people of Color; and engaging in meaningful action against racism at a personal, interpersonal, and community level—these findings suggest that there is much work to be done within the White antiracism movement. According to the growing body of antiracism literature, awareness and discussion of racism and interruption at an interpersonal level are not sufficient; political action is necessary. As Stephanie wondered, “What could we do if we really applied ourselves as White people? . . . How hard is that to do?”

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