

White Moms Raising Multi-Racial Children: Dedicated Methods of Color-Conscious Parenting

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Abstract

Objective: The purpose of this study is to investigate the ways that White mothers racially socialize their multi-racial children. Findings are connected to widespread and public demands for Whites to become racially literate, following the 2012 Black Lives Matter movement and increases in race-motivated hate crimes in the United States. This study examines three primary research questions: 1). Do White mothers with multi-racial children use color-conscious or color-blind methods to racially socialize their children? 2). How do the racial socialization practices of White mothers with multi-racial children compare to the racial socialization practices of White mothers with White children? 3.) How might the racial socialization methods used by White mothers raising multi-racial children contribute to demands for Whites to become racially literate? **Method:** To answer these questions I conducted in-depth, qualitative interviews with 5 White mothers whose multi-racial children were between the ages of 3 and 18. After each interview, I transcribed and qualitatively coded participant interviews, identifying themes related to racial socialization and Whiteness. **Conclusion:** Parenting multi-racial children in the era of the Black Lives Matter movement motivated the mothers in my sample to understand how the history of systemic racism in the United States differently shapes the racial identity, experiences, and outcomes of themselves compared to their children of color. White mothers' lack of racial trauma and personal investment in the topics of race make them an ideal demographic to educate other Whites on these topics. This empirically supported proposal provides a possible path forward, directly responding to widespread and public calls for Whites to become racially literate, hoping that this change will halt the perpetuation of racial harm.

Introduction

Following the Black Lives Matter movement in 2012, and nationwide protests which occurred after the police murders of Black Americans like Breonna Taylor (2020), George Floyd (2020), and Daunte Wright (2021), America has undergone a “racial reckoning” as discussions of racial inequality and Anti-Black violence unfold routinely and publicly (McCoy, 2020, Underhill & Simms, 2022). Coinciding with these calls to action, Asian Americans have experienced a dramatic increase in hate crimes and harassment following the spread of Anti-Asian rhetoric which blamed communities of Asian descent for creating and spreading the Coronavirus (Abdollah & Hughes, 2021, Sy & Nagy, 2021). A survey issued in 2020 found that one in eight Asian Americans said they had experienced a racially motivated hate crime in 2020 and the first three months of 2021, which agrees with the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism’s report citing a 150% increase in Asian-American hate crimes from 2019-2020 (Kai-Hwa Wang, 2022).

As a result, public calls for White parents to implement color-conscious racial socialization methods through discussing race, racism, and Whiteness with their children have grown (White-Cummings, 2020). Color-conscious racial socialization openly challenges color-blindness by valuing racial diversity, acknowledging the impact of race and racism, and advocating for equal rights and treatment across different racial groups (Bañales et al., 2019). Oppositely, color-blind racial socialization practices, which are produced by color-blind racial ideologies, are modern forms of racism embodied by either color evasion (claiming to “not see race”) or power evasion (denying the material and emotional realities of racial inequality) (Abaied & Perry, 2021).

Advocates hope that implementing color-conscious methods of racial socialization in White households will reduce racial ignorance and halt the perpetuation of racial harm that precipitate from color-blind methods. U.S. racial experts like Dr. Jennifer Harvey and Nikole Hannah-Jones urge White parents to view parenting the next generation of White Americans as an opportunity to promote racial progress by implementing color-consciousness. For example, Dr. Margaret Hagerman, author of *White Kids: Growing Up in America with Racial Privilege*, supports this stance, stating White children “possess the rhetorical tools and agency necessary to challenge and rework dominant ideology, demonstrating the participatory role that children play in social change” (2014, p. 76). While some White parents were inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement to reject color-blind racial ideologies and replace them with color-conscious ones, most White households have not changed their racial socialization practices (Underhill, 2017, Underhill & Simms, 2022).

In a 2020 survey issued by Pew Research Center, 60% of U.S adult Whites said they strongly supported the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement (Parker et al., 2020). Although this may appear to be an optimistic indication of shifting race relations in the U.S, support of BLM does not change the daily lives of Whites, who remain the sole beneficiaries of White supremacist systems. Civil unrest in solidarity with BLM among Whites declined after the 2020 protests that fomented in response to George Floyd’s murder. Today, the status quo normalizing racialized violence and inequality prevails. However, not all Whites have lost interest in

addressing racial inequality in the U.S. Unlike White children who are granted protection from their racial status, multi-racial children remain vulnerable to pervasive violence in their daily lives. White mothers raising multi-racial children are intimately proximate to issues that threaten their children's safety, and for this reason, this group of Whites may still be responding to activists' and experts' calls to action through their racial socialization practices. Examining their methods of racial socialization, which require divestment from racial privilege in order to encourage their children's safety, may provide future directions for improving the racial literacy of Whites as a whole.

Background: Racial Socialization among White Parents

The United States is a country rife with racial categorizations so serious, they shape and predict the social location of citizens. In 2019, 56% of adult Americans said being Black hurts people's ability to get ahead, and 51% said the same about being Hispanic. In stark contrast, 59% of adult Americans say being White helps people's ability to get ahead (Horowitz et al., 2021). These beliefs about race and opportunity are further contextualized when looking at the Black-White income gap which has persisted over time. In 2018, the difference in median household incomes between Black and White Americans was an estimated \$33,000.00, a drastic comparison to the 1970 estimation of \$23,800.00 (Kochhar & Cilluffo, 2018). Further, Black and Hispanic households are twice as likely to live in poverty (Pew Research Center, 2016).

Despite these statistics and widespread beliefs which admit race is an important and contemporary social determinant, most White Americans endorse the dominant racial ideology of colorblindness; one which minimizes the social and historical importance of race in society by ignoring it almost completely (Bonilla-Silva, 2021, Plaut et al., 2018). Common colorblind messages include an emphasis on egalitarianism and a petition for "treating everyone the same", despite mountains of empirical data which cite gross disparities between racial groups. Although they are not the only group who subscribe to color-blind ideologies, Whites are more likely to endorse a color-blind ideology than people of color and do so for many reasons (Plaut et al., 2018, Ryan et al., 2007). Adopting a color-blind racial ideology allows members of the racially dominant group, and others who subscribe, the ability to forgive themselves for perpetuating racism by projecting a racially egalitarian image of themselves and the world around them (Plaut et al., 2018). The effects of color-blindness include a reduction in the individual's ability to accurately perceive racial discrimination, and a false understanding of real-world issues of inequality, such as wage or achievement gaps (Abaied & Perry, 2021). There is no evidence that shows color-blind ideologies improve race relations. Contrary to color-blind racial ideologies are color-conscious ones. Color-conscious ideologies openly challenge color-blindness by valuing racial diversity, acknowledging the impact of race and racism, and advocating for equal rights and treatment across different racial groups (Bañales et al., 2019). Color-conscious racial ideologies promote healthy identity cultivation in youth of color and are related to lower levels of depression and anxiety, increased capacity to manage emotions, and better school efficacy and achievement (Hughes et al., 2006, Huguley et al., 2019)

Children absorb racial ideologies through racial socialization. Racial socialization describes the processes that inform children of the values, attitudes, and beliefs about the role and importance of race (Abaied & Perry, 2021, Freeman et al., 2022). While most of the messages children receive about race come from parents, direct and indirect messages also come from peers, teachers, and the media (Hagerman, 2020). The racial socialization practices in households of color are well documented. Research examining methods implemented by parents of color reveals four thematic dimensions of racial socialization used to prepare youth to navigate hostile racialized landscapes: cultural socialization, preparation for bias, promotion of mistrust, and egalitarianism (Huguley et al., 2019). Cultural socialization involves teaching children about their racial or ethnic heritage, culture, and history. Preparation for bias, designed to enhance children's safety, includes discussing race, racism, and discrimination children will likely face because of their race or ethnicity. Promotion of mistrust concerns the degree to which parents endorse wariness about members outside of their child's race or ethnic group. Finally, egalitarianism includes parents' emphasis on mainstream values unrelated to racial or ethnic identity, such as working hard or being honest, to promote their child's success.

Although racial socialization happens to an extent in all families, less is known about the racial socialization practices of White families (Freeman et al., 2022, Underhill, 2017, Vittrup, 2016). Research that does exist reveals most White parents endorse color-blind ideologies, stating that race is either unnecessary or inappropriate to discuss (Abaied & Perry, 2021, Underhill, 2017, Vittrup, 2016). A recent study of 6,070 parents collected in 2019 found that 61% of Black parents "often" or "sometimes" spoke with their children about race, compared to 56% of Asian parents, and 46% of Latinx parents, using at least one or all the above-mentioned color-conscious methods (Kotler et al., 2019). Only 27% of Whites from the sample "often" or "sometimes" spoke to their children about race (Kotler et al., 2019). Very few Whites endorse color-conscious racial socialization methods with their children (Kotler et al., 2019, Underhill 2017, Vittrup, 2016, Zucker & Patterson, 2018). Parents' life experiences serve as a critical backdrop for their child's racial socialization, underscoring the fact that parents bring a prior set of experiences and worldviews to the process (Hughes et al., 2006). White parents who endorse color-conscious racial socialization practices often struggle to implement and execute their color-conscious socialization goals with White children. Parents' explanation for this is twofold. First, White parents report insecurity about their lack of knowledge stemming from color-blind families of origin (Underhill 2017; Underhill and Simms 2021). Often, Whites who choose to implement color-conscious ideologies in the home are simultaneously unlearning a lifetime of messages which encourage them to ignore racial identity and invisibilize the rewards attached to Whiteness (Underhill and Simms 2021; Underhill and Clark 2023). Second, White parents struggle to authentically expose their children to racially diverse spaces and relationships, stemming from the pervasive educational and residential segregation in which they live, work, and send their children to school (Underhill, 2018). This means color-conscious ideologies are, for the most part, theoretical knowledge for White children.

The Current Study

The findings in this paper come from a data set collected and created to answer separate research questions. The original research questions explored

conflict and gender related to the racial socialization practices of interracial couples raising multi-racial children. 1. Do differently-raced parents experience conflict when it comes to the racial socialization of their bi-racial children? 2). Does gender influence how parents perceive and respond to conflict associated with the racial socialization of their children? The original interview-based project was designed to collect perspectives from both mothers and fathers because most research concerning racial socialization practices to date comes from the perspective of mothers. During data analysis, participants' responses would be compared to their spouses and then coded for themes of gender and conflict. Unfortunately, I was unable to pursue this original project because male participants were extremely difficult to recruit. During the coding process though, important themes emerged among the female participants regarding their color-conscious racial socialization practices. For this reason, I narrowed the data set to mothers who were interviewed for the original project.

Method

Data for the current study includes mothers who agreed to be interviewed and met the following criteria: cis-gendered, heterosexual, White, with multi-racial children ages 3-18. Mothers had a range of educational attainment from high school diplomas to PhDs and were aged 33 to 49 years old. Self-reported annual household income varied from \$18,000 to \$300,000. The children referenced in this paper have parents who are either Black and White, Asian and White, or Hispanic and White. I recruited mothers using personal networks and public and private online parenting groups. In July 2022, recruitment flyers were distributed to eligible participants via social networks and local public bulletin boards, inviting them to take part in a study seeking to "understand how parents teach their children about race and racism". To reach a larger population of eligible participants, the same recruitment flier was distributed online using a Facebook profile made on behalf of the project. Using this profile, I requested membership to public and private Facebook groups. I selected parenting groups based on their purpose and goal orientation. All selected groups hosted peer-to-peer support among multi-racial families and had been active within the last four weeks. My recruitment flier, which included a description of eligible participants, encouraged those interested to email me and upon contact, I sent detailed consent forms, built rapport, and scheduled interviews with participants. Interviews lasted an average of sixty minutes. After completion, I transcribed the interviews and coded them for themes relating to racial socialization methods and Whiteness.

Results: Multiple Motivations for Color-Conscious Racial Socialization Methods

In characterizing motivations for mothers' color-conscious racial socialization practices, I identified three main themes: countering color-blind backgrounds, fostering strong ethnic or racial identities, and keeping children safe.

“How I Grew Up Was Not Okay”: Countering Color Blind Backgrounds

White mothers' color-conscious racial socialization practices exist in contrast to their own color-blind upbringings. Regardless of their proximity to non-Whites, as children, mothers in this sample received color-blind messages from their parents that disregarded differences in racial groups as meaningful or products of systematic inequality. Some mothers recalled exposure to explicitly identified forms of racial inequality or discrimination through public school curricula or media viewed outside the home, but it did not resonate with their color-blind ideologies which promoted race neutrality. When I asked Joslyn to reflect on her childhood relationship to race, she recalled a behavior common among mothers, who were taught to compartmentalize racism as a pastime:

I grew up in a White household, so I didn't know a lot of that stuff. You see it in movies and you just think like that something of movies or something of the past, and you don't realize how current that is. Until it happens to someone close to you, or you meet somebody, and you hear their story. And then when you get into having a black teenager who looks more black than white, even though you know, she's mixed, especially like she gets her hair braided or something, you know, it matters in a different way than it did before.

Most mothers reported using the color-blind racial ideology taught in their family of origin up until giving birth to their first multi-racial child. As soon as children are born in the United States, parents are immediately required to racially categorize them to receive a birth certificate. For the White mothers of this study, this was the first distinguishable moment that color-blind ideologies did not support their new roles as parents. One mother felt like she was 'jumping in really quickly' when she and her husband were forced to check off a single box to categorize their newborn child; “Bronson was, you know, two days old. So, what does that even mean?”

Up until this point, mothers had not considered raising a child in a world where one box would not capture their child's racial identity. When asked if they had discussed what it would mean to raise a multi-racial child with their children's father, mothers said they probably discussed the appearance of their children, wondering whose eyes the child would have and what texture hair they would possess. But in terms of discussing how to teach their children about issues of race or multi-racial identity, all but one said no.

Color-conscious parenting is not only a racial socialization practice for White mothers with multi-racial children but also a new lifestyle entirely. The shifts required to deploy color-conscious racial socialization methods with their children compel mothers to reevaluate their relationship to daily life, and teach mothers that socialization is a process adults *and* children undergo:

I see that how I grew up was not okay and that I don't want that to be how my girls are raised. And obviously, them being half Hispanic is going to be different. But also, it could be the same if I chose it to be that way. I think in a lot of ways, it really could be the same. And it was unfortunate that it was that way, but I'm happy that at least I'm not still there. I've grown and I am

intentionally making differences, or, you know, differences and choices in my daily life. I'm still growing and learning, but at least I could do this for me and my family -Scarlett

To promote their children's well-being, White mothers were required to identify shortcomings attached to racial privilege and color-blindness. For example, schoolteachers who endorse color-blind ideologies which promote "treating everyone the same" no longer represent egalitarianism for these White mothers. Instead, race-neutral stances alert them to adults who may perpetuate racial harm by minimizing the reality of racial disparities in schools. Mothers said color-blind ideologies are not suitable for raising multi-racial children and they have to act accordingly. No one in the sample described a shift in their racial ideology shifting from color-blind to color-conscious as being remarkably apparent. But all agreed that this change occurred in response to becoming a parent of a multi-racial child who would likely be identified as non-White.

Being a 'Port in the Storm': Creating and Maintaining Positive Racialized Environments

"We knew we would need to build our kids Black identity because the world would be exposing them to White identity. And so it'd be our job as a household to like, teach them about being strong black kids in a world that maybe didn't support that." -Olivia

"We talk about it all the time. Because I'm really into this space in terms of wanting to make sure my kids are like, they feel validated, and they feel connected. And so we revisit competition about race, ethnicity, and culture, probably daily in some way, shape, or form." -Nora

In agreement with common racial socialization practices of African American, Asian American, Latinx, and other households of color in the United States, mothers in this study emphasized the importance of cultivating strong racial or ethnic identities in their children. The United States sends racialized messages that position Whites as superior and all other races as inferior. Mothers try to counter these messages by routinely emphasizing their children's positive attributes and group membership in daily conversations. Nora recalled a conversation that unfolded during a car ride after picking up her daughter from middle school. Like every day, her daughter reported on the happenings of class, recess, and lunch. But on this day, disparaging messages she had received regarding her identity and appearance emerged. Disturbed, Olivia casually probed her daughter to learn more:

People are giving her messages like you're not black, your hair is weird, you know, like, her White friends are like your hair looks bad. But her hair is very nicely braided. But they're like, "your hair is so kinky on the ends."

Repressing her heartbreak and rage, Nora patiently listened to her daughter. Immediately after, Nora responded with confident, positive messages that celebrated her daughter's multi-racial identity and affirmed her appearance. Mothers who shared similar stories acknowledged that adolescence is a time when peer-to-peer competition is normal and that judgmental comments about appearance are

common. However, mothers fear that the racialized nature of the comments their child receive may irreversibly torment their child's identity development; a fear they didn't believe they would possess if their child were White.

Mothers draw attention to the broader racial and ethnic community their children are a part of to support the cultivation of their child's multi-racial identity. First, mothers identify and share aspects of their child's racial or ethnic culture, alternative to Whiteness, that are unique and special. Then, they provide explanations rooted in history and practice that describe why these cultural elements are worth investing pride in. For example, Rebecca referenced cultural values regarding community as a particularly important value that her daughter's Vietnamese American identity existed within, but cultures of Whiteness do not:

There are a lot of things about Asian culture that are really great, and these things don't exist or aren't appreciated in dominant slash White culture in the United States. So for instance, like taking care of your community members, taking care of your family, right, you don't need people to ask you to do things, you should just do things, especially if they're elderly, you should have respect for the elderly.

Others had similar stories emphasizing the differences in community and values between groups. Olivia's daughter is multi-racial but is read by many outsiders as Black. After an elderly Black woman offered a five-dollar bill to her young daughter in the grocery store, which is a relatively frequent occurrence, Olivia invited her daughter to reflect:

I want you to think about how Black people care about other Black people. And how you notice when we go in the store or the gas station, the Black men always nod at each other to acknowledge one another right away to say, like, I've got your back. I want you to think about how that does not happen with White people. Think about *how* White people care about their circle. Their circle is defined as their friends or their church or they're whatever, and how Black people have a broader circle. And some of that is born out of trauma. But that is really like a nice way to live.

When mothers are limited in the ability to support their children's multiracial experience/identity due to their White identity, they openly acknowledge this to their children and ask others for help. Mothers commonly rely on their children's fathers or community members to help supplement the guidance they are not able to provide. This happens by either educating themselves on a topic with the help of others or, by facilitating direct interactions between their children and trusted sources to ensure their children receive support rooted in shared, first-hand experience. One example is hair care. For White mothers whose children have different hair textures than theirs, it has taken time to understand the importance of haircare in terms of identity and symbolic belonging to a broader racial or ethnic group. Caring for their children's hair is a labor of love that requires collective assistance from people and places like the internet, beauty store clerks, and family or community members. As Olivia put it, "I am very invested in learning. I want them to embrace their Blackness and not see like their hair is a burden or problem or like I'm gonna straighten it because I can't deal with curls."

‘You Can’t Get Away with Some of the Things Your Friends Can’: Keeping Multi-Racial Children Safe

“I don’t want to label them as bad and make my kids fearful. But I do want them to be cautious.” Joslyn

Disparities in force used by police against children vary dramatically by race, where Black and Hispanic youth are six times more likely to die from police shootings than their White counterparts (Heyward & Costa, 2020). Although most mothers in the sample were not formally aware of these statistics, they said parenting multi-racial children in an era of racial reckoning sparked by the Black Lives Matter movement inspired an emphasis on their children’s personal safety. Mothers who live in racially diverse neighborhoods were more likely to express concern for their children to be racially profiled. Mothers believe that racially segregated communities where multi-racial children are the minority, however alienating to their children, may provide some protection due to their children’s increased proximity to Whites. Joslyn, who lives in a racially diverse neighborhood, closely correlates her children’s safety to the threat others might feel in response to her children’s racial appearance:

So even then playing outside, you know, running around in hoodies because it’s October if you get too many kids together, and most of them are Black, and they’re running around through people’s yards, is a neighbor gonna feel threatened?

Understanding that their children are disproportionately likely to experience discrimination due to their multi-racial identity, mothers teach their children how to interact with authority figures, specifically law enforcement. The lessons mothers teach are informed by an awareness of systematic racism, not lived experience. Joslyn tells her children to deprioritize their personal feelings when interacting with law enforcement as a strategy of self-protection. She says, “if you do get pulled over by a police officer, you need to be aware that they might feel threatened. And they need to make sure that you’re not a threat.” Her advice suggests that at the point of interaction, children have little choice but to obey strategies of passivity as self-preservation, regardless of potential feelings stemming from mistreatment or injustice. Similarly, Olivia provides her children with specific instructions on how to conduct themselves upon contact with law enforcement. Not only has she trained her children how to respond, but she has also seen these programmed responses unfold in real time; during an experience, she described as ‘difficult to witness’:

We have taught them that if they see a police officer or one speaks to them, they should, like, stand with their hands out. They need to show their hands. So when this cop on a bicycle approached, all three kids dropped to the ground and put their hands out. And I was thinking, gosh, this is awkward.

Mothers educate their children on the historical experiences of racial or ethnic groups, which helps to contextualize their emphasis on safety. These conversations include descriptions of systematic violence and repression that can make children uncomfortable:

She doesn't really want it, as stated. She's like, Mom, you're scary. You tell me scary things. I wish you would stop telling me these scary things. And I'm like, Lilly, you need to know and this is the problem with is that people aren't willing to have these conversations. And it is true. It's terribly scary. I can't believe people did these things. But they did. And they do.

Olivia, a mother of three multi-racial children whose parents are Black and White, conveyed a similar experience when attempting to prepare her children with information about US racism. She noted:

So, I think that they know the broader context of their history and of their current lived situation and I always say, you can't really say you can't get away with some of the things that your friends can get away with. And then I think all the time, like, am I raising them to be like, paranoid? But then, in my mind, we're raising them to be safe.

Identifying safety in terms of appearance is one way for children to understand the role and importance of race in everyday life. Notably, White mothers teach safety to their children by drawing distinctions between their own lived experiences and their children's. Instead of hypothetically discussing racial privilege and racial vulnerability, mothers identified their own social location and compare it to their children's. This helps mothers clearly articulate what racial differences can mean in terms of safety. It was common for mothers to tell their children that because they were White, they were safer, and because their children were not White, they were less safe. For example, Olivia drew a distinction between the safety of White women and Black women to her daughters:

I say to them, I could get away with this kind of stuff, because I am, in a lot of ways, invisible to authority. And I always say to them, like, you are tall, beautiful, black girls, and people will notice you more.

Rather than succumbing to White guilt, mothers in this sample teach their children that society considers White women worthy of protection. They teach their children that this consideration is not universally applied. White mothers using their specific social location to demonstrate who is granted safety and who is not becomes significant when considering that most White struggle to identify themselves as recipients of racial privilege (Lewis, 2004).

“Change Starts with Us”: Raising Racial Allies

Mother's racial socialization practices are meant to promote social responsibility in the form of racial allyship. Racial allyship, often discussed in relation to Whites aspiring to be anti-racist, encourages individuals to divest from their racial privilege by de-centering Whiteness, amplifying marginalized voices, and engaging in ongoing education addressing internalized racism and bias (Lamont, 2021). These practices are designed to encourage Whites to recognize racial discrimination and use their privilege to intervene instead of standby, as a measure of solidarity and harm reduction. Racial allyship was discussed generally and in the context of their children's current environment, such as on the playground or in school. Mothers wanted their children to first recognize racial discrimination and then respond to it by denouncing the behavior and supporting the recipient. Mothers talk to their children

about racial discrimination as comparable to bullying. Scarlett, whose Hispanic and White children are five and ten, said:

I want them to be able to be that person to be able to say something if they see something. When I talk about these things with them, it's about recognizing situations. In kids their age, bullying is really common so it's easy for them to recognize. And when we talk about bullying, we talk about *why* a kid is being bullied. So first we talk about bullying, and then we talk about racism. And recognizing bullying and recognizing racism and why you would want to, well, why you're going to stop someone from being picked on for both.

Mothers understood the importance of teaching *and* modeling racial allyship. When asked how they respond to racial discrimination when with their children, many said that their children's safety was their priority. When conditions were not threatening to their child's safety, mothers report that they usually intervene with confidence. Notably, they made clear distinctions between identifying and responding to racial microaggressions versus conventional or explicit forms of racial discrimination. Scarlett described an important teaching moment that precipitated from a racial microaggression while standing in line at the Post Office. At the counter was an elderly man trying to send a package home to Vietnam. Without a translator who could facilitate discussion, there was an uncomfortable period of silence moments before a bystander used a translator app on their phone. In the period of silence, however, a White man standing in line chuckled, mocking the elderly man. When Scarlett and her children got in the car, they immediately unpacked what they had witnessed. As a group, Scarlett and her two children discussed in detail what happened and the reasons why. Their discussion was comprehensive and thorough. It included possible alternatives to helping the elderly man and even included what to do if the man's inappropriate behavior became violent or hostile. Resisting the bystander effect was central to many mothers' motivation for teaching allyship. Rebecca said she's showing them how to "be involved in the role of knowing why it's [racial discrimination] wrong for so many reasons, even though so many people will tell you why it's okay."

Mothers in the sample were more likely to respond to racial discrimination because of their color-conscious racial ideologies and their motivation to inspire their children to be allies. Mothers want their children to understand allyship is not a monolith. Mothers shared stories that featured the diverse strategies they use for condemning racist behavior or discrimination. Joslyn described one way she modeled allyship by positioning herself as a White bystander in the presence of law enforcement:

I remember seeing two Black teenage boys sitting on the sidewalk. They were pulled over by the cops and they were in handcuffs. But I know all the kids in our community. I worked with all these Kids since they were little, so they all know me as Miss Joslyn. I wanted to see who it was, so I pulled over, with the kids in the car and I got out. I waited with them until their parents got there. Just in case.

These examples illustrate mothers distinguishing racial microaggressions from possible racialized violence and then actively responding. This demonstrates the

keen awareness, driven by a deep sense of empathy, which compels White mothers to view the world through a lens that decenters their racial comfort and privilege.

‘Did you see that flag? Here's what that means’: How White Moms Implement Color-Conscious Racial Socialization Methods

Two themes emerged exploring *how* mothers implement color-conscious racial socialization methods with their children. First, mothers ensure communication is ongoing and all-inclusive. Second, they require discussions of race to be factually grounded.

When asked how they determined which topics were “too much” to discuss with their children, mothers said that since discussions of race and racism seriously affect the personal safety of their children, no topic was off limits. As Scarlett put it, “I don't think that any conversation is up for not having”. Rebecca corroborated this sentiment and directly related it to White privilege:

“I have erred on the side of not having really anything off limits. And I say that because I'm like, You know what?... parents of color don't have the ability to decide. They can't exercise as much choice or freedom about what their kid is exposed to, because the world around them doesn't allow them to do that. So why should I?”

However confident in their reasoning, though, mothers' dedication to transparency was accompanied by some feelings of guilt and uncertainty. During our interviews, mothers often paused to question the frequency and extent to which they shared information related to racialized violence with their young children. They wondered to what extent discussing discrimination, poverty, sexualized violence, and police brutality was exposing their children to developmentally inappropriate information. Surpassing these reservations, though, all mothers eventually returned to their initial state of confidence, certain that discussing these topics was critical to promoting safety. Below, Olivia processes the requirement for preparing her 10-year-old daughter to navigate a society that is likely to both age and criminalize her:

I'm constantly torn. Like do I need to emphasize that everywhere is unsafe? Or not? Like she's 10. But also, she's quite tall... So you would probably experience her as like 15 not 10. I just wanna emphasize to them that your safe bubble is our house and outside of our house. It's not, not really not safe. You gotta watch yourself.

Mothers discuss racialized violence with their children to encourage caution but try to spare gruesome details that aren't important for young children. For example, Olivia was compelled to share the murder of George Floyd with her children ages ten, eight, and five. She needed her children to understand that “a cop is a cop. And if you see a cop, you need to be careful all the time”. She described the tragedy of Floyds with her children in the most age-appropriate way she could think of. She told them, “They [the police] stomped on George Floyd and killed him” and later said, “it just seemed easier than explaining the whole thing.”

Dedicated methods of color-conscious parenting require frequent and spontaneous conversations. To promote these, mothers instill behavioral norms so that at any time, they or their children can breach topics about race. Mothers do this by asking their children to reflect on events of the day, or by asking them questions about what they observe in terms of race and society. These kinds of conversations happen in a variety of settings such as in the car, at the dinner table, in the backyard, or out in public. It is important for mothers to normalize racialized perspectives in everyday conversation since elsewhere in their children's lives, it is discouraged. The conversations mothers have with their children are designed to encourage emotional processing, answer questions, or prompt critical thinking through dialogue. These kinds of discussions are encouraged to happen as soon as possible, if not right away. When Joslyn pulled over to monitor a situation between two Black teenage boys being detained by police, she described the impromptu conversation that unfolded alongside it:

So my kids were in the car. And they asked why [we pulled over]. And I had to, you know, have that conversation on the spot... My kids have a lot of questions. So they keep asking, and I'll keep talking about it. I try to explain it to them. Not on too deep of a level first. And then when they ask more questions, I might get deeper as to why, this or that.

Mothers *and* children benefit from color-conscious dialogues because they promote collective critical thinking, teamwork, and emotional regulation. Difficult conversations about race do not become easier over time, but they do become more natural. Mothers stated that their disposition serves as guidance through conversations about race. For this reason, ensuring compassion and patience is an important element of their color-conscious methods. Mothers understand that racial inequality can be difficult for young children to process and accept. Here again, White mothers step outside of their social location as White women and prioritize their multi-racial children - a demographic who face serious systemic vulnerabilities due to racial identity.

'I Want Them to Know What I Tell Them is True': Countering Misinformation and American Politics

All mothers wanted their children to be informed about race and said it was their responsibility as parents to provide their children with factual and up-to-date information. Many expressed this effort becomes a daily struggle since race has reemerged as a defining issue in American politics. Recently, topics of race, racism, and inequality have profoundly reshaped the talking points of Democrat and Republican politicians, influencing the American public's opinion (Balz, 2020). In January 2020, former president Donald Trump inherited the American Whitehouse from the first Black President of the United States, former President Barack Obama. Trump's four-year term that followed was rife with racist, Islamophobic, and anti-immigrant rhetoric. For example, in 2019, Trump called for four nonwhite members of Congress to "go back" to where they came from, and in 2020, when he lost the presidential election to current President Joe Biden, Trump endorsed claims of widespread voter fraud to explain his loss. While many Americans consider Trump's rhetoric to be racist incitements to violence based on deception, many do not (Dost et al., 2019). A 2017 survey collected from a nationally representative sample of

2,296 American adults found that in every case, Republicans were more than twice, and in some cases three times, as likely as Democrats to agree that Trump's rhetoric was not racist or fabricated (Dost et al., 2019).

Mothers in this sample are parenting during a time where topics of race are often received as divisive talking points. As Scarlett put it, issues of race are "unfortunately, a debated topic". She, like others, acknowledged that her children receive messages about the meaning and importance of race from peers, teachers, and media outlets that may differ from the ones they receive at home. Mothers worry that their children will receive and internalize false messages about race when at school or under the care of other adults. Examples of false messages include ones that negatively sanction multi-racial identity *and* ones that ignore or minimize it. Since color-blindness is the dominant racial ideology in the United States, mothers said that sometimes even instilling the belief that race *matters* feels daunting.

To situate themselves as trustworthy sources for their children, Mothers try to ensure what they teach their children is indisputable by conducting thorough research on topics of race and racism. Their Whitewashed public-school educations compounded by color-blind childhood households mean most mothers raising multi-racial children feel unprepared to discuss some topics. The lifestyle changes related to changes in racial ideologies for White mothers in the sample is not limited to their identities as parents. For many mothers, there are daily instances where they realize their color-blind backgrounds have created a deficit in terms of their knowledge as individuals. Nora explained:

It's not second nature to me to have a real, honest conversation with all of the leaders who changed the world with the Civil Rights Movement. I'm still learning that a lot. U.S history is so perplexing in the sense of like, what I was taught as a White rural Wisconsin kid... I'm like, Whoa, holy hell, all of that wasn't true.

It is common for mothers to pause and revisit certain conversations about race since they cannot rely solely on personal experience. When mothers do not have an answer to their children's questions, they clearly state it. Mothers believe demonstrating conversational humility positively influences their personal practices and also demonstrates behavior they want their children to embody. They are motivated to show their children it is okay to pause a conversation and collect information. Scarlett described her process of due diligence in conversations with her ten- and seven-year-old:

If I don't have an answer, I like to take notes so I don't forget. And then let's say a couple of days later, they're like, 'Hey, did you find out?' Or, you know, you circle back because you have an answer. Especially if it's a serious topic. This kind of dynamic holds us all accountable to wait for facts instead of just giving in to the moment.

These collective conversations are intellectually stimulating for both children *and* mothers. This conversational structure, implemented by all mothers, encourages critical thinking in children and aids in their emotional and cognitive development, as well as their social skills. Mothers said they have watched their children learn to become active participants in conversations about race, rather than passive

recipients. Mothers believe the process of countering misinformation about topics of race will aid their children in all personal, social, and professional areas of life as they age.

Discussion

This study found that White mothers are highly motivated to understand issues of race and racism in terms of identity, history, and systemic oppression because of raising multiracial children. Contrary to most White racial socialization literature, color-blindness was absent from the current study. Instead, White mothers in this study demonstrated strict color-conscious methods. Mothers did this by routinely acknowledging the importance of race in society and conveying messages to their children that promoted the understanding of historical and contemporary racial discrimination. Notably, all mothers in the sample were raised in color-blind households and began to interrogate this dominant racial ideology only after becoming parents to multi-racial children. It is important to note that Mothers in the study demonstrated multiple racial socialization methods associated with families of color. For example, mothers endorsed a promotion of mistrust, a thematic racial socialization practice well documented in families of color, designed to protect children from racialized violence they are likely to experience. Specifically, mothers endorsed a promotion of mistrust for law enforcement to their children, even though they themselves had not had negative experiences with law enforcement. Parenting multi-racial children in the era of the Black Lives Matter movement motivated the mothers in the sample to understand how the history of systemic racism in the United States differently shapes the racial identity, experiences, and outcomes of themselves compared to their children of color. Notably, mothers emphasized the protection they are automatically afforded in an effort to teach their children the role of race in the United States. This is not the case among most White mothers raising White children, who for the most part, believe discussions of White privilege and race are unimportant. Feelings of White guilt or racial discomfort did not prevent mothers from racializing the world - even when doing so required discussing stark differences between themselves and their children. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, White mothers in this sample are recreating their relationship to race by first identifying the role that race plays in the experience, and secondly, by discarding previously held color-blind racial ideologies that perpetuate racial harm through silence about race.

Addressing racial inequality in the U.S. will remain a demand for the individuals and groups most severely harmed. Education is a powerful tool to effectively endorse racial literacy. White mothers with multi-racial children are intimately affected by racism in ways other Whites are not. This compels them to proceed with due diligence and sustained dedication to ongoing education and advocacy. Whites who do not have intimate or natural relationships to people of color but are race experts or educate Whites on issues of race and racism, may rely on theoretical knowledge and are forced to compensate for a lack of drive motivated by familial love. This makes them less effective long term. Alternatively, people of color who educate Whites on issues of race and racism are likely to undergo a series of racial micro-aggressions when educating Whites, which may be retraumatizing and perpetuate racial harm. Financial compensation cannot protect educators of color from these kinds of negative experiences. White mothers with multi-racial children lack racial trauma and have a personal investment in topics of race, which makes them an ideal demographic to educate other Whites on issues of race and racism.

This empirically supported proposal provides a possible path forward, directly responding to widespread and public calls for Whites to become racially literate, hoping that this change will halt the perpetuation of racial harm.

Limitations and Future Directions

As noted in my methods section, one of my intentions was to study how conflict impacts the racial socialization methods of interracial couples. I was unable to explore this because of recruiting difficulties with men. This dimension of racial socialization remains an empirical gap worth exploring as multi-racial children are one of the fastest-growing segments of the U.S. population, and parents play a vital role in cultivating positive racial identities in children (Livingston, 2020). Findings from this study illustrate White mothers with multi-racial children adopt new racial ideologies that become lifestyle shifts and serve the health and well-being of their children. However, due to financial and time constraints, I was unable to collect data from a larger sample. Therefore, these results cannot be generalized to all White mothers with multi-racial children. Future studies should identify the racial socialization methods of White mothers raising multi-racial children in a larger sample to better understand the practices of this group as a whole.

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