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Negotiating Whiteness: White Children's Racial Identity, Intergroup Attitudes, and Experiences of Socialization

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Negotiating Whiteness: White Children's Racial Identity, Intergroup Attitudes, and Experiences of Socialization

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Education

by

Taylor Rae Hazelbaker

2021

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Negotiating Whiteness: White Children's

Racial Identity, Intergroup Attitudes, and Experiences of Socialization

by

Taylor Rae Hazelbaker

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2021

Professor Rashmita S. Mistry, Chair

This 3-study dissertation explored White children's negotiation of Whiteness, racial identity development, intergroup attitudes, and experiences of socialization. Participants were from an ethnically and racially diverse, rural elementary school in the Midwest United States. In Study 1, I explored the labels that White children (N = 53; M_{age} = 8.97, SD = 1.72) use to define themselves and their open-ended identity-related beliefs and knowledge. Results revealed that White children most often identified as American or with an ethnic heritage label. White children's identity-related beliefs were grouped into five narratives indicating that some children were still developing identity-related beliefs whereas others' beliefs conformed to dominant ideologies that normalized Whiteness. In Study 2, I examined White children's (N = 53; M_{age} = 8.97, SD = 1.72) conceptions of and attitudes about ethnic-racial and religious groups and the degree to which they were correlated with child and parent level characteristics. Results

indicated that White children reported more social group-related knowledge about ethnic as compared with racial and religious groups and more favorable attitudes about their own as compared with other groups. These dimensions of children's intergroup attitudes were differentially correlated with parent level characteristics: children's conceptions of ethnic-racial and religious groups were related to parents' racial attitudes whereas children's attitudes about these groups were related to parents' comfort with intergroup contact and socialization practices. Using a phenomenological approach in Study 3, I explored White elementary school teachers' (N = 12) attitudes about and strategies for addressing ethnicity, race, and related topics in their classrooms. Results highlighted a paradox in teachers' attitudes and socialization about ethnicity and race. Teachers reported an appreciation for the school-level ethnic and racial diversity, while simultaneously endorsing a colorblind ideology. Additionally, while teachers reported incorporating race-related lessons and conversations, these topics were more frequently discussed in reaction to holidays and student-initiated questions. Taken together, these three studies illustrate the ubiquitous influence of the ideologies of White supremacy and colorblindness on White children's developing understanding of themselves and others. Implications for racial identity development, the racial socialization of White children, and the development of anti-racist White children are discussed.

The dissertation of Taylor Hazelbaker is approved.

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2021

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Hazelbaker, T., & Mistry, R. S. (revised & resubmitted). "Being colorblind is one of the worst things": White teachers' ethnic-racial socialization in a rural elementary school. *Journal of Social Issues.*

Gillen-O'Neel, C., Huynh, V. W., Hazelbaker, T., & Harrison, A. (2021). From kindness and diversity to justice and action: White parents' ethnic-racial socialization goals. *Journal of Family Issues.* https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X21996392

Hazelbaker, T., Griffin, K. M., Nenadal, L., & Mistry, R. S. (2018). Early elementary school children's conceptions of neighborhood social stratification and fairness. *Translational Issues in Psychological Science, 4*(2), 153-164. https://doi.org/10.1037/tps0000153

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

"Everybody learns some combination, some version, of the rules of racial classification and of her own racial identity, often without teaching or conscious inculcation" (Omi & Winant 1994; p. 30). Take, as a hypothetical example, Luke, a White boy who was born in 2010 during a time when many classified the United States as "post-racial" after the election of the first Black President of the United States, Barack Obama. Luke grew up in the small midwestern community of Franklin City. A town which was majority White for many years and now has an ethnically and racially diverse population. Luke was in first grade in 2016 when President Trump was elected and going into second grade at the time of the 2017 White nationalist rally in Charlottesville. During this time, he overheard statements like, "immigrants are stealing all the jobs," "Muslims are terrorists," and "Mexican people need to go back to where they came from." When he asked his parents about statements like this, they shushed him and told him that he was too young to understand. At school, his teachers said that people have different skin colors and speak different languages, but that everyone is the same on the inside. No one ever told Luke that he was White or explained what it means to be White in the United States. Instead, he was left to develop his own understanding of himself and others.

Like Luke, White children's developing understanding of themselves and others is shaped by the time and place in which they develop including the sociopolitical climate, dominant narratives they hear in the media, and messages that they receive from their parents and teachers (Hughes et al., 2016). These macro- and micro-level contexts influence how children sort individuals into groups and the meaning and feelings (both positive and negative) that children attach to these groups (Bigler & Liben, 2007). Indeed, as Omi and Winant (1994) point out, even in the absence of explicit conversations about group membership at home or at

school, children develop such ideas and beliefs. Given their historical and contemporary position of power and privilege in the United States, White children's developing notions of themselves and others likely look very different from those of children of Color. For example, White children have to negotiate Whiteness to make sense of themselves whereas children of Color navigate their sense of self parallel to their awareness of stereotypes about and discrimination towards their group (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014).

Whiteness is multifaceted; it includes the explicit and implicit messages and systems and structures that situate Whiteness as a position of advantage and the cultural practices associated with Whiteness as normative (Helms, 2017; Roberts & Rizzo, 2020). Whiteness is also intersectional. That is, White individuals' understanding of themselves and others is influenced by their own intersecting identities (e.g., based on nationality, religion, and language) along with macro-level systems and structures of inequality (e.g., White supremacy; Crenshaw, 1991). For example, being American is often granted more easily to White individuals while being Christian and speaking English are considered ideal and normative because they are associated with Whiteness (Roberts & Rizzo, 2020).

Indeed, White children are negotiating their Whiteness within dominant societal ideologies. Before proceeding, I define two of these ideologies. Specifically, in this dissertation I operationalize White supremacy and colorblindness as dominant ideologies (Bonilla-Silva, 2001) and master narratives (Syed & McLean, 2020) that manifest at both individual and structural levels. The ideology of White supremacy: (a) places White individuals, both historically and contemporaneously, as superior in the racial hierarchy (i.e., White superiority), (b) advantages White individuals and disadvantages and marginalizes people of Color on the basis of race (i.e., White privilege), and (c) situates Whiteness and all that is associated with it as normative (i.e.,

normalizes Whiteness; see Ansley, 1997; Walton, 2019). Notably, the current sociopolitical climate conflates White supremacy with an individual-level ideology – that is, with White *supremacists*. However, I align with scholars who push back against this assertion and conceptualize White supremacy as structural and operating within political, economic, and cultural systems (Ansley, 1997; Beliso-De Jesús & Pierre, 2019; Bonilla-Silva, 2001)). White supremacy and the systems and structures that maintain it are upheld, reinforced, and sometimes resisted by individuals both consciously and unconsciously (Ansley, 1997; Walton, 2019).

Colorblindness also warrants further conceptualization here. Neville and colleagues (2013) posit that a colorblind ideology includes highlighting that everyone is the same and ignoring race (e.g., color-evasion) as well as the belief that racism is in the past and the denial of institutional racism and White privilege (e.g., power-evasion). While colorblindness may represent an ideal vision of an equal society (e.g., an egalitarian belief that all people are equal), denying the impact of racism actually reinforces racial inequality (Neville et al., 2013). As ideologies, White supremacy and colorblindness are not exclusive to White individuals though White people may be more inclined to them as compared with people of Color (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Neville et al., 2013). In my dissertation, I focus on these two ideologies "to name whiteness and its centrality to the construction of this racialized unequal world" (Beliso-De Jesús & Pierre, 2019, p. 3). Further, I pay particular attention to how White children's negotiation of Whiteness aligns with and upholds these ideologies.

Little attention, however, has been paid to how White individuals experience Whiteness in a racialized society (Rogers et al., 2020). The ethnic-racial identity and ethnic-racial socialization (ERS) literatures, for example, have primarily been conducted among families and youth of Color (Rogers et al., 2020; Umaña-Taylor & Hill, 2020) and even less attention has

been paid to teachers' ERS practices (Farago et al., 2019). In contrast, an expansive body of literature has examined White children's intergroup attitudes (see Raabe & Beelmann, 2011). Thus, in developmental science, there is a demonstrable need to examine White children's understanding of Whiteness and their socialization of what it means to be White in an increasingly diverse, yet pervasively racially unequal society. My dissertation aims to fill this gap in the literature. Specifically, my 3-study dissertation explores: (1) White children's racial identity development, (2) their conceptions of and attitudes about ethnic-racial and religious groups in relation to their parents' racial attitudes and socialization practices, and (3) White teachers' attitudes and beliefs about race and their ERS practices in the classroom.

Overview of Theoretical Perspectives

Given these three aims, I draw on multiple theoretical perspectives to guide my dissertation. In Study 1, I draw on a master narrative framework which outlines three co-existing narratives: personal narratives or stories told by individuals that shape their identities, master narratives as cultural scripts that guide individuals' beliefs and behaviors, and alternative narratives that are deviations from the master narratives (McLean & Syed, 2015). I draw on this theoretical perspective to situate children's negotiation of Whiteness and White racial identity within the master narratives of White supremacy and colorblindness. Study 2 is guided by Developmental Intergroup Theory (DIT) which posits that young children recognize salient attributes of individuals in their environment (e.g., based on racial features or religious markers), categorize individuals into social groups, and attach meaning to these groups (Bigler & Liben, 2007). DIT further outlines that in the absence of explicit conversations about ethnicity and race (e.g., with parents or teachers), children come up with their own ideas about groups which are often inaccurate and stereotypic (Bigler & Liben, 2007). DIT guides my examination of White

children's intergroup attitudes and relation to their parents' attitudes and ERS. Finally, I draw on Hughes and colleagues' (2016) transactional/ecological approach which posits that the processes of ethnic-racial identity, ERS, and discrimination are intertwined and embedded in individuals' environments. This theoretical perspective guides my exploration of teachers' ERS practices in Study 3.

Drawing on each of these three theoretical perspectives, I argue that, for White children, the processes of ethnic-racial identity development, intergroup attitudes formation, and experiences of ERS are intertwined. Moreover, these processes are shaped by both proximal (e.g., home, school) and distal (e.g., cultural ideologies) settings (Bigler & Liben, 2007; Hughes et al., 2016; Syed & McLean, 2015). Yet, few studies have examined these processes simultaneously which is the overarching goal of this dissertation.

Overview of Method

Data for this dissertation come from a larger study that explored ethnic-racial, national (American), and religious identity development among a sample of White children and children of Color, their intergroup beliefs and attitudes, and their parents' and teachers' attitudes and ERS. Data were collected during the fall of 2018 – two years after the 2016 presidential election and two years before the murder of George Floyd and mobilization for racial justice across the United States. For the purpose of this dissertation, I focus on a subsample of White children (n = 53) and their parents (n = 53) and teachers (n = 12). Below, I briefly outline the process of recruitment for the larger study. Detailed information about the participants, procedures, and measures are described in the Method section for each respective study.

Schools were recruited from a rural region in the Midwest United States if they were within a targeted 60-mile radius, a K-6 elementary school, and enrolled at least 50 students per

grade level. All nine schools that met these criteria were approached to participate in the study and, of those, one agreed (i.e., Franklin City Elementary School)[1]. Notably, Franklin City Elementary School was the most ethnically and racially diverse of the nine schools that were approached; seven schools had a student body that was over 80% White.

Prior to participant recruitment at Franklin City Elementary School, I took steps to get to know the school community (e.g., attended a beginning of school staff meeting and the first grade parent night). Two weeks into the 2018-2019 school year, I sent recruitment packets, including information about the study, the parent consent form, and the parent demographics survey, home with 189 first, third, and fifth grade children. Children were told to bring the recruitment packets back to school and that if everyone in their class brought back the packet, no matter if their parent said yes or no, the whole class would get a small prize. I visited each classroom multiple times to remind students to return their packets and handed out replacement packets to those who had not returned them yet. Of the 189 children recruited, consent forms were returned by 118 students (62%). Of the 118 returned consent forms, I received written consent for 83 students (70%) and 80 parents (68%) to participate. In addition, all first, third, and fifth grade, and specialist (e.g., art, English Language Learner, physical education) teachers were recruited to participate in individual interviews; 12 of 15 teachers consented to interviews.

Franklin City Elementary School is located in a rural, midwestern town with a population of less than 5,000. The town – a historically White community – has experienced rapid demographic shifts in the last few decades as a result of increased immigration. Franklin City Elementary School was a unique research setting for my dissertation because the ethnic-racial

[1] While I cannot know for sure, senior school administrators may have declined to have their students and teachers participate in the study because of the topic (i.e., a focus on race, ethnicity and religion) and/or the timing and context of the study (i.e., rural, majority White communities in the Midwest during a time of heightened sociopolitical divisiveness).

diversity mirrors the larger child demographic shifts in the United States. In the 2018-2019 school year, the student body was 54% White, 29% Latinx, 14% African American, and 3% another race-ethnicity; 61% of students qualified for free and/or reduced-price meals and 26% were classified as English language learners. In contrast to the student body, however, the teachers were mostly White which mirrors the mismatch between educators and public-school children across the United States (Geiger, 2018).

Study 1

Ethnic-racial identity development begins early in life (Williams et al., 2020). Indeed, prior research indicates that by age 5, children of Color and White children label themselves using ethnic-racial, national (American), and religious group labels (Brown et al., 2010; Connolly et al., 2002; Williams et al., 2020). Children begin to ascribe meaning to their group membership, for example, based on tangible characteristics such as language and family heritage by age 7 (Hazelbaker, 2017; Rodriguez et al., 2016; Rogers et al., 2012; Rogers & Meltzoff, 2017). Less is known about how White children negotiate Whiteness in forming their identities. Thus, the first study in my dissertation explored White children's racial identity development and how they make sense of Whiteness. I first examined the labels that White children use to define themselves (e.g., ethnic, racial, national American, and religious groups). Second, I explored children's open-ended identity-related beliefs and knowledge while paying attention to how these narratives aligned with and upheld the cultural scripts of White supremacy (i.e., White superiority, White privilege, normalizing Whiteness) and colorblindness (Syed & McLean, 2020).

Study 2

In addition to identity formation, middle childhood (i.e., 6 – 12 years old) is also an important developmental period for White children's understanding of their own and other ethnic-racial and religious groups (Bigler & Liben, 2007). In terms of ethnic-racial attitudes, evidence demonstrates that White children hold strong ingroup biases; they prefer or attribute more favorable traits to their own as compared with other ethnic-racial groups (Raabe & Beelmann, 2011). Less attention has been paid to religious attitudes, although one study conducted with a predominately White sample of children (i.e., 81%) found that children endorsed more negative attitudes about Muslim as compared with non-Muslim immigrant groups (Brown et al., 2017). Some evidence suggests that White children have more favorable attitudes when they are older (Raabe & Beelmann, 2011), have at least one cross-race friendship (Davies et al., 2011), or have parents who recognize and talk about race and racism (Pahlke et al., 2012; Perry et al., 2020). Thus, the second study in my dissertation examines: (a) White children's ethnic-racial and religious attitudes, and (b) the degree to which these attitudes are associated with child (i.e., age, cross-race friendships) and parent (i.e., attitudes, ERS practices, and religious socialization practices) level characteristics.

Study 3

In addition to parents, scholars have conceptualized teachers as important levers of school ERS (see Byrd, 2017). However, limited attention has been paid to documenting White teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and socialization practices about ethnicity-race and related topics. The small body of existing literature indicates that White teachers primarily engage in colorblind socialization about ethnicity-race and related topics (e.g., ignoring or denying the importance of race; Farago et al., 2019; Vittrup, 2016). Study 3 aims to better understand White teachers' ERS

practices. Using a phenomenological approach, I explored White elementary school teachers' attitudes about and strategies for addressing ethnicity, race, and related topics in their classroom.

Summary

Taken together, these three studies illustrate White children's understanding and socialization of Whiteness in a rural, racially and ethnically diverse setting. By examining White children's identity development and intergroup attitudes as well their parents' and teachers' attitudes and socialization about ethnicity-race, this dissertation highlights the importance and inseparability of these processes for understanding how children learn about themselves and others. Next, Study 1, Study 2, and Study 3 are presented. I conclude by discussing overall findings, themes across studies, limitations of the dissertation, and implications and future directions for research and practice.

STUDY 1

Negotiating Whiteness: Exploring White Elementary School-Age Children's Racial Identity Development

Negotiating Whiteness: Exploring White Elementary School-Age Children's Racial Identity Development

Whiteness includes "the overt and subliminal socialization processes and practices, power structures, laws, privileges, and life experiences that favor the White racial group over all others" (Helms, 2017, p. 718). Whiteness is multidimensional: it is a position of advantage, provides the ability to see oneself outside of race (i.e., as just human), and is a set of unnamed, yet normative, cultural practices (Helms, 2017; Roberts & Rizzo, 2020). For much of U.S. history, Whiteness has been viewed as normative with the benefits of racism invisible to White people who do not recognize White privilege and the social norms that maintain it (Helms, 2017). Recent events – including the 2017 Charlottesville White nationalist rally and the more recent January 6th, 2021 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol by White supremacists – highlight the necessity of understanding how Whiteness is experienced, socialized, enacted, and negotiated by White individuals. White people must wake up to the racialized realities of Whiteness, and we assert that this needs to happen early in life, during childhood. That is, White children need to learn to identify as White, recognize that they have a race, and understand the role it plays in their lives (Hazelbaker et al., *under review).* Thus, the purpose of the current study was to explore White children's racial identity development including how they make sense of their group membership.

Literature Review

Prior to reviewing the literature, we provide a definition of terms and a brief overview of who has been considered White across U.S. history. Next, we describe the master narrative approach to identity research which guided the current study. We conclude with an overview of

ethnic-racial identity development in middle childhood (i.e., ages 6-12) followed by a review of research examining children and youth's conceptions of Whiteness and White racial identity.

Conceptualization of Terms

Ethnicity and race are socially constructed; race on the basis of shared physical characteristics such as skin color, and ethnicity based on shared culture, traditions, and language (Richeson & Sommers, 2016; Tatum, 2017). Race is not solely based on physical characteristics but is also influenced by social norms and laws. The White racial category in the U.S. has shifted across time and in relation to the sociopolitical landscape (Painter, 2010). For example, the "one-drop rule" defined Whiteness based on the percentage of one's ancestors of African descent in an attempt to maintain the position of power held by White individuals so that only those who were fully White could own property, work, and vote (Roberts & Rizzo, 2020). Waves of immigration have also shifted societal notions of Whiteness. In the 1900s, Jewish, Irish, and Italian Americans were not considered White, while Arab Americans had often been labeled as White prior to, but not after, the 9/11 terrorist attacks (Richeson & Sommers, 2016).

In the current study, we use the term *ethnic-racial* in recognition of the fact that although ethnicity and race are distinct constructs both are important and influential in shaping children's development and lived experiences (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Ethnic-racial identity (ERI) is defined as:

> the process and content that defines an individual's sense of self related to ethnic heritage and racial background. It includes labels individuals use to define themselves according to ethnicity/race; awareness, beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge they have about their ethnic-racial background; enactment of their identity; and processes by which each of

these dimensions evolve. (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014 as cited by Williams et al., 2020, p. 100)

For our purposes, we use ethnic-racial when discussing the process of identity formation but distinguish between the terms when describing children's identification as White (i.e., racial) versus German or Irish (i.e., ethnic).

Moreover, we recognize that race and ethnicity intersect with other social categories such as religion and nationality. Intersectionality theory states that an individual's perspectives and experiences are shaped by both their own intersecting identities and structures of inequality (Crenshaw, 1991). For example, children's ERI development is informed by and develops in concert with their other social identities and the macro-level systems and structures that produce inequality. In the current paper, we pay attention to how children's negotiation of Whiteness intersects with their beliefs about ethnicity, religion and nationality, and how these processes are influenced by and contribute to systems of oppression (e.g., White supremacy and colorblindness). For example, Whiteness intersects with religion and nationality: it conflates being American with being White and deems being a Christian and speaking English as ideal and normative because they are associated with Whiteness (Roberts & Rizzo, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

Our exploration of White children's ERI development is guided by a master narrative framework which situates one's personal narrative (i.e., stories shared by individuals that are used to form their identities) as co-existing with master narratives (i.e., "culturally shared stories that guide thoughts, beliefs, values, and behaviors"; Syed & McLean, 2020, p. 3) and alternative narratives (i.e., stories that challenge master narratives; McLean & Syed, 2015). In the master narrative framework, structural factors and systems that uphold inequality are interwoven with

individuals' daily experiences (Syed & McLean, 2020, p. 4). That is, an individual's personal narrative is shaped by and shapes the master and alternative narratives. For example, individuals conform to master narratives by incorporating them into their personal narratives, often unconsciously. Individuals from dominant groups (e.g., White individuals) are more likely to conform to master narratives while those from marginalized groups are more likely to deviate from them. This may be because master narratives reinforce the inequality and social norms that uphold dominant group members' position of power and privilege (Syed & McLean, 2020).

In the current study, we pay attention to how children make sense of Whiteness (i.e., their personal narratives) given the master narratives of (a) White supremacy, the cultural script that positions White people as superior in the racial hierarchy (i.e., White superiority), advantages White individuals and disadvantages people of Color (i.e., White privilege), and situates Whiteness and all that is associated with it as normative (i.e., normalizes Whiteness; Ansley, 1997; Roberts & Rizzo, 2020), and (b) colorblind ideology, the belief that race does not matter, and everyone is the same (Neville et al., 2013). The ideologies of White supremacy and colorblindness are embedded in the environments in which White children spend their time (e.g., standards of beauty, stereotypical media representations of people of Color, the omission of people of Color from school curriculum; Tatum, 2017). These master narratives influence development early in life, so it is important to understand how they are informing White children's personal narratives.

Ethnic-Racial Identity Development

While ERI research has primarily been conducted with adolescents of Color (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014), there is a small body of literature examining ERI development earlier in life. Middle childhood is a particularly important period of identity development because it marks a

developmental shift in children's capacity to engage in social reasoning. During this time, children develop more complex socio-cognitive abilities and broaden their participation in social contexts that have implications for their understanding of ethnic-racial groups (Quintana, 2008). For example, whereas children as young as age 4 view race as a salient attribute and use it as the basis for categorizing individuals by racial group (Pauker et al., 2016), focusing primarily on physical characteristics such as hair and skin color, these notions shift during middle childhood as children begin to think about ethnicity-race in terms of less visible concepts like ancestry and cultural practices (Quintana, 2008).

Research evidence supports this developmental progression in children's reasoning about race and ethnicity, among both children of Color and White children. Rogers and colleagues (2012), for example, examined the meaning that second and fourth grade children ascribed to their ERI. Children who identified as Dominican, Chinese, Russian, Black, or White were asked what it means to be of that ethnic-racial group. Results revealed that language (e.g., "I speak Chinese," p. 103) and heredity and birthplace (e.g., "If your mother is Dominican, then you are Dominican," p. 102) were most frequently mentioned in children's responses. Moreover, White and Black children mentioned physical characteristics and made group comparisons more often than Dominican, Chinese, and Russian children. Although few age-related differences were found, fourth as compared with second grade children more often referenced multiple aspects of their background (Rogers et al., 2012). Previous research has also examined the centrality of race for children's sense of self and has found that children of Color tend to rank race as more central to their self-concept than White children. Research indicates that few White children situate being White as an important part of themselves (Turner & Brown, 2007; Rogers & Meltzoff, 2017).

Whiteness and White Racial Identity

Little attention has been paid to how White people experience Whiteness in a racialized society (Rogers et al., 2020). Existing models posit that White racial identity development includes challenging the internalization of racism, becoming aware of Whiteness and recognizing it as personally and socially significant, and committing to racial justice (see Helms, 2020). These models have been almost exclusively examined with samples of White college-aged youth and adults and lack attention to the development of White racial identity earlier in life. Indeed, much less is known about White children's racial identity development (see Rogers et al., 2020).

A small body of research has investigated how White children and youth construct White identities and understand Whiteness. For example, in an ethnographic study of White high school students, Perry (2002) identified three strategies that White youth used to negotiate their Whiteness and form their racial identity. Specifically, White youth expressed *White as the norm* through describing Whiteness in terms of what it is not (e.g., not Black). They also endorsed *post-cultural* beliefs about race, for example, believing that race does not matter or that racism is a thing of the past (i.e., colorblindness). Finally, White youth provided *symbolic-ethnic* descriptions of Whiteness by drawing on their European immigrant ancestries (Perry, 2002). In another study, Grossman and Charmaraman (2009) found that White youth distanced themselves from Whiteness and focused instead on their ethnic or American identities. Further, 60% of White youth reported either not having explored their racial identity or believing that race does not matter (Grossman & Charmaraman, 2009). These findings align with Perry's (2002) findings and suggest that White youth minimize the role of Whiteness in their lives (i.e., White as norm), endorse a colorblind ideology (i.e., post-cultural), and often opt to identify as American or with their ethnic heritage rather than as White (i.e., symbolic-ethnic). Taken together these studies

suggest that White youths' conceptions of Whiteness (i.e., personal narratives) reinforce the normalcy of Whiteness.

These trends are also evident in middle childhood. For example, Turner and Brown (2007) found that no White 5- to 12- year old children placed race in a rank order of their top three most central social identities. In another study, 89% of 7- to 12-year-old White children reported that race was not an important part of themselves (Rogers & Meltzoff, 2017). When asked about the meaning of their race, White children were marginally more likely than Black and Mixed-Race youth to describe the equality of racial groups or state that being White does not mean anything (Rogers & Meltzoff, 2017). While the two studies discussed above begin to address White children's conceptions of what it means to be White, they were limited in their measure of identity. That is, each study provided children with limited choices for identification (e.g., Asian, Black, Hispanic, or White; Rogers & Meltzoff, 2017) potentially presuming that White children would identify as White. In contrast, Brown and colleagues (2010) found that some White children identified as American, with a hyphenated American label, or with an ethnic/cultural/religious group (e.g., Jewish, Irish). Thus, White children may also be negotiating Whiteness through their national, ethnic heritage or religious identity.

To date, little research has explored White children's reasoning about their national, ethnic, and religious identities. In one study, Hazelbaker (2017) found that, in a sample of ethnically and racially diverse third grade children, most selected the label 'American' and referenced birthplace and residence (e.g., "Because I was born in America") when explaining their choice (Hazelbaker, 2017, p. 18). Findings from another study with 10- to 12-year-old children found that compared with their White peers, children of Color identified as American more often and referenced pride and feelings of belonging when explaining what it means to be

American (Rodriguez et al., 2016). White children in the study tended to identity as White, but their reasoning was not probed due to the study's focus on American identity (Rodriguez et al., 2016). We were not able to identify any studies directly exploring White children's reasoning about their ethnic identity. However, these identifications were mentioned by some children when describing what it meant to be White or American, for example, through describing their family heritage (e.g., ancestors from Germany; Hazelbaker, 2017). Similarly, in the United States, limited attention has been paid to children's religious identity formation. Studies conducted outside of the United States indicate the 5- to 6-year-old children are capable of labeling their religion (see Connolly et al., 2002). Thus, the goals of the current study were to explore both how White children identity in terms of ethnicity, race, nationality, and religion and how they make sense of their identification.

Current Study

The purpose of the current study was to explore how White children make sense of Whiteness and construct their personal narratives. Specifically, we were interested in (a) the labels White children use to define themselves along with (b) their personal narratives including their beliefs and knowledge about their identity. We used a phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2016) which includes describing the essence of a lived phenomenon (i.e., White children's ERI development), interviewing several individuals who have this phenomenon in common, and developing a description of the nature of the experience for these individuals. A sample of White children were intentionally recruited from a rural, racially diverse elementary school because it offered a unique opportunity to better understand how White children construct and negotiate their personal narratives within a racially diverse context.

Method

Community Setting

Generally perceived as homogenous and majority White, the midwestern state where data were collected has experienced rapid demographic changes in the last 50 years as a result of increased immigration. Since the late 1900s, the state has been a haven for refugees from many countries fleeing civil war and oppression. Two major factors support the growing number of immigrant and refugee community members: a strong economy rooted in agriculture and food processing and a strong network of social safety programs. While immigrants and people of Color are more likely to live in urban areas, some rural towns, including the study community, have drawn immigrants and refugees away from the city due to the increased job opportunities.

Franklin City (pseudonym) is a rural town with a population of less than 5,000 located in a midwestern state. The community is racially diverse; the three largest ethnic-racial groups are White (48%), Latinx (21%), and Black or African American (11%). In Franklin City, the shift in ethnic-racial composition has elicited mixed responses from the community. On the one hand, community members celebrate an annual multicultural festival to accompany the naturalization ceremony for new citizens. In contrast, fear and stereotypes endorsed by White community members used to living in a majority White town persist. For example, prior to the 2018-2019 school year, the school board voted against creating a mural of the student body on the outside of the high school building. Example murals portrayed mostly people of Color prompting members of the community to make negative comments on social media such as, “We don’t need to highlight our students of color anymore” and “Everybody knows Franklin City is a school of diversity.”

Research Site

The current study is part of a larger project that examined children's ethnic-racial, national (American), and religious identities, their intergroup beliefs and attitudes, and their parents' and teachers' attitudes and ethnic-racial socialization practices. Data were collected from first, third, and fifth grade students, and their parents and teachers at Franklin City Elementary School (pseudonym), a K – 6 public school comprised of around 480 students and 40 full-time teachers.

Franklin City Elementary School was selected as the research setting because the ethnic-racial diversity mirrors the larger child demographic shifts in the United States. In the 2018-2019 school year, the student body was 54% White, 29% Latinx, 14% African American, and 3% another race-ethnicity; 61% of students qualified for free and/or reduced-price meals and 26% were classified as English language learners. Although the aggregate religious affiliation of students at the school was not available, parents of children (N = 83) in the larger study reported identifying as Christian (e.g., Lutheran, Catholic) and Muslim. In contrast to the student body, however, the teachers at this school were mostly White, mirroring the more general mismatch between educators and public-school children across the United States (Geiger, 2018).

Participants

Participants were 53 6- to 7- (n = 17), 8- to 9- (n = 15), and 10- to 12-year-old (n = 21) children (M_{age} = 8.97, SD = 1.72). Children reported their gender: 53% identified as boys, 45% identified as girls, and 2% preferred not to answer. All parents (n = 53; M_{age} = 37.94, SD = 6.78) reported their own and their child's ethnicity-race as White/European American. Based on parent report, most children lived in two-parent households (77%). Parent education ranged from completing high school to an advanced degree; 70% of children had at least one parent who held a 4-year college or advanced degree. Average reported family income was 5.43 (SD = 1.73)

which corresponds to between $50,001 – $75,000 on a scale ranging from less than $10,000 to more than $200,000. Parents also reported their political affiliation as Republican (40%), Democrat (26%), or Independent (13%); 21% preferred not to answer.

Procedure

Procedures were approved by the University of California, Los Angeles' Institutional Review Board (IRB#18-000262). The lead author spent a substantial amount of time at Franklin City Elementary School during the spring of 2018 (for a pilot study) and again from September through December of 2018 (data collection for the current study). Prior to recruitment and data collection, the lead author spent two weeks volunteering in the classrooms and visiting parent information sessions. A packet with consent forms and a demographic questionnaire was sent home with all first, third, and fifth grade children who were encouraged to bring the packet back to school whether their parents provided consent or not. Only children who received parental consent and who themselves provided verbal assent were interviewed individually in a quiet room in the school by the first author. Interviews ranged between 15 and 30 minutes in length and were audio-recorded. The current study focuses on participants who were identified by their parents as White.

Measures

Ethnic-Racial, National, and Religious Identification

Child participants completed a measure of social group identification (Bernal et al., 1990) that assessed which ethnic-racial, national, and religious labels children identified with. It contained a list of 17 social groups informed by census data on the major ethnic-racial groups residing in the area of data collection, alongside additional labels typically used to categorize one's ethnic-racial, national, and religious group membership (e.g., Lutheran, Hispanic,

German). Each label was presented sequentially on an iPad. Children were asked, “Are you [label]?” and they indicated their response (i.e., “yes”, “no”, or “I don’t know”) on the iPad. At the end of the task, they were given an opportunity to provide any other labels that described them. To explore which of their identifications were most central to their sense of self, children were shown all the labels that they selected and asked, “Which of these words is most like you?” to form a rank order of the groups they selected.

Identification Interview

Children were asked five open-ended questions about the meaning and importance of their identification as well as from whom they have learned about belonging to that group (adapted from Hazelbaker, 2017; Gillen-O’Neel et al., 2015). Example questions included: “What does it mean to you to be [group]?” and “How do you know that you are [group]?”

Positionality

The lead author conducted all the recruitment and data collection and worked with two undergraduate research assistants to analyze the data. The lead author identifies as White and cisgender female. The undergraduate research assistants identify as Latina and cisgender female and Mexican-American and cisgender female and were unfamiliar with the school context. The second author, the senior developmental scientist on the team, identifies as cisgender female, and as Asian-American of South Asian heritage. She audited the data analysis due to her substantive expertise in the area of young children’s social identity development and experience with qualitative methods. All researchers discussed potential power differentials, personal biases and expectations about what they would find before and throughout coding the data. In an effort to minimize bias due to the lead author’s proximity to the data (i.e., having conducted all of the

interviews and spent time within the school context), the two undergraduate research assistants completed the final coding analysis.

Analysis

All interviews were transcribed by trained research assistants. During transcription, identifying information was omitted and a verbatim transcription of speech was typed while removing interview noise (i.e., denaturalized transcription; Oliver et al., 2005). Data were coded by the team described above using Strauss and Corbin's (1998) procedure for open-ended data. This involved an iterative process of selecting 20-25% of responses to define and refine codes until coders reached agreement on the final set of codes. The codes were developed using both an inductive and deductive (e.g., based on previous research; Hazelbaker 2017; Rogers et al., 2012) approach. The two undergraduate research assistants coded the data, and interrater reliability was established (κ = .88).

Results

We begin by describing the labels that White children used to define themselves. Next, we draw on children's interview responses to illustrate their identity-related beliefs and knowledge while paying attention to how these personal narratives conform to the master narratives of White supremacy and colorblindness.

The Labels White Children Use to Define Themselves

White children selected an average of three labels to describe themselves (M = 3.47, SD = 2.14; range = 1–10). As displayed in Figure 1-1, children most frequently selected American, followed by White labels and specific ethnic heritage (e.g., Irish, German) or religious (e.g., Lutheran, Christian) labels. However, a different pattern emerged when considering which label children picked as most central to their sense of self. That is, when asked which group was most

like them, almost half of the children selected American (n = 25) and one-third chose an ethnic label (n = 18). White or a religious label were less frequently selected (n = 5, respectively; see Figure 1-1).

It is notable that children in our sample selected White as a label that described themselves but ranked American and ethnic heritage labels as more like them than White. This may, in part, be due to their apparent discomfort when asked, "Are you White?" Specifically, some children were hesitant to answer the question, oftentimes shrugging their shoulders and saying "I guess" or attempting to hide their answer from the interviewer. Unfortunately, our data do not speak to the reason for this discomfort. It might be that children had never been asked this question directly before and they may have been confused. Or it may be that children have already started to internalize the messaging that race is a taboo topic (Apfelbaum et al., 2008). Although we did not ask about Whiteness directly in the follow-up interview (unless the child identified most as White), it was described within many children's beliefs and knowledge about nationality, ethnicity, and religion (see below).

White Children's Personal Narratives

Children's beliefs and knowledge about the label they chose as most like them were coded into two categories: *tangible factors* (e.g., concrete or literal factors associated with group membership including family heritage, birthplace, cultural practices and beliefs, language, and physical characteristics; n = 43) and *social factors* (e.g., socially defined expectations about groups including stereotypical, colorblind, or historical statements about race; n = 26). In the discussion that follows, we describe how children used tangible and social factors to describe their identity and negotiate Whiteness. We pay attention to how White children's personal narratives draw upon the master narratives of White supremacy (i.e., White superiority, White

privilege, normalizing Whiteness) and colorblindness. This discussion is organized around five personal narratives including children who (1) lacked an awareness of the meaning of their group membership; (2) focused only on tangible aspects of identity; (3) provided an ethnic heritage or ancestry-based description of their identity; (4) normalized Whiteness; and (5) reported colorblind beliefs about race.

Lack of Personal Narratives

Nine children struggled to articulate their beliefs and knowledge about the label they selected as most like them. For example, some children provided only brief, affective sentiments such as: "I like being American" or "[Being White] is good." Others said, "I don't know" or provided a response that was not identity-related (e.g., associating being Swedish with being sweet). These children tended to be among the youngest in our sample (i.e., $n = 6$ were 6- to 7-year-olds). Developmentally, this is not surprising as young children may lack the socio-cognitive skills to wrestle with the complexity of their group membership (Quintana, 2008). These children's lack of awareness of race and ethnicity and the meaning behind their group membership suggest that their personal narratives are still developing.

Narratives Focused on Tangible Factors

Almost one-quarter of our participants ($n = 12$) focused only on tangible factors associated with their label choice. There were no descriptive differences by age, or the label children selected as most like them. These children commonly referenced physical characteristics, residence, and cultural practices. Children who referenced physical characteristics often used skin color to describe their identity. Owen (age 9), for example, said, "I can see it on my hands and on my body. Other people can see it. That's the most known fact about me cause if they do see me, they will see that I'm White." On the other hand, those who

identified as American commonly drew on their place of residence to explain that they were American saying, for example, “I live in the United States of America” or “Most of my family is from America.” A couple children referenced food in their responses including Gwen (age 6) who shared that she is Irish because, “My mom makes really good Irish food.” However, their responses indicated that they did not have a clear conceptualization of ethnic food differences. This was the case for Gwen who in response to an interviewer follow-up of, “What does she make?” responded, “Tacos.” Finally, three 10- to 12-year-old children who most identified with a religious group (e.g., Lutheran) cited religious practices such as going to church and believing in God to make sense of their identity.

As evident by the quotes above, children were focused on observable characteristics associated with their group membership and some were beginning to understand that group membership has something to do with their parents’ socialization of practices, activities, and preferences (Loyd & Gaither, 2018). Given the ages of the children in this study, this type of reasoning aligns with Quintana’s (2008) developmental model of racial perspective-taking and, in particular, young children’s tendency to focus on concrete aspects of race. It may be that these children are still developing a more complex understanding of their identity including the ways in which it influences their experiences, sense of self, and stories about themselves (i.e., personal narratives).

Narratives Describing Ethnic Heritage

Ten White children in our study negotiated their Whiteness by identifying instead with their ethnic heritage. These children tended to be among our oldest participants (n = 8 10-12-year-olds). They had knowledge of their European ancestry and drew on that to make sense of their identity. Often, their reasoning was tied to such factors as family heritage. For example,

children frequently described the ethnic heritage of their grandparents saying things like: "[My grandpa] was half Irish, so I was half Irish" or "I don't know much about Sweden and Germany, but I know my great grandparents and my great grandparents came from Sweden and Germany."

Of interest, and invoking a reference to the Holocaust, Benjamin (age 10) and Gretchen (age 7), who both identified as German, were careful to note that their German ancestors were good. Benjamin shared, "Even though I'm German it doesn't mean that my grandpas were on the bad side. They were actually with Americans even though they were German which is actually why I'm proud of it. If they were on the bad side, it would be like – I'm not [proud]." Gretchen similarly noted that being German, **"**Means that I kind of feel powerful and even though I think Germans were a little mean, now I think they're really nice and I don't care anymore because some are my ancestors." Gretchen went on to say that she likes being German because it makes her feel "excited that my ancestors were different than me and a lot of kids have different stuff about them, but I don't really have anything."

The narratives above do not explicitly speak to children's conceptions of Whiteness. What they do emphasize, however, is the privilege that White individuals have to identify with their ethnic heritage rather than their Whiteness. Indeed, this substitution – and the ability to see oneself outside of race – is a product of White supremacy (see Helms, 2017; Perry, 2002). However, it is notable that not all the children who identified with an ethnic label conformed to this master narrative in the same way.

That is, two children admitted that they did not want other kids to find out about their heritage because they were worried about not fitting in or being made fun of. For example, Harper (age 7) shared, "My great grandma was half [American] Indian… I want it to be a secret because I don't want anyone to think that I don't belong here. Some friends laugh at me because

they think I don't belong here." While scholars have framed White youth identifying with an ethnic-heritage label as distancing themselves from their Whiteness (see Grossman & Charmaraman, 2009; Perry, 2002), the finding that two children were wary of others discovering their ethnic heritage may be indicative of children's understanding of White superiority. Although we cannot say for sure, these children may be aware of the stigmatization of Indigenous and other communities of color due to their deviation from the norm of Whiteness.

Narratives Normalizing Whiteness

In our study, 16 children's personal narratives were classified as reinforcing White as the normative racial group to which other ethnic-racial groups are compared. Notably, all the children in this category identified as American and there were no descriptive differences by age. Children in this classification normalized Whiteness by citing a variety of tangible factors and most commonly conflating being American with speaking English and being White. For example, when asked why he chose American as most like him, Landon (age 8) said: "because I'm White. I speak English. I eat American food like hamburgers, candy, and lemonade." Responses like this – that grant the label of American only to White Americans – are shaped by and reinforce the master narratives of White supremacy and colorblindness. Indeed, many children were quick to invoke this association. For example, Sophia (age 6) was asked if all of their friends were American during a discussion about eating watermelon with their "American friends." They replied, "Uh no. Some of my friends are Somali." Levi (age 8) stated that he knows he is American because of "My skin color… if it's not White then it's maybe from Africa." Finally, Stella (age 10) shared that being American was important to her because "I'd be a whole different person if I wasn't… [I] would not wear the same clothes, I'd be a little different skin tone, speak another language."

Children also normalized White culture by associating playing sports, Christianity, and celebrating certain religious and cultural holidays with being American and White. Some children described sports as something that only Americans know about. Evan (age 10) implicitly disassociated being Somali with being American by saying that being American means, "I have access to sports. Some kids that are Somali, their parents don't like it when they play sports." Further, children described being American in terms of what it is not, for example, saying that they know they are American because Somali people do not celebrate Christmas or because they do not speak any other languages. In the personal narratives described above, children incorporated aspects of the cultural scripts of White supremacy as part of their own identity-related beliefs. For example, the superiority of the White racial group is reinforced through the association of American as equal to White and that certain activities, religion, and holidays are normal and exclusive to White culture (Helms, 2017; Roberts & Rizzo, 2020).

Colorblind Narratives

Finally, nine children drew on social factors and made statements that race is a thing of the past, described racism as only historical, or reported that everyone is the same and race does not matter. Colorblind narratives were endorsed by five children who selected American as most like them along with three who chose White and one who selected an ethnic label. Descriptively, younger children tended to endorse the belief that race does not matter, while older children referenced historical racism and described racism as a something in the past. For example, Noah (age 6) shared that he likes being White and that "It doesn't matter if you're White or Black." On the other hand, Lillian (age 9), talked about where she learned about being American, saying:

> You don't really talk about that at my house… [In school] we talk about Martin Luther King Jr. and Ruby Bridges. We read books about them and we talk about them as even if

> you're different it doesn't matter… We would talk about how they used to be separated that there'd be a group of people in one school and the White people would get all the good things and the Black people would get all the bad things. And then they would fight because some people didn't think that it was fair. Right now, all of us are sharing a school because everybody thinks that's not fair to have people split… I think that it's better than it was way back there. It's way better because there's not as much problems as there used to be and drama because a long time ago people used to fight about it. Now, everybody's calm and they don't care.

Lillian and other children in this classification incorporated the master narrative of colorblindness into their own personal narratives. They did so by describing racism as part of the past and reinforcing the narrative that race does not matter – that "everybody's calm and they don't care." Lillian's response also highlights the common practice of silence about race utilized by many White parents who believe that not talking about race will help their children not notice it (Loyd & Gaither, 2018). However, endorsing beliefs that deny or ignore the importance of race does nothing to challenge and instead reproduces racial inequality (Neville et al., 2013).

Alternative Narrative

To conclude, we want to draw on a personal narrative that differs from the five categories above. Although just one child, we include this personal narrative to illustrate the variability in White children's negotiation of Whiteness and to show that there are White children who are, at times, deviating from and questioning the master narratives of White supremacy and colorblindness. Grayson (age 10) was one of the five children who identified most as White. When discussing what it means to be White, he shared:

Grayson: Other people think being White gives you more opportunities, but I don't really think it does. Just cause what's the difference? Your skin is a different color, so what? … I just seen some like historical videos about Martin Luther King that everyone's different, but all White people are different, no one is the same so why do we treat people from a different race differently?

Interviewer: Have you ever talked to your parents about being White?

Grayson: Uh, not really. It's kind of a thing that we just keep to ourselves. I mean once in a while I'll see a thing about like a Black kid getting shot because he goes through a window of his own house, and I sometimes think if a White kid did that, would they shoot him or not? … I just think about it sometimes, like would it be different if a different race was in there.

Grayson's response conforms to the master narratives, but also questions them. For example, he asserts that everyone is the same, but questions White privilege (although not in those words). Moreover, he was the only child in the current study to reference contemporary racism and question the racial aspect of a current event. Grayson appears to be negotiating his Whiteness in a way that differs from the other children in our sample.

Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to explore how White children negotiate Whiteness. We examined whether they identify as White or with an ethnic heritage, national American, or religious label. We also explored how children make sense of their identity and in what ways their personal narratives conform to and reproduce the master narratives of White supremacy and colorblindness. We found evidence that most White children were aware of their Whiteness (i.e., 75% chose the White label to describe themselves). Notably, 25% of children did not label

themselves as White. This finding parallels a body of research with White adults in which they tend to identify as American or with an ethnic heritage label rather than White when asked what their race is (see Helms, 2020). Moreover, very few children identified most as White instead selecting American or an ethnic heritage label as most like them. While our data do not speak to why children placed their White identification lower in their rank order of identities, it is notable that so few selected White as most like them. These findings are not surprising because Whiteness, due to its position of power and privilege, often goes unexamined by White individuals (Helms, 2020). Especially in majority White spaces, including Franklin City, Whiteness is not often explicitly named.

Regarding how White children made sense of their identity, our findings revealed two groups of children who lacked personal narratives or discussed only tangible aspects of their identification. These two classifications of personal narratives align with Quintana's (2008) model of racial perspective-taking. It is developmentally appropriate that the younger children in our sample struggled to articulate identity-related beliefs. Moreover, the focus on tangible factors is common in middle childhood and consistent with prior research (Quintana, 2008; Rogers et al., 2012). The master narrative framework has only recently been applied to examinations of children's identity formation (see Syed & McLean, 2020) and little is known regarding at what age children begin to develop personal narratives. These findings suggest that middle childhood may be a formative period for White children's developing personal narratives.

While the small body of research examining White adults' racial identity (see Helms, 2020) is instructive, it lacks attention to the development of White racial identity earlier in life. Even in adolescence, there are only a few studies examining White racial identity development, and ours is one of even fewer exploring this process during middle childhood. Our findings

indicate that White children are negotiating Whiteness in similar ways as White youth (Grossman & Charmaraman, 2009; Perry, 2002). White children in our study negotiated Whiteness and conformed to the master narratives of White supremacy and colorblindness in three distinct ways. Consistent with Perry's (2002) findings, children (1) described their ethnic heritage rather than racial group membership, (2) normalized Whiteness, and (3) endorsed colorblind beliefs. It is notable – although perhaps not surprising – that we found evidence of the internalization of the ideologies of White supremacy and colorblindness in 6- to 12-year old White children's personal narratives. While limited, there is some evidence that White children internalize White superiority and Whiteness as normative as early as preschool (Feagin & Ausdale, 2001). Indeed, we also found evidence of White teachers at Franklin City Elementary School conforming to these master narratives (see Study 3). Teachers, for example, valued the diversity at the school, but simultaneously endorsed stereotypes about people of Color and minimized the importance of race. One teacher noted that White students were less aware of their own racial background as compared with children of Color after overhearing a White student share, "Culture? I don't have a culture." Master narratives are pervasive, culturally held scripts that operate at multiple levels and guide individuals' thoughts and behaviors (McLean & Syed, 2015).

It is striking that only one child in the current study questioned these master narratives while most of the children appeared uncomfortable during their interviews. One child admitted that doing the interview was "weird, cause I don't even really think about these things." Indeed, thinking about Whiteness and learning to identify as White are posited as the first step towards the development of anti-racism for White children and youth (Hazelbaker et al., *under review*). That is, in order to deviate from the master narratives and develop a personal narrative that

incorporates an alternative narrative of anti-racism, White children have to recognize that they have a race and begin to understand the role it plays in their lives.

Our findings have important implications for the socialization of White children. Parents and teachers of White children must talk about race. In school, this includes anti-bias and anti-racist pedagogy. At home, this includes conversations about race, racism, and Whiteness. Race-related socialization is crucial to support White children in negotiating their Whiteness in a constructive and healthy capacity in order to move towards anti-racism (Hazelbaker et al., *under review*).

Limitations and Future Directions

One limitation of the current study was the limited sample of White children from one particular school context. Indeed, scholars posit that identity development is transactional; that is, one's personal narrative is inseparable from the time and place in which they are experienced (Williams et al., 2020). Thus, more research is warranted to examine how White children in urban or suburban communities, in racially homogenous communities, or in politically progressive communities negotiate Whiteness. A second limitation is that we limited the follow up interview to the label that children selected as most like them. Drawing on an intersectional approach and asking children about the relationship between their racial, ethnic, national and/or religious identities (e.g., what does it mean to be White, Irish, Lutheran, and American?) is an important avenue for future research.

A strength of the current study was exploring White children's racial identity development and paying particular attention to how they negotiated Whiteness. This study begins to fill the gap in developmental science's understanding of the process of racial identity development for White children. However, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how

White children negotiating Whiteness and form their racial identity, more research is needed. Additionally, a novel contribution of this study was extending the master narrative framework to an exploration of racial identity development in middle childhood. Most often, the master narrative approach has been used with samples of adolescents and emerging adults (Syed & McLean, 2020). Fewer studies to date have utilized this framework during middle childhood and those that have focused on gender identity development (see Rogers, 2020). This raises important directions for future research including examining if the personal narratives found in this study are seen in other contexts and at other ages, and, importantly, if and when White children resist the master narratives in developing their personal narratives.

Conclusion

Rogers and colleagues (2020) assert that, "the social construction of race is inextricable from whiteness… [but] when researchers do examine ERI among Whites, there seems to be a lack of attention to the racialized experiences of whiteness" (p. 12-13). The current study explored how children's personal narratives conformed to master narratives of White supremacy (i.e., White superiority, White privilege, normalizing Whiteness) and colorblindness. Findings from the current study were consistent with the ways in which White youth negotiated Whiteness, that is, by identifying with their ethnic heritage, normalizing Whiteness and endorsing colorblind beliefs (Grossman & Charmaraman, 2009; Perry, 2002). Our study suggests that White children as young as 6- to 12-years-old are internalizing aspects of these ideologies and using these cultural scripts to make sense of their own identities.

Our study highlights that it is imperative for White children to learn about Whiteness and the systems and structures that uphold racial inequality so that they can work to dismantle – rather than uphold – them. Indeed, many White individuals are "waking up" to the racialized

realities of racism in this country after recent events including the murder of George Floyd and the White supremacist insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. White individuals also need to "wake up to the racialized realities of Whiteness, educate their children about White supremacy and White privilege, and begin the crucial work of raising anti-racist White children.

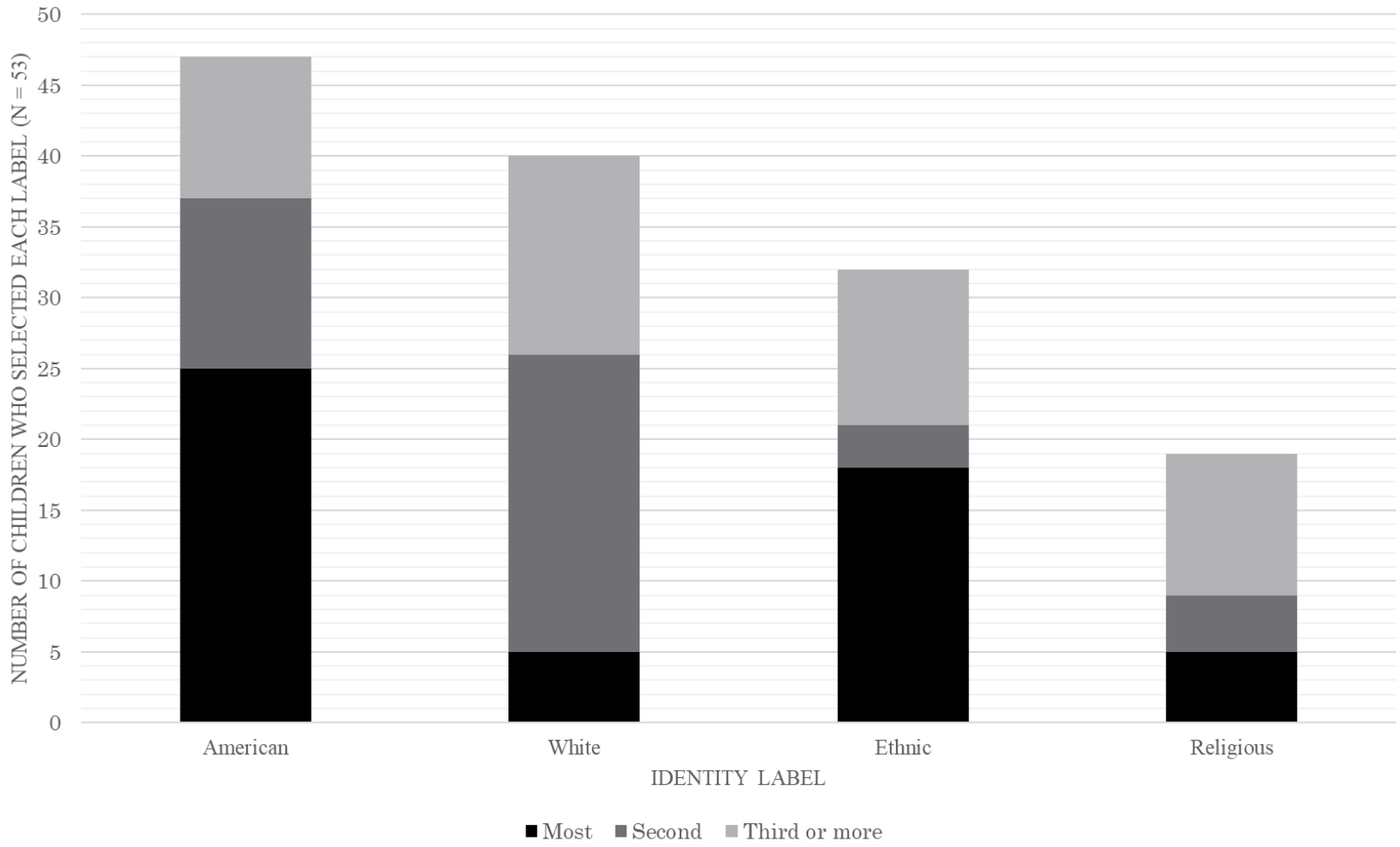

Figure 1-1. Frequency of Ethnic, Racial, National American and Religious Label Selection

Note. Ethnic includes German, Irish, Norwegian, Swedish; Religious includes Christian, Lutheran, Catholic.

Legend: rank order of labels

STUDY 2
White Children's Ethnic-Racial and Religious Attitudes

White Children's Ethnic-Racial and Religious Attitudes

In the fall of 2018 – the period of data collection for the current study – the Southern Poverty Law Center (2019) reported 3,265 incidents of hate and bias based on race, sexual orientation, immigrant status, and religion witnessed by K-12 educators in the United States. Children, for example, used racial slurs when referring to Black students, chanted "build the wall," shared anti-Semitic jokes, and called Muslim students, "terrorists" (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2019, p. 4). Racist and xenophobic incidents like these are a product of the intergroup attitudes (i.e., positive and negative feelings about members of one's own or other social groups) that children develop early in life and are influenced by children's proximal contexts including their home (Pauker et al., 2017).

A large body of developmental science evidence demonstrates that children, particularly White children, hold strong ingroup biases – showing preference for and attributing more favorable traits to their own as compared with other groups – at an early age (Pauker et al., 2017). Although more limited in scope, some researchers have investigated efforts to reduce White children's racial ingroup bias and their findings suggest that parents' conversations about race and racism (i.e., color-conscious socialization) help to reduce children's racial bias (Perry et al., 2020; Vittrup & Holden, 2011), although on average few White parents report color-conscious socialization (Loyd & Gaither, 2018). Children's ideas and beliefs about ethnic-racial groups have also been shown to be influenced by parental attitudes about race and racism (Pahlke et al., 2012), although once again research on this topic is limited. In general, less is known about children's ideas and beliefs about religion and how they are shaped by parents' attitudes and socialization about religion. To expand understanding of White children's intergroup attitudes and the influence of parents' attitudes and socialization practices, the current

study sought to descriptively explore: (1) White children's conceptions of and attitudes about ethnic-racial and religious groups, (2) parents' attitudes and socialization about ethnic-racial and religious groups, and (3) associations between children's intergroup beliefs and attitudes and parental attitudes and socialization practices.

Theoretical Framework

The current study was guided by Developmental Intergroup Theory (DIT) which posits that young children recognize salient attributes of individuals in their environment (e.g., based on racial features or religious markers), categorize individuals into social groups, and attach meaning to these groups (Bigler & Liben, 2007). It is well-documented that ethnicity and race are salient social groups for children (see Quintana, 2008). Further, using DIT as a lens it is plausible that religion is another relevant social category for children because they may be using salient religious markers (e.g., a Muslim girl wearing a hijab) to categorize people into religious groups. According to DIT, parents who do not explicitly discuss ethnicity-race or religion – as is true for many White parents (Loyd & Gaither, 2018) – are leaving their children to come up with their own, oftentimes inaccurate and stereotypic, ideas about these groups (Bigler & Liben, 2007).

Children's Conceptions of and Attitudes about Ethnic-Racial and Religious Groups

Middle childhood (ages 6-12) marks a developmental shift in children's capacity to engage in social reasoning. During this time, children develop more complex socio-cognitive abilities and broaden their participation in social situations that have implications for their understanding of ethnic-racial and religious groups (Quintana, 2008). Evidence demonstrates that children as young as 4-years-old are capable of categorizing individuals by racial groups and show a preference for their racial ingroup (Pauker et al., 2016). By ages 5 to 7, White children

continue to display a preference for their ingroup and begin to show signs of bias toward the outgroup (Raabe & Beelmann, 2011). For example, White children endorse more positive feelings and traits about White people, while ascribing more negative feelings and traits to another racial group until about age 7. Their expression of explicit racial biases decreases thereafter likely influenced by a growing awareness of the social taboos around talking about race or stating explicitly racially biased comments (Raabe & Beelmann, 2011).

While some studies conducted outside of the United States provide evidence that children as young as 5-years-old categorize others by religious group (e.g., Connolly et al., 2002), much less is known about children's religious attitudes in the U.S. However, one study found that 6- to 11-year-old non-Muslim children in the United States reported more negative attitudes about Arab Muslim immigrants as identified by clothing markers (i.e., a woman wearing a hijab or a man wearing a White prayer hat) as compared with European American and Arab immigrants (Brown et al., 2017). Additionally, and strongly aligning with the tenets of DIT, results indicated that children who lacked an understanding of the term Muslim more strongly endorsed stereotypes about Arab Muslims as compared with the small group of children who were knowledgeable of the term (i.e., only 11% of children; Brown et al., 2017). An additional goal of the current study was to examine children's conceptions of and attitudes about religious groups given the dearth of knowledge on the topic.

Parents' Ethnic-Racial Attitudes and Socialization Practices

According to DIT, children's ideas about salient social groups are informed by explicit and implicit messages in their home (Bigler & Liben, 2007). Indeed, White parents transmit information about ethnic-racial and religious groups through both their expressed or observed attitudes and conversations and comments about group members (i.e., socialization).

Parental Attitudes

Prior research has examined the relation between children's and parents' intergroup attitudes which show moderate associations when measured on similar scales across respondents show (Degner & Dalege, 2013). Less attention has been paid to the extent to which other indicators of parental attitudes (e.g., their comfort with intergroup contact and endorsement of colorblind beliefs) are related to children's conceptions of and attitudes about ethnic-racial and religious groups. In one study, White children reported lower levels of racial bias if they had parents who had more friends of color (Pahlke et al., 2012). Moreover, prior research suggests that White parents who reported less racially biased attitudes talked to their children more about race and racism (Zucker & Patterson, 2018). While this study did not examine child level associations, it is likely that children are attuned to their parents' racial attitudes. Thus, one of the goals of the current study was to examine the relation between children's ideas and beliefs about ethnic-racial and religious groups and their parents' racial attitudes.

Parent Socialization

White children also learn about ethnic-racial and religious groups through the messages that they receive from their parents. Most of the extant research has focused specifically on how children learn about ethnicity and race from their parents via a process described as ethnic-racial socialization (ERS; Loyd & Gaither, 2018), although much of what is known has focused on ERS among families of color as compared with White families (Umaña-Taylor & Hill, 2020). The smaller body of research examining ERS among White families demonstrates that White parents tend to be silent about race or engage in colorblind ERS (e.g., messages that highlight that everyone is the same or that racism is in the past; Loyd & Gaither, 2018; Vittrup, 2018). Moreover, White children who had mothers who engaged in colorblind ERS held more favorable

attitudes about White versus African American people (Pahlke et al., 2012). Thus, in line with DIT, not talking about race leaves children to draw their own conclusions that may contribute to biased perspectives, stereotypic beliefs, and prejudicial attitudes and behaviors toward others (Bigler & Liben, 2007).

On the other hand, some White parents do engage in color-conscious ERS in which they acknowledge race and racism (see, for example, Vittrup, 2018). A few studies have demonstrated that White parents' color-conscious ERS can reduce their children's racial bias. For example, Vittrup and Holden (2011) found that White children reported more positive attitudes about Black individuals after engaging in race-related discussions with their parent (Vittrup & Holden, 2011). In another more recent study, Perry and colleagues (2020) found that White children's implicit anti-Black attitudes decreased after having conversations about racism (scaffolded by a video scenario and prompts) with their parents. Thus, one of the goals of the current study was to examine if parents' ERS was correlated with children's intergroup attitudes.

Even less attention has been paid to parents' religious socialization. A recent study with a nationally representative sample of parents of 3- to 12-year-old children found that 54% of parents reported talking to their child about their own religion (Kotler et al., 2019). However, very little research to date has examined the messages that parents transmit to their children about other religious groups. In one study exploring parents' role in their children's friendship formation, parents who identified as Christian expressed concerns about children interacting with non-religious families and spoke of Muslim families as having cultural differences (Hunter et al., 2012). However, research has yet to unpack how family religious practices and conversations about other religious groups is related to children's understanding of their own and other groups.

Current Study

The purpose of the current study was to examine White children's conceptions of and attitudes about ethnic-racial and religious groups and the degree to which these attitudes and beliefs were correlated with child and parent level characteristics. The specific research questions were:

1. What are White children's conceptions of ethnic-racial and religious groups (i.e., spontaneous associations)?
    a. To what extent are these conceptions correlated with child (i.e., age, cross-race friendships) and parent level (i.e., attitudes, ERS practices, and religious socialization practices) characteristics?
2. What are White children's attitudes about ethnic-racial and religious groups (i.e., trait attributions)?
    i. To what extent are these attitudes correlated with child (i.e., age, cross-race friendships) and parent level (i.e., attitudes, ERS practices, and religious socialization practices) characteristics?

Hypotheses

Regarding children's conceptions of ethnic-racial and religious groups, I expected younger children to say "I don't know" more often than older children due in part to their developing socio-cognitive abilities (see Quintana, 2008). Consistent with Brown and colleagues' (2017) findings, I also expected children to have less knowledge about religious as compared with ethnic-racial groups. Given the developmental trends in children's intergroup attitudes described above, it was expected that younger children – more so than older children – would hold more favorable attitudes about their ingroups as compared with their outgroups

(Raabe & Beelmann, 2011). Further, I expected this variation by age to be evident in both children's ethnic-racial and religious attitudes.

I expected both children's conceptions of and attitudes about ethnic-racial and religious groups to be associated with their cross-race friendships. Davies and colleagues (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of 17 studies that examined the relationship between children's prejudice and cross-race friendships. Results indicated that having at least one cross-race friend was related to lower levels of ethnic-racial prejudice – especially for White children (Davies et al., 2011). I expected to find evidence of this association in the current study; that is, White children will have more knowledge and more favorable attitudes about ethnic-racial and religious groups when they have at least one cross-race friend.

Further, I expected children's conceptions of and attitudes about ethnic-racial and religious groups to be associated with their parents' attitudes and socialization practices. Consistent with Pahlke and colleagues' (2012) findings, I expected that parents' comfort with their child's intergroup contact would be correlated with children's favorable attitudes about ethnic-racial and religious groups. I also hypothesized that parental endorsement of color-conscious but not colorblind attitudes would be related to children having more knowledge of and more favorable attitudes about ethnic-racial groups (see Zucker & Patterson, 2018). I expected this association to be similar for religion as parents with color-conscious racial attitudes would also be likely to hold similar attitudes about religion. Finally, consistent with Pahlke and colleagues' (2012) findings, I expected White children's knowledge of and favorable attitudes about ethnic-racial groups to be correlated with their parents' color-conscious but not colorblind socialization. Extending what is known about the relationship between ERS and ethnic-racial attitudes, I expected to see a correlation between children's religious attitudes and their parents'

religious socialization such that more frequent religious socialization would be related to more knowledge and more favorable attitudes about religious groups.

Method

Research Site

The current study is part of a larger project that examined children's ethnic-racial, national (American), and religious identities, their intergroup beliefs and attitudes, and their parents' and teachers' attitudes and ERS. Data were collected from first, third, and fifth grade students, and their parents and teachers at Franklin City Elementary School (pseudonym), a K – 6 public school comprised of around 480 students and 40 full-time teachers. Franklin City Elementary School was selected as the research setting because the ethnic-racial diversity mirrors the larger child demographic shifts in the United States. In the 2018-2019 school year, the student body was 54% White, 29% Latinx, 14% African American, and 3% another race-ethnicity; 61% of students qualified for free and/or reduced-price meals and 26% were classified as English language learners. Although the aggregate religious affiliation of students at the school was not available, parents of children (N = 83) in the larger study reported identifying as Christian and Muslim. In contrast to the student body, however, the teachers at this school were mostly White, mirroring the more general mismatch between educators and public-school children across the United States (Geiger, 2018).

Participants

Participants were 53 6- to 7- (n = 17), 8- to 9- (n = 15), and 10- to 12-year-old (n = 21) children (M_{age} = 8.97, SD = 1.72) and their parents. Children reported their gender: 53% identified as boys, 45% identified as girls, and 2% preferred not to answer. Parents (n = 53; M_{age} = 37.94, SD = 6.78) completed a demographic questionnaire; fewer completed the follow up

survey (n = 43). All parents reported their own and their child's ethnicity-race as White/ European American and their family religion as Christianity (e.g., Catholic, Jehovah's Witness, Protestant). Based on parent report, most children lived in two-parent households (77%). Parent education ranged from completing high school to an advanced degree; 70% of children had at least one parent who held a 4-year college or advanced degree. Average reported family income was 5.43 (SD = 1.73) which corresponds to between $50,001 – $75,000 on a scale ranging from less than $10,000 to more than $200,000. Parents also reported their political affiliation as Republican (40%), Democrat (26%), or Independent (13%); 21% preferred not to answer.

Procedure

The study was approved by the University of California, Los Angeles' Institutional Review Board (IRB#18-000262). The lead author spent a substantial amount of time at Franklin City Elementary School during the spring of 2018 (for a pilot study) and again from September through December of 2018 (data collection for the current study). A packet with consent forms and a demographic questionnaire was sent home with all first, third, and fifth grade children who were encouraged to bring the packet back to school whether their parents provided consent or not. Only children who received parental consent and who themselves provided verbal assent completed two sessions of data collection. First, children were interviewed individually in a quiet room in the school by the first author. Interviews ranged between 15 and 30 minutes in length and were audio-recorded. Second, children were surveyed for an average of 20-minutes. 6- to 9-year-old children were surveyed individually with all questions read out loud by the lead author. 10- to 12-year-old children completed the survey individually on iPads in small groups of three to four. Parents completed the demographic questionnaire and follow-up survey in the privacy of

their own homes either on paper or online through Qualtrics. Parents who completed both surveys received a $10 Amazon gift card to thank them for their participation.

Measures

Children's conceptions of and attitudes about ethnic-racial and religious groups were examined using two measures. Each measure asked children about four ethnic-racial (i.e., White, Somali, Mexican, Black) and two religious (i.e., Christian, Muslim) groups which were selected based on the demographics of the school and community.

Spontaneous Associations

During their first interview session, children were asked, "First, I'd like to know more about what you think. I'm going to read some words and phrases to you, and I want you to tell me whatever comes to your mind when I read those words." In a randomized order, children were asked, "What do you think of when you hear the word [ethnic-racial/religious group]?" (adapted from Mistry et al., 2015). Verbal responses were audio-recorded and transcribed. Data were coded using Strauss and Corbin's (1998) procedure for open-ended data. This involved an iterative process of selecting 20-25% of responses to define and refine codes until coders reached agreement on the final set of codes. The codes were developed using an inductive approach. Two independent researchers coded the data, and interrater reliability was established (κ = .85).

Trait Attributions

During the second interview session, children reported their ethnic-racial and religious attitudes using a trait attributions measure (Mistry et al., 2015; Pahlke et al., 2012). In a randomized order, they were asked to indicate how many people in specific ethnic-racial or religious groups were six positive (e.g., smart, honest) and six negative (e.g., rude, liars) traits. Children reported their trait attributions on a 5-point pictorial scale ranging from none (1) to

almost all (5). Children's overall attitudes towards each ethnic-racial and religious group were computed by first reverse scoring the negative traits attributions and then averaging the 12 items for a mean score of attitudes toward each group (i.e., higher scores indicate more favorable attitudes). Cronbach's alphas for each ethnic-racial and religious group were adequate (α range = .72 to .84).

Child Level Characteristics

Child Age. Child age in years was calculated at the time of data collection using birthdates (M = 9.15 years, SD = 1.77 years; range: 6- to 12-years-old).

Cross-Race Friendships. To examine children's cross-race friendships, they were asked to share up to three of their good friend(s) in their grade (adapted from Graham et al., 2018). Next, children were asked if each friend was from the same ethnic-racial group as them and indicated "yes," "no" or "I don't know." If children struggled to answer, they were reminded of their own ethnic-racial identification (recorded as part of the larger study). Responses were aggregated across friends and dichotomized (i.e., 1 = children reported at least one cross-race friend and 0 = children reported only same-race friends or said "I don't know").

Parent Level Characteristics

Attitudes About Their Children's Intergroup Contact. To measure parents' attitudes about their children's intergroup contact, they were asked to rate how comfortable they would feel regarding 16 different scenarios of school and neighborhood intergroup contact (adapted from Pahlke, 2009). Parents rated their level of comfort on a five-point scale from extremely uncomfortable (1) to extremely comfortable (5). Example scenarios included asking parents how comfortable they would feel if their child, "attended a school where a majority of the children were Latino/a" and "grew up in a mostly non-White neighborhood." An exploratory factor

analysis (EFA) using principal axis factoring with promax rotations was conducted using an eigenvalues greater than one criteria (used for all parent measures). Results of the EFA and item-level means, and standard deviations are presented in Table 2-1. The EFA indicated that the items loaded onto three factors. Scale scores were created by averaging the responses for each of the items that loaded onto parents' comfort with *diverse contact* (4 items; α = .83) and *majority outgroup contact* (i.e., schools or neighborhoods that were majority Black, Latinx, or Muslim; 4 items; α = .82). Given the limited number of items that loaded on to the third factor and low associated factor loadings (i.e., *majority ingroup contact;* 3 items;), and a low Cronbach's alpha for the third scale score (α = .49), this scale was not included in the analyses (see Table 2-1).

Racial Attitudes. Parents reported their racial attitudes by indicating their agreement with seven statements from the Colorblind Racial Attitudes Scale (Neville et al., 2000) and two statements from the Psychological Costs of Racism Scale (Spanierman & Heppner, 2004). An example statement from each scale is: "Immigrants should try to fit into the culture and adopt the values of the U.S." and "Racism may have been a problem in the past, but it is not an important problem today." Parent responses ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). An EFA indicated that the items loaded onto two factors (see Table 2-2 for item-level means and standard deviations). Scale scores were created by averaging the responses for each of the items that loaded onto parents' *color-conscious* (4 items; α = .76) and *colorblind* (3 items; α = .60) attitudes.

Ethnic-Racial Socialization. Parents were asked to report how often they talk to their child or do things to learn about race and ethnicity. Adapted from Hughes and Chen (1997), parents were asked a subset of 10 questions including five questions about their cultural socialization practices (e.g., "How often have you done things to celebrate the history of other

racial groups?"), two questions about their messages around preparation for bias (e.g., "How often have you talked with your child about how people can be discriminated against because of their race or ethnicity?"), and three questions about their colorblind messages (e.g., "How often have you told your child that race is no longer a problem in society?"). Parents responded to each question using a 5-point scale from never (1) to very often (5).

An EFA indicated a three-factor solution with multiple items loading positively onto more than one factor (results not reported). Guided by previous research, a EFA was conducted specifying a two-factor solution. Results indicated that items loaded onto two factors and scale scores were created by averaging the responses for the items loading onto each factor (see Table 2-3 for item-level means and standard deviations). Factor one was labeled *color-conscious socialization* and included seven items that suggested parents believed racism was in the past but engaged in practices that celebrated and taught their children about their own and other ethnic-racial backgrounds. The second factor, labeled *colorblind socialization*, included three items that suggested parents minimized race and wanted their children to treat everyone the same. Cronbach's alphas were acceptable (α = .83 for color-conscious socialization; α = .68 for colorblind socialization).

Religious Socialization. Adapted from Hughes and Chen (1997; see above), parents were also asked eight questions regarding how often they talk to their child or do things to learn about religion. Parents responded to each question using a 5-point scale from never (1) to very often (5). An EFA indicated a three-factor solution, but examination of the scree plot suggested use of one-factor solution. Thus, an EFA specifying a one-factor solution was conducted (see Table 2-4 for item-level means and standard deviations). A scale score was created and labeled *religious socialization* (8 items; α = .85).

Results

Before examining children's conceptions of and attitudes about ethnic-racial and religious groups and their association with child and parent level characteristics, I describe White parents' attitudes and socialization practices and correlations among these variables. Next, I examine White children's spontaneous associations with ethnic-racial and religious groups and the correlations between spontaneous associations and child (i.e., child age, cross-race friendships) and parent level characteristics (i.e., attitudes about diversity, racial attitudes, and socialization practices). Finally, I examine children's trait attributions and their relation to child and parent level characteristics. Intercorrelations among study variables, along with sample means and standard deviations are presented in Table 2-5.

Parent Level Characteristics: Descriptive Findings

In general, parents showed high levels of comfort with their children having diverse (M = 4.33, SD = 0.65) and majority outgroup contact (M = 4.41, SD = 0.87; r = . 52, p < .01), and low levels of both colorblind (M = 2.82, SD = 0.84) and color-conscious (M = 2.76, SD = 0.79) beliefs. In terms of socialization practices, parents engaged moderate levels of colorblind socialization (M = 3.97, SD = 0.84) and low levels of color-conscious (M = 2.40, SD = 0.84) and religious socialization (M = 2.71, SD = 0.80). Correlations among types of socialization practices ranged from .37 to .84 (ps < .05; see Table 2-5).

Two patterns of correlations between parents' attitudes and socialization practices are noteworthy. First, parents' expressed comfort with diverse and majority outgroup contact were significantly correlated with colorblind attitudes and color-conscious and religious socialization practices, in the expected direction. Higher levels of endorsement of diverse and majority outgroup contact were positively associated with color-conscious and religious socialization

practices (r ranged from .44 to .62, ps < .05) and lower levels of colorblind attitudes (r = -.34 and -.36, p < .05, respectively). Comfort with diverse contact, but not comfort with majority outgroup contact, was significantly related to colorblind socialization (r = .37, p < .05; r = .28, p > .05, respectively). Regarding parental racial attitudes, color-conscious attitudes were significantly related to colorblind socialization (r = -.44, p < .01) whereas colorblind attitudes were associated with color-conscious and religious socialization (r = -.38, p < .05; r = -.49, p < .01, respectively).

Conceptions of Ethnic-Racial and Religious Groups

Children's spontaneous associations with the words White, Black, Mexican, Somali, Muslim, and Christian were coded as social group-related or non-group-related; that is, as indicating whether children connected these words to ethnic-racial and religious groups or struggled to understand them. Group-related associations included tangible factors (e.g., language, physical characteristics, and cultural practices like going to church), descriptive factors (e.g., describing groups of people and their disposition or place of residence), social statements (e.g., referencing the history, stereotypes, or generalizations about groups) about ethnic-racial and religious groups. Non-group-related associations included, for example, associating White with a house or snow or saying, "I don't know."

Over half of the children provided social group-related responses about the words Mexican (75%), Somali (62%), and Christian (62%); fewer reported group-related responses for Muslim (40%), Black (28%), and White (26%). Instead, children frequently associated White and Black with the color (e.g., "White snow," "the black sky") or stated that they did not know the word (e.g., "I don't even know what that [Muslim] is"). Children associated ethnic-racial and religious groups with a variety of social group-related factors. For example, they associated

Mexican with “tacos” and “Spanish,” while Christian was frequently associated with people who go to church. In addition, children associated Somali with negative group descriptors such as, “they always fight,” but also referenced having friends who were Somali and that they speak a different language. Finally, children made social statements and drew on tangible descriptors in their associations with the words White (e.g., “segregation,” “the color of someone’s skin”), Black (e.g., “Somali people,” “darker skin”), Somali (e.g., “girls who wear the thing over their hair and darker skin”), and Muslim (e.g., “a religion,” “I wonder why they have [hijabs]).

Child Level Characteristics

Child age was significantly correlated with children describing social group-related factors about the words Black, Somali, Mexican, Christian, and Muslim (*r* ranged from .32 to .60, *p*s < .05) with older children having more knowledge of these ethnic-racial and religious groups as compared with younger children. Interestingly, and counter to expectations, having at least one cross-race friendship was unrelated to children’s spontaneous associations. Chi-square goodness of fit tests were conducted to further examine age-level differences. For analysis purposes, child age was separated into three groups: 6- to 7-year-olds, 8- to 9-year-olds, and 10- to 12-year-olds. Results indicated significant associations between child age and social group-related responses about the words Black ($\chi^2(2) = 7.05$, $p = .029$), Mexican ($\chi^2(2) = 6.60$, $p = .037$), Somali ($\chi^2(2) = 14.20$, $p = .001$), Christian ($\chi^2(2) = 21.38$, $p < .001$), and Muslim ($\chi^2(2) = 8.09$, $p < .017$). There was no significant association between child age and social group-related responses about the word White ($\chi^2(2) = 4.16$, $p = .13$).

Post-hoc chi-square tests, with Bonferroni adjustments (used throughout the results), indicated that, for the word Somali, 6- to 7-year-old children were less likely to provide social group-related associations as compared with 8- to 9-year-old ($\chi^2(1) = 7.94$, $p = .005$) and 10- to

12-year-old children ($\chi^2(1) = 12.88$, $p < .001$). For the word Christian, results indicated that 6- to 7-year-old and 8- to 9-year-old children were less likely to provide group-related associations as compared with 10- to 12-year-old children ($\chi^2(1) = 20.44$, $p < .001$ and $\chi^2(1) = 10.51$, $p = .001$, respectively). For the word Muslim, results revealed that 6- to 7-year-old children were less likely to report group-related associations as compared with 10- to 12-year-olds ($\chi^2(1) = 7.96$, $p < .005$). No other age-level differences were found (see Table 2-6). While White children's social group-related conceptions varied, older children tended to have more social group-related conceptions of ethnic-racial and religious groups, in particular, Somali, Christian, and Muslim as compared with younger children.

Parent Level Characteristics

Overall, I observed few correlational trends between children's spontaneous associations and parents' attitudes and socialization practices. One exception was the pattern of correlations between children's spontaneous associations and parents' racial attitudes: color-conscious attitudes were significantly correlated with children's social group-related responses about the word Muslim ($r = .48$, $p < .01$) while colorblind attitudes were significantly related to social group-related associations with White ($r = -.47$, $p < .01$) and Christian ($r = -.51$, $p < .01$). This trend suggests that parents who acknowledge race and racism have children who connect the word Muslim with a religious group. On the other hand, parents who deny or ignore the importance of race have children who do not connect the word White with a racial group or Christian with a religious group.

Attitudes About Ethnic-Racial and Religious Groups

Overall, White children in the current study reported favorable attitudes about ethnic-racial and religious groups (see Table 2-5 for means and standard deviations). To examine

differences in their attitudes about ethnic-racial groups, I conducted a one-way repeated measures ANOVA. Results indicated a significant main effect of target group race (i.e., White, Black, Somali, Mexican), $F(3, 44) = 5.70$, $p = .002$, $\eta_p^2 = .12$. Post-hoc paired samples *t*-tests indicated that children held more favorable attitudes about White people as compared with Black ($t(47) = 3.35$, $p = .002$) and Somali people ($t(46) = 3.52$, $p = .001$). No significant differences were found between children's attitudes about White and Mexican people or their attitudes about Black, Somali, and Mexican people (see Table 2-7). To examine differences in children's attitudes towards religious groups, I conducted a paired samples t-test which indicated that children held more favorable attitudes about Christian as compared with Muslim people, $t(39) = 2.88$, $p = .006$. Thus, while children reported generally favorable attitudes about all groups, these attitudes were more favorable for their ingroup (i.e., White and Christian) as compared with some of their outgroups (i.e., Black, Somali, and Muslim).

Child Level Characteristics

No significant correlations were found between children's trait attributions and child age or cross-race friendships (see Table 2-5). Notably, there were no significant correlations between children's spontaneous associations and trait attributions for ethnic-racial and religious groups (see Table 2-5). This suggests that providing a group-related response about an ethnic-racial or religious group was not related to reporting more favorable attitudes about that group.

Parent Level Characteristics

Finally, there were few significant correlations between parent level characteristics and children's trait attributions except in regard to children's attitudes about Somali and Muslim people. That is, children's favorable attitudes about Somali people were significantly correlated with parental comfort with diverse contact ($r = .42$, $p < .01$). Children's favorable attitudes about

Muslim people were significantly correlated with parental comfort with diverse and majority outgroup contact, and color-conscious, colorblind, and religious socialization (*r* ranged from .34 to .47, *p*s < .05). These trends indicate that White children have more favorable attitudes about Muslims, in particular, when they have parents who are comfortable with intergroup contact and engage in ethnic-racial and religious socialization.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine White children's conceptions of and attitudes about ethnic-racial and religious groups and the degree to which they relate to child (e.g., age) and parent level characteristics (e.g., parent socialization). Findings showed a distinct pattern of associations among child and parent characteristics and children's (a) conceptions of and (b) attitudes about ethnic-racial and religious groups.

Conceptions of Ethnic-Racial and Religious Groups

Overall, the results suggest that White children had more social group-related knowledge about the words Mexican, Somali, and Christian and less about Muslim, White and Black. This finding partially supported the study hypothesis that children would have more knowledge about ethnic and racial groups as compared with religious groups. A possible explanation for children's non-group-related responses about racial groups (i.e., White and Black) is the particular context in which the data were collected. Specifically, in Franklin City, White is the majority racial group but is not labeled explicitly. Somali individuals, too, are labeled by their ethnic rather than racial group (i.e., Black). This suggests that children may not be exposed racial labels as often as ethnic or national origin labels and highlights the importance of children's proximal contexts in shaping their understanding of social groups.

The study hypothesis about age-related differences was also partially supported. Consistent with developmental patterns in children's understanding of racial groups (Quintana, 2008), older children had more social group-related knowledge about the words Somali, Christian, and Muslim as compared with younger children. This aligns with Brown and colleagues (2017) findings that only 11% of their sample of 6- to 11-year-old children had knowledge of the term Muslim. Informed by DIT (Bigler & Liben, 2007), it may be that children's conceptions of religion develop later in childhood because religion tends to be less visibly salient than ethnicity and race. The age-related findings about children's conceptions of Somali may again be explained by the children's proximal context. Specifically, there are proportionately few Somali children in Franklin City Elementary School and the Somali population is relatively new to the community. It may be that young children have not had as much exposure to and are still learning about the Somali community.

Attitudes about Ethnic-Racial and Religious Groups

Consistent with prior research examining children's intergroup attitudes (e.g., Raabe & Beelmann, 2011), our results indicated that White children held more favorable attitudes about their ethnic-racial ingroup (i.e., White) as compared with Black and Somali people. There were no significant differences between children's attitudes about White and Mexican people. Findings indicated a similar trend in terms of religious attitudes. That is, children held more favorable attitudes about their religious ingroup (i.e., Christian) as compared with Muslim people. These trends make sense given that, in Franklin City, being Mexican and Somali intersect with other social groups (e.g., language, religion, immigrant status). For example, Mexican community members have been in the town longer than Somali individuals who more recently immigrated to the United States. In terms of religion, White and Mexican community

members tend to be Christian while Somali community members tend to be Muslim. While I do not have evidence that young children are attuned to these intersections, it may be that some racialized others are more accepted due to a shared religious ingroup (e.g., Mexican and White people tend to be Christian). It may also be that young children have not had as much exposure to and are still learning about the Somali and Muslim community.

Contrary to the study hypothesis, child age was unrelated to children's ethnic-racial and religious attitudes. Prior research suggests that White children's racial biases decrease across the middle childhood years due in part to their more nuanced understanding of social norms (see Raabe & Beelmann, 2011). I suspect that the anti-Muslim and anti-Somali rhetoric that permeates the news and that was evident in teachers' attitudes about diversity (see Study 3) contributed to the null association in the current study. That is, instead of becoming aware of the social norm that it is unacceptable to be overtly biased about a group of people, these children are in a context where stereotypes about Somali and Muslim people are common.

Association with Cross-Race Friendships

Given prior study findings demonstrating the benefits of diverse friendships for White children's intergroup attitudes (see Davies et al., 2011), it was also surprising that having at least one cross-race friend was not related to children's intergroup attitudes in the current study. Again, I turn to the context of Franklin City Elementary School to make sense of this finding. As described above, a potential explanation for this null association may be the general lack of knowledge about the Somali community coupled with the anti-Somali, anti-Muslim rhetoric evident at the school, in the community, and in the news. Group-level stereotypes about individuals who are Somali, and Muslim were witnessed in the school context by the author and perpetuated by teachers and children. Therefore, having a friend of color (even a Somali and

Muslim friend) may not be sufficient in this particular context to counter the dominant and negative community beliefs about the larger community. Additionally, my measurement of cross-race friendships lacked a more comprehensive examination of the quality of such friendships which may have influenced the null associations in the current study.

Children's Conceptions of and Attitudes about Ethnic-Racial and Religious Groups

Of interest, findings indicated that children's conceptions of and attitudes about ethnic-racial and religious groups were not significantly correlated (e.g., providing social group-related responses about Black people was not related to endorsing more favorable attitudes about them). According to DIT, this may be explained by children developing their own oftentimes stereotypic beliefs about group membership even when group labels are not explicitly explained to them (Bigler & Liben, 2007). Moreover, these dimensions of children's attitudes were differentially correlated with parents' attitudes and socialization practices. That is, parents' racial attitudes were more consistently related to children's conceptions of but not their attitudes about ethnic-racial and religious groups. On the other hand, parent socialization and comfort with intergroup contact showed significant correlations with children's attitudes about (albeit still few and focused on Somali and Muslim people) but not conceptions of ethnic-racial and religious groups.

The findings pertaining to children's attitudes about Muslim individuals are especially interesting. Contextually, a majority of the Muslim students at the school and in the community are ethnically Somali and racially Black. However, study results indicated that many children did not know what Muslim meant. For example, when asked what they think of when they hear the word "Muslim," children said things like, "Muscle," or "I've never heard that word." Brown and colleagues (2017) found that even when White children did not have prior knowledge about

Muslim individuals, they reported negative attitudes about them. Current study findings suggest a similar trend. Notably, children's favorable attitudes about Muslim individuals where higher when they had parents who expressed greater comfort with intergroup contact and engaged in ethnic-racial and religious socialization. In line with DIT, these findings may be explained by parents' explicit conversations about ethnic-racial and religious groups (Bigler & Liben, 2007).

Limitations and Future Directions

As with any study, the findings and contributions of the current study should be evaluated in relation to its limitations. Perhaps most significantly, the small sample size prevented the use of inferential statistics to test the significance of relations between children's conceptions of and attitudes about ethnic-racial and religious groups and their parents' attitudes and socialization practices. Furthermore, although the sampling design of the study was intentional, the unique, rural context from which the data were collected also limit the generalizability of the findings. Given the use of explicit, self-report measures of children's and parents' intergroup attitudes, social desirability may have (and likely did) influence participants responses. Finally, although computed due to the small sample size, combining (rather than separating) children's endorsement of positive and negative trait attributions for ethnic, racial, and religious groups likely influenced the pattern of findings.

These caveats point to important avenues for future research. First, in majority White spaces, more research is warranted to better understand when and how children come to understand ethnic-racial and religious groups. The use of implicit attitudes measures to assess both children's and parents' attitudes is also an important avenue for future research. Finally, research is needed to better examine age-related differences and associations with parents' attitudes and socialization practices in demographically similar and different contexts.

Conclusion

In a time of increasing hostility towards individuals from different ethnic-racial and religious backgrounds (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2019), the results point to the importance of understanding White children's conceptions of and attitudes about these groups. Overall, the results indicated that White children varied in their knowledge of ethnic-racial and religious groups. There was also evidence of ingroup bias; that is, children had more favorable attitudes about their own as compared with other racial and religious groups. The results, while limited in generalizability, also illustrate the importance of children's proximal contexts in shaping their ideas and beliefs. Specifically, better understanding the role that parents play in informing children's conceptions of ethnic-racial and religious groups can help researchers, educators, and parents develop interventions aimed at increasing children's knowledge of and positive attitudes about ethnic-racial and religious groups.

Table 2-1

Exploratory Factor Analysis Results for Parents' Attitudes about Their Children's Intergroup Contact (*n* = 42)

Items	M(SD)	Eigenvalues > 1		
		Diverse Contact	Majority Outgroup Contact	Majority Ingroup Contact
How comfortable would you feel if your child...				
grew up in a racially mixed neighborhood	4.57 (0.70)	1.05		
attended a school that was racially mixed; that is where there was no majority racial group	4.74 (0.50)	0.95		
grew up in a religiously diverse neighborhood	4.26 (0.83)	0.78		
grew up in a mostly non-White neighborhood	3.67 (1.05)	0.51		
attended a school where a majority of the kids were Latino/Latina	3.76 (0.98)		0.51	
attended a school where a majority of the kids were African American or Black	3.40 (1.13)		0.82	
grew up in a mostly Muslim neighborhood	3.33 (1.00)		0.74	
attended a school where a majority of the kids were Muslim	3.14 (1.20)		0.70	
grew up in a mostly White neighborhood	3.95 (1.08)			0.78
attended a school where a majority of the kids were White	3.43 (1.27)			0.44
grew up in a mostly Christian neighborhood	4.36 (0.73)			0.33
Eigenvalues		4.57	1.60	1.40
% variance		41.53	14.56	12.70

Note. Principal axis factoring with a promax rotation and Kaiser normalization. Factor structure denoted by bolded factor loadings. Factor loadings < .30 are not shown. Although rare, the factor loading of 1.05 (a regression coefficient from the pattern matrix) indicates that much of variance in Factor 1 (Diverse Contact) is tied to this item.

Table 2-2

Exploratory Factor Analysis Results for Parents' Racial Attitudes (n = 43)

Items	M(SD)	Eigenvalues > 1	
		Color-Conscious	Colorblind
Racial and ethnic minorities do not have the same opportunities as White people in the U.S.	3.19 (1.22)	0.86	
Everyone who works hard, no matter what race they are, has an equal chance to become rich	3.33 (1.23)	-0.77	
Race is very important in determining who is successful and who is not	2.07 (0.94)	0.59	
It is important that people begin to think of themselves as American, not as African American, Mexican American, or Italian American	3.53 (1.03)	-0.48	
Racism is a major problem in the U.S.	3.40 (1.12)	0.45	
I have very few friends of other races	2.91 (1.31)		0.71
Immigrants should try to fit into the culture and adopt the values of the U.S.	3.51 (1.14)		0.57
Racism may have been a problem in the past, but it is not an important problem today	2.05 (0.87)		0.50
It is important for public schools to teach about the history and contributions of racial and ethnic minorities	4.28 (0.59)	—	—
Eigenvalues		2.96	1.58
% variance		37.00	19.73

Note. Principal axis factoring with a promax rotation and Kaiser normalization. Factor structure denoted by bolded factor loadings. Factor loadings < .40 are not shown. One item was removed because it loaded positively onto both factors.

Table 2-3

Exploratory Factor Analysis Results for Parents' Ethnic-Racial Socialization (n = 40)

Items	M(SD)	Two-Factor Solution	
		Color-Aware	Colorblind
How often have you…			
done things to celebrate the history of other racial or ethnic groups	2.45 (1.40)	0.87	
done things to celebrate the history of your child's racial or ethnic group	3.33 (1.19)	0.73	
taken your child to cultural events about other racial ethnic groups	2.30 (1.22)	0.73	
taken your child to cultural events about their racial or ethnic group	2.55 (1.24)	0.65	
told your child that people might treat them unfairly because of their race or ethnicity	2.28 (1.18)	0.63	
told your child that race is no longer a problem in society	1.40 (0.81)	0.62	
encouraged your child to read books about the history of their racial/ethnic group or about well-known people in their group	2.38 (1.10)	0.44	
encouraged your child to make friends with people of all races and ethnic backgrounds	4.53 (0.64)		0.99
told your child that race doesn't matter -- everyone has the same opportunities to succeed	3.88 (1.36)		0.67
talked with your child about how people can be discriminated against because of their race or ethnicity	3.50 (1.06)		0.55
Eigenvalue		4.42	1.73
% variance		44.23	17.31

Note. Principal axis factoring with a promax rotation and Kaiser normalization. Factor structure denoted by bolded factor loadings. Factor loadings < .40 are not shown.

Table 2-4

Exploratory Factor Analysis Results for Parents' Religious Socialization (n = 42)

Items	M(SD)	One-Factor Solution
		Religious Socialization
How often have you…		
taken your child to cultural events about other religious groups	2.14 (1.14)	0.80
done things to celebrate the history of other religious groups	2.33 (1.07)	0.84
encouraged your child to read books about the history of their religious group	2.33 (1.12)	0.67
told your child that people might treat them unfairly because of their religion	1.95 (1.10)	0.67
talked with your child about how people can be discriminated against because of their religion	3.43 (1.06)	0.64
done things to celebrate the history of your child's religious group	3.14 (1.14)	0.67
taken your child to cultural events about their religious group	3.02 (1.20)	0.45
told your child that religion doesn't matter -- people from all religious groups have the same opportunities to succeed	3.48 (1.33)	0.45
Eigenvalue		4.03
% variance		50.42

Note. Principal axis factoring with a promax rotation and Kaiser normalization. Factor structure denoted by bolded factor loadings. Factor loadings < .40 are not shown.

Table 2-5

Intercorrelations and Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. TA White	—														
2. TA Black	.46**	—													
3. TA Somali	.31*	.73**	—												
4. TA Mexican	.29*	.57**	.55**	—											
5. TA Christian	.55**	.19	.18	.48**	—										
6. TA Muslim	.63**	.39*	.28	.26	.43**	—									
7. SA White	.07	.21	.27	.12	.19	.02	—								
8. SA Black	.03	-.08	-.01	.03	.14	-.10	.34*	—							
9. SA Somali	.10	.07	.14	.15	.15	.10	.30*	.35*	—						
10 .SA Mexican	-.25	.18	.06	-.07	-.18	-.11	.15	.04	.07	—					
11. SA Christian	-.20	-.05	.07	.00	.11	-.09	.41**	.29*	.28*	.44*	—				
12. SA Muslim	-.09	.02	.08	-.12	-.02	-.11	.20	.23	.40*	.36**	.34*	—			
13. Child Age	-.25	.07	.14	.08	.01	-.06	.27	.32*	.46**	.36**	.60**	.37**	—		
14. Cross-Race Friend	-.21	-.15	-.21	.01	.18	-.07	.19	.23	.24	.25	.21	.11	.18	—	
15. Diverse Contact	.28	.16	.42**	.07	.01	.46**	.06	-.19	.04	-.23	.04	-.02	.19	-.30	—
16. Majority Outgroup Contact	.13	-.09	.08	-.02	.11	.38*	-.09	-.11	.20	.01	.18	.14	.29	-.03	.52**
17. CC Attitudes	-.08	.05	-.12	.06	.06	.00	-.02	.21	.25	.07	.25	.48**	.26	.12	-.09
18. CB Attitudes	.03	-.16	-.28	-.14	-.19	-.32	-.47**	.03	-.27	.05	-.51**	-.13	-.35*	.02	-.34*
19. CC Socialization	.07	.04	.11	.11	.08	.34*	.06	-.02	.13	-.05	.20	-.09	.37*	-.18	.44**
20. CB Socialization	.26	.17	.24	.18	.26	.44**	.28	.04	.26	-.01	.11	-.19	.24	.18	.37*
21. Religious Socialization	.22	.17	.27	.17	.20	.47**	.16	-.01	.26	.05	.29	.05	.34*	-.24	.45**
Mean	3.71	3.44	3.38	3.55	3.81	3.59	0.32	0.30	0.55	0.66	0.53	0.28	9.08	0.51	4.33
SD	0.53	0.49	0.50	0.54	0.46	0.46	0.47	0.46	0.50	0.48	0.50	0.45	1.71	0.50	0.65
N	51	48	47	48	46	43	53	53	53	53	53	53	53	53	43

Table 2-5

Continued

Variable	16	17	18	19	20	21
16. Majority Outgroup Contact	—					
17. CC Attitudes	.26	—				
18. CB Attitudes	-.36*	-.25	—			
19. CC Socialization	.62**	.16	-.38*	—		
20. CB Socialization	.28	-.44**	-.26	.37*	—	
21. Religious Socialization	.57**	.11	-.49**	.84**	.55**	—
Mean	3.41	2.76	2.82	2.40	3.97	2.71
SD	0.87	0.79	0.84	0.84	0.80	0.80
N	42	43	43	43	43	43

Note. TA=Trait attributions. SA=Spontaneous associations. CC=Color-conscious. CB=colorblind. SD=Standard deviation. N=Sample size.

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$.

Table 2-6

Post-Hoc Chi-Square Goodness of Fit Tests: Child Age by Social Group-Related Conceptions of Ethnic-Racial and Religious Groups

Ethnic-Racial or Religious Group	Age Comparison	χ^2	Adjusted *p*-value
Black	6-7- versus 8-9-year-olds	—	—
	6-7- versus 10-12-year-olds	6.62	*ns*
	8-9- versus 10-12-year-olds	0.03	*ns*
Mexican	6-7- versus 8-9-year-olds	0.54	*ns*
	6-7- versus 10-12-year-olds	6.50	*ns*
	8-9- versus 10-12-year-olds	3.09	*ns*
Somali	6-7- versus 8-9-year-olds	7.94	$p = .005$
	6-7- versus 10-12-year-olds	12.88	$p < .001$
	8-9- versus 10-12-year-olds	0.40	*ns*
Christian	6-7- versus 8-9-year-olds	1.97	*ns*
	6-7- versus 10-12-year-olds	20.44	$p < .001$
	8-9- versus 10-12-year-olds	10.51	$p = .011$
Muslim	6-7- versus 8-9-year-olds	—	—
	6-7- versus 10-12-year-olds	7.96	$p = .005$
	8-9- versus 10-12-year-olds	1.62	*ns*

Note. df = 1 for all analyses. Bonferroni adjusted *p*-value. Post-hoc tests were not conducted when less than 75% of cells had an expected cell count less than 5.

Table 2-7

Post-Hoc Paired Samples T-Tests: Children's Attitudes about Ethnic-Racial and Religious Groups

Ethnic-Racial and Religious Group Comparison	*t*-test	df	Adjusted *p*-value
White versus Black	3.35	47	$p = .002$
White versus Somali	3.52	46	$p = .001$
White versus Mexican	1.79	47	*ns*
Black versus Somali	1.07	46	*ns*
Black versus Mexican	-1.05	45	*ns*
Mexican versus Somali	1.70	44	*ns*
Christian versus Muslim	2.88	39	$p = .006$

Note. Bonferroni adjusted *p*-value.

STUDY 3

"Being Colorblind is One of the Worst Things": White Teachers' Attitudes and Ethnic-Racial Socialization in a Rural Elementary School

"Being Colorblind is One of the Worst Things": White Teachers' Attitudes and Ethnic-Racial Socialization in a Rural Elementary School

> For our students, I hope they're aware [of race] because being colorblind to me is one of the worst things. When people are like, "I'm colorblind. I don't see race. Everybody's equal." It's like no, no, no. We have to see race. We have to acknowledge it. And we have to know that race and culture is an awesome thing, part of our education, part of our life, and what makes us the United States. Kids who are White, I hope they're becoming more aware of it. But our students of color, they're definitely aware of it because if they have a White teacher maybe things that are said – just little comments. I wish there were more teachers of color or more teachers educated in backgrounds and having conversations that included things of all students.

In the quote above, an elementary school teacher at a rural, racially diverse school in a midwestern state in the United States aptly outlines the problem with the dominant colorblind ideology in schools. Colorblindness includes ignoring or denying the importance of race (Neville et al., 2013). A colorblind ideology is communicated in schools through both teachers' attitudes and beliefs, and school-level curriculum and policies such as mandated curriculum that minimizes or deems invisible the perspectives and histories of people of Color, school discipline policies that unfairly target students of color, and school-level segregation that persists as a result of zoning and redlining policies. Colorblindness perpetuates racism and reinforces White privilege by denying racial inequality (Husband, 2016; Neville et al., 2013) and is detrimental for students. For White students, not talking about race leaves them to draw their own, oftentimes inaccurate, conclusions that may contribute to biased perspectives, stereotypic beliefs, and prejudicial attitudes and behaviors toward others (Apfelbaum et al., 2010; Bigler & Liben, 2007).

For students of color, ignoring the existence of race or the impact of racism negatively influences their academic well-being (Byrd, 2015, 2017).

In the opening quote above, the teacher also alluded to the mismatch between student and teacher demographics. Increased immigration over the past few decades have shifted the demographics of many communities and schools in the United States. The percentage of students of color in public schools has increased from 39% in 2000 to 51% in 2015 (de Brey et al., 2019). Meanwhile the percentage of teachers has remained majority White. In 2016, 80% of the teaching force was White; these percentages are even higher among rural schools as compared with urban or suburban schools (Geiger, 2018). Thus, the current state of public education in the United States today is that a majority White teaching force is responsible for educating a student body that is majority students of color. This mismatch is problematic as research suggests that White teachers often endorse colorblind ideologies and implicit racial biases while teaching through a White, mainstream lens (Husband, 2016).

White teachers often do not acknowledge themselves as having a culture or ethnicity and lack an awareness of racism (Sleeter, 2008). White teachers who have been raised in a White dominant culture may not have had to confront their own colorblindness or address its consequences (Sleeter, 2008). Furthermore, in racially homogenous White communities, they may not be accustomed to thinking about and dealing with race on a daily basis. But, as immigration continues to expand its reach across the United States some historically White communities are undergoing rapid demographic change (Parker et al., 2018). Teachers are often the first to encounter such demographic shifts in their classrooms, but often have little in-service training to support them (Jupp et al., 2016). To help inform professional development

opportunities targeting White teachers, the current study sought to better understand White teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and strategies for addressing race-related issues in their classrooms.

Literature Review

We begin our literature review with a brief conceptualization of terms before moving to an overview of the theoretical framework. Next, we review previous literature examining teachers' race-related attitudes and beliefs and how teachers talk about race in the classroom.

Conceptualization of Terms

We recognize that, in the United States, race is socially constructed and oftentimes thought about as shared physical characteristics, while ethnicity is described as a group's shared history and culture (Richeson & Sommers, 2016). In this paper, we use the terms *ethnicity* and *race* jointly (e.g., ethnic-racial) as previous research demonstrates that children and adults do not differentiate them systematically (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). To describe the process by which teachers communicate ideas about race to children, we use the term ethnic-racial socialization (ERS) which is defined as "behaviors, practices, and social regularities that communicate information and worldviews about race and ethnicity to children" (Hughes et al., 2016, p. 4).

We further recognize that race and ethnicity intersect with other social categories such as religion, language, and immigrant status (e.g., being Somali, Black, and Muslim or Mexican, Spanish-speaking, and immigrant-origin). Intersectionality theory states that an individual's perspectives and experiences are shaped by both their own intersecting identities and structures of inequality (Crenshaw, 1991). For example, teachers' race-related attitudes and behaviors are informed by and develop in concert with their own identities and the socio-cultural systems and structures that produce inequality. In the current paper, we pay attention to how teachers' race-related attitudes and behaviors intersect with attitudes about religion, language and immigrant

status, and how these processes are influenced by and contribute to the ideologies of White supremacy and colorblindness. White supremacy is the cultural script that positions White people as superior in the racial hierarchy (i.e., White superiority), advantages White individuals and disadvantages people of Color (i.e., White privilege), and situates Whiteness and all that is associated with it as normative (i.e., normalizes Whiteness; Ansley, 1997; Roberts & Rizzo, 2020). Whiteness intersects with religion and language and deems being a Christian and speaking English as ideal and normative because they are associated with Whiteness.

Colorblindness also warrants further conceptualization here. The dominant ideology of colorblindness in the United States dates back to 1896 when the Supreme Court upheld racial segregation as constitutional and Justice John Marshall Harlan stated, "Our constitution is colorblind, and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens." Today, colorblind policies persist, for example, in court cases (e.g., Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District, 2007) and in school systems (e.g., curriculum, school segregation). Neville and colleagues (2013) posit that a colorblind ideology includes both color-evasion (e.g., highlighting that everyone is the same; ignoring race) and power-evasion (e.g., belief that racism is in the past, denial of institutional racism and White privilege). White individuals are more likely than people of Color to endorse colorblindness which scholars have theorized is a strategy to appear nonprejudiced or "maintain an egalitarian self-image" (Neville et al., 2013; Plaut et al., 2018, p. 201). While colorblindness may represent an ideal vision of an equal society, denying the impact of racism actually reinforces inequality (Neville et al., 2013). One goal of the current study was to explore White teachers' endorsement of colorblind racial attitudes and socialization practices.

Theoretical Perspective

The current study was guided by a transactional/ecological perspective which posits that the process of ERS is intertwined with ethnic-racial identity and discrimination and that these processes are "deeply rooted in the micro-systems in which youth operate" (Hughes et al., 2016, p. 5). Hughes and colleagues (2016) point out that these processes have been examined primarily at the individual level (e.g., children's experiences of ERS) and highlight the importance of examining the proximal settings (e.g., home, school) in which these processes occur. Advancing our understanding of the proximal settings that influence children's experiences of ERS is essential for moving towards system-level change to support positive child development across settings (Hughes et al., 2016). With respect to the school-setting, scholars have conceptualized teachers as important levers of school ERS (see Byrd, 2017). Thus, we explored teachers' attitudes and beliefs about ethnicity-race and diversity more broadly and how they shape the setting in which ERS occurs; that is, classrooms. Our focus on teachers' attitudes and beliefs about race and their ERS informs a larger developmental literature on factors that promote the development of a positive ethnic-racial identity and the mitigation of discriminatory experiences for children and adolescents (Hughes et al., 2016).

Teacher Attitudes and Beliefs About Ethnicity-Race and Diversity

Teachers' attitudes and beliefs about ethnicity-race and diversity more broadly are informed by and inform the larger school racial climate which in turn shapes the setting for ERS. These attitudes and beliefs include teachers' acknowledgement of race or endorsement of a colorblind ideology. Research examining teachers' acknowledgement of race and the role it plays in education has found that teachers, especially White teachers, endorse a colorblind ideology by denying or ignoring the salience of race (Husband, 2016; Vittrup, 2016). Jupp and colleagues' (2016) review of research found that some White teachers were race-evasive, that is,

they denied and resisted to acknowledge race, Whiteness, and White privilege. Some teachers, on the other hand, were race-visible – acknowledging both the racial differences between themselves and their students and the role that race plays in teaching and students' learning. Nevertheless, race-visible White teachers still incorporated race-evasive and colorblind teaching practices in their classrooms. Jupp and colleagues (2016) deemed this a "fertile paradox" wherein White teachers were well-meaning (e.g., acknowledged race) but still upheld Whiteness at an institutional level (e.g., avoiding conversations about race, continuing to teach Eurocentric curriculum). This paradox underscores the complexity of White teachers' attitudes and practices and highlights the need for more research on this topic.

Teacher Ethnic-Racial Socialization

Hughes and colleagues (2016) argue that children's proximal contexts are important settings in which ERS occurs. Much of the extant literature on ERS has examined parents as socializing agents, and adolescents as recipients, particularly among African American families in the United States (Priest et al., 2014). We extend the study of ERS to the school setting. We focused on an elementary school setting because this is an important developmental window for children's understanding of their own ethnic-racial identity as well as the ethnic-racial identities of others (Pauker et al., 2016).

It is also the case that fewer existing studies have assessed teachers as socializing agents (Farago et al., 2019). Although not developed explicitly for teachers, Byrd's (2017) framework for high school students' perceptions of the school racial climate informs our approach to thinking about school ERS. Byrd (2017) described five aspects of school racial socialization: (1) *cultural socialization,* including learning about one's own ethnic-racial group, (2) *mainstream socialization* or learning about Western/United States norms and values, (3) *promotion of*

cultural competence through learning about other ethnic-racial groups and group histories, (4) *colorblind socialization* or ignoring the importance of ethnicity-race, and (5) *critical consciousness socialization* which supports students' understanding of power, privilege, and ethnic-racial group differences and is less common in schools.

While some teachers report talking about race in their classrooms, most studies investigating teacher ERS have found that they frequently engage in colorblind socialization. For example, Vittrup (2016) assessed 77 elementary school and early childhood educators' ERS. Regardless of ethnic-racial group membership, 70% of participants' ERS practices were coded as colorblind. That is, teachers did not talk about ethnicity-race in the classroom or they reported regularly discussing the topic but struggled to provide an example beyond lessons about equality or celebrating holidays (Vittrup, 2016). In Australia, Priest and colleagues (2016) explored how White Australian teachers talked about race and racism with their students. Findings revealed that teachers did not feel confident talking about race and primarily engaged in reactive (i.e., unplanned, occur when prompted often by student questions or current events) rather than proactive socialization (i.e., planned, deliberate; Priest et al., 2016).

The studies described above highlight the importance of the school context in contributing to children's racial knowledge. They also exemplify the paradox described by Jupp and colleagues (2016), that teachers believe ethnicity-race is important but report discussing race or related topics infrequently. This is problematic because colorblind ERS perpetuates racism in schools and leaves teacher biases unexamined which has negative implications for the ethnic-racial identity development of all children (Husband, 2016). Further examining the paradox between White teachers' attitudes and beliefs and their ERS practices may help inform greater

efforts to induce systemic change in schools that promotes a more inclusive and equitable learning environment for all students.

Current Study

The current study aims to fill two gaps in the literature. First, while research has primarily focused on parent ERS, we explored teacher ERS. Second, we sought to examine the ERS experiences of White children and children of Color at school. Less attention has been paid to documenting how teachers, as socializing agents, have conversations about ethnicity-race with both children of Color and White children. We intentionally recruited a sample of White elementary school teachers from a rural, racially diverse school to describe their ethnicity-race related attitudes and beliefs and ERS practices. This particular setting was selected because it mirrors the mismatch between educators and children in public schools across the United States (Geiger, 2018). Therefore, it provided a unique opportunity to better understand how White teachers socialize White children and children of Color about ethnicity-race. Guided by Creswell (2016), we utilized a phenomenological approach which includes describing the essence of a lived phenomenon (i.e., White teachers' ERS practices at a racially diverse school), interviewing several individuals who have this phenomenon in common, and developing a description of the nature of the experience for these individuals (i.e., teachers).

Method

Community Setting

Generally perceived as homogenous and majority White, the midwestern state where data were collected has experienced rapid demographic changes in the last 50 years as a result of increased immigration. Since the late 1900s, the state has been a haven for refugees from many countries fleeing civil war and oppression. Two major factors support the growing number of

immigrant and refugee community members: a strong economy rooted in agriculture and food processing and a strong network of social safety programs. While immigrants and people of Color are more likely to live in urban areas, some rural towns, including the study community, have drawn immigrants and refugees away from the city due to the increased job opportunities.

Franklin City (pseudonym) is a rural town with a population of less than 5,000 located in a midwestern state. The community is racially diverse; the three largest ethnic-racial groups are White (48%), Latinx (21%), and Black or African American (11%). In Franklin City, the shift in ethnic-racial composition has elicited mixed responses from the community. On the one hand, community members celebrate an annual multicultural festival to accompany the naturalization ceremony for new citizens. In contrast, fear and stereotypes endorsed by White community members used to living in a majority White town persist. For example, prior to the 2018-2019 school year, the school board voted against creating a mural of the student body on the outside of the high school building. Example murals portrayed mostly people of Color prompting members of the community to make negative comments on social media such as, “We don’t need to highlight our students of color anymore” and “Everybody knows Franklin City is a school of diversity.” According to Hughes and colleagues (2016), changes at the macro-system level including patterns of immigration and accompanying attitudes in the local context shape the settings in which ERS occurs.

Research Site

The current study is part of a larger project that explored elementary school-aged children’s social identity development. The larger study examined how children think about themselves in terms of ethnic-racial, national (American), and religious group membership, the ideas they espouse about their own and other ethnic-racial groups, and their parents’ and

teachers' attitudes and ERS. Data were collected from first, third, and fifth grade students, their parents, and their teachers at Franklin City Elementary School (pseudonym), a K – 6 public school comprised of around 480 students and 40 full-time teachers.

Franklin City Elementary School was selected as the research setting because the ethnic-racial diversity mirrors the larger child demographic shifts in the United States. In the 2018-2019 school year, the student body was 54% White, 29% Latinx, 14% African American, and 3% another race-ethnicity; 61% of students qualified for free and/or reduced-price meals and 26% were classified as English language learners. Religious affiliation for students at the school was not available, but parents and children who were part of the larger study reported identifying as Protestant, Catholic, Muslim or another religion (e.g., Jehovah's Witnesses). In contrast to the student body, however, the teachers at this school were mostly White which mirrors the mismatch between educators and public-school children across the United States (Geiger, 2018).

Participants

Participants (N = 12) for the current study included first (n = 3), third (n = 3), and fifth grade (n = 3), English language learning (n = 2), and art (n = 1) teachers. All identified as European American/White; 10 were female, and eight held a master's degree. Teaching experience ranged from 1 to 31 years (M = 15.92, SD = 9.68). Most teachers were drawn to Franklin City because they grew up or had family in the area. Ms. May (all teacher names are pseudonyms) who recently returned to the community also noted, "We just wanted Franklin City really because of the multicultural education students get here. My husband is from Mexico, and we just did not want our child to go to an all-White school. That was super important to us."

Procedures

Procedures were approved by the University of California, Los Angeles' Institutional Review Board (IRB#18-000262). The lead author conducted one semi-structured interview with each teacher who provided written consent to participate in the study. The interviews lasted between 20 and 30 minutes and explored teachers' beliefs, experiences, and practices around teaching about ethnicity-race and related topics in their classroom (adapted from White et al., 2013). The lead author spent substantial time at Franklin City Elementary School during the spring of 2018 (for a pilot study) and again from September through December of 2018 (data collection for the larger project). All teacher interviews were conducted in December 2018.

Teachers answered demographic questions about their ethnic-racial and gender identity, highest level of education, and teaching experience. The interview started with four open-ended questions aimed at understanding teachers' attitudes about diversity more broadly and how they see it represented in the school (see Table 3-1). Follow up questions were asked to better understand the influence of racial diversity, specifically, in their teaching. Other social groups – language and religion – were asked about because of their intersection with racial group membership in the community. Next, teachers answered three questions about specific activities or lessons they use to promote conversations about diversity-related topics including ethnicity-race, religion and family heritage (see Table 3-1). In addition to teacher interviews, a sample of school and newspaper artifacts about ERS were collected and fieldnotes were collated and are used throughout the results to further contextualize the school climate as a setting for ERS.

Research Team

The research team included two primary coders – the lead author and an advanced undergraduate research assistant – and the second author who served as an auditor in every stage of the research process (e.g., interview protocol development through analysis). The lead author

identifies as White and cisgender female, holds a K-6 teaching credential and was motivated to understand the attitudes and ERS practices of White teachers in a racially diverse school. Her background both as a White educator and developmental scientist informed analysis of the data. The undergraduate research assistant identifies as White, Ashkenazi Jewish and cisgender female and was unfamiliar with the teachers and the school context. The second author, the senior developmental scientist on the team, identifies as cisgender female, and as Asian-American of South Asian heritage. She was selected as the auditor due to her substantive expertise in the area of young children's social identity development and experience with qualitative methods. Potential biases, expectations about the findings, and power differentials were discussed prior to and throughout the analysis. As examples, to lessen power differentials, the primary coders rotated who shared their thoughts first, thoroughly discussed coding differences in a collaborative manner, and had frequent check-ins with the auditor.

Analysis

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by trained research assistants. During transcription, identifying information was omitted and a verbatim transcription of speech was typed while removing interview noise (i.e., denaturalized transcription; Oliver et al., 2005). A consensual qualitative research (CQR) approach was used to code the data (Hill et al., 2005). CQR relies on five essential components: (1) open-ended data collection (e.g., interviews), (2) multiple coding team members involved in the coding process, (3) utilizing consensus when coding the data, (4) an auditor who checks the analysis of the coding team, and (5) construction of domains, core ideas, and cross-analysis. We elected to use a CQR approach to capture the subtleties and complexities of the data through consensus or a common understanding of the data (Hill et al., 2005).

Data were coded according to the CQR approach across eight months and the primary coders met one to two times per week. First, two domains (i.e., teachers' attitudes and beliefs about ethnicity and race and teachers' ethnic-racial socialization practices) were identified by listening to and reading the transcripts multiple times. Next, data were segmented into the two domains, with disagreements resolved by consensus. Throughout the process of assigning each segment to a domain, the analysts worked collaboratively to generate a summary (i.e., core idea) of each segment. Next, the core ideas were individually reviewed to create broad themes to capture commonalities across participants. This process of cross-analysis was repeated multiple times by reading a 20% selection of the core ideas and generating themes until a final set of themes were agreed upon. Each primary coder completed a final cross-analysis of the full corpus of data and disagreements were resolved by consensus (further methodological details are available, upon request, from the lead author).

Results

As displayed in Table 3-2, the first domain, teachers' attitudes and beliefs about ethnicity-race included four themes centered around teachers' valuing of diversity, minimization of the importance of ethnicity-race, reinforcements of stereotypes, and underestimation of student racial knowledge. The second domain, teachers' ethnic-racial socialization practices, yielded three themes: proactive ERS, reactive ERS, and colorblind/Eurocentric ERS. In discussing the domains and themes, we draw on quotes from many of the teachers, but primarily highlight four teachers' responses throughout the results. Ms. Jorgenson, a fifth grade teacher, and Ms. Williams, a first grade teacher, were selected because they exemplify the paradox described by Jupp and colleagues (2016). They valued diversity and simultaneously minimized the importance of race and reinforced stereotypes. In terms of ERS practices, Ms. Jorgenson's

responses were split between proactive and reactive whereas Ms. Williams reported reactive ERS three times as much as proactive ERS. An ELL teacher, Ms. Robinson, was included to demonstrate another paradox, that is, a well-intentioned teacher who reiterated her value of diversity throughout the interview, but simultaneously minimized the importance of race, reinforced stereotypes, and whose ERS practices were primarily reactive and colorblind/Eurocentric. Finally, Ms. May was selected because she presents a counternarrative to the rest of the teachers at this school. She was the art teacher in her first year at the school and was drawn to the multicultural student body at the school. She valued diversity and her ERS practices were coded as proactive.

Teachers' Attitudes and Beliefs About Ethnicity-Race

The year of data collection, a new poster was created and displayed in every classroom stating, "Our differences drive our greatness. We all belong here." Each interview began by asking the teacher to describe what the poster meant to them followed by a question asking them to define diversity and share how ethnic-racial diversity influences their teaching and students' racial knowledge. Their responses fell into the four themes described below.

Valuing of Diversity

In general, the teachers at Franklin City Elementary School reported valuing and appreciating the racial and cultural diversity at the school. They described the uniqueness of the study community in contrast to the surrounding majority White towns. Further, while race or culture were often teachers' initial responses to describing diversity, they also recognized the multidimensionality of the term. When describing what 'Our differences drive our greatness. We all belong here." meant to her, Ms. Williams shared,

> Franklin City is a place that is like no other here in the [Midwest] area. I feel like kids are different in so many different ways and the obvious one when people look into Franklin City is the culture piece of it. And that's something that makes Franklin City great. But it also means that we are inclusive with our special ed population, we're inclusive with our ELL, with the different economic backgrounds that we have. Without all of those melding together we wouldn't have the diversity that we have within Franklin City.

Like Ms. Williams, nine teachers made statements about the value of diversity including broad statements such as, "We celebrate our diversity" and "We appreciate each other's differences." Eight teachers mentioned the multidimensional diversity at the school including diversity in terms of religion, language, gender, and ability.

Two teachers' responses offered counternarratives to the narrative above. Mr. Howard reported only colorblind attitudes about diversity and race. Specifically, he described diversity as "overrated" and said, "I get sick of hearing it only because people get too caught up in racial commentary… Things would be a lot better if we worry about being just good people." In contrast to the responses of the other teachers, Ms. May shared race-visible responses that were only coded as valuing diversity. She described seeing the poster on display and thinking, "'Yes! It just means everybody's welcome. There's no um, but, and, or … everybody." When asked to define diversity, she said:

> Ugh which part? There's like diversity of thought, there's diversity of culture, of sexual orientation, of age, of race, of religion. I think in staff meetings when people say diversity, they mean more cultural and racial diversity.

Here, Ms. May captured the complexity of the term "diversity" and highlighted the common association between diversity and race found across the other teachers' responses (n = 8).

Clearly, teachers at Franklin City Elementary School were aware of the racial and cultural diversity in their environment. While these teachers were well-meaning (i.e., they valued diversity at the school), their responses were also race-evasive (e.g., minimizing race, reinforcing stereotypes and underestimating students' racial knowledge).

Minimization of the Importance of Ethnicity-Race

The race-visible narrative of valuing diversity described above was complicated by underlying notions in teachers' responses that minimized the importance of ethnicity-race. Many teachers defined diversity as equivalent to difference. For example, when asked what diversity meant to her, Ms. Jorgenson said,

> When I think of diversity, I always think of the word different, but I don't mean different in a negative way. I guess so that it's not the norm. It just opens your eyes to the world around us. I think especially in our area we're just so secluded and it's all White, it's all middle to lower class. But when I think of diversity, I always think we're just a diamond in the rough in this area. We're a better snapshot of what the real world looks like.

Here, Ms. Jorgenson's response illustrates the paradox between valuing diversity and minimizing the importance of race. In the quote above, diversity is associated with difference, which is described as "not the norm." As Ms. Jorgenson continues, her response suggests that the norm she is referring to is White and middle to lower class, so diversity is equal to difference which is equal to not White. This narrative of othering reinforces the normalcy and supremacy of Whiteness in the classroom (Neville et al., 2013). Moreover, teachers' responses also conveyed that racial diversity is exceptional or out of the ordinary. This was evident in Ms. Jorgenson's and four other teachers' descriptions of the community as "a diamond in the rough" or the ethnic-racial composition of their classroom as "a beautiful assortment."

Further, two teachers minimized the importance of ethnic-racial group membership by reinforcing the societally held colorblind notion that the United States is a melting pot of people from multiple backgrounds who are "melding together" and "working together in a uniform community." Narratives like this, even unconscious ones, are common in colorblind ideology (Husband, 2016; Neville et al., 2013). They reinforce Whiteness as normative, thus upholding rather than challenging racial inequality in society.

Teachers' responses were also laden with Eurocentric statements. The four quotes below emphasize how teachers referenced and thus reinforced the normalcy of Whiteness and all that is associated with it – including Christianity and what it means to be American.

> The majority of the kids [in my class] share pretty similar backgrounds, but there's a *couple of kids that are much different*.
>
> The *Mexican culture is not as different, they're mostly Christian* and I think that's where we know more, but we don't so much about the Somali.
>
> [Diversity is represented in the school] in our cute little girls running around with their hijabs holding their little *American friend's* hand.
>
> I feel like part of ELL instruction because they're in America is to understand the American flag, the pledge, the American holidays. *Even if you don't celebrate Christmas this is an American holiday.* [Emphases added]

The language used above by teachers implies difference as non-White, American as White, and Christianity as the normative religion. Again, these associations – even if they were unconscious associations – revealed that teachers' attitudes and beliefs about race are influenced by the societal narratives of White supremacy and colorblindness. Further, these associations show that attitudes and beliefs about race intersect with notions about religion and nationality. The

intersectionality of race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, and language were further evident in teachers' reinforcement of stereotypes and underestimation of students' racial knowledge.

Reinforcement of Stereotypes

Teachers recognized stereotypes about immigrants and people of Color held by members of the community while simultaneously reinforcing these stereotypes in their responses (n = 5). This paradox is illustrated by Ms. Robinson's description of her students' and teachers' experience of race and the shifting demographics of the school. She said:

> Someone just befriends a friend and they don't care of the race… I'm not going to say that we don't have racism, I don't think I can really count many times that I've heard people say that it's race… the only time I saw a problem was when we had all Hispanic friends and then we added the Vietnamese seamlessly because they're quieter in their culture and they go about their business. But we added some of our Bosnian friends and they're like [*teacher mimicked growling noise*] I'm ready to fight.

She continued by describing the teachers' experiences with increased immigration, saying, "I think that a lot of people are really afraid, and we've gotten some education on the other cultures but not enough… Every time I added a new culture I was like 'how's that going to be?' and I was like 'they're all kids,' but you know there's…" She drifted off here before commenting that, "the fear is getting less and less."

Some teachers recognized that their students are more accepting of difference as compared with children from other communities or even their parents who did not grow up with the same diversity. Ms. Williams, for example, shared that, "[Students do not] see the color as much as somebody who isn't from Franklin City. They're not nervous. They don't fear somebody that's different than them." The emotions described in these responses indicate a bias

held by teachers who believed that it is normal for students and adults – especially White students and adults – to be fearful and nervous towards people of Color.

Racial stereotypes were explicit in some of the teacher comments. Teachers endorsed stereotypes about cultural holidays including that some Hispanic families celebrate Day of the Dead instead of Halloween and "they go with the whole sacrifice children thing… that is kind of scary." They also stereotyped the behaviors of specific ethnic-racial groups, as evident in Ms. Robinson's response above regarding the integration of Bosnian and Vietnamese students at the school. Stereotypes about Somali families were also shared. Ms. Parker said, "If I see a Somali lady coming in and they look so serious... your first instinct is 'Oh, they're grumpy' but that's just their resting face." Two other teachers discussed Somali women in the hallway saying that they "only having two volumes" – a whisper you can barely hear and shouting – and then one teacher imitated the shouting in Somali.

It is striking that five of the same teachers who reported valuing diversity also made racially stereotypic comments about newer immigrant community members. This is problematic as research has linked teacher biases to lower academic engagement for children of Color (Husband, 2016). Moreover, stereotypes may also be transmitted to White students instead of demonstrating how to examine bias and challenge stereotypes which are important components of anti-bias education (Husband, 2016). Teachers' underestimation of students' racial knowledge might also relate to their lack of dismantling stereotypes in the classroom.

Underestimation of Student Racial Knowledge

In general, teachers did not think that their students were aware of ethnicity-race. If students were aware, teachers noted that they did not talk about it and reasoned that this could be because they are used to the racial diversity present in the community and school. Many teachers

believed that children should hold a colorblind perspective and appreciated when they noticed their students interact with each other without attention to race. When asked how aware students are of their own and others' ethnic-racial backgrounds, Ms. Parker said, "When I see my kids mingling from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, it's really exciting to me cause they're just seeing people instead of seeing your skin color." This notion was echoed by six other teachers who agreed that it was a positive thing for students not to be aware of race and instead "just see people as people." Ms. May again was an exception to this belief and argued instead that, "being colorblind to me is one of the worst things. No, no, no. We have to see race. We have to acknowledge it."

Other teachers believed that student awareness of race depended on the child's age (n = 4) and group membership (n = 2). For example, some teachers believed that older students were more aware of the complexity of race whereas younger students "don't think that much about different race or culture." Ms. Jorgenson, in contrast, shared that students in her fifth-grade classroom did not ask questions about each other's race or culture but they might have when they were younger. In terms of variation by students' racial background, Ms. May and Ms. Smith noted that their White students tended to be less aware of ethnicity-race as compared to their students of color. Ms. Smith recognized that White students talk about their ethnic and racial backgrounds less often, and Ms. May recounted hearing White students make statements such as, "Culture? I don't have a culture. I don't know." These findings are consistent with previous research suggesting that White teachers believe that their students do not harbor any racial biases or notice race (Vittrup, 2016). However, research evidence has shown that children as young as 4-years-old do, in fact, notice race and that 4- to 7-year-old White children report more favorable attitudes about their own ethnic-racial group (Pauker et al., 2016).

Teachers' underestimation of their students' racial knowledge intersected with their beliefs about students' religious knowledge. Ms. Jorgenson, for example underestimated her Muslim students' knowledge about their religious practices. She recounted examples of Christian students sharing their religious beliefs and/or practices, but said, "I don't feel like our Muslim students feel like they can be proponents for themselves. They're not coming and saying, "I'm Muslim so I don't eat pork." They just kinda mumble it." Teachers' perceptions of their students' knowledge about religion appears to be influenced by the societal narrative of White supremacy which reinforces Whiteness and Christianity as the norm. For example, it is possible that the reason Muslim students are not "proponents for themselves" is not because they lack the knowledge, as Ms. Jorgenson suggests, but because they are aware that their religion deviates from what is normative.

Overall, these findings suggest that not only do teachers themselves endorse a colorblind ideology; they believe children do and possibly should also hold colorblind perspectives as well. Teachers noted that younger students and White students appeared less aware of race which aligns with Sullivan and colleagues' (2020) finding that parents from various racial backgrounds vastly underestimated the age at which children learn race-related concepts and develop race-related biases and beliefs.

Summary

Our findings regarding teachers' attitudes and beliefs about ethnicity-race and diversity are informative about how race is enacted within the school setting. Teachers appeared to value and appreciate the diversity while at the same time upholding White supremacy and a colorblind ideology. This is problematic for all children. Reporting colorblind messages from teachers has been associated with students of color feeling less connected to school and perceiving their

academic abilities more negatively (Byrd, 2015, 2017). Fostering colorblind attitudes in White children, on the other hand, may lead to them to be less likely to acknowledge their own privilege or notice and challenge racism and discrimination (Farago et al., 2019). For the positive development of all children, teachers need to address their own biases and researchers and policymakers need to come alongside them to challenge the educational systems that perpetuate colorblindness. Creating opportunities through both pre-service preparation courses and in-service professional development for teachers to engage with their own biases, biases held at the societal level, and the ages at which children develop racial awareness is important if we want teachers to engage in ERS with students.

Teachers' Ethnic-Racial Socialization Practices

Regarding teachers' ERS practices, most teachers (n = 10) reported both proactive and reactive ERS. Mr. Howard discussed only reactive and colorblind/Eurocentric ERS practices. Ms. May presented a counternarrative to these themes as her ERS practices were only coded as proactive. Since most of the teachers engaged in both types of ERS, we looked at how often teachers' self-reported conversations about ethnicity and race were either proactive or reactive.

Proactive Socialization

Proactive socialization was reported through incorporating diverse children's literature into classroom lessons, third grade teachers discussing a family heritage unit, and Ms. May describing the art projects completed by students.

Children's Literature. Eight teachers mentioned using a specific book to introduce a discussion based on ethnicity-race. For example, when asked about how having a racially diverse group of students influences what she teaches in the classroom, Ms. Jorgenson said,

> With the literature I choose, especially the picture books, I try to incorporate different cultures and different backgrounds and not necessarily [do] they have to be Somali or Mexican... even whether it's Jewish... I think it just opens their world even more.

She described a couple of the books she has used in her classroom including "The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind" and continued,

> Another piece that I really like to tie in with these fifth graders [to] make them culturally aware is that I connect them with African Americans and Africans and how we here in the United States have a history of not treating Black, people of Color, or of a different race very welcomingly. [Interviewer: And how do you do that?] That would be just the selections that I use like "The Bat Boy and His Violin" and "Henry's Freedom Box."

Ms. Smith had a similar focus on incorporating diverse children's literature. The library nook in her classroom included a rotating display of book recommendations. During the first month of the school year, Ms. Smith displayed her recommendations which included many racially diverse books with race conscious messages (e.g., "The Other Side" by Jacqueline Woodson). Like a couple of other teachers, Ms. Smith described reading many of these books out loud to her class to open the door for questions and conversations about race and related topics. For example, her classroom read "The World is Not a Rectangle" by Jeanette Winter, a nonfiction story about Muslim architect Zaha Hadid, who grew up in Iraq and faced challenges throughout her career. One page displayed a committee of White men who told Zaha that they would not build her building because she was a woman and an Arab and students shared reasons why this was unfair.

Building a diverse classroom library and reading books with diverse characters and perspectives was a common strategy utilized by teachers to illicit conversations about ethnicity-race and related topics in their classrooms. Indeed, reading diverse books that prompt

conversations about ethnicity-race is a common strategy of antibias education in early education classrooms (Farago et al., 2019). This practice may also promote students' cultural competence as they learn about the experiences and histories of other ethnic-racial groups (Byrd, 2017). However, simply exposing children to diverse books can have limits to their depth of understanding if not accompanied by further questions and conversation (Byrd, 2017).

Third Grade Heritage Unit. The third grade teachers described a "heritage" or "ancestry" unit that they completed every spring. According to Mr. Green, "it's a study of where your ancestors came from, possibly why they came from there, and in the interview of the ancestor to learn more about their family and family origins." Ms. Glenn described other aspects of the project including creating a family tree and mapping out where students' ancestors originated. For the mapping project, students' pictures surround a world map and are connected by a string to a country where their ancestors are from. Mr. Green described that the mapping is meant for students "to get a visual of where their ancestors came [from] and in Franklin City it's all over." Students then go on to create a family crest displaying family traditions followed by interviewing and writing a biography about a family member.

This unit aligns with the cultural socialization dimension of Byrd's (2017) framework of school racial socialization in which students learn about their own racial background. Although this unit is an encouraging step towards learning about and affirming the cultural backgrounds of their students, teachers admitted that they did not engage in conversations about students' backgrounds or identities in the classroom. According to Jupp and colleagues (2016) a family heritage unit would be classified as race-visible, but the lack of conversation suggests a race-evasive execution of the unit. Moreover, there are problematic aspects of ancestry units or lessons such as these in the classroom because they assume that children have access to ancestral

information. Students who identify as African American may not have access to this information due to their family's history of enslavement. This critique highlights that race-visible curriculum may not be inclusive for all children and the careful consideration and planning needed to create opportunities for cultural socialization at school.

Art Projects. Ms. May was the only teacher whose ERS practices were coded as only proactive. She said she "works really hard to bring in artists of color" and not teach too much about artists who are older White men. At the time of data collection, the first grade unit was covering environmentalism, while most other grade-level units explicitly focused on supporting students' ideas and beliefs about race, ethnicity, and family heritage (e.g., sculpting Alebrijes – Mexican folk art sculptures of mythical creatures – out of plaster).

In fifth grade, students began the school year by learning about Thailand, Buddhism, and the art of Mandalas. Ms. May described the excitement of one student who was Buddhist and got to be highlighted in an area where he would normally be overlooked at the school. She outlined the unit, saying, "We talked about empathy related to Mandalas and how it's important to really build tolerance for others. And even though sometimes I feel like it went over the fifth graders' heads a little bit, it's still planting that seed, constantly hearing these important words."

In December, students in third through sixth grade began a new art unit on self-portraits. Ms. May received a grant to work with a local artist to create three bronze benches. She said,

> Our students are going to help design them and they're going to focus on self-portraits. The main thing is having conversations with people who look different than me. It's encouraging people downtown. There's going to be three of them and it's going to be people of different backgrounds looking at each other like they're having a conversation.

Six students' self-portraits (across ethnic-racial backgrounds) were selected to be portrayed on the benches, and all the portraits were displayed in storefronts during the community's annual multicultural celebration. In contrast to the proactive ERS strategies reported by other teachers, Ms. May was more intentional in her inclusion of race-related topics. She said, "I always wanna make sure we're doing artwork with meaning behind it." Through these lessons, students were learning about their own ethnic-racial background (i.e., cultural socialization) as well as the traditions of other cultural groups (i.e., promotion of cultural competence; Byrd, 2017).

Reactive ERS

Teachers' self-reported socialization practices were coded as reactive 1.5 times more often than proactive, and they shared that holidays and student-initiated questions spurred the lessons and conversations about ethnicity-race in the classroom.

Holidays. Nine teachers reported that holidays tended to bring up more conversations around ethnicity-race. When asked to describe what lessons or conversations they used to incorporate race-related discussions, Ms. Williams and two other teachers discussed Martin Luther King Junior Day. Ms. Williams shared, "Every year when we talk about Martin Luther King Jr. that comes up. Kids will talk about where they're from and that's when they notice the difference in color I think sometimes." In response to the next question asking about integrating multiple perspectives, Ms. Williams continued,

> I think a lot of times it just kind of comes up… I would say again during holidays or if Eid comes up. In first grade we're so concentrated on learning the curriculum parts of things that we don't take the time to do that social studies part.

Social studies, however, is not the only period when teachers can incorporate conversations about race. Moreover, only incorporating the experiences and perspectives of people of Color

during certain times of the year is problematic because it suggests to children that these experiences are not the norm (Husband, 2016). Further conversations about holidays are often classified as colorblind ERS because they fail to promote an in-depth understanding of ethnicity-race and instead reinforce stereotypes and racial inequality (see Vittrup, 2016).

Student-Initiated. Student initiated conversations tended to focus on questions or comments about religion. For example, teachers reported students having questions about why Muslim students leave to pray, students telling each other that they are not supposed to say "God," or Muslim students explaining why they do not eat pork. Ms. Robinson shared,

> The first time I started getting Somali girls with hijabs some of the boys were just staring and staring. Finally, one day this boy yelled out 'Do you have any hair?' because he has never seen-they don't show their hair. And I said, I guess I never thought about that but that is a good question.

Other teachers shared examples of questions that were frequently initiated by students. After hearing multiple questions about the ELL program in her classroom, one first grade teacher starts the beginning of the year with a conversation about what the ELL program is, why students leave to attend the program and where they go. It is interesting to note that no other teachers brought this up especially when about a quarter of the students in each classroom are classified as English language learners. In some cases, teachers did not respond with clarification when students asked questions about the ELL program. For example, a fifth-grade student asked what ELL was and was told by their classmate, "It's learning English." The first student responded in confusion saying, "But [classmate who attends the ELL program] speaks English. Maybe it's because they can't pronounce English because [classmate] doesn't pronounce things right."

Clearly students have questions and confusion about the ethnic-racial backgrounds of some of their classmates and sometimes these questions went unanswered by their teachers. In the instances above, however, teachers' responses were race-evasive (Jupp et al., 2016) and by not engaging in a conversation and correcting students' misconceptions, teachers may have instead reified the stereotypes. Race-evasiveness is also evident in teachers' reliance on holidays and student questions to incorporate conversations about race in the classroom rather than purposefully planning lessons around these topics (Jupp et al., 2016). Although we cannot say for sure, reactive ERS practices may convey a colorblind message to students – that race is not something we talk about.

Colorblind/Eurocentric ERS

Colorblind/Eurocentric ERS lessons were double coded with reactive socialization in all but two instances. Mr. Howard's ERS practices were only coded as reactive and colorblind/ Eurocentric ERS because they focused on the perspectives of White men (e.g., lessons on Christopher Columbus, "introducing the big dogs of the constitution and Declaration of Independence"). Other colorblind/Eurocentric ERS practices included lessons and activities that took place in classrooms around holidays including Christmas, Thanksgiving, and Halloween (*n* = 7). The following quote from Mr. Green highlights the focus on Eurocentric holidays.

> [A nearby school is] having a Christmas program. We don't because here we don't draw attention to one particular cultural background... We have the tree and we have the ornaments but for my kids with a Somali background they turn their ornament into a magnet for the refrigerator and they'll do a snowman.

This Eurocentric ERS around holidays was prevalent in teachers' responses and other aspects of the school including, for example, classroom and school decorations (e.g., star ornaments with

students' photos on them lining the first grade classrooms; writing cards to Santa Claus) and the songs played during the winter band concert (where one student who did not celebrate Christmas did not play a song). Ms. Robinson summed up the prevalence of colorblind/Eurocentric ERS at the school saying, "Even if you don't celebrate Christmas, this is an American holiday."

The practices coded as colorblind/Eurocentric align with colorblind and mainstream socialization dimensions of school racial socialization (Byrd, 2017). The conflation of Christianity and Whiteness with American minimizes the importance of other religions and ethnicities represented at the school. Further, omitting the perspectives, experiences, and traditions of people of Color in curricula and classroom activities reinforces racial inequality and limits children's understanding of ethnicity-race (Husband, 2016).

Summary

Most of the teachers reported engaging in ERS practices that were both proactive and reactive. This is not surprising given their attitudes and beliefs about ethnicity-race. Moreover, these findings are consistent with Vittrup's (2016) results that 70% of surveyed teachers reported ERS that was colorblind and only 30% reported color-conscious ERS. Vittrup (2016) also reported that teachers in her study were uncomfortable and unprepared to discuss race with their students. The frequency of reactive ERS in our study may also be related to their feelings of preparedness; nine teachers concluded their interviews by admitting they are not as knowledgeable as they should be about ethnicity-race which appeared to contribute to their race-evasiveness.

In addition, teachers called upon the school and district for more professional development. Ms. Jorgenson said, "We could have some professional development from local leaders from the different cultures come and talk to us about the traditions. We would all

welcome that and be very grateful that they would come and share with us." Other teachers suggested incorporating cultural diversity days or building a bilingual section in the library. Ms. May hopes to bring in speakers who talk about White privilege to start having those conversations and shifting the school racial climate. The call for more professional development from several of the teachers highlights that they want to learn. Districts and states need to answer this call and develop anti-bias training for in-service teachers that includes an examination of their own biases along with training in anti-bias curriculum.

Discussion

The current study explored White teachers' attitudes and beliefs about ethnicity-race and their ERS at a rural elementary school that has experienced a rapid influx of students from diverse backgrounds. Our findings were consistent with the paradox outlined by Jupp and colleagues (2016) in which White teachers acknowledged the importance of race and engaged in both race-visible and race-evasive ERS. We found evidence of another paradox in teachers' attitudes; they valued the diversity at Franklin City Elementary School, but simultaneously endorsed a colorblind ideology. Moreover, while teachers reported both proactive and reactive socialization, these practices were also accompanied by descriptions of colorblind/Eurocentric ERS. Colorblind attitudes and socialization are detrimental for children's developing notions of themselves and others (Byrd, 2017; Farago et al., 2019). Thus, there is a need to foster White teachers' knowledge about ethnicity-race and increase their comfort in talking about it with students. Indeed, teachers in the current study called on the school for more professional development. While scholars have called for changes to pre-service teacher education programs to better prepare White teachers for diverse students (e.g., Sleeter, 2008), professional development for in-service teachers is also needed. These professional development

opportunities need to be integrated into the curriculum and multi-staged and layered. For example, White teachers need to first examine their beliefs and confront their biases about race and learn about race, racism, and the detrimental effects of colorblindness before moving towards practicing anti-bias and anti-racist education (Husband, 2016; Sleeter, 2008).

Limitations and Future Directions

One limitation of the current study was the limited sample of White elementary school teachers in one particular school setting. Although teachers' experiences described here are specific to Franklin City and the school, they may not be unique. As stated earlier, increasing patterns of immigration are changing the demographic landscapes of historically White majority midwestern communities. More research is warranted to assess the similarities and differences in the experiences of other White elementary school teachers teaching in rural, ethnically and racially diverse schools. A second limitation is that we focused on teachers' self-reported attitudes and ERS practices. Teachers may be engaging in ERS beyond what they mentioned in the interviews, in both promotive and problematic ways. Future studies could include classroom observations to address this limitation.

A strength of the current study was examining the school as an important proximal setting for ERS experiences and teachers as the socializing agent. However, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of ERS in the school setting, future studies should include the experiences of children and administrators. This is especially important to better understand the relationship between experiences of ERS, ethnic-racial identity, and discrimination at school which will enable researchers, educators, and policy makers to move towards system-level change to support the positive development of all children (Hughes et al., 2016).

Conclusion

Findings from the current study were consistent with the paradox of White teachers' race-visible and race-evasive attitudes and classroom practices (Jupp et al., 2016). Teachers simultaneously appreciated diversity and embraced colorblindness. They reported lessons and conversations that were proactive, reactive and colorblind/Eurocentric. However, teachers also reported a desire to learn and had suggestions for what the school could do to support them in teaching students about ethnicity-race. Our study highlights that it is imperative to provide teachers with professional development training around anti-bias and anti-racist pedagogy to foster more culturally competent teachers. As Ms. May stressed, colorblindness is detrimental especially for students' emerging understanding of their own and other groups.

The necessity of anti-bias and anti-racist educational training is even more pronounced at a time when people across the United States are mobilizing for racial justice. Yet, former President Trump deemed anti-racism training "divisive, anti-American propaganda" (Miller, 2020). Racism is ongoing in our country and recent events – the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd; a school calling the police on a Black child for playing with a toy gun during a virtual class (Peiser, 2020) – highlight the need for White teachers to acknowledge racism, understand the impact that such events have on their students and their classroom practices, and join the movement for racial justice. Researchers, teachers, and policy makers need to come together to challenge colorblindness and the notion that talking about race is anti-American and instead provide teachers with anti-bias and anti-racist training and curricula.

Table 3-1

Teacher Interview Questions

Question Topic	Questions
Teachers' Attitudes	"I noticed the posters up around the school that say, 'Our differences drive our greatness. We all belong here.' What does this poster mean to you?"
	"What does diversity mean to you and how do you see it represented among the students at the school?",
	"Can you tell me about the diverse backgrounds of your students?"
	"How aware do you think the kids are of differences in their own and other students' racial and ethnic backgrounds?"
Teachers' Ethnic-Racial Socialization	"How do you integrate the perspectives of a wide range of racial and ethnic groups in your lessons?"
	"How does teaching a group of students from diverse backgrounds influence what and how you teach in your classroom?"
	"What kinds of teaching strategies do you use in your lessons to foster tolerance and acceptance of others from diverse backgrounds in the classroom?"

Table 3-2

Description, Example, and Frequency of Cross-Analysis Themes

Domain/Theme	Description	Example	Frequency (N = 12)
Teacher Attitudes and Beliefs About Ethnicity-Race			
Valuing of Diversity	Value of or appreciation for diversity. Overly positive affect about diversity. Describing diversity as multidimensional.	"Franklin City is diverse and that we celebrate our diversity, that we see it as a strength"	11
Minimization of the Importance of Ethnicity-Race	Colorblind statements that minimize the importance of ethnicity-race including not noticing their students' racial backgrounds, believing everyone is the same, and describing diversity in terms of difference.	"We have so much diversity that I don't think of students as diverse. I basically as a teacher look at where they're academically"	9
Reinforcement of Stereotypes	Stereotypes about ethnic-racial groups or cultural holidays. Normalizing fear of people of Color.	"They're not nervous. They don't fear somebody that's different than them. They're just like 'Hey, come and play.'"	5
Underestimation of Student Racial Knowledge	Describing students as colorblind or unaware of ethnicity-race. Variation in students' understanding by age or group membership	"They don't really notice it as much anymore. It's just Joe and just Caroline. It's just their friends. They don't notice the skin color."	12
Teacher Ethnic-Racial Socialization Practices			
Proactive Socialization	Intentionally including lessons and conversations about ethnicity and race	"We're pretty intentional of not just saying 'Jake and Sue' but we are trying to use our students' names of all different ethnicities… We try to include diverse books."	11

Table 3-2

Continued

Domain/Theme	Definition	Example	Frequency (N = 12)
Reactive Socialization	Including lessons and conversations about ethnicity and race when prompted by a student question, holiday or other event (e.g., presidential election)	"When it's January or February we do a lot of African American studies tied around Martin Luther King and other famous Black Americans."	11
Colorblind/ Eurocentric	Centering Whiteness and Christianity in classroom lessons and conversations.	"Part of ESL instruction because they're in America is to understand this is the American flag… even if you don't celebrate Christmas this is an American holiday."	8

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Think back to Luke, the hypothetical White boy who lives in Franklin City. He would be in fourth grade during the mobilization for racial justice across the nation after the murder of George Floyd. In fifth grade, he would have experienced the 2020 presidential election of Joseph Biden and the historic election of Vice-President Kamala Harris. On January 6th, 2021 he would have witnessed the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol by White supremacists. How might he be making sense of these events? How might he be negotiating his own identity – his Whiteness – in response? How might his parents be helping him to make sense of what was occurring and the role that being White and Whiteness played in it? Indeed, these recent events highlight the necessity of understanding how Whiteness is experienced, socialized, enacted, and negotiated by White individuals. White people must wake up to the racialized realities of Whiteness, and I assert that this needs to happen early in life, during childhood. Specifically, White children need to learn to identify as White, recognize that they have a race, and understand the role it plays in their lives (Hazelbaker et al., *under review*).

The current dissertation examined the co-occurring and inseparable processes of White children's ethnic-racial identity development, intergroup attitude formation, and experiences of ERS. I explored these processes in an ethnically and racially diverse, rural elementary school context in the midwestern United States. Moreover, I paid particular attention to how these processes were shaped by and reinforced the master narratives of White supremacy (i.e., the cultural script that positions White people as superior in the racial hierarchy, advantages White individuals and disadvantages people of Color, and situates Whiteness and all that is associated with it as normative; Ansley, 1997; Roberts & Rizzo, 2020), and colorblind ideology (i.e., the belief that race does not matter, and everyone is the same; Neville et al., 2013). By doing so, this

dissertation illustrates the importance of both distal and proximal level processes in informing White children's developing understanding of themselves and others.

In Study 1, I explored how White children negotiate Whiteness through their selection of ethnic-racial, national American, and religious identity labels and how they make sense of their own group membership. I examined White children's conceptions of and attitudes about ethnic-racial and religious groups along with the extent to which they relate to their parents' attitudes and socialization practices in Study 2. Finally, in Study 3, I explored White teachers' attitudes about ethnicity and race and their ERS practices in the classroom. Taken together, results from my 3-study dissertation illustrate the ubiquitous influence of the ideologies of White supremacy and colorblindness on White children's developing understanding of themselves and others as well as their experiences of ERS. Next, I discuss broad themes from the dissertation, study implications, and the limitations of the current study along with opportunities for future research.

The Pervasiveness of the Ideologies of White Supremacy and Colorblindness

The ideologies of White supremacy and colorblindness are embedded in the environments in which White children spend their time (Roberts & Rizzo, 2020; Tatum, 2017). Consistent with prior studies, my dissertation showed evidence of White children's and teachers' conformity to these master narratives. In Study 1, although some children were still developing an understanding of their ethnic-racial identity, many White children's ideas and beliefs about their group membership incorporated aspects of White superiority, normalized Whiteness and aligned with colorblind beliefs about race. For example, children minimized the importance of racial group membership by identifying instead with an ethnic heritage or national American label. They normalized Whiteness by conflating being American with being White, speaking English, and participating in certain activities and Christian holidays. Moreover, White children

believed that race does not matter and referenced racism as a thing of the past. These findings are consistent with prior studies exploring White youths' racial identity development (Grossman & Charmaraman, 2009; Perry, 2002) and illustrate the internalization of beliefs that normalized Whiteness, situate White as superior in the racial hierarchy and deny the importance of race, early in life.

Consistent with prior studies (see Raabe & Beelmann, 2011), in Study 2, White children showed evidence of ingroup bias; that is, they endorsed more favorable attitudes about their ingroups (i.e., White and Christian) as compared with their ethnic-racial and religious outgroups (i.e., Somali, Black, and Muslim). These findings provide further evidence that White children situated White people (and all that is associated with Whiteness including Christianity) as superior and normative. In Study 3 and aligned with Jupp and colleagues' (2016) findings, results indicated a paradox in White teachers' attitudes about race; they acknowledged the importance and value of race at the school, while simultaneously endorsing a colorblind ideology. Teachers, for example, minimized the importance of race, underestimated their students' racial knowledge, and endorsed stereotypes (both explicitly and implicitly) about people of Color in the community. They also reported both proactive and reactive ERS, but these practices were accompanied by descriptions of colorblind/Eurocentric ERS. This finding is consistent with White parents' tendency to avoid race-related conversations or engage in colorblind ERS (see Loyd & Gaither, 2018 for review). Study 3 points out that societal narratives are transmitted to White children through their experiences in school including their teachers' racial attitudes and the conversations they take up (or ignore) in the classroom.

Knowledge about Ethnic-Racial and Religious Groups

Of interest, White children in the current dissertation appeared to have less knowledge about racial and religious groups as compared with ethnic groups. In Study 2, for example, over half of the children did not provide a social group-related response when asked what they think of when they hear the words Muslim, Black, and White. Younger children, in particular, lacked social group-related knowledge about the words Somali, Christian, and Muslim as compared with older children. Of interest, however, White children's conceptions of ethnic-racial and religious groups were not correlated with their attitudes about these groups. That is, having more knowledge about Somali people was not related to having more (or less) favorable attitudes about them. The role of White children's context is important to consider when making sense of these findings. While White is the majority racial group in Franklin City, it is not labeled explicitly. Somali and Mexican individuals, too, are labeled by their ethnic rather than racial (i.e., Black) or pan-ethnic (i.e., Latinx) group. Thus, the labels used in children's proximal contexts matter for how they make sense of these groups.

The findings above may also better situate the results of Study 1. That is, while 75% of White children selected the White label to describe themselves, 25% did not. Further, very few children chose White as the label most like them. Indeed, children appeared uncomfortable with being asked if they were White; many shrugged their shoulders or tried to hide their answer from the interviewer. Although my data do not speak to the reason for their discomfort, based on the findings from Study 2, it is possible that they lacked a conceptual understanding of what it means to be and if they are White. This parallels research with White adults who sometimes find it difficult to identify as White and instead identify as American or with an ethnic-heritage group (see Helms, 2020). Moreover, the lack of information and/or discomfort with Whiteness evident in this dissertation is a product of White supremacy. Indeed, for much of U.S. history, Whiteness

has been viewed as normative with the benefits of racism invisible to White people who do not recognize White privilege, the social norms that maintain it, or the role it plays in their lives (Helms, 2020; Tatum, 2017).

Notably, White children also reported a lack of knowledge and less favorable attitudes about Somali and Muslim (but not Mexican) people. These findings are not surprising given certain community- and school-level factors. Specifically, in Franklin City, Mexican and Somali intersect with other social groups (e.g., language, religion, immigrant status). For example, Mexican community members have been in the town longer than Somali individuals who more recently immigrated to the United States. In terms of religion, White and Mexican community members tend to be Christian while Somali community members tend to be Muslim. While I do not have evidence that young children are attuned to these intersections, it may be that some racialized others are more accepted due to a shared religious ingroup (e.g., Mexican and White people tend to be Christian). It may also be that young children have not had as much exposure to and are still learning about the Somali and Muslim community. At the school-level, findings from Study 3 indicated that teachers at Franklin City elementary school admitted that they knew less about the Somali culture. This general lack of knowledge was coupled with teachers implicitly and explicitly endorsing stereotypes of Somali individuals. Again, this highlights how bias towards Somali and Muslim individuals is transmitted through the school context and shaping White children's ideas and beliefs.

Implications

The findings from my dissertation studies have several implications for White children's developing understanding of themselves and others, the identity-related experiences of children of Color, and the necessity of anti-bias and anti-racist ERS practices for parents and teachers.

First, the current dissertation begins to fill the gap in developmental sciences understanding of White children's ethnic-racial identity formation given their racialized experience of Whiteness (Rogers et al., 2020). White children are not absent from racial identity development, but it looks qualitatively different for them than for children of Color (Rogers et al., 2020). According to Helms (2020), White individuals must continuously challenge the internalization of racism and negotiate their Whiteness to develop a healthy White identity. Previous studies indicate that White children do not believe race is an important part of themselves and that they rely on equality-based reasoning to make sense of what it means to be White (e.g., everyone is the same; Rogers et al., 2012; Rogers & Meltzoff, 2017; Turner & Brown, 2007). However, these studies paid less attention to how children made sense of their identity within the master narratives of White supremacy and colorblindness. Indeed, the structural context cannot be removed from the individual process of identity development (Hughes et al., 2016).

White children's negotiation of Whiteness has implications for the social contexts they co-construct (e.g., school climate, interactions with people of Color) as well as for their long-term attitudes and beliefs (e.g., civic beliefs, political attitudes, anti-racist behaviors; Hazelbaker et al., *under review*; Helms, 2020; Rogers et al., 2020). Further, White children's negotiation of Whiteness is not separate from the experiences of children of Color – that is, children's understanding of themselves and others is relational. How White children understand themselves and others plays a role in shaping the contexts in which children of Color also navigate their identity development (Rogers et al., 2020). Better understanding the association among the ethnic-racial identity development of White children and children of Color can help scholars identify the aspects of social contexts (e.g., schools) are promotive of healthy identity development for all children.

Second, the three studies that make up my dissertation highlight the important role that context – both distal and proximal – play in shaping children's understanding of themselves and others in terms of ethnicity, race, nationality, and religion. Guided by Hughes and colleagues (2016), by situating White children's ethnic-racial identity development, intergroup attitude formation, and experiences of ERS, I aim to, "[shift] researchers' gaze from studying them as individual-level processes to studying the features of settings that produce them" (p. 31). This is especially important for understanding White children's conceptions of race and racial identification which are not devoid of context. As my dissertation suggests, White children are internalizing aspects of the ideologies of White supremacy and colorblindness at an early age due to the pervasiveness of these societal narratives. While it is important to understand these processes at the individual level, it is critical to make sense of them at the structural level.

The master narrative framework (McLean & Syed, 2015) offers an approach for investigating the structural and psychological factors that have implications for children's identity development (Syed & McLean, 2020). My dissertation is one of few studies to use this approach with children, and my findings suggest that White children's experiences are embedded within the master narratives of White supremacy and colorblindness. This has important implications for understanding – and interrupting – the transmission of these ideologies to children during middle childhood which is a crucial developmental period for the formation of attitudes and beliefs about race.

Finally, there are important implications of the dissertation findings for motivating White parents and teachers to engage in anti-bias and anti-racist ERS. Although my dissertation was conducted in a racially diverse, rural community, it contradicts the belief that exposure to diversity (e.g., racial diversity, religious diversity) is sufficient for positive intergroup attitudes.

Indeed, my dissertation provided some evidence that mere exposure to diversity does not move White children and teachers towards anti-racism. Moreover, exposure to diversity does not in and of itself combat the individual racism of White individuals or give them more racial awareness. The societal ideologies of White supremacy and colorblindness are also the "smog in the air" (Tatum, 2017) in diverse spaces like Franklin City. Yet, teachers at the school presented an interesting paradox – they cared about and valued the diversity at the school but did not do much about it in terms of socializing their students. This finding points to the importance of unpacking the complexity of White teachers' experiences and motivating them to act – to teach their students about race and racism.

Critically, this process must start with parents and teachers examining their own attitudes and biases and then learning and relearning about race and racism. For example, White parents and teachers need to understand that colorblind beliefs and ERS, which are common among White parents and teachers (Loyd & Gaither, 2018), are detrimental for all children's understanding of themselves and others (Husband, 2016). At the structural level, more support should be provided around the best practices for engaging in anti-bias and anti-racist ERS. For example, recent evidence suggests that color-conscious ERS even if parents are uncomfortable or anxious improves children's anti-Black attitudes (Perry et al., 2020). This finding underscores the notion that saying something (even if you are uncomfortable) is better than saying nothing at all. Indeed, this may also be the case for teachers. Teachers in Study 3 admitted that they needed and wanted to learn more about teaching students about race and related topics. Thus, my dissertation highlights that it is imperative to support White parents and teachers in engaging in anti-bias and anti-racist ERS practices.

Limitations and Future Directions

As with any study, the findings and contributions of my dissertation should be evaluated in relation to its limitations. An important limitation of the current study was the limited sample of White children and their parents and teachers from one particular school context. More research is warranted to examine how White children in urban or suburban communities, in racially homogenous communities, or in politically progressive communities negotiate Whiteness. However, researchers should also consider the difficulty of recruiting schools and participants – especially majority White schools and participants – for a study on children's understanding of their own and others' ethnic-racial and religious groups. Given the polarized socio-political climate, it may be difficult to receive permission to talk to White children about race – a topic that makes even many White adults uncomfortable. Thus, researchers must keep in mind the importance of building trust with community members and being transparent in their research goals.

Additionally, as this dissertation used explicit, self-report measures of children's, parents' and teachers' intergroup attitudes and ERS practices, social desirability may have (and likely did) influence participants responses. Future research should incorporate implicit measures of intergroup attitudes and observations of ERS at home and school to capture children's and their parents' and teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and practices more fully. The dissertation also explored children's proximal contexts (i.e., home and school) separately and does not account for the interaction of these contexts in shaping children's racial identity and intergroup beliefs. Thus, future work should examine the congruency and type of ERS practices at home and school to better understand how both contexts shape White children's understanding of themselves and others.

Conclusion

By examining identity development and intergroup relations in context, the current dissertation outlined the ways in which Whiteness is experienced, socialized, enacted and negotiated by White children. My findings suggest that White children are internalizing and thus upholding ideologies of White supremacy and colorblindness. That is, while White children recognized that they are White, they opted to identify as American or with an ethnic heritage group and normalized Whiteness and endorsed colorblind beliefs when making sense of their identity. Moreover, White children lacked knowledge of racial and religious groups and reported more favorable attitudes about their ethnic-racial and religious ingroups as compared with their outgroups. Children's racial identity development and intergroup attitudes are likely shaped by their experiences of ERS. Indeed, I found evidence that White teachers at Franklin City Elementary School valued the ethnic and racial diversity at the school while also endorsing colorblind beliefs and reinforcing White supremacy. Findings from this 3-study dissertation illustrate that these societal narratives are imbued in children's distal and proximal contexts. My findings highlight the necessity of shifting systems and structures. According to the master narrative framework (Syed & McLean, 2020), master narratives can be transformed through collective resistance that crafts an alternative narrative, for example, of anti-racism. Thus, resisting, challenging, and ultimately dismantling these narratives must occur at multiple levels.

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