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Parents' Color-Blind Racial Ideology and Implicit Racial Attitudes Predict Children's Race-Based Sympathy

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We examined the relation of White parents' color-blind racial attitudes (a global composite score and its subscales) and their implicit racial attitudes to their young children's race-based sympathy toward Black and White victims. One hundred and eighty non-Hispanic White children (54% boys, $M_{age} = 7.13$ years, $SD = 0.92$) reported their sympathy in response to short films depicting bullying toward White or Black children. Their primary caregivers' (mostly mothers') color-blind racial ideology (CBRI) was assessed through a questionnaire (reflecting global color blindness, as well as denial of institutional racism, White privilege, and blatant racial issues), and their implicit racial attitudes were assessed with a computerized test. Children's sympathy toward Black victims and their equitable sympathy (difference score toward Black vs. White victims) was predicted by parents' color blindness, implicit racial attitudes, and their interaction. Results indicated several interaction effects, such that parents' denial of blatant racial attitudes and global CBRI were negatively related to children's sympathy toward Black victims and equitable sympathy toward Black versus White victims, only when the parents held implicit racial attitudes that favored White people. In addition, parents' denial of White privilege was negatively related to children's sympathy toward Black victims. The findings are discussed in terms of potential ways to shape children's race-based sympathy and compassion, particularly with an eye toward ways White parents might socialize sympathy toward historically marginalized youth.

Keywords: color-blind racial ideology, implicit racial attitudes, race-based sympathy, young White children, racial socialization

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Current events in the United States have sparked increasing public discourse around issues of discrimination, White supremacy, and racial justice—along with a call for antiracist action. Although developmental researchers have demonstrated that children develop racial biases by preschool age (Raabe & Beelmann, 2011), there is almost no understanding of the foundations of children's equitable behaviors and emotions toward different racial groups, particularly in White families (Seaton et al., 2018). In addition, there is an urgency to understand contexts that promote White children's

sympathy directed toward Black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC). Existing research indicates that White parents promote color-blind ideologies, avoiding discussing race and racism with their children, with the belief that their children do not see color. However, researchers have shown that this avoidance is related to higher levels of children's racial bias (Loyd & Gaither, 2018; Pahlke et al., 2012; Priest et al., 2014). This issue is particularly alarming given White children demonstrate racial bias as early as 3–5 years of age, and children's racial attitudes appear to crystalize around age 7

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The materials and data for this study are not available to the public, and the study was not preregistered.

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(Raabe & Beelmann, 2011). Although parents' and children's racial attitudes are sometimes positively related (Degner & Dalege, 2013), researchers have not examined whether White parents' color-blind racial ideology (CBRI)—racial attitudes that might be relevant to White parents' racial socialization—is related to young children's race-based sympathy, which was the goal of the present study.

Children's Race-Based Sympathy Responses

Sympathy, an emotion thought to stem from empathy, is often defined as feelings of concern or sorrow toward another person (Eisenberg et al., 2015). Sympathy is a powerful motivator of prosocial behaviors, such as helping, sharing, and comforting others. Even in early childhood, children differ in their sympathy toward different recipients, favoring mothers compared to strangers (Spinrad & Stifter, 2006). It is also possible that children differentiate among various racial targets in their sympathy responses, although such race-based sympathy has not been examined in prior work (for exception, see Spinrad et al., 2022). White children's sympathy toward Black victims is of particular interest for the growing field of the development antiracist attitudes in the United States (Hazelbaker et al., 2022). Specifically, White children's other-oriented concern toward people who are historically marginalized is perhaps a key foundational ability that might facilitate or be a precursor to White youth's antiracist actions (Hazelbaker et al., 2022; Thomann & Suyemoto, 2018). In addition, White children's *equitable* sympathy toward White versus Black victims may also illuminate our understanding of precursors to antiracist action. Research with adults indicates that White adults tend to feel more empathy toward White people versus Black or Asian targets in viewing vignettes or images of mild negative experiences, such as getting ill, stubbing their toes, or physical pain (Hudson et al., 2019; Neumann et al., 2013). Neuroscientific evidence also has demonstrated evidence that White adults sometimes experience higher levels of neurological indices of empathy for in-group versus Black or Asian people (e.g., Gutsell & Inzlicht, 2010).

Research on White children's disparities in empathy or sympathy is exceptionally limited. There is some preliminary evidence that children discriminate in their sympathy toward different ethnic/racial groups. For example, Dore et al. (2014, 2018) found that early elementary school-aged American children (85%–90% of the samples were White) believed that Black targets experienced lower levels of pain compared to White targets in the same pain-inducing situations. This racial bias in perceptions of pain suggests that White children may feel less sympathy toward Black people compared to White people. In a study of 11- and 12-year-old Arab children in Israel, researchers found lower empathy toward Jewish-Israeli children (the out-group) compared to Arab children (Shechtman & Basheer, 2005). Although this study focused on young adolescents' responses to ethnic groups in a context of religious conflict in the Middle East, the data supports the notion that children exhibit biases in their empathy (favoring their own social group). It is unknown whether White children in the United States experience equitable sympathy toward Black versus White peers. Therefore, the present study was designed to fill this research gap by investigating the predictors of children's sympathy toward Black children and their equitable sympathy toward Black and White children in realistic social situations involving an injustice (i.e., bullying).

Parents' CBRI and Children's Race-Based Sympathy

CBRI refers to the explicit attitudinal minimization of racism and racial discrimination. This ideology supports the belief that race is not a relevant characteristic affecting individuals' lives and that everyone, regardless of race, has equal opportunities (Neville et al., 2013). In addition, CBRI is an explicit attitude that rationalizes racial inequities as a consequence of the behaviors of BIPOC groups, as opposed to acknowledging the impact of systemic racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). Because CBRI does not acknowledge interpersonal or systemic racial discrimination, this ideology perpetuates the negative effects of racism on people of color and reinforces White supremacy in society (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Vittrup, 2018). CBRI has been positively related to White adults' racial bias and prejudice toward BIPOC groups (Neville et al., 2000).

It stands to reason that parents' CBRI may play an important role in shaping White children's race-based moral emotions and behaviors. This relation may be through a variety of mechanisms, such as children's own racial attitudes. Indeed, previous literature has demonstrated the significant relations between parents' explicit racial attitudes and their children's racial attitudes (see a meta-analysis, Degner & Dalege, 2013). A recent study demonstrated that parents' explicit racial attitudes favoring racial in-group peers were negatively related to White adolescents' awareness of discrimination toward Black people and their support for affirmative action's (Glover et al., 2022). The only existing study to our knowledge that specifically examined the relation of parents' color-blind attitudes to children's racial bias found that White Dutch parents' global CBRI was unrelated to their children's negative attitudes toward racial out-groups (see Mesman et al., 2022). However, in this study, only global CBRI was assessed.

Another possible mechanism through which parents' CBRI might predict children's race-based moral emotions may be through children's contexts. Hagerman discussed potential ways that White parents value living in an exclusive, predominantly White upper middle class neighborhood and school for their children (Hagerman, 2014). In turn, this lack of diversity in children's contexts (e.g., neighborhood, school) may be negatively related to children's positive racial attitudes and moral emotions toward BIPOC groups (Qian et al., 2017; Žeželj et al., 2015).

We also speculate that parents' CBRI is linked to children's race-based emotions and behavior through parents' racial socialization practices. The literature on White parents' racial socialization highlights the predominance of a color-blind approach. Indeed, White parents tend to believe that children "do not see race" and avoid the topic of race in their interactions with their children (Abaied & Perry, 2021; Pahlke et al., 2021; Sullivan et al., 2022; Vittrup, 2018), which may be grounded in parents' CBRI. This avoidance of race in their socialization practices could signal to White children that racism and discrimination (possibly observed through media and their segregated environment) are tolerated and acceptable (Katz, 2003). On the other end of the spectrum, in a recent study of White Dutch families, parents' self-reported color-conscious attitudes (i.e., attitudes that acknowledge race) were positively related to their self-reported color-conscious parenting behaviors, such as discussing race and racism with children (Mesman et al., 2022). Regardless of the underlying mechanisms accounting for the predict relations, to our knowledge, researchers have not investigated how White parents' CBRI are related to children's race-based sympathy. Although

we do not examine the specific mechanisms that account for the relation between parents' CBRI and children's race-based outcomes, understanding the associations between parents' attitudes and children's moral emotions can fill an important gap in the literature and serve to focus interventions toward what may mark the beginning of a chain reaction toward antiracist socialization strategies. That is, changing parents' attitudes are likely an important first step in changing parents' racial socialization behaviors.

In addition to parents' global CBRI, it is essential to further investigate the components of parents' CBRI to understand children's race-based outcomes. There are three components of CBRI as follows: denial of blatant racial issues, denial of White privilege, and denial of institutional racism (Neville et al., 2000). The first component of CBRI refers to the denial of blatant racial issues in U.S. society, including the beliefs that "racism is not a major problem in the U.S." or "talking about racial issues causes unnecessary tension" (Neville et al., 2000). Denial of blatant racial issues is problematic in its avoidance of race as an important social construct. Because those who endorse this attitude believe that racism is no longer a problem in our society, we speculated such parents may completely avoid discussing race with their children, even when faced with evidence of racism or discrimination. Avoiding the discussion race could signal to White children that racism and racial discrimination (learned through media and their social environments) does not exist, are taboo to discuss, and are tolerated and acceptable (Pahlke et al., 2012). Alternatively, when parents have color-conscious attitudes, they tend to discuss race and racial issues with their children (Mesman et al., 2022). Thus, we hypothesized that parents' denial of blatant racial issues would be related to children's low levels of sympathy toward Black peers compared to White peers.

The second component, parents' denial of White privilege, is also likely related to young children's race-based sympathy. That is, White people who deny White privilege tend to believe that their own successes (or BIPOCs' failures) are the results of individuals' own actions rather than societal inequalities. Thus, such beliefs may be related to blaming victims of injustices. This victim-blaming mindset is related to adults' negative attributions to BIPOC individuals (Richeson & Nussbaum, 2004) and a lack of sympathy/empathy toward BIPOC groups from professionals and practitioners in social service (Burkard & Knox, 2004). Parents who believe that everyone has the same opportunities may pass the belief to their children that race is not a relevant factor, that everyone has the same opportunities, and blame the victim of injustices for inequities. In turn, their children would not be expected to feel sympathy or concern when confronted with BIPOC peers who are struggling.

Individuals who deny institutional racism do not believe that the present day policies and practices in the U.S. institutions (e.g., the education system) produce the inequitable opportunities for different racial ethnic groups. In fact, they believe that racial groups should identify as American, adopt values of the United States, and have English as the only official language of the United States (Neville et al., 2013). This attitude represents a modern form of racial intolerance that denies racism by not considering power in the definition of racism. This attitude can be particularly difficult to combat because, rather than focusing on the color of one's skin, this attitude involves the denial of power relationships all around and across the society. Neville et al. (2013) suggested that denial of institutional racism is more prevalent than other aspects of CBRI.

Empirical studies have found that professional training and diversity experience have been unrelated to individuals' denial of institutional racism (Danforth et al., 2020; Loya, 2011). Hypothetically, when White parents adopt this form of CBRI, children may learn from parents the normality of the discrimination in an institutional level and that White people are victims of racism, and BIPOC have been given unearned privileges under social policies such as affirmative action. Therefore, it is likely that children would experience more sympathy toward White victims compared to Black victims and, consequently, have biased, inequitable sympathy favoring their in-group. However, because the denial of institutional racism involves relatively abstract concepts regarding institutions in the society or affirmative action policies, it is possible that such attitudes may not predict children's outcomes until late childhood or early adolescence when they can more easily understand such abstract concepts. Because the three aspects of CBRI discussed different levels and realms of racism, one of the primary goals of the present study is to examine separately the relations between the three aspects of parents' CBRI and their White children's race-based sympathy.

The Moderating Role of Parents' Implicit Racial Bias

To better understand the relation of parents' CBRI (an explicit attitude) to children's race-based sympathy, it is useful to consider parents' implicit racial attitudes. According to developmental intergroup theory (Bigler & Liben, 2007), both explicit and implicit inputs shape children's development of prejudice and stereotypes. Unlike explicit attitudes and values, implicit racial attitudes are the spontaneous reaction when presented certain stimuli (Dovidio et al., 2002; Hofmann et al., 2008) and direct individuals' nonverbal behaviors when interacting with members of different racial groups (Kurdi et al., 2019; McConnell & Leibold, 2001). Empirical studies have shown that children tend to show positive attitudes toward groups favored by their parents (or adult actors) either implicitly or through subtle nonverbal behaviors (e.g., facial expressions, tone, body language, adults' intergroup contacts; Castelli et al., 2008, 2009; Skinner et al., 2020). In addition, parental implicit racial attitudes may direct the way parents structure their children's social environment (such as choosing schools, communities, and friends for their children), through which children's attitudes toward out-group members are shaped. Empirically, the role of parents' explicit and implicit racial attitudes in children's racial attitudes has been studied through two separate lines of research (Bigler & Liben, 2007). Only a few researchers have examined prediction of children's racially relevant behaviors or attitudes by parents' explicit and implicit racial attitudes simultaneously and found that White children's positivity toward Black individuals were negatively related to parents' implicit racial prejudice and positively related to White adults' (actors') nonverbal behaviors favoring Black people (Castelli et al., 2009). However, their parents' explicit attitudes were unrelated to children's racial attitudes (Castelli et al., 2008, 2009). Nevertheless, it is still unknown how parents' explicit and implicit racial attitudes interact with each other and shape children's race-based sympathy.

The quality of the relation between parents' CBRI and children's race-based sympathy may vary based on parents' implicit racial attitudes. When parents who adopt color-blind attitudes fail to educate their children about race or racism, children are left to make assumptions about their parents' racial attitudes (which may or

may not correspond to their actual attitudes). Perhaps children who cannot get explicit information about racism may be forced to learn about races through other cues in the social environment. If these parents hold implicit negative bias about Black people, they may act less friendly toward Black people (Dovidio et al., 2002) and exhibit more biased social interactions with (or simply avoid interactions with) Black people (Kurdi et al., 2019; McConnell & Leibold, 2001). We believe that children might be sensitive to parents' cues on how to understand race and racist issues in society, which could magnify parents' silence about racism. That is, parents who hold explicit attitudes that deny White privilege, institutional racism, or racial issues are likely to have children who show lower levels of sympathy toward Black peers, particularly when the parent also holds negative implicit racial attitudes about Black people. Specifically, under the condition that parents implicitly favor White people, parents' CBRI may be negatively related to children's sympathy toward Black people because parents may behave in color-blind socialization practices that send the message that racism is normative and accepted or that marginalized others are not worthy of sympathy and compassion. In such a socialization environment, we would expect children to report feeling lower levels of concern toward Black peers and less equitable sympathy when compared to their concern toward White peers.

In contrast, CBRI may not be particularly harmful if the parent holds relatively positive implicit attitudes toward Black people. That is, children may be learning about parents' attitudes through nonverbal behavior or social contexts. This "disconnect" between parents' explicit attitudes that "race doesn't matter," but relatively positive implicit attitudes about Black people may offer an opportunity for children to take note of other cues about race. For example, if parents have friends who are BIPOC or engage with diverse people, children may incorporate similar values into their own social contexts. In this circumstance, children's sympathy toward Black peers could be relatively high, regardless of parents' color-blind racial attitudes.

The Present Study

In the present study, we investigated whether each aspect of White parents' CBRI (i.e., parents' denial of White privilege, institutional racism, and blatant racial issues) and the global composite score of CBRI were related to their children's sympathy toward Black victims and their equitable sympathy responses toward White and Black victims. We focused on early school-aged children (age between 5 and 9) because moral development (including moral emotions such as sympathy) in this period may set the stage for later antiracist behaviors (Hazelbaker et al., 2022). Specifically, White children appear to develop their own racial identity and start to recognize interpersonal racism at this developmental timeframe (Hazelbaker et al., 2022).

Because parents' CBRI is closely related to their racist beliefs (Neville et al., 2013), in general, all aspects of White parents' CBRI may be negatively related to children's equitable sympathy and sympathy toward Black victims. We explored whether each of three aspects of CBRI predicted children's sympathy responses, with the hypothesis that the denial of White privilege and denial of blatant racial issues may be particularly relevant, through parents' racial socialization practices (i.e., victim blaming, avoiding discussion of race).

Further, we hypothesized that the meanings and functions of parents' CBRI would vary according to parents' implicit racial attitudes. We expected a stronger negative relation between parents' CBRI and children's sympathy toward Black victims and equitable sympathy when parents had high levels of implicit racial attitudes. That is, when parents hold implicit racial attitudes favoring White versus Black individuals, we expected that parents' color-blind beliefs (i.e., denial of White privilege, institutional racism, and blatant racial issues) would more strongly predict low levels of children's sympathy toward Black peers and equitable sympathy.

Method

Participants

Participants were part of a research project on White children's racial attitudes, emotions, and behaviors. Using G*power (Version 3.1.9.7), we found that 146 participants were needed for our regression analysis with power ($1 - \beta$) set at .95, $\alpha = .05$, and six predictors, in order to fulfill a median effect size ($F = .15$; Faul et al., 2007). Practically, we recruited 190 children and a primary caregiving parent from two metropolitan areas (103 boys, $M_{age} = 7.09$, $SD = 0.94$, age ranging from 5.40 to 8.91 years old). In a Southwestern city of the United States, we recruited participants ($N = 99$) through sending letters and flyers in various forums including local museums, bookstores, after school programs, and Facebook. The other research site was in the Northeastern United States, where participants ($N = 91$) were recruited from a research database operated by a university. All children were non-Hispanic White (hereafter referred to as White) given our research interest of studying White children's equitable sympathy responses. Nineteen families had two siblings enrolled in the study. No data were excluded from the present study.

In the present sample, primary caregiving parents were the parent who typically spent the most time with the child. There were 177 biological mothers, 12 biological fathers, and one adoptive mother. Mean levels of mothers' and fathers' education were 6.07 ($SD = 1.44$) and 5.88 ($SD = 1.47$), respectively (1 = *some high school*; 2 = *high school graduate*; 3 = *some college*; 4 = *technical training certificate*; 5 = *2-year degree*; 6 = *bachelor's degree*; 7 = *master degree*; 8 = *PhD, MD, JD, or other doctorate*). Family annual income ranged from less than \$15,000 to more than \$100,000. The median income was over \$100,000.

Procedure

The study was approved by the institutional review board of Arizona State University and Lehigh University (Study No. 00004912 and 999863-12, respectively). Data were collected in 2017, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. We requested that the child be brought to the research labs by their primary caregiving parent. Parents filled out questionnaires regarding demographic information and CBRI, and then completed a computer-based task to assess their implicit racial attitudes. At the same time, in another room, in addition to participating in tasks designed to assess children's attitudes, social and emotional competence and knowledge, children watched two sets of videos (two videos in each set, four videos in total) depicting social injustice scenarios involving a White perpetrator(s) bullying or teasing either a White or Black victim (counter-balanced). After each video, children were asked to report their

feelings of sympathy toward victims. Between the two sets of films, children participated in other tasks not included in the present study. The laboratory visit was about 60–90 min in total, and families were paid for their participation (\$40 cash/gift card).

Measures

Primary Parents' CBRI

Parents' CBRI were assessed through the self-reported, Color-Blind Racial Attitudes Scale (Neville et al., 2000). The 20 items were rated from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*), to measure three dimensions of parents' CBRI: denial of blatant racial issue (six items; e.g., Talking about racial issues causes unnecessary tension; $\alpha = .81$), denial of racial/White privilege (seven items; e.g., "Everyone who works hard, no matter what race they are, has an equal chance to become rich"; $\alpha = .88$), and denial of institutional discrimination (seven items; e.g., "Social policies, such as affirmative action, discriminate unfairly against White people"; $\alpha = .84$). Items were averaged to create the subscales with high scores reflecting more color blindness. Because the subscales were positively correlated ($r_s = .69-.71$), we also computed a composite score of CBRI by averaging the scores from three dimensions.

Primary Parents' Implicit Racial Attitudes

Parents' implicit racial attitudes were measured with the computerized implicit association task (IAT; Greenwald et al., 1998). Parents were instructed to respond, through pressing computer keys, to associations between a target concept (i.e., race in the present study, operationalized as pictures of White and Black faces) and an attribution concept, which was operationalized as positive versus negative words. Specifically, in the attitude congruent condition, participants were asked to press one key to respond to either a positive word or a White face and to use another key to respond to either a negative word or a Black face. In the attitude incongruent condition, the association between race and attribution reversed—parents used one key to respond to either a negative word or a White face and used another key to respond to either a positive word or a Black face. The assumption of this method is that individuals respond faster to the associations that already exist in their mindset than to the reversed associations. The final scores were D scores, calculated such as that the difference between the latency of stereotype congruent and incongruent conditions was divided by each participant's standard deviation (Lane et al., 2007). A higher D score reflected more biased racial attitudes favoring White versus Black people. Trials with latencies slower than 10,000 ms or individuals with more than 10% of trials with latencies less than 300 ms (one case) were dropped (Lane et al., 2007). Eighteen cases were missing due to equipment failure.

Children's Race-Based Sympathy

Children reported their feelings of sympathy toward the target children in two sets of videos (four video clips in total), which depicted real-life social injustice scenarios. The perpetrators (who were always White) and victims in the videos were approximately the same ages as the participants. In the first set of films, the perpetrator teased the child and poured a liquid on the target child's clothing or artwork (see Supplemental Materials). In the second set

of films, the perpetrator teased the target child for their clothing or their haircut (see Supplemental Materials). The scenarios were very similar in terms of content and story lines and were filmed in real school settings. Each film was shot in four versions so that the cast included either all male or all female actors with either a Black or White victim. Participants watched same-sex films and the presentation of the stories and race of the target child were counterbalanced (four possible orders for each set, always viewing one Black victim and one White victim per set; Spinrad et al., 2022; also see Supplemental Materials).

After each film, the experimenter presented a picture of the victim child and asked the participant to rate in what degree they felt sorry (i.e., sympathy) for the victim (3 = *a whole lot*, 2 = *some*, 1 = *a little bit*, 0 = *not at all*). Because children's sympathy was correlated across the two sets of films ($r_s = .46$ and $.56$, $p_s < .001$, for White victims and Black victims, respectively), we created separate composite scores for children's sympathy toward White victims and Black victims by averaging the responses across the two sets of films. In addition, we calculated children's equitable sympathy response by computing the difference score between sympathy toward the Black victims versus the White victims (a score of zero indicated equitable sympathy feelings; lower scores indicated more White favoritism).

Covariates

Socioeconomic status (SES) was measured as the average score of the standardized values of mother's education level, father's education level, and family income. Another covariate was children's social desirability. Children completed a shortened 14-item Marlowe–Crowne Social Desirability Questionnaire (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964). Evidence of reliability and validity of the shortened measure for use with children can be found in prior work (e.g., Eisenberg et al., 1996). Children were asked a series of questions with socially desirable answers. For example, "Are you always glad to share your things with others?" (1 = *yes*, 2 = *no*). The internal reliability of children's social desirability was .63 with the 14-item scale, and four items were deleted to improve the reliability to .71. In addition, child age was used as covariates.

Because the videos that we used in the present study were filmed with child actors, the materials and data are not available to the public. The study analysis codes were adopted from STATA user manuals. This study is not a preregistered study.

Results

Descriptive Analyses

Descriptive data and correlations are presented in Table 1. The composite score of CBRI, denial of blatant racial issues, and denial of White privilege were negatively related to children's sympathy toward Black victims, but parents' denial of institutional racism was not related to children's sympathy. None of the CBRI constructs was related to children's equitable sympathy. All three parents' CBRI subscales were significantly positively related to parents' implicit racial attitudes favoring White individuals. Parents' implicit racial attitudes were significantly correlated with all CBRI constructs, but were not significantly correlated with children's sympathy toward Black and equitable sympathy. In addition, children's sympathy toward Black victims was positively related to children's equitable sympathy. Child age was negatively related to children's social desirability and positively related

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Covariates										
1. Child age	—									
2. Child social desirability	-0.43***	—								
3. Family SES	-0.05	-0.13 ⁺	—							
Predictors										
4. CBRI composite score	0.04	0.11	-0.23	—						
5. CBRI blatant racial issues	0.06	0.09	-0.14*	0.87***	—					
6. CBRI White privilege	0.01	0.13 ⁺	-0.27***	0.91***	0.71***	—				
7. CBRI institutional racism	0.02	0.07	-0.19**	0.90***	0.69***	0.70***	—			
8. Parent IAT	-0.01	-0.03	-0.15 ⁺	0.28***	0.22***	0.28**	0.24**	—		
Outcomes										
9. Sympathy toward Black	0.24**	-0.12 ⁺	0.07	-0.16*	-0.15*	-0.16*	-0.11	-0.07	—	
10. Equitable sympathy	0.13	-0.10	0	0.10	-0.10	-0.08	-0.10	-0.15 ⁺	0.37***	—
<i>n</i>	190	188	190	190	190	190	190	171	190	190
Min	5.40	0.07	-2.64	1	1	1	1	-1.17	0	-2.50
Max	8.91	1	1.19	5.21	5.33	5.86	5.57	1.08	3	1.50
<i>M</i>	7.09	0.64	0	2.81	2.07	3.41	2.96	0.28	2.47	-0.01
<i>SD</i>	0.94	0.20	0.76	0.86	0.79	1.13	0.96	0.44	0.81	0.57

Note. Age = child age in years; CBRI = color-blind racial ideology; SES = socioeconomic status; IAT = implicit association task; Parent IAT = parental implicit race attitude (higher score indicates more race attitude bias, a.k.a., favoring White).

⁺ $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

to children's sympathy toward Black victims. Family SES was negatively related to three subscales of CBRI.

Independent samples *t* tests indicated no child sex differences ($ts < 1.17$, $ps > .25$) or site differences ($ts < 0.62$, $ps > .27$) on the predictors and outcome variables. Similarly, there were no differences in regard to demographic variables (including child sex, age, family SES) and parental global CBRI ($ts < 1.23$, $ps > .10$) between participants who had missing data versus those who did not (i.e., 18 cases had missing data on IAT and two cases on children's social desirability). Furthermore, Little's Missing Completely at Random Test consistently found that the data were missing completely at random ($\chi^2_{20} = 20.00$, $p = .46$; Little, 1988). To maximum use of information, missing data were handled through STATA (Version 17) using multiple imputation with multivariate normal distribution (Lee & Carlin, 2010). Imputation of missing data for each variable was based on the auxiliary variables of child sex and other variables in the analysis. A total of 20 imputations were performed.

Primary Analyses

Because there were 19 pairs of siblings in the sample, generalized estimating equations was used to correct for clustered and correlated data (Liang & Zeger, 1993). Using STATA (Version 17), we ran four regressions for each outcome variable (i.e., children's sympathy toward Black victims and equitable sympathy). The predictors were parents' CBRI (global and three subscales), implicit racial attitudes, and the interaction between the two (covarying for child age, social desirability, and family SES). Guided by Cohen et al.'s (2003) work, all continuous variables were centered in the models, and results with imputed data sets are reported (Table 2).

Predicting Children's Sympathy Toward Black Victims

With the outcome of children's sympathy toward Black victims, child age was positively related to children's self-reported sympathy

toward Black victims for all four regressions ($\beta s \geq .18$, $ps < .01$; Table 2), consistent with correlational analyses. When considering the composite score of global CBRI, no significant main effect was found. The interaction between parental IAT and the composite score of parents' CBRI was significantly related to children's sympathy toward Black victims ($\beta = -.36$, $p = .02$). To probe the interaction effect, a simple slope analysis was conducted to determine the relation of parents' global CBRI under conditions of 1 *SD* above and below the mean and the mean level of implicit racial attitudes (Cohen et al., 2003). Specifically, parents' global CBRI was only negatively related to children sympathy toward Black victims when parents had high levels of implicit racial attitudes (i.e., greater implicit White favoritism; $\beta = -.29$, $p = .004$), but not when parents had mean or low level of implicit racial attitudes ($\beta s = -.13$ and $.03$, $ps = .07$ and $.80$, respectively, Figure 1a). That is, when parents implicitly favored White people versus Black people, parents' higher level of CBRI was related to lower levels of children's sympathy toward Black victims.

Similar patterns were found with parents' denial of blatant racial issues. The main effect of parents' denial of blatant racial issues subscale was not significant ($\beta = -.11$, $p = .13$). However, the interaction between parents' denial of blatant racial issues and parents' implicit racial attitudes was significantly related to children's sympathy toward Black victims ($\beta = -.50$, $p = .005$). Specifically, parents' denial of blatant racial issues was negatively related to children's sympathy toward Black victims, but only when parents had a high level of implicit racial attitudes ($\beta = -.32$, $p = .002$; Figure 1b). This relation was not found when parents had low and mean levels of implicit racial attitudes ($\beta s = .10$ and $-.11$, $ps = .32$ and $.14$, respectively). That is, when parents favored White people versus Black people, parents' higher level of blatant racial issue denial was related to lower levels of children's sympathy toward Black victims.

The main effect of parents' denial of White privilege was significant, with denial being negatively related to children's

Table 2

Main Effects and Interaction of Parental Color-Blind Racial Attitudes and Parental Implicit Race Attitude on Children's Reported Sympathy Toward Black Targets (Model 1) and Equitable Sympathy (Model 2)

Measure	Variable	Model 1			Model 2		
		Sympathy to Black target			Equitable sympathy		
		<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i> value	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i> value
CBRI—composite score	Child age	0.18**	0.07	<.01	0.04	0.05	.37
	Social desirability	-0.05	0.31	.87	-0.24	0.23	.30
	Family SES	0.04	0.08	.60	-0.03	0.06	.55
	CBRI	-0.13 ⁺	0.07	.06	-0.02	0.05	.65
	Parent IAT	-0.05	0.14	.71	-0.17 ⁺	0.10	.08
	CBRI × IAT	-0.36*	0.16	.02	-0.26*	0.11	.02
	<i>R</i> ²	0.12			0.07		
CBRI—denial of blatant racial issue	Child age	0.18**	0.06	<.01	0.04	0.05	.35
	Social desirability	-0.05	0.31	.88	-0.22	0.22	.32
	Family SES	0.06	0.08	.42	-0.03	0.05	.64
	Parent deny racial issues	-0.11	0.07	.13	-0.01	0.05	.94
	Parent IAT	-0.05	0.13	.72	-0.17 ⁺	0.10	.07
	Deny Racial Issues × IAT	-0.50**	0.17	<.01	-0.35**	0.12	<.01
	<i>R</i> ²	0.09			0.06		
CBRI—denial of White privilege	Child age	0.20**	0.07	<.01	0.05	0.05	.29
	Social desirability	0.01	0.31	.98	-0.21	0.23	.36
	Family SES	0.04	0.08	.63	-0.03	0.06	.61
	Parent deny White privilege	-0.12*	0.05	.03	-0.01	0.04	.72
	Parent IAT	-0.01	0.14	.93	-0.17	0.10	.10
	Deny White Privilege × IAT	-0.22 ⁺	0.12	.06	-0.14	0.08	.10
	<i>R</i> ²	0.11			0.05		
CBRI—denial of institutional racism	Child age	0.18**	0.07	<.01	0.05	0.05	.32
	Social desirability	-0.08	0.32	.81	-0.23	0.23	.31
	Family SES	0.05	0.08	.52	-0.04	0.06	.49
	Parent deny institutional	-0.08	0.06	.21	-0.03	0.04	.50
	Parent IAT	-0.09	0.14	.54	-0.19 ⁺	0.10	.06
	Deny Institutional × IAT	-0.23	0.15	.12	-0.19 ⁺	0.10	.06
	<i>R</i> ²	0.09			0.06		

Note. Significant effects are bolded in the table. Parent IAT = parental implicit race attitude; CBRI = color-blind racial ideology; SES = socioeconomic status; *SE* = standard error; IAT = implicit association task.

⁺ *p* < .10. * *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01.

sympathy toward Black victims ($\beta = -.12, p = .03$), but the moderation between denial of White privilege and parents' IAT was nonsignificant, albeit approaching significance and with the same pattern as the above scales ($\beta = -.22, p = .06$; see Supplemental Materials). There was no main effect or interaction effect with parents' denial of institutional racism as a predictor of children's sympathy toward Black victims.

Predicting Children's Equitable Sympathy

In the second group of models, there were no effects of the covariate of child age ($\beta s < .05, ps > .29$), main effects of parents' CBRI constructs ($\beta s > -.03, ps > .50$), or implicit racial attitudes ($\beta s > -.19, ps > .06$; Table 2). There were two significant interactions between parents' IAT and global CBRI and parents' denial of blatant racial issues ($\beta s = -.26$ and $-.35, ps = .02$ and $.005$, respectively). Simple slope analysis of global CBRI indicated that parents' global CBRI was negatively related to their children's equitable sympathy only when parents had a high level of implicit racial attitudes favoring White people ($\beta = -.14, p = .048$), but not when parents had mean and low levels of implicit racial attitudes ($\beta s = -.02$ and $.09, ps = .65$ and $.19$, respectively, Figure 2a). Simple slope tests showed that parents' denial of blatant racial issues

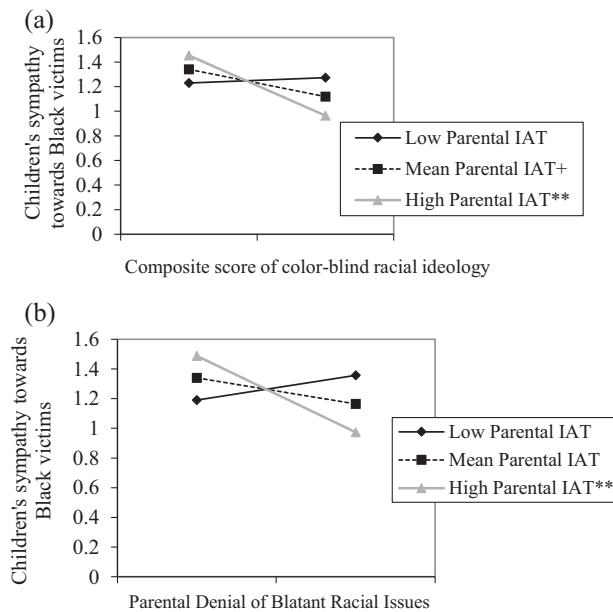
was negatively related to children's equitable sympathy when parents had a high level of implicit racial attitudes ($\beta = -.16, p = .04$, Figure 2b). The relation was positive ($\beta = .15, p = .045$) when parents had low levels of implicit racial attitudes. That is, when parents favored White people versus Black people, parents' higher denial of blatant racial issues was related to children's less equitable sympathy, but this relation reversed when parents had low levels of implicit racial attitudes (i.e., favoring Black people). The interaction terms were not significant (but approached significance) for the other two subscales ($\beta s = -.14$ and $-.19, ps = .09$ and $.06$, for parents' denial of White privilege and institutional racism respectively; see Supplemental Materials).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of parents' CBRI on children's race-based sympathy and the potential moderating role of parents' implicit racial attitudes, which is a largely understudied area of research in the present literature. Our results indicated that parents' explicit attitudes (i.e., CBRI) interacted with their implicit racial attitudes to predict children's sympathy toward Black peers and their equitable sympathy. That is, parents' global CBRI and their denial of racial issues were negatively related to

Figure 1

Parental Implicit Racial Attitudes Moderate the Relations Between Parental Color-Blind Racial Ideology and Child Self-Reported Sympathy Toward Black Victims



Note. (a) Composite score of parental color-blind racial ideology. (b) Parental denial of blatant racial issues. High IAT score indicated parents' more implicit race bias/more White favoritism. IAT = implicit association task.

⁺ $p < .10$. ^{**} $p < .01$.

children's sympathy toward Black victims, but only when parents had high levels of implicit preference toward White people versus Black people. Similarly, under conditions of high implicit racial attitudes favoring White people, parents' global CBRI and denial of racial issues was negatively related to equitable sympathy. The belief that racism is "a thing of the past" is harmful because such attitudes disregard present day racial disparities. When faced with evidence of discrimination, especially if they hold negative implicit racial attitudes toward people of color, individuals may blame the victim or identify the prejudiced acts as having nothing to do with race. We speculate that parents who deny blatant racial issues or endorse global CBRI, while holding implicit unfavorable racial attitudes about Black people, are likely to avoid discussions about race with their children while nonverbally conveying negative attitudes toward Black individuals (Danforth et al., 2020).

Although we did not specifically measure parents' race-based socialization practices, parents' attitudes about race are likely to carryover into everyday interactions with children. When parents avoid talking about race, children are forced to look for additional cues about how to understand race in our society. Thus, children may look for more subtle (often nonverbal) cues from their parents. For example, when race is viewed as a taboo topic, children might pay particular attention to how their parents interact in diverse social situations. In turn, these subtle socialization behaviors may carry over into children's own sympathy reactions.

Interestingly, when parents held more positive implicit racial attitudes about Black people, CBRI was unrelated to children's

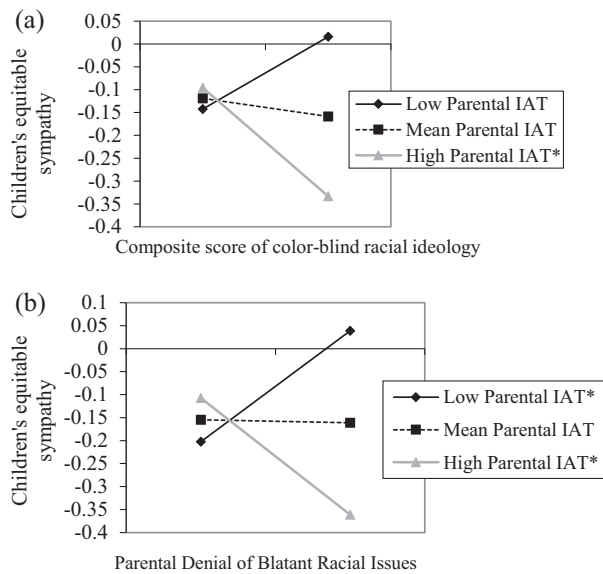
sympathy for Black victims or was positively related to equitable sympathy in the case of blatant denial of racial issues. It may be that parents with favorable attitudes about Black individuals exhibit fewer subtle racist cues and may even engage in positive behaviors with Black colleagues, neighbors, and friends (Gillen-O'Neel et al., 2022). This "disconnect" between parents' explicit attitudes that "race doesn't matter" but relatively positive implicit racial attitudes about Black people may offer an opportunity for children to take note of other cues about race. For example, if parents have friends who are BIPOC, children may value diversity in their own social contexts. In this circumstance, children's sympathy toward Black peers could be relatively high, regardless of parents' color-blind racial attitudes. Future research should focus on the mechanisms that explain how parents' implicit and explicit attitudes interact to predict children's race-based moral emotions.

The interaction effects reported in the present study might explain previous null results in the role of parents' CBRI on children's antiracist attitudes and feelings (Mesman et al., 2022; Pahlke et al., 2012); that is, the association of parents' CBRI to children's race-based outcomes might depend on their parents' implicit racial attitudes. Further, because most prior work examines global CBRI, our results indicate that the subscale of denial of blatant racial issues may be particularly relevant to children's outcomes. Thus, future researchers should consider testing whether the subscales separately differentially predict outcomes for children.

In addition to the interaction effects, our results indicate that parents' denial of White privilege was negatively related to children's sympathy toward Black victims (significant main effect). By denying White privilege, parents who hold these beliefs may ignore societal inequalities and disparities, which may lead to victim-blaming when faced with discrimination and disparities. Previous studies have found that young adults tended to show less sympathy if they think people are responsible to their own disadvantaged situation (Schmidt & Weiner, 1988). It is reasonable to assume that parents' denial of White privilege could result in lower levels of children's sympathy toward Black people who have been victimized. This effect was not identified when predicting children's equitable sympathy, which leaves the possibility for future studies to examine this process. In addition, parents' denial of institutional racism was not related to either children's sympathy toward Black victims or equitable sympathy in our sample. This result may be due to the nature of institutional racism, which is a sophisticated operation of racism and not related to interpersonal interactions in daily life. More studies are needed that differentiate the facets of CBRI on children's development, especially in older samples, when children can understand more abstract or sophisticated constructs, than in our present study.

Although this study presents pioneering work focused the predictors of young children's equitable sympathy in White families, some limitations should be noted. First, the present study focused only on children's race-based sympathy. Although sympathy has been positively associated with an individual's perceptions of fairness and social justice/injustice (Urbanska et al., 2019), it would be useful to investigate other aspects of children's moral emotions, such as their guilt or shame toward the White perpetrator of discrimination. Second, our films depicted only White perpetrators, so it is unclear whether children's emotional responses would differ if the perpetrators' race varied. Another limitation in the present study regards the limited age span of participants. It is possible that

Figure 2
Parental Implicit Racial Attitudes Moderate the Relations Between Parental Color-Blind Racial Ideology and Children's Equitable Sympathy



Note. (a) Composite score of parental color-blind racial ideology. (b) Parental denial of blatant racial issues. High IAT score indicated parents' more implicit race bias/more White favoritism. IAT = implicit association task.
 * $p < .05$.

White parents' believe that it is important to educate children about antiracism as they develop (Hilliard & Liben, 2020). Longitudinal studies that investigate how White parents adapt their racial socialization as children age are needed. Furthermore, we did not explicitly study White parents' racial socialization practices in this study; rather, we focused on parents' attitudes that likely predict their socialization practices (Dovidio et al., 2002). Nevertheless, we believe the present study could serve as a first step of understanding the effect of parents' CBRI in shaping their children's race-based moral emotions from a young age. Future research should examine the potential mechanisms, including investigating parents' behaviors, message about race, home environment, and neighborhood. We also need to acknowledge that the effect size of the present study was quite small, especially for children's equitable sympathy, which means these predictors explained a small variation of children's equitable sympathy. Finally, this work mainly focused on high SES mothers, and the results may not be generalizable to a broader population. Future studies should expand the sample to a more diverse White sample, and also include fathers, teachers, and peers.

Practically, this study illuminated the potential importance of considering parents' racial attitudes when promoting young children's race-based sympathy, and our results point to the need for effective interventions in this area. The present study suggests that parents' CBRI likely is a factor to children's sympathy toward Black peers, but the role of parents' CBRI varies in the levels of parents' implicit racial attitudes. The findings from present studies could inform educators, interventionists, and researchers to consider the multiple indicators in developing programs to addresses White parents' own racist attitudes. For example, potential programs

should consider increasing White parents' critical consciousness and understanding of their own White privilege and racial power, as well as explore possible solutions of reducing implicit bias at the same time. Programs of raising awareness of White privilege and power started to be discussed in higher education environment (Case & Rios, 2017; Schumacher-Martinez & Proctor, 2020), but programs that target young children and their parents are highly needed.

In conclusion, this study is one of the first examinations of White children's equitable sympathy and its relations with parents' CBRI and implicit racial attitudes. The findings suggested that the role of parents' CBRI in children's race-based sympathy may vary depending on parents' implicit racial attitudes. Specifically, this study indicates that when parents hold high levels of implicit racial attitudes, their color-blind racial attitudes are especially relevant for predicting lower levels of their children's sympathy toward Black children.

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