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TALKING WITH CHILDREN ABOUT RACE:
A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

Contrary to popular belief, children begin developing ideas and attitudes about race and the meaning and implications of race very early in the lifespan. They recognize differences between people and begin to categorize and attach meaning to them. Unfortunately, parents and teachers tend to believe that children are colorblind to racial differences and will only notice them if they are pointed out, and therefore do not talk to children about race and what it means to have different skin color. According to the current research, parents and teachers need to begin having meaningful conversations with children about race at a very early age in order to help children develop positive racial attitudes across racial groups. This paper explores the current research about racial attitudes in children, including the development of racial attitudes in children across races, how this process varies as a function of race, the influences on racial attitudes in children, and what we can do to improve these attitudes in our children.

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Chapter 1

Defining Racism and What it Means for our Children

We all hate stereotypes. Stereotypes are killing us, and they are killing our children, and they are putting LSD into the water supply. Stereotypes are like rogue elephants with AIDS that have been set on fire by terrorists, except worse. We all hate stereotypes. Seriously...we...hate them. Except that we don't. We adore stereotypes, and we desperately need them to fabricate who we are (or who we are not). (Klosterman, 2007, para. 1)

People tend to believe two things about racial attitudes in children. First, they believe that children are “colorblind” and not influenced by adults’ negative social biases; second, they believe racial attitudes are learned, and if they just never talk about race to children, children won’t notice racial differences and similarities. Contrary to these beliefs, however, researchers have shown that racial attitudes, stereotyping, and prejudice exist in children as early as 3 years old (Katz, 2003).

When well-intentioned parents and teachers silence children’s inquiries and curiosities about race, children begin to believe that this curiosity is unwelcome. Silencing their racial inquiries does not stop their curiosity, it just forces them to take it away from adults and begin to draw their own conclusions elsewhere. Regardless of whether or not adults entertain children’s curiosities, children are aware of race and recognize the power and advantage associated with being White in the United States (U.S.) and the inherent disadvantage of being a minority, irrespective of their racial or ethnic identity (Copenhaver-Johnson et al., 2007). Just because adults do not talk about race does not mean children stop noticing it.

Though some people claim that racism is a thing of the past and racism in our country has vastly improved in many ways, racism is still present in our society. Open and explicit forms of racism have diminished, but they still occur. Hate groups are still active, violent hate crimes are still committed, and race-based harassment and brutality is still prevalent in our police departments, our prison system, and our courts. In addition to these explicit acts of racism, many forms of implicit, or dysconscious, racism exist as well. Modern racism looks very different than it did in the past and is often not as readily apparent, leading people to claim that it no longer exists and that the playing field is now level for all people in U.S. society. This phenomenon has been called the “velvet glove,” as opposed to the “iron fist” of past racism, because of the ability of modern racism to hide itself and often go unnoticed. One example of this hidden form of racism is institutional racism. Many institutions in our society, such as banks, schools, housing, retail stores, employment systems, the criminal justice system, churches, and the media, function differently in communities of color than they do in White communities. They are often controlled by White communities, giving minority populations little to no access to these institutions and allowing the institutions to provide them with insubstantial services (Barndt, 2007).

Even with the progressive changes that have been made in regards to race relations, including new laws, new opportunities, and overall good intentions, the results have not changed significantly; the differences in living conditions between White people and minority races have remained about the same, poverty rates for minorities are three times the poverty rate for Whites, inequity for minority students plagues our education system, there is a housing gap evidenced by, in 2007, only 48% of Blacks and 47 % of Hispanics/Latinos owning their own homes compared to 72% of Whites, there is a social service gap in the every day lives of minority individuals, and

a disproportionate amount of minorities are represented in our criminal justice system and our prisons (Barndt, 2007). Because of racism's lasting presence in the United States, it is crucial to educate our children about the existence and meaning of race to prevent another generation of American adults who engage in racial intolerance and discrimination, whether conscious and explicit or not.

President Barack Obama's election in 2008 commenced a new era in race relations in the U.S., yet many people still do not know how to talk to their children about race. Some parents acknowledge the color of the president's skin as a message that anyone, regardless of appearance, can achieve anything, but many parents still believe that it is better not to mention it at all for fear of teaching their children racial constructs. They believe that acknowledging race to their children will urge them to see divisions within our society where they did not see them before. They believe that children are "colorblind and do not notice these divisions on their own and that we should just let them learn by example; what they see around them is what they will believe to be normal (Bronson & Merryman, 2009).

In a 2007 study conducted by Brown, Tanner-Smith, Lesane-Brown, and Ezell (2007), 45% of parents of all races reported that they had never or almost never talked about race with their children. Of the White parents, however, the number was much higher: 75% of White parents in the study never or almost never talked to their children about race; they were three times less likely to talk to their children about race than the non-White parents. Many parents believe that children will not notice racial differences unless they are pointed out to them, however, as more research has delved into this topic, we are starting to understand that this presumption is not accurate. Children see the difference between pink and blue and we tell them what these colors mean; pink is for girls and blue is for boys. Children also see the difference

between White people and Black people and brown people and yellow people, but adults do not discuss these differences; these colors are a mystery that children are left to figure out on their own (Bronson & Merryman, 2009).

Why do so many White adults find it difficult to talk to children about race? Researcher Copenhaver-Johnson (2006) outlined four main reasons why White adults may fail to have these important conversations. First, for many White people, the subject just does not come up. Whites rarely think about race because being White is so rarely scrutinized. In other words, individuals who live with constant privilege, as Whites in our society do, are seldom aware of its presence so the process of silencing begins early. Secondly, many Whites lack a true understanding of race and what race means. Because of this lack of understanding, well-intentioned Whites often turn to an avoidance of the existence of race, but this only emphasizes blindness to the detrimental effects of racism. Whites often think that being colorblind promotes equality but, as Garcia (as cited in Copenhaver-Johnson, 2006) explains, “by acting ‘as if’ we do not see color, we reinforce the distance between us, rather than the similarity” (p. 13).

The third reason that Copenhaver-Johnson (2006) outlines as to why White adults do not discuss race with children is because they might be hiding behind the idea of a meritocratic society. Reliance on this idea of meritocracy in our society can be perilous, diluting the achievements of the civil rights movement and allowing people to think that race is not a relevant factor in a person’s ability to be successful. This is considered to be symptom of the denial of White privilege, which prevents Whites from even acknowledging the existence of racism, let alone discussing it with children. The last reason Copenhaver-Johnson (2006) discusses, and identifies as possibly the most profound reason, is fear. White adults fear that something they say will be taken the “wrong way,” or misinterpreted, and the best way to ensure this does not

happen is to avoid talking about race at all. The yearning to avoid conflict, controversy, and offense inhibits White parents and teachers from openly discussing race and racial issues with children.

If we want to eliminate negative racial attitudes, stereotypes, discrimination and prejudice in our society, we must start with our children. When children hold racial biases at a young age, they are more likely to grow up to become prejudiced adults, exacerbating the racial divide that exists in our society (Vittrup & Holden, 2011). If we are to make meaningful, positive changes in race relations, we must first understand how children develop racial attitudes, what influences the development of these attitudes, and how we can prevent and reduce them early in the lifespan.

The development of racism begins early and is often fueled by secondhand information and misinformation about people who are different. Children often spend the first several years of their lives surrounded by people who look like them and live in neighborhoods consisting mostly of the same racial group as their own. Therefore, the information children receive about people of other races often does not come from firsthand experience, and the secondhand information they rely on is often either incomplete or distorted by bias and stereotypes (Tatum, 1997).

In an early research study, Tatum (1997) examined preschoolers' perceptions of Native Americans by asking children ages 3 and 4 at a day care center to draw a picture of a Native American. When asked to do this, most of the children had no idea what a Native American was. When the request was rephrased, however, and the children were asked to draw a picture of an Indian, they were easily able to complete the task. Nearly every picture utilized inaccurate stereotypes about Native Americans; most of the children drew feathers, weapons, and portrayed

a violent or aggressive individual. When these children who were mostly White and lived nowhere near a Native American population were asked where they learned this information, the Disney movie *Peter Pan* was the source most credited. These children already had negative stereotypes in place, the types of stereotypes that lay the foundation for harmful prejudices in adolescence and adulthood (Tatum, 1997).

Beyond the racial stereotypes that children absorb from the media and from the people around them, racial assumptions are also formed based on what children are *not* told. For example, the English curriculum in many schools provides very limited exposure, if any, to books written by Black authors. This often leads children to believe that Black people do not write books. It is unlikely that teachers tell their students that there are no Black authors, however this omission of Black authors from the curriculum leads many children of all racial groups to believe that there are none (Tatum, 1997).

Stereotypes, omissions, and distortions of information all lead to the development of prejudice. Prejudice, by definition, is “a preconceived judgment or opinion, usually based on limited information” (Tatum, 1997, p.5). Cultural racism, by definition, is “the cultural images and messages that affirm the assumed superiority of Whites and the assumed inferiority of people of color” (Tatum, 1997, p.6). Both prejudice and the ideas of cultural racism are inescapable in our society. Children are surrounded by stereotypical images, ethnic jokes, and widespread discrimination in many forms, and it is easy for them to develop these negative ideas and form prejudices. Oppressed and frequently stereotyped groups are also surrounded by these stereotypes and often internalize them, creating internalized oppression and sometimes leading them to believe the distorted messages they hear about themselves (Tatum, 1997).

Racism, by definition, is “a system of advantage based on race” (Tatum, 1997, p.7). It is important to understand that racism is not just made up of personal beliefs, but rather is a “system involving cultural messages and institutional policies and practices as well as the beliefs and actions of individuals” (Tatum, 1997, p.7). According to scholars, there are two types of racism: active racism and passive racism. Active racism is what we often consider racism to be, blatant and intentional acts of intolerance and discrimination. Passive racism is more elusive and is found in acts such as telling racial jokes, letting acts of discrimination go unchallenged, and avoiding race-related issues. What we must determine is how we can move people from active and passive racism towards antiracism. When racial attitudes and prejudices are combined with the social power often afforded to Whites in our society, institutional racism and fundamentally racist policies and practices are born. In the United States, Whites have overwhelming access to social, cultural, and economic recourses and decision-making, giving Whites a systematic advantage (Tatum, 1997).

There are many indicators of the systematic advantage and privilege that Whites receive in American society. Overall, Whites have greater access to big things such as jobs and housing, higher salaries, and longer life expectancies, as well as smaller things such as the ability to shop in a store without being followed and suspected of wrongdoing and the ability to always find the appropriate hair and make-up products at any store. Whites also have the privilege of being viewed as individuals rather than just a member of a racial group. For example, less than pleasing behaviors exhibited by a Black person, such as chewing with their mouth open or being late, are often attributed to their race. When a White person exhibits these behaviors, however, it is generally not attributed to the fact that they are White. Additionally, when a Black person

expresses an opinion, it is often not viewed as an individual opinion, but rather as the “Black” opinion that represents how all Black people must feel (Tatum, 1997).

Whether aware or not, all White people in our country benefit in one way or another from this systematic advantage of racism, and building awareness of this benefit is crucial. Unfortunately, however, this awareness often bring feelings of guilt or shame and creates discomfort around the idea of talking about racism, further hindering meaningful discussion, especially when it comes to having these discussions with our children. However, this system of racism is perpetuated when we do not acknowledge its existence. Since all White people in America do, in some way, benefit from racism, it is important to consider what we can all do as individuals and as a society to disrupt its cycle and weaken its influence (Tatum, 1997).

Although Whites might be benefitting from a racist system, there are formidable economic costs of racism for all people, regardless of race. Racism causes lower productivity due to racial tensions in the workplace, loss of real estate equity due to housing discrimination, the tax revenue lost due to the underemployment of minority groups, and the high costs of prisons housing mostly minority individuals. All of us are paying a price, regardless of race, and it is in all of our best interest to ensure equal treatment and rights for all people of all colors, and that starts with talking to our children (Tatum, 1997).

Chapter 2

The Development of Racial Attitudes in Children

Implicit racial attitudes in adults have been well studied and documented and it has been shown that these attitudes predict a wide range of behaviors, including friendliness towards out-groups, job selection, and sharing of resources. We know much less, however, about these same racial attitudes and their implications in children. An understanding of the development of racial attitudes in children is crucial due to the important role these attitudes play throughout the lifespan. Understanding these attitudes, their development, and their influences could provide important opportunities to intervene early in their development and promote healthy racial attitudes (Baron & Banaji, 2006).

Recent studies show that children begin to report negative racial attitudes as early as age 3, and that by ages 5 and 6 children readily report negative and stereotypical attitudes and judgments towards different racial categories. In a study cited by Katz (2003), over half of the White children who participated exhibited significant anti-Black and pro-White attitudes. In a study of White preschoolers in Canada, 85% of the children participating showed these biases at age 5. Even infants as young as 6 months old notice the difference between a White face and a Black face, they just have not yet attached meaning to this difference. However, children never think groups are random so as they reach age 3 and older they begin to attach meaning to these differences (Katz, 2003).

In order to understand how children develop racial attitudes, Katz (2003) conducted a longitudinal study of 100 White infants and their families and 100 Black infants and their families and tracked them from ages 6 months to 6 years. Both groups of participants came from diverse backgrounds and over the six years period each child was tested nine times. Children

were administered both verbal and nonverbal measures of racial attitudes, such as sorting dolls by race and labeling their own and their friends' races, while their parents were administered attitude tests and interviews that gauged their parenting techniques, their children's choices of media and friends, and their child's social environment (Katz, 2003).

At 6 months of age, Katz (2003) found that children already recognized differences in race, evidenced by the children's dishabituation (reacting to an old stimulus as if it were new) of a face shown to them that was a race different from their own. In other words, the infants looked longer at faces of a different race, signifying that they noticed that this face was novel and different than the people they usually interact with. Also within the child's first year of life, Katz tested the infants' responses to strangers. White children showed much higher levels of anxiety and apprehensiveness towards strangers and were already beginning to show signs of bias (Katz, 2003).

In the children's second year of life, Katz (2003) began to study how the parents approached the topic of race with their children. She gave parents a picture book with no words and asked the parents to go through the book with their child and talk about the pictures. The pictures were evenly divided by race, however parents almost never mentioned race when talking about the pictures. Interestingly, both Black and White parents focused on the people in the book who shared the same race as them. When asked if they discussed race with their children at home, the majority of parents stated that they did not and that they did not believe it to be important (Katz, 2003).

The results of the attitude measures administered to the children also revealed an interesting pattern. At age 3, both White children and Black children showed mild preferences for their own group. At ages 5 and 6, however, there was a divergence. Ingroup preferences

increased in White children while Black children showed a sharp decrease in ingroup preferences, signifying that by age 3 Black children had already become aware of the power differences between Blacks and Whites and the privilege associated with being White (Katz, 2003).

Katz (2003) then measured peer preferences by asking the children's parents about their child's friends and asking the children themselves to choose friends they would like to have from a series of diverse photographs. Reinforcing the results of the attitude measures, at age 3 86% of White children chose friends who were also White, while only 32% of the Black children chose friends who were also Black, and this discrepancy continued to increase with age. Lastly, Katz examined the children's cognitive perceptions of race at ages 5 and 6. When given a set of pictures and asked to sort them in any way, 68% of children sorted the pictures according to race, further signifying that race is salient to children by this age (Katz, 2003).

More evidence of the saliency of race was exhibited in two first grade classrooms in Mansfield, Ohio. In these classrooms, teachers read aloud a storybook to their students that featured a Black Santa and encouraged discussion. Many of the White children's responses and curiosities about the possibility of a Black Santa were evident of dysconscious racism in these children, a form of racism in which individuals accept dominant White norms and privileges. In discussions about Black Santa, the White and Black students alike were already demonstrating an understanding of White power in society in just the first grade. For example, many children rationalized the existence of a Black Santa by explaining that he was the "helper" Santa, signifying their understanding of racial inequalities, placing Black Santa in the less powerful role. One child's explanation reflected the "separate, but equal" ideas of segregation in the U.S.

suggesting that “White [Santa] goes to White people’s houses and Black [Santa] goes to Black people’s houses” (Copenhaver-Johnson et al., 2007).

Another study, conducted by Baron and Banaji (2006), identified the implicit and explicit racial attitudes in a group of 77 White, middle-class children in Boston, MA. They studied 27 6-year-olds, 30 10-year olds, and 22 19-year-olds in order to examine when in the lifespan these attitudes emerge, as well as how the development of these attitudes grows from early childhood, to middle childhood, and to adulthood. Individuals’ implicit attitudes were measured using the Implicit Association Test (IAT), including a modified, child-friendly version for the younger participants. The IAT measures the strength of associations between a target concept (race) and an attribute concept (words with good meanings and words with bad meanings) by showing participants the faces of White children and Black children paired with positive words or negative words and measuring reaction times. Following the IAT, participants’ explicit racial attitudes were measured. They were asked to view a series of paired pictures (a White child and a White child, or a Black child and a White child) and then indicate their preference (Baron & Banaji, 2006).

The results of the IAT in 6-year-olds indicated that by age 6 these children had already developed pronounced, implicit pro-White and anti-Black attitudes. The second test also revealed that the 6-year-olds’ explicit attitudes were parallel with their implicit attitudes, self-reporting a strong preference for pictures of White children over pictures of Black children. Similar results were found in the implicit attitudes of 10-year-olds, suggesting that these attitudes remain constant throughout the elementary years. There was a difference, however, in the *explicit* attitudes of 10-year-olds. At age 10, the children still showed a preference for other

White children, but this preference was subdued, indicating some understanding of social expectations (Baron & Banaji, 2006).

The implicit attitudes recorded in the 19-year-old participants were also consistent with those found in the 6-year-olds, suggesting that the racial attitudes we develop as children remain constant into adulthood. There was a significant difference, however, between the implicit racial attitudes found in the adult participants and their self-reported, explicit racial preferences. The adult participants showed the same pro-White and anti-Black implicit attitudes that were found in the children, but reported a contradicting equal preference for Whites and Blacks when asked to self report. This inconsistency shows a potential gap in education; we learn that we are not *supposed* to have these attitudes and ingroup preferences but we do not learn to actually overcome them. Overall, Baron and Banaji's (2006) study demonstrates implicit racial attitudes in Whites that were developed early and remained stable across the lifespan, even though the explicit racial attitudes seemed to disappear in adulthood. These attitudes were present by age 6 and around age 10 children became conscious of societal demands and began to adjust their self-reported preferences accordingly (Baron & Banaji, 2006).

In 2006, Vittrup (as cited in Bronson & Merryman, 2009) designed a study with the objective of determining if typical children's videos with multicultural storylines would help to improve children's racial attitudes. She recruited about one hundred children and their parents in Austin, Texas to participate. The first step of the study was to test the children and their parents with a Racial Attitude Measure. This measure used a series of questions including: "How many White people are nice?" and "How many Black people are nice?" Throughout the test, the word "nice" was replaced with many different adjectives, including dishonest, pretty, curious, and snobby (Vittrup, as cited in Bronson & Merryman, 2009).

After their initial attitudes were assessed, Vittrup instructed a third of the families to watch a selection of typical multicultural-themed videos for one week. These videos included an episode of *Sesame Street* in which they visit the home of an African-American family and an episode of *Little Bill* where the neighborhood comes together to do community service, for example. Vittrup did not expect to see much, if any, change in racial attitudes from just watching these videos. Previous research has indicated that the multicultural curriculum we use in schools is largely ineffective because the message it conveys of “we are all friends” is too vague for children and they do not understand that it refers to skin color (Vittrup, as cited in Bronson & Merryman, 2009).

What Vittrup did believe would be successful in improving children’s racial attitudes, however, was supplementing the multicultural videos with explicit conversations with their parents. In order to test this theory, she instructed a second group of families to use the provided videos as a starting point for a conversation about interracial friendship. She provided the parents with a checklist of points to discuss during the conversation that reflected the themes presented in the shows. The last third of families were given this same checklist without any videos and were instructed to bring up to topic of racial equality on their own every night for five nights. In these conversations, parents were told to say things such as:

Some people on TV or at school have different skin color than us. White children and Black children and Mexican children often like the same things even though they come from different backgrounds. They are still good people and you can be their friend. If a child of a different skin color lived in our neighborhood, would you like to be his friend? (Vittrup, as cited in Bronson & Merryman, 2009, p. 48)

Unfortunately, as soon as parents learned what they were expected to say, five of the families in the last group quit explaining that they did not want to have those conversations with their child and did not want to acknowledge skin color. These parents knew that the study they agreed to participate in was about racial attitudes in children, but once they were asked to openly talk about race with their children, they were no longer interested in participating (Vittrup, as cited in Bronson & Merryman, 2009).

Parents' unwillingness to talk to their children about race was also reflected in the results of their initial racial attitudes test. The parents claimed to be welcoming multiculturalists and promoters of diversity, however hardly any of the White parents had ever talked to their children about race. Vague comments such as "everybody's equal," "God made all of us," and "under the skin, we are all the same" did not call children's attention to racial differences and were not effective in promoting positive racial attitudes. Parents wanted their children to be colorblind and believed that by not talking about or bringing attention to race, their children *were* colorblind. However, the results of the children's racial attitudes test did not confirm their parents beliefs; when asked how many White people are mean the children frequently answered "almost none," but when asked how many Black people are mean, they frequently answered "some" or "a lot." When asked if their parents like Black people, 14% of the children answered "No, my parents do not like Black people" and 38% of the children responded "I don't know." Since their parents never talked to them about race, they were forced to draw their own conclusions from the silence (Vittrup, as cited in Bronson & Merryman, 2009).

Among the families who did participate, the families who watched the videos without any conversation or parental involvement showed no change in the children's scores; the messages of racial harmony in the videos had no impact on the viewers. When Vittrup reviewed the results of

the families who were asked to also hold a conversation in addition to watching the videos, however, she also found no change in scores. At first she was confused how this could be possible, but when she reviewed the results in more detail, she found that the majority of parents who talked to their children about race only briefly mentioned it or used vague terminology. They did not actually have meaningful conversations like Vittrup had hoped. Only 6 families actually engaged in meaningful conversations and all 6 of those children's racial attitude scores improved dramatically (Vittrup, as cited in Bronson & Merryman, 2009).

Once children notice the difference between two groups, they easily and quickly develop a preference for their ingroup. To understand this, Patterson and Bigler (2006) ran a study in three preschool classrooms. They gave half of the students blue t-shirts and half of the students red t-shirts and told them to wear the shirts for three weeks. Throughout these three weeks in the classroom, the teachers never mentioned the colors, never grouped the students by colors, and never referred to students by their color. As the experiment went on, the children did not segregate themselves by color, but they did begin to form opinions about the color groups. They believed that the students in their own color group were smarter, nicer, and better than the other color group. When asked how many students of their color were nice, they answered "all of them," but when asked the same question about the other color, they only answered "some." They showed a clear preference for their own color without the teacher ever having mentioned it (Patterson & Bigler, 2006).

According to Patterson and Bigler (2006), it is critical to begin talking to children about race as early as age 3 because, as demonstrated in their experiment, children are developmentally prone to ingroup favoritism. Whether we talk about race or not, children notice it and they form their own preferences. Children categorize everything from a very young age and they never

think groups are random; before they have the cognitive ability to think critically about groupings, they use what is visible to attach meaning. Once children notice that someone resembles them, they tend to like that person more than someone who does not resemble them. They attach meanings to these similarities, believing that anything they like, someone who looks like them must like and, in turn, people who do not look like them must like things that they dislike. This pattern of assumptions is called essentialism. No matter how much we try to create colorblind environments for children, racial differences are clearly visible. They do not need to be pointed out for children to notice them and, just like with blue and red t-shirts, even if no one mentions it, children will decide what skin color means on their own (Patterson & Bigler, as cited in Bronson & Merryman, 2006).

Another misconception that parents commonly hold is called the Diverse Environment Theory. In other words, if you raise your child in a racially diverse environment and expose them to people of different races and cultures, then you do not have to talk about race; they already think that diversity is normal. However, simply exposing children to diversity is not enough. Evidence of this is found when examining the effects of desegregation in schools. Many schools with diverse student populations do not feel the need to discuss race in the classroom because they are around children of other races all the time, but Orfield of the Harvard Civil Rights Project conducted research on school integration that showed that school diversity did not always have the desired effect (Orfield, as cited in Kurlaender & Yun, 2001).

As Orfield explained, in order for integration in schools to have a positive effect, we cannot just place children of different races together in the same school or they will segregate themselves. By doing this, children have even more chances to learn and develop stereotypes. In other words, there is no guarantee that students at a racially diverse school will have better racial

attitudes than students at a homogenous one. Evidence of this was found when the Civil Rights Project studied the racial attitudes of high school juniors in six school districts. In Lynn, Massachusetts, in a school noted as a model of diversity, only 35% of White students polled stated that they would like to live in a diverse neighborhood when they grow up; 70% of nonWhite students reported the same (Orfield, as cited in Kurlaender & Yun, 2001).

Stephan (2002) also studied students' racial attitudes in integrated schools. He surveyed students after their first year in an integrated school and in 16% of the integrated schools he studied White students developed more positive attitudes towards Black students, in 36% of the schools students showed no difference, and in 48% of the schools the White students' attitudes towards Black students grew worse. These findings show that diverse student bodies rarely promoted cross-race friendships and interactions; in fact, they often had the opposite effect.

In a study conducted by Moody (2001), 90,000 adolescents at 112 schools across the country were asked to name their 5 best male friends and their 5 best female friends. Moody then matched the ethnicity of the students with the ethnicity of their identified best friends to determine the amount of cross-race friendships, and then compared that to the overall diversity of the school. His results showed that the higher the diversity in the school, the more the students self-segregated and the lower the likelihood of cross-race friendships. Moody's analysis controlled for activities, sports, academic tracking, and other school structural conditions that often lead to cross-race interaction and friendship and the trend that more diversity creates more separation between students still held true. More opportunities to interact with members of another race also translated into more opportunities to reject another race, and the latter is what appeared to be happening much more often (Moody, 2001).

In our country today, the odds of a White high school student having a best friend of another race is only 8%, and the odds are not much better for the next four best friends. The odds for Black high school students are not much higher; 85% of Black students' best friends are also Black. Even when cross-race friendships do occur, the friends often only share one activity rather than several, like many friends do, so these friendships are more likely to be lost as students transition to middle and high school and become involved in different activities. Although the integration of schools is not having the desired effect, professionals and researchers are in no way suggesting that we revert to segregation; instead, in order to improve racial attitudes in students at integrated schools, it is suggested that parents and teachers reinforce the ideas of integration by talking to children about the races they encounter and interact with at school (Bronson & Merryman, 2009).

Chapter 3

Influences on the Development of Racial Attitudes in Children

Before we can begin to prevent or reduce negative racial attitudes and stereotypes in children, it is imperative to first understand what influences the development of these attitudes. By analyzing and understanding intergroup influences, predictors of racial attitudes, parental influences, social influences, and media influences, we can better understand how to intervene and promote a positive understanding of race in children.

Developmental Intergroup Theory

One theory that describes the influences noted above is Developmental Intergroup Theory (DIT). DIT researchers examine the development of stereotypes, prejudice, and ingroup preferences by studying children's reactions to novel social groups. For example, a typical study would involve 6- to 11-year-old summer school students, acquainted with each other before the study begins, who are placed into novel groups, usually created by assigning children to wear different colored shirts. Characteristics and treatment of the groups would then be manipulated within the classroom. In experimental classrooms, teachers would manipulate the groups by organizing desks and activities by color. In control classrooms, teachers would not acknowledge the colors at all. Several weeks later when children's attitudes regarding the groups were assessed, ingroup biases only emerged in the experimental classrooms (Bigler & Liben, 2007).

DIT states that three core processes influence the formation of racial attitudes in children: (a) establishing the psychological salience of a different person's attributes, (b) categorizing individuals they encounter, and (c) developing stereotypes and prejudices of salient social groups. DIT operates on the assumptions that children want to understand the world around them and that humans naturally think categorically, so in order to understand their world children try

to determine important ways of classifying people. In making these classifications and groupings, researchers have found that young children generally rely on prominent features, such as race, gender, age, and attractiveness, to do so. Additionally, children notice the sizes of groups; smaller, minority groups are more distinctive than larger, majority groups, causing the minority groups to generally become the target of children's stereotypes. DIT researchers also suggest that children's grouping criteria becomes even more salient when they are reinforced by the behavior of adults. Children never think groups are random, so when social grouping occurs without explanation children find and attach meaning to it. Children observe how we are sorted in society, noticing people who live, work, and socialize together and they assume these divisions are due to meaningful, characteristic differences between people (Bigler & Liben, 2007).

Second, DIT states that because children categorize information in their attempt to understand the world, they place all individuals they encounter into psychologically salient categories such as race. Lastly, DIT states that this categorization of people leads to children's formation of beliefs, stereotypes, and prejudices about certain groups. Children want to attach meaning to groupings so if a grouping does not make sense, they go beyond the information that is available in their environment and begin to make inferences about the characteristics attributed to social categories. Children tend to naturally rely on essentialist thinking—the belief that members of the same group share important, non-obvious qualities—to make these inferences, which are often incorrect and lead to the development of ingroup preferences and negative attitudes towards out-groups (Bigler & Liben, 2007).

Predictors of Racial Bias

In order to successfully promote the development of positive racial attitudes in children, we must understand what factors play a role in predicting the racial attitudes that children develop. In a longitudinal study on racial attitudes, Katz (2003) identified predictors of racial bias in children. The child's race was consistently one of the strongest predictors of developing racial bias. At every age, White children displayed overall higher racial bias scores than Black children.

Katz (2003) also found predictors specific to children of different ages. As early as infancy, infants raised in more racially uniform social environments were found to hold higher racial biases at age 6 than infants who experienced more diverse social environments. Katz found a number of racial attitude predictors in toddlers ages 1 to 3. The first predictor was doll play. At age 1, children were more likely to choose to play with a doll that shared the same racial features as them. If a Black child showed the opposite preference and chose to play with White dolls, they were more likely to hold higher racial biases later in life. The second predictor was early mastery of cognitive skills, for White children in particular. Third, children with a best friend of the same race were also more likely to hold higher racial biases later in the lifespan; these homogeneous friendships could be due to lack of diversity in the child's social environment in infancy. Lastly, children who displayed high racial biases later in life had parents who, when looking at picture books with their toddlers, focused more on characters in the book of the same race as them (Katz, 2003).

Lastly, Katz (2003) found two predictors in preschoolers. First was the child's attitude at earlier ages; children's racial attitudes, especially White children's, were found to remain relatively consistent throughout the childhood years, emphasizing the importance of intervening

early in children's development. The second predictor at the preschool age was whether the child's parents talked to them about race or if the parents believed that talking to their child about race was important. It was common for both White and Black parents to be uncomfortable talking to their children about race and, even when they did believe that it was important to do so, they rarely did. Katz found that Black parents were more likely than White parents to talk to their children about race but, overall, parents were overwhelmingly found to be silent on the issue. Many of the White parents expressed the belief that talking to their children about race would bring racial differences to their attention that they did not see before, while many Black parents believed that their children were too young to talk about race. These beliefs were unfounded, however, as the 6-year-olds in the study who reported the least amount of racial bias had parents who talked to them about race (Katz, 2003).

Interestingly, however, researchers have not found a correlation between children's racial attitudes and their parent's racial attitudes, likely because parents prefer to ignore the subject. This does not mean, however, as many parents believe, that children simply do not develop racial attitudes. Instead, parents influence their children's racial attitude development indirectly by choosing their social environments, their neighborhoods, and the television they allow their children to watch. In other words, just because parents do not identify as being racist or as having negative racial attitudes does not ensure that their children will not become racist or develop negative racial attitudes if parents do not take the time to have meaningful conversations with them about race. Although many parents worry that having these conversations with young children will encourage racism, not talking about race has been shown to make racial bias worse (Katz, 2003).

Parent Influences on Children's Views About Race

During their formative years children are largely influenced by their parents. Because of the significant role that parents play in their children's development, it is important to also understand what role they play in the development of their children's racial attitudes. Children look to their parents to help them build an understanding of the world around them and interracial interactions are a large part of that.

In past studies of the correlations between children's and their parents' racial attitudes, many inconsistencies have been found and have led some theorists to believe that parents play a weak role in influencing their children's racial attitudes and ingroup preferences. As Castelli, Zogmaister, and Tomelleri (2009) pointed out, however, these studies tested children's racial attitudes and preferences using self-report measures, which can be challenging due to children's difficulty introspectively understanding their own subtle attitudes and due to the social desirability that goes along with reporting about racial preferences. In response to these inconsistencies and the suggestion of parental influence demonstrated in previous studies such as Bigler and Liben's (2007) Developmental Intergroup Theory and Katz's (2003) longitudinal study, Castelli et al. (2009) constructed a study to investigate parental influence on children's racial attitudes and ingroup preferences using implicit measures that tap into more automatic and spontaneous cognitive processes rather than the deliberate and controlled responses given in self-reports.

Castelli et al. (2009) assessed 72 White, middle-class families in Northern Italy using the IAT. In all of the participating families the parents were married and the child ranged from ages 3 to 6 (average age was 4 years). Children were each shown two drawings, one of a White child and one of a Black child, and were then asked which child they would prefer to play with. Next,

the child was read eight traits, randomly ordered. Some of the traits were positive, such as nice, happy, clean, and likable, and some were negative, such as ugly, sad, dirty, and bad. After each trait was read the child was asked to assign the trait to the White child, the Black child, both children, or neither children (Castelli et al., 2009).

When the children were asked to choose a playmate, 67% chose a White playmate. There were no significant differences between male and female responses, suggesting that ingroup bias was equally likely across gender. When asked to assign positive and negative traits, positive traits were assigned more often to the White child and negative traits were assigned more often to the Black child, further indicating the manifestation of ingroup bias. Additionally, Castelli et al. found that the ascription of positive traits to the White child increased with age while the ascription of negative traits to the White child decreased with age, indicating the growing importance of ingroup belonging as children get older (Castelli et al., 2009).

Parents in the study were administered the IAT individually in their homes. The test consisted of a series of five trial blocks about racial discrimination. After the IAT, parents were asked to complete a reduced version of the Blatant-Subtle Prejudice Scale developed by Pettigrew and Meertens in which they read a sentence and rated how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the statement, with higher ratings indicating a more prejudiced attitude. When the results of the parent's IATs were analyzed, it was found that both mothers and fathers demonstrated significant implicit prejudice, and this did not vary by gender. In regards to explicit prejudice, both the mothers and fathers demonstrated low scores and presented egalitarian attitudes. No correlation between the implicit and explicit attitudes was found (Castelli et al., 2009).

Castelli et al. (2009) used these results to understand the relationship between parents' attitudes and children's responses. They found that the mothers' implicit attitudes significantly predicted their children's choices. The higher the implicit prejudice of the mother, the lower the number of positive traits and higher the number of negative traits their child attributed to the picture of the Black child. No significant results were found in regards to the fathers' attitudes. Consistent with previous literature, Castelli et al. found no correlation between children's racial attitudes and the explicit racial attitudes of their parents. However, they did find a strong correlation between children's racial attitudes and their mothers' implicit racial attitudes. This study shows the importance of considering not only the racial attitudes that parents explicitly portray or vocalize, but also focusing on parents' unspoken acts of racial prejudice. These results indicate that parents do play a role in the development of their children's racial attitudes and that these attitudes can be transferred within the family, so it is important to identify ways in which we can prevent this transmission (Castelli et al., 2009).

Social Influences on Children's Views About Race

Another large influence in children's development is their social environment and social interactions. Children will experience racial differences in their social environment and interactions and it is important to understand how children respond to these differences and what influences their social environment has on the development of their racial attitudes.

In order to understand how White children develop significant ingroup preferences and devaluation of outgroups, Castelli, De Dea, and Nesdale (2008) conducted studies on the sensitivity of preschool-aged children to the nonverbal behaviors of White adults during interracial reactions. It is important to assess social factors in regards to development of racial attitudes because a positive correlation between parents' and their preschooler's racial attitudes

has yet to be established. This leads us to consider that social influences from other significant adults might be playing a role in early attitude formation. Castelli et al. (2008) explored whether preschool-aged children recognized the nonverbal behaviors of adults that imply friendliness or uneasiness and if these nonverbal behaviors played a role in shaping the development of their racial attitudes. There is evidence that infants as young as 1 week old respond to nonverbal cues and that children's social referencing relies not only on their parents, but on other adults as well, leading the researchers to believe that children rely on adults' nonverbal behaviors when forming their own attitudes and behaviors (Castelli et al., 2008).

In their first study, Castelli et al. (2008) assessed 78 children between the ages of 41 and 78 months ($M = 58.7$, $SD = 9.2$). They created six videos: an introduction to a White adult and a debrief video were used in every experimental condition and the other four represented four different experimental manipulations that were used in four different experimental conditions. In the introductory video, a White adult introduced himself as a father of a child the same age as the research participant in order to establish relevance as a model for the subject. The four experimental videos showed different interactions between the White adult previously introduced and a new Black adult. The Black adult acted the same in every video while the behavior of the White adult varied in each video. The White adult's verbal behavior was either positive or neutral, never negative, but his nonverbal behavior was either friendly or uneasy. To signal friendliness, the White adult shook the Black adult's hand firmly, sat in close proximity to him, spoke with an energetic tone, leaned his body towards him, and maintained good eye contact. To signal uneasiness, the White adult shook the Black adult's hand loosely, sat farther away, keeping an empty seat between them, spoke with a slow, hesitant tone, leaned away from him, and avoided eye contact (Castelli et al., 2008).

After viewing the videos, participants were interviewed individually about their perceptions of the relationship between the two adults and about their attitudes towards the Black adult. Their perceptions about the relationship were assessed in three ways. First, they were presented with scenarios in which the Black adult asked the White adult for help and then were asked whether they believed that the White adult would help him. Second, participants were asked a series of questions about the interaction regarding whether or not the White adults enjoyed speaking to the Black adult, if they could become friends, and whether or not they like each other. Lastly, the participants were told that the White adult had a certain number of sweets and were asked how many sweets they think he would give to the Black adult. The participants' attitudes towards the Black adult were assessed using five questions (the Black adult is named Abdul): How much do you think that Abdul is a nice person? Would you like to play with Abdul? If Abdul asked you for a piece of your cake, would you be willing to give it to him? If Abdul says he likes your toys, would you be willing to lend them to him? How much do you like Abdul? After the interview, the subjects were shown a debrief video in which the two actors hugged, explaining that they had only pretended to be strangers but were actually good friends (Castelli et al., 2008).

The results of the study indicated that preschool-aged children are sensitive to the nonverbal behaviors displayed by adults. The children in the study were able to correctly ascertain the quality of the interaction (whether the adult's nonverbal behaviors were conveying friendliness or uneasiness) and, in turn, when asked about their attitudes towards the Black male, the children's attitudes reflected the White adult's nonverbal behaviors, not his spoken words. In other words, adults' nonverbal behaviors impact children's attitudes regardless of what they

verbally communicate. Just because an adult says nice words to someone, if his or her nonverbal behaviors convey something different, children will likely pick up on it (Castelli et al., 2008).

In order to determine the generalizability of these findings, Castelli et al. (2008) conducted a second study. In this study, instead of focusing on a specific Black adult in the video, they aimed to assess children's attitudes towards Black people in general in order to determine whether adults' nonverbal behaviors influence children's attitudes towards another race as a whole rather than just a targeted individual. In the second study, the researchers tested 79 children ages 40 months to 70 months ($M = 54.4$, $SD = 8.2$). The participants viewed the videos in the same way as in the previous study, however the White adult's verbal message was always positive, not neutral. Their perception of the interaction between two adults was assessed in the same way but a second phase was added in which some participants were shown a picture of an entirely different Black adult and were asked how they thought the White male from the videos would behave towards him and some participants were shown a picture of another White adult and were asked how the White adult from the videos would behave towards him. Then, participants were asked about their attitudes towards the new target. They were debriefed in the same way as the previous study (Castelli et al., 2008).

The results of both studies indicate that children were not only sensitive to the nonverbal behaviors exhibited by adults in interracial interactions, but were influenced by them. The children were able to detect when the White adult was exhibiting negative nonverbal behaviors towards the Black adult and their subsequent attitudes were likely to be more negative after observing negative nonverbal behaviors than when they observed positive nonverbal behaviors. The findings of the second study extended the results of the first study, indicating that the attitudes formed by observing the nonverbal behaviors of the White adult generalized to other

Black people, not just the Black adult in the video. This is the process that leads to the development of negative racial attitudes towards entire outgroups. Importantly, these results were contingent on the Black target; negative nonverbal behaviors exhibited towards another White adults did not lead children to have negative attitudes towards that White target or towards other White people. These results of these two studies comprehensively make a strong argument that social behaviors exhibited by adults in interracial interactions can have a significant impact on the formation of children's racial attitudes. Not only are adults responsible for what they say around children, they must also be sensitive to the nonverbal cues they are conveying as negative nonverbal behaviors towards outgroups may create the foundation for prejudice in children (Castelli et al., 2008).

Media Influences on Children's Views About Race

Children's culture is unique and what it means to be a child is defined by the media's attempts at entertainment, advocacy, and pleasure, and is influenced by gender, race, and class standings in the greater society. Children's identities are molded both politically and educationally by the media they consume: the video games they play, the television they watch, and the movies they see. In general, adults assume that children's media is innocent and wholesome, inspires creativity, and is generally good for children to consume, providing them with entertainment and joy. These agents of children's entertainment have become more than that however; they have become a means of teaching roles, values, and ideals, and the world of the media is much more captivating than the traditional classroom. Unfortunately, the Hollywood version of children's culture often comes from a place of cultural homogeneity and depicts a pure history of our world rather than accurately portraying important complex issues, cultural

differences, and social struggles, giving children a skewed view of the society they live in (Giroux, 1994).

Giroux (1994) studied the effects of the Disney Corporation on children's culture. He did so because Disney is not just a successful corporation, but has become a cultural institution ingrained in American society and a moral authority of American values. Disney and its characters have breached every aspect of children's social lives and shape our children's experiences. Giroux (1994) even argues that the world of Disney has become more real than fantasy as it has become the image on which America constructs itself.

While Disney films seem innocent and harmless to most adults, there is a large amount of racial stereotyping that exists in these films that can be harmful to children and contribute to the development of negative racial attitudes. Racial stereotyping can be found in Disney films dating back to the 1940s. People of color were belittled in *Song of the South* in 1946 and *The Jungle Book* in 1967, Native Americans were portrayed as violent Redskins in Frontierland in the 1950s, and a degrading statue of a former slave was placed in a restaurant in Disneyland (Giroux, 1994).

Some more recent examples of Disney's racial stereotyping are in the films *Aladdin* in 1989 and *The Lion King* in 1994. *Aladdin* opens with the lyrics of "Arabian Nights," which states, "Oh I come from a land, from a faraway place, where the caravan camels roam, where they off your ear if they don't like your face, it's barbaric, but hey, it's home" (Giroux, 1994, p.72). This highly offensive description of the Arab culture exacerbates the negative stereotypes presented in the media during the Gulf War. This racist representation of the Arab culture continues throughout the film with grotesque, violent, and cruel characters representing Arab people. A former spokesperson for the South Bay Islamic association, Yousef Salem, describes the racist undertones of the movie this way:

All of the bad guys have beards and large bulbous noses, sinister eyes and heavy accents, and they're wielding swords constantly. Aladdin doesn't have a big nose; he has a small nose. He doesn't have a beard or a turban. He doesn't have an accent. What makes him nice is they've given him this American character... I have a daughter who says she's ashamed to call herself an Arab, and it's because of things like this. (Giroux, 1994, p.72)

In addition, Arab names were mispronounced, there was racial coding of accents, and senseless scribbles were used to represent the Arab language (Giroux, 1994).

Racial coding of languages is a form of racism found in many of Disney's films. In *Aladdin*, the bad guys have thick, Arab accents while Aladdin and Jasmine speak American English. In *The Lion King*, the members of the royal family speak with high-class English accents while the "bad" hyenas speak with urban Black and Latino accents. Examples of this can be found in *The Three Little Pigs*, *Song of the South* and *The Jungle Book*. These movies are portraying to children that anything that is not White and Americanized must be deviant, inferior, unintelligent, and threatening. At the same time that non-Whites are being demonized, Whites are being glorified (Giroux, 1994).

Chapter 4

How We Can Improve Racial Attitudes in Children

One common theme among researchers in this field is the importance of adults talking to children about race in a meaningful way. Unfortunately, this is also something that the majority of parents seem to be uncomfortable with, unwilling to do, and do not believe to be important. Parents are generally comfortable talking to their children about gender and often work very hard to challenge boy-girl stereotypes; parents should talk about race in the same way. Just like parents tell their children that girls can be doctors just like boys can, they should be teaching them that doctors can have any skin color (Bronson & Merryman, 2009).

When children make inappropriate or improper comments regarding race, it is often our first instinct to shush them, but this can be detrimental. Children's brains categorize everything and they learn from the examples that adults set, so when adults silence children as they point out their observations about race, they learn that race is an off-limits topic, making it even more daunting. Researchers have found that in order for conversations with children about race to be effective, the adults must be explicit and use language that children understand (Bronson & Merryman, 2009). For example, Bigler (1999) conducted a study where children in a two-week history class read two different brief biographies of famous African Americans, one more explicit than the other. In the case of Jackie Robinson, for instance, half of the students read about how he was the first African American baseball player in the major leagues, while the other students read extra, more explicit information; they read that he had been downgraded to the Negro leagues and that he was taunted and harassed by White fans. Just five short sentences were added but after the two-weeks of class, the children who read the full story about the discrimination that the famous African Americans they learned about faced, reported

significantly more positive attitudes towards Blacks when surveyed. We must be explicit when discussing race with children (Bigler, 1999).

Based on the research, we know that it is beneficial for children to have meaningful conversations about race with their parents, but the way race is discussed often looks very different in White families than in minority families. Harris-Britt, Valrie, and Kurtz-Costes (2007) study how minority parents help their children develop racial identity and found that all minority parents discuss racial discrimination with their children but, unlike White families, these conversations are usually started by parents, not by children, and are often triggered when the parents experience discrimination in their own life and decide to prepare their child for what they might experience. While some of this preparation for bias may be good for minority children—94% of Black eighth graders that Harris-Britt surveyed reported that they had experienced some form of discrimination in the last three months—too much can be detrimental. Minority children who hear these warnings of imminent discrimination too often are markedly less likely to relate their success to their effort and significantly more likely to blame their teachers, who they believe to be discriminating against them, when they fail. When minority parents consistently tell their children that they are going to be discriminated against, it sends the message that the world is a hostile place and that they are not valued as human beings. This can be even more damaging to a child than discrimination itself (Harris-Britt et al., 2007).

Rather than constantly preparing their children for bias, minority parents can positively impact their children by teaching them ethnic pride. Coaching minority children to be proud of their ethnic history can significantly improve their self confidence, and studies have shown that Black children who frequently hear messages of ethnic pride are more engaged in school and are

more likely to connect their successes and achievements to their own effort and abilities (Bronson & Merryman, 2009).

For many years, researchers have conjectured that intergroup contact could also help to reduce racial prejudice. Essentially, spending time with people of an outgroup could lead to greater understanding and affection that generalizes to the entire outgroup, and that remaining segregated would only breed more hate and prejudice. It was hypothesized that the more time someone spends with someone of a different race, the more positive his or her racial attitudes would become. This theory is called Intergroup Contact Theory (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Intergroup Contact theory has been tested in many ways over the decades and researchers have concluded that intergroup contact is successful in reducing intergroup prejudice. Deutsch and Collins (1951, as cited in Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) investigated this theory in a housing project in Newark, New Jersey where Black and White tenants were assigned to live in separate buildings. At the same time, a housing project in New York City integrated their tenants. Deutsch and Collins interviewed White housewives in both of these housing projects and found that the women living in integrated housing had far more positive attitudes and regard towards their Black neighbors and expressed support of integrated housing.

Another researcher, Allport (1954, as cited in Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), found that prejudice reduction could be better facilitated during intergroup contact if four optimum conditions of the interracial contact were met: equal status between parties, common goals, cooperation, and support of authorities, laws, and customs. While it is accepted that these four conditions can better facilitate prejudice reduction and increases in positive attitudes about an outgroup during interracial interactions, Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) conducted a meta-analysis of existing research to determine whether or not these conditions are *necessary* for positive

outcomes to ensue. They found that Allport's conditions are not essential in achieving positive outcomes however, when they are met, the positive effects of the interaction are greatly enhanced. Even without these conditions, there is still a significant relationship between increased intergroup contact and prejudice reduction; Allport's conditions act as facilitators (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). These findings indicate that the more contact children have with members of outgroups, especially if the contacts meet Allport's conditions, the more their prejudices against them will decrease and the more positive attitudes they will develop towards members of an outgroup and that outgroup as a whole.

Another good model for improving racial attitudes in youth is the Racial Healing and Reconciliation Project, which is a program founded for high school students in Boston. The program started in 2010 as a means of bringing a diverse group of adolescents together to improve community health. The students involved in the program met twice a week at workshops and discussion groups to have honest conversations about the issues of race and racism in our society that most people avoid, and were facilitated and supported by a team of community organizers and social workers. The students developed a deeper understanding of racism in society today, of each other, and of their place in the problem and in the solution. The program provides a safe space for all participants to speak out and to share their experiences, feelings, and opinions. It challenges the common notion in U.S. culture of avoiding the hard conversations about racism so we do not have to feel anything and provides thought-provoking, challenging prompts of discussion. Students in the Racial Healing and Reconciliation Project learn acceptance and the benefit of having meaningful conversations about race rather than avoiding the problem. This kind of program could be beneficial for all students in any school and community (Dwyer, 2012).

Another effective program for reducing racial prejudice in adolescents is Jane Elliot's "Blue Eyes/Brown Eyes" exercise. Jane Elliot is a teacher, lecturer, and diversity trainer and, inspired by the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., she developed this exercise to expose the prejudice and intolerance in her students and to help her students understand racism and its effects. In this exercise, participants are labeled as either inferior or superior based on the color of their eyes. It is intended to give students the opportunity to experience what it is like to be a minority individual in our society and to develop the skills to empathize with those who experience racial inequalities and prejudices on a daily basis. She explained that White people's greatest freedom in this country is the freedom to be ignorant of the experiences of people who are anything other than White, and she wanted to challenge that freedom (Elliot, 2006).

Elliot began this exercise in her 3rd grade classroom on the day that Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated. She has since developed the exercise and continues to perform it with participants of all ages because she believes "people need this because we are still doing now what we were doing in the 50s" (Elliot, 2012). In one exercise Elliot performed recently, she began by identifying all of the blue-eyed students in the group and placed them in a holding room. She stated that she facilitated the exercise in a "mean, nasty way because racism, sexism, homophobia, ethnocentrism are mean and nasty" (Elliot, 2012). She explained the exercise to the remaining students and instructed them to treat the blue-eyed students as if they were inferior by treating them as if they are not as smart or as clean, by lowering their expectations for them, and by blaming their inability to succeed on the color of their eyes. They called the blue-eyed students childish names such as "boy" and "doll face," and called them "bluey" and "fool" and blatantly disrespected them. Throughout the day Elliot treated the blue-eyed students as inferior students and when the students became upset or frustrated or wanted to quit, she explained that

this is the type of treatment that people of color receive all the time and they do not get to quit because there is no place in our society where they can go and will not experience some sort of racism; quitting is a freedom that people of color do not have (Elliot, 2012).

Recommendations for Talking with Children About Race

Parents and teachers need to talk to children about race because children understand the message that silence sends. As noted by Ladson-Billings (as cited in Copenhaver-Johnson, 2006), racism is a “learned behavior, and, as such, it can be unlearned” (p. 17) There are endless empowering opportunities for parents and teachers to open meaningful dialogue with children about the meaning of race in their world. Parents and teachers who want to avoid calling attention to the existence of race are not adequately preparing children to be positive members of a multiethnic society. As Copenhaver-Johnson (2006) explained, “our children’s youth does not insulate them” (p. 20). Children know that race exists and they want to talk about it; it is up to us to welcome these conversations that our children are ready to hold (Copenhaver-Johnson, 2006).

Talking to children about race can feel like a daunting task. Below are recommendations and resources to help parents and teachers navigate meaningful discussions about race with their children and students and to ultimately help children develop a positive understanding of race and to grow into racially conscious, educated, antiracist adults.

Recommendations for Educators

Teachers have a unique opportunity to help children develop positive racial attitudes and minimize prejudice and stereotypes and to help children challenge their assumptions. With the guidance of teachers, classrooms can be a safe place for children to explore race and the relationship between race and power. Since the majority of teachers in this country are White, it

is critical that our nation's teachers take the initiative to bring discussion and critical thinking about race into the classroom (Copenhaver-Johnson et al., 2007).

Teachers often silence children's questions regarding race and this silencing leads children to believe that the topic of race is "off-limits" or "bad," contributing even further to the development of deep-rooted stereotypes, prejudices, and ingroup preferences. In their first grade classrooms, teachers Joy Bowman and Angela Johnson and researcher Jeane Copenhaver-Johnson (2007) demonstrated how to break this silence and elicit conversations that challenge children's existing racial schemas by reading aloud picture books that highlight the issues of race and power. Allowing the children to lead the conversation provided them with an opportunity to learn how the children were understanding and experiencing race in their lives and allowed them to see the bias, prejudice, and errors in information that the children in their classes had already developed; if we are aiming to improve children's attitudes we must first know what they are (Copenhaver-Johnson et al., 2007).

The students in Bowman and Johnson's classrooms came from "working poor" families and lived in ethnically diverse neighborhoods, bringing a multitude of racial backgrounds and experiences to the classroom. Of the 33 students, 23 students identified as White and 10 identified as Black or "mixed" (i.e., biracial or multiracial). Each teacher read their classroom a story about Santa in which, rather than the White Santa students expected, they saw a Black Santa. The students were shocked and confused when they saw Black Santa and immediately began trying to rationalize how this could be so. Initially, many students revealed stereotyped and prejudiced attitudes in their responses, such as painting Black Santa as the less powerful, "helper" Santa or suggesting that White Santa brings toys to White children and Black Santa brings toys to Black children. As the year went on, however, Bowman and Johnson began to read

more books to the class that brought up issues of race and power and the children started to demonstrate a change in perspective. Copenhaver-Johnson, Bowman, and Johnson (2007) demonstrated that using literature to challenge what children believe to be true about the world and invoking student-led conversations about race can help children begin to develop healthier racial attitudes (Copenhaver-Johnson et al., 2007).

Using their method of doing read-alouds of picture books in which the issues of race and power are emphasized, meaningful conversations can effectively be brought into the elementary classroom. These conversations can give teachers insight into how their students are experiencing the issues of race in their lives and can open the floor for children to express the bias, prejudice, misinformation, and overgeneralizations they have learned so we can begin to challenge them. Rather than avoiding controversial content, it is important to use the power of literature based conversations and allow students to lead the conversation with their inquiries and to support students through their exploration of race issues (Copenhaver-Johnson et al., 2007).

Letting the student lead the conversation with their questions is called an inquiry-oriented approach. In order to challenge students' distorted belief systems and provide opportunities for children to redefine their prejudices, we must first know what those prejudices are and understand their current belief systems. Letting the students lead the conversation helps them to perceive their world in new ways and promotes the possibility of real change. For this reason, it is suggested that teachers not create explicit agendas for these conversations but rather to create a safe space for children to express themselves and where the race topic is not "off limits" and to help students extract their own insights. In order to encourage meaningful discussion, a read-aloud format can be used in which the teacher reads a page aloud, shows the class the illustration, and then pauses to welcome student comments. The teacher directs the students to

discuss with each other, not just with the teacher, and the goal is more to elicit conversation amongst students rather than to teach them a particular “lesson.” Another good strategy for tapping into students’ perceptions of their world is to ask students to draw their representations of the story after it has been read in its entirety. Simply reading literature to children cannot and will not change our society’s deeply ingrained belief systems that children are submersed in; the only way to make real change is to engage in meaningful conversations and encourage our students to talk about race (Copenhaver-Johnson et al., 2007).

Bowman and Johnson are two teachers who regularly exercise these strategies in their classrooms. They have found that their students’ freedom to continue their exploration of race issues depends on their eagerness as teachers to allow the students to lead the discussions, to provide a multitude of provoking and diverse literature, to *listen* to the students, and to begin disrupting dysconscious racism in all its forms. They have also seen more positive outcomes in discussions where children are given the opportunity to express their “first draft” thought without being judged or interrupted, and then they can move towards more critical thinking and constructed ideas. Children must first feel safe and supported in their exploration. By teaching students to question and challenge society’s ideals, we can begin to start children off on the right path to becoming critical and responsible citizens (Copenhaver-Johnson et al., 2007).

Through her experience in Bowman and Johnson’s classrooms, Copenhaver-Johnson created a list of strategies for creating a safe space to talk about race. The first on this list of strategies is to create as safe a response environment as possible. When students feel safe, that their audience is without judgment, and that they can expect a supportive response, they are more likely to share and discuss their beliefs deeply and honestly. Another strategy is to prepare ample time for reading aloud and invite children to respond *during* the reading rather than after. Doing

this ensures that their insights are not lost in a rushed read aloud and promotes a more meaningful learning experience. Another strategy of creating a safe space for discussions about race is to demonstrate wondering talk. For example, teachers say things such as “I wonder...” “What if...?” “Have you considered...?” in response to students’ ideas. By doing this, teachers can encourage students to further explore their ideas without critiquing them. When teachers demonstrate uncertainty, students see that knowledge is constantly being built and that the teacher is willing to explore their questions and uncertainties with them. Their last strategy is to encourage students to discuss with one another. Requiring children to raise their hand when they want to share limits the discussion to student-teacher interactions. Implementing different kinds of participant structures that promote more student-to-student dialogue allows students to become more involved in the classroom conversation and promotes peer-to-peer sharing and learning (Copenhaver-Johnson et al., 2007).

Outside of the elementary school classroom, it is important for teachers in all grades to continue to open the conversation. Ensuring that the classroom is a safe space for conversation about race and racism and encouraging students to share their experiences is essential. Talk about race, be accurate and age-appropriate, take incidences of racial bias and discrimination seriously, encourage critical thinking about racial issues, empower students to be actively antiracist, and expose them to ways in which they can fight for positive change for people of all races (Winkler, 2009).

Full acceptance of racial diversity is a key player in the pursuit of social justice and it offers educators both extraordinary potential and intimidating challenges. By embracing and discussing racial diversity in the classroom, teachers and students have the opportunity to enrich their learning with a multitude of experiences, languages, and cultures, and provide the

empowering type of learning that prepares us and our students to be global citizens in society. At the same time, however, teachers in diverse classrooms face mounting challenges on a daily basis, such as the growing academic achievement gap between minority and White students, racial segregation in the schools, the lack of educational resources for low-income minority students, and equal access to education for minority and immigrant students. Aside from these challenges, teachers are not always supported in teaching students about race and race relations, evidenced by biased standardized testing and lack of funding and resources for “nonessential” subjects, making it hard for teachers to be able to effectively teach these types of lessons (Diversity toolkit, 2014).

Amidst these challenges, there are many strategies that teachers can use in the classroom to overcome them and seize the potential for enriching, empowering, and diverse learning. In order to assist educators in this task the National Education Association (NEA) created the Diversity Toolkit, an online resource that outlines many strategies for educators to utilize. Before teachers can begin facilitating meaningful conversations about race and diversity with their students, it is important that they first explore diversity themselves. The NEA Diversity Toolkit suggests that teachers utilize opportunities to learn about races and cultures that are different from their own, talk to people with different experiences, examine their own attitudes and beliefs about races different than their own, promote conversation with their peers and coworkers about race and diversity, assess race relations in their school and in their classroom, and explore and execute ways to promote awareness of racial diversity and to celebrate our differences (Diversity toolkit, 2014).

Teaching students about race and racism in our country is a complex and emotional task so the NEA also provides some strategies for how to effectively bring these topics into the

classroom. First, they suggest that teachers educate themselves about the social construction of race in America and the systems of advantage and disadvantage surrounding race. Second, teachers are encouraged to reflect on their own racial identity and how it has impacted their experiences; before teachers can effectively facilitate inquiry among their students they must first conduct a personal inquiry. Third, teachers must create a safe space for conversations about race by encouraging their students to take responsibility for their own learning experience, to respect each other, to avoid judgments and blame, and to allow others to make mistakes while navigating this difficult topic, and by modeling these behaviors for their students. Lastly, teachers are encouraged to formulate lessons and discussions that promote continual inquiry and empower students to examine challenges, and to prepare to meet students' needs as they navigate this difficult and emotional topic (Diversity toolkit, 2014).

In addition to these suggestions, Adams, Bell and Griffin (2007), in their book *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*, outline a sequence of learning activities for teachers to utilize in order to effectively and safely discuss race and ethnicity with their students. They suggest that teachers begin with low-risk activities so that students can feel safe expressing themselves. For example, begin with tasks that only require self-reflection, then move to small group discussion or discussion in pairs, then, once students feel safe and supported, they can begin to engage in whole group discussions. Adams et al. (2007) also suggest that when engaging in race conversations teachers move from concrete to abstract. The concepts of race and oppression can be difficult for students to fully understand so it is helpful for them to first see concrete examples and experiences. Similarly, it is beneficial for teachers to move from personal to institutional and societal. To build understanding of institutional and societal racism, students should first explore the effects of race on a personal level. Lastly, teachers should move from difference to

dominance. This can be done by allowing students to first share their own experiences as members of their racial group and then building to discussions of large-scale social power and privilege due to race (Adams et al., 2007).

By using these strategies, teacher can begin to facilitate meaningful conversation about race in the classroom and, in turn, enrich their students' learning and empower them to be positive global citizens. The most important thing is that the conversation remains open and that the classroom is a safe place for all students, regardless of race, to explore their world.

Recommendations for Parents

The most important recommendation for parents is to talk to their children about race. When children notice racial differences or begin a conversation about race, do not silence them or avoid the conversation. Take their wonder and their questions as an opportunity to engage in open, honest, age-appropriate conversations about race and racial issues, and do so frequently. Talking to them about race will not "put ideas in their head"; ideas about race and its meaning are already there so if you avoid the conversation, the stereotypes they might have created remain unchallenged (Winkler, 2009).

Do not dilute the conversation because you think the topic is too complex for your child to understand. This only leads to superficial discussions without any real meaning or learning (Winkler, 2009). Children should be presented with age-appropriate information about the reality of racial inequality (Hirschfeld, 2008). Do not rely on educational resources that frame racism as an issue of the past that our society has overcome. It is important to present the issues of race and racism to children accurately so that children can understand how discrimination really works and recognize that racism goes deeper than a few "bad" individuals; it is a societal issue (Winkler, 2009).

Take race issues seriously with your children. Many parents believe that their child cannot be prejudiced so they ignore incidences in which their child expresses negative racial attitudes and biases. However, this only exacerbates the child's developing racial attitudes. If children engage in acts of discrimination and these acts go unchallenged, they learn that the behavior is acceptable. Because of this, it is important for parents to be aware of their child's expression of negative racial attitudes, and when incidents of racial bias occur do not shame or scold them but take the opportunity to engage in a specific, direct discussion about the incident and the inaccurate racial attitude it displayed. Additionally, encourage complex thinking about race and racial issues. Just providing children with information is not enough to challenge their existing negative racial attitudes and ingroup biases; we must also teach children to think about these issues critically and to understand what the information means in their life (Winkler, 2009).

Empower your children to be antiracists. Give your children ideas about how they can actively fight racial inequity and show them models of active antiracists in your community and in the greater society. Show your child that while racism does exist in our society, there are also people and groups out there fighting it and making positive changes for all people, and that they can be a part of the movement to make the world a better place (Winkler, 2009).

When discussing race with children who are racial minorities, there are some other factors to consider. It is important to focus the conversation around pride for their ethnicity rather than just preparing the child to face bias discrimination. As explained by Bronson and Merryman (2009), while it is important to prepare children for the hardships they are going to face, too much of this preparation for bias can be detrimental for minority children and can foster negative racial attitudes of outgroups, but by teaching their children ethnic pride minority parents can positively impact their children's racial attitudes, both about outgroups and about their own

racial group. Coaching minority children to be proud of their ethnic history can significantly improve their self confidence, and studies have shown that Black children who frequently hear messages of ethnic pride are more engaged in school and are more likely to connect their successes and achievements to their own effort and abilities (Bronson & Merryman, 2009).

Resources for Parents and Teachers

Books for Children and Adolescents to Promote Meaningful Discussion about Race

- Preschool – Grade 2:
 - All the Colors of the Earth by Shelia Hamanaka
 - Amazing Faces compiled by Lee Bennett Hopkins
 - Bein' With You This Way by W. Nikola-Lisa
 - Come On, Rain by Karen Hesse
 - Jamaica & Brianna by Juanita Havill
 - Shades of People by Shelly Rotner
 - The Skin You Live In by Michael Taylor
 - Skin Again by Bell Hooks
 - All the Colors We Are by Katie Kissinger
 - Hair Dance! by Dinah Johnson
 - The Colors of Us by Karen Katz
 - The Story of Ruby Bridges by Robert Coles
 - Nappy Hair by Carolivia Herron
 - Poppa's Itchy Christmas by Angela Shelf Medearis

- Grades 1 – 4:
 - Baseball Saved Us by Ken Mochizuki
 - The Bracelet by Yoshiko Uchida
 - Chicken Sunday by Patricia Polacco
 - Freedom Summer by Deborah Wiles
 - The Other Side by Jacqueline Woodson
 - Ruth and the Green Book by Calvin Alexander Ramsey
 - White Socks Only by Evelyn Coleman
 - Martin’s Big Words: The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. by Doreen Rappaport
 - ‘Twas the Night B’Fore Christmas: An African American Version: by Melodye Benson Rosales
- Grades 3 – 7:
 - The Basket Counts by Matt Christopher
 - Fathers by Jacqueline Woodson
 - The Friendship by Mildred Taylor
 - The Other Half of My Heart by Sundee Frazier
 - Witness by Karen Hesse
 - Through my Eyes by Ruby Bridges
- Grades 7 – 12:
 - The Absolutely True Story of a Part Time Indian by Sherman Alexie
 - American-Born Chinese by Gene Luen Yang

- Face Relations: Eleven Stories About Seeing Beyond Color edited by Marilyn Singer
- The Girl Who Fell From the Sky by Heidi Durrow
- I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This by Jacqueline Woodson
- The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros
- The Freedom Writers Diary by Erin Gruwell

Resources for Teachers to Help Create a Positive, Racially Conscious Classroom

- Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom by Lisa Delpit
- Savage Inequalities by Jonathan Kozol
- The Freedom Writers Diary by Erin Gruwell
- Bad Boys: Public Schools in the Making of Black Masculinity by Ann Arnett Ferguson
- Whatever is Takes by Geoffrey Canada
- "Multiplication is for White People": Raising Expectations for Other People's Children by Lisa Delpit
- Why are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria by Beverly Daniel Tatum
- NurtureShock by Po Bronson and Ashley Merryman
- Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare to Teach by Paulo Freire
- Becoming Multicultural Educators: Personal Journey Toward Professional Agency by Geneva Gay
- Crossing Over to Canaan: The Journey of New Teachers in Diverse Classrooms by Gloria Ladson-Billings
- Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice by Maurianne Adams
- Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom by Bell Hooks

- Radical Equations: Math Literacy and Civil Rights by Robert P. Moses
- *Waiting for Superman* (documentary)
- National Education Association Diversity Toolkit: <http://www.nea.org/tools/diversity-toolkit.html>
- Southern Poverty Law Center Teaching Tolerance Program: www.tolerance.org
- www.teachingforchange.org

Resources for Parents to Prepare for Meaningful Discussions with their Children About Race

- White Like Me by Tim Wise
- Why are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria by Beverly Daniel Tatum
- I'm Chocolate, You're Vanilla: Raising Healthy Black and Biracial Children in a Race-Conscious World by Marguerite A. Wright
- NurtureShock by Po Bronson and Ashley Merryman

These resources are just a starting point. The journey to eradicating social injustice is life long and there are many available resources to accompany us on this journey.

Conclusion

Contrary to beliefs commonly held by many adults, children are in no way colorblind. This awareness has important implications for parents and teachers, demonstrating the importance of having meaningful conversations with our children about race and ensuring that our children develop an accurate understanding of the world around them and grow into adults who challenge racism and fight for positive change.

Eliminating racism from our society will require resolute, cognizant and unremitting effort from all races. Both the privileged and the oppressed must work together and engage in open conversations about the existence of racism and the behaviors, or evasion of behaviors, that exacerbate it. Participating in meaningful conversations about race can empower our children and leave them far less paralyzed in discussing these issues. Only then can the silence be broken and true social justice take place. Talking to our children about race will not conquer racism entirely, but it is a crucial step in the right direction (Copenhaver-Johnson, 2006). It is time to open the conversation.

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