

Exploring the Impact of Educational Television and Parent–Child Discussions on Children’s Racial Attitudes

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The purpose of this study was to test the potential of educational television and parent–child discussions about race to change White children’s attitudes toward Blacks. Ninety-three White children ages 5–7 and their parents participated. Families were randomly assigned into three experimental groups and one control group. Those in the experimental groups were asked either to show their children five educational videos, with or without additional discussions, or to have race-related discussions with their children without the videos. Improvements were seen in children’s out-group attitudes in both the video and discussion groups, whereas in-group attitudes decreased for those who watched videos and had discussions with their parents. Results revealed lack of parental compliance. Even when instructed to do so, only 10% of parents reported having in-depth race-related discussions with their children. Children’s racial attitudes were not significantly correlated with those of their parents, but children’s perceptions of their parents’ attitudes were positively correlated with their own. Reasons for parents’ reticence about race discussions, their outcome implications, and directions for future research and intervention are discussed.

By the time they are 6 years old, many children are showing in-group favoritism toward their own race, which some have interpreted as a developing prejudice toward people of other racial and ethnic groups (Aboud, 2005; Aboud & Doyle, 1996; Bigler, 1999; Castelli, De Amicis, & Sherman, 2007; Katz &

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Kofkin, 1997). Strong in-group favoritism, at the expense of out-group tolerance, may lead to racial bias, and racially biased children are at risk for growing up to be prejudiced adults and thus perpetuating existing problems in our society associated with racial prejudice. Once attitudes have been held for many years, they become a stable part of a person's personality, and it follows that it will be more difficult to change attitudes in adulthood than in childhood. Therefore, it is important to investigate how children's racial attitudes can be modified. Research has shown that White children are likely to display more racial¹ bias than other groups (Corenblum & Annis, 1993; Katz, 2003; Milner, 1975), and thus the focus of the present study was on White families.

Many individuals and experiences influence children's development of racial attitudes, including parents, peers, amount of exposure to people of other races, and the mass media (Katz, 2003). Indeed, it has been argued that children's racial attitudes reflect the attitudes of familiar individuals in their social environment (Castelli, De Dea, & Nesdale, 2008), and for this study we focused on parents and media.

Parental Influences on Children's Racial Attitudes

Parents are the major socializing agents in young children's lives. They take on the roles of teachers, models, and disciplinarians (Holden, 2010). In the child's early years, the power of socialization lies almost exclusively with the parents. The child comes to depend on them, imitate them, and slowly begin to adopt their mannerisms. In addition, young children do not have much access to alternative answers or explanations, so the child's contact with the world is essentially filtered through the parents' biases and perspectives (Milner, 1996). Essentially, parents are the interpreters and instructors of the value systems that are in place in our society.

In terms of their children's racial attitudes, parents can have both direct and indirect influences. Direct influences would include teaching children explicitly about race, instructing them how to interact with people of other racial groups, and disciplining them based on their expressed attitudes and behaviors. Such direct influences could be either positive or negative, depending on the parents' own racial attitudes and the importance they place on diversity and interracial contact. Research into various types of racial and ethnic socialization practices indicate that many parents, both White and non-White, believe that cultural socialization and promotion of egalitarianism is important. However, the types of conversations often vary based on the parents' race or ethnic background (Hughes et al., 2006), and White parents often refrain from specifically discussing race with their young

¹ For the sake of simplicity, the term "race" is used here to refer to both race and ethnicity.

children (Katz, 2003). While such silence has not typically been used as a measure of racial socialization practices, it is important to recognize that failure to discuss racial issues does in fact communicate race-related values and perspectives to children (Hughes et al., 2006).

Marshall (1995) found large discrepancies between parents' and children's reports of race discussions. Although the parents reported that they engaged in racial socialization at home, their children often revealed that their parents taught them little about race. It is possible that both parent and child informants were partially correct: parental messages may not have been explicit enough and therefore the verbal messages were not successfully transmitted.

Research comparing the similarities between parents' and children's explicit racial attitudes has generally revealed weak to null correlations (Aboud & Doyle, 1996; Castelli, Zogmaister, & Tomelleri, 2009; Katz, 2003). In the absence of explicit discussion, parents may assume that their children have racial attitudes that are similar to their own, and they are surprised to find out otherwise. It has been suggested that young children form rigid racial stereotypes that are resistant to messages from adult authority figures (Bigler, 1999). However, it may also be that without explicit parent-child conversations about race, children are more likely to form attitudes based on information from other sources, such as peers and the media. In families where parents do talk to their children about race, parents', and children's attitudes are in fact more similar (Katz, 2003). Furthermore, Castelli et al. (2009) found that mothers' *implicit* racial attitudes were significant predictors of children's attitudes, indicating that parents may not accurately report their racial attitudes to researchers due to social desirability and established social sanctions. Castelli et al. (2008) further showed that children are able to pick up on subtle, nonverbal cues from adults' interracial interactions and that these cues influenced their racial attitudes. In the absence of explicit messages, these cues may be even more influential.

Television Influences on Children's Racial Attitudes

During the past two decades, the influence of television on children's development has received increased attention due to the large amount of time children spend watching television and to the view that television has taken on the extra role of a socializing agent. On average, children watch 3–5 hours of television per day (Roberts & Foehr, 2004). Therefore, television has often been referred to as a "window on the world" (Barcus, 1983; Graves, 1999). It is a medium through which children experience and learn about the things they would not otherwise personally experience. Through television they learn about societal customs, values, morals, and expectations. Television also provides children with information about people of other racial and ethnic groups. While older children and adults are more skeptical about the media content, young children are likely to view media

content as a glimpse of reality, and thus they are more likely to be influenced by it (Chandler, 1997; McKenna & Ossoff, 1998).

Previous research supports the connection between television exposure and racial attitudes. For example, frequent exposure to stereotypical portrayals of Blacks can lead to a greater endorsement of such stereotypes and more negative attitudes toward Blacks in general (Dixon, 2008; Graves, 1999; Lee, Bichard, Irey, Walt, & Carlson, 2009; Ramasubramanian, 2010). According to Children Now's *Fall Colors: Prime Time Diversity Report*, prime time television remains overwhelmingly White (Children Now, 2004). Whites account for 73% of prime time television portrayals, Blacks comprise 16%, and Latinos represent only 6.5%. Furthermore, when excluding all-Spanish channels (such as Univision and Telemundo), the television representation of Latinos accounts for only about 1%. In addition to being underrepresented on television, minority actors who do appear on television are often in minor roles, and compared to Whites, minorities on television are more likely to hold low-status jobs, be aggressive, or engage in criminal activity (Baynes, 2007; Brown-Givens & Monahan, 2005; Children Now, 2004; Graves, 1999).

According to cultivation theory, television "cultivates" beliefs about the world (i.e., norms, structure, and social behavior) through the way the world is depicted (Comstock, 1993; Graves, 1999). Thus, the world portrayed on television becomes the social reality of the viewer. For those with limited contact with people of other racial and ethnic groups, television becomes a critical source of knowledge and opinion formation (Fuijoka, 1999; Tan, Fuijoka, & Lucht, 1997). Consequently, the limited presence of ethnic minorities on television can lead viewers to believe that these groups are not important. Furthermore, the types of roles minorities play most commonly (e.g., those in low-status occupations or involving criminal activity) promote the view that they lack power and status. Children do in fact pick up on status cues and such cues can influence their intergroup attitudes (Bigler, Averhart, & Liben, 2003; Bigler, Brown, & Markell, 2001). Recent research also suggests that race biases displayed through nonverbal behavior in television programs can influence young people's racial attitudes (Weisbuch, Pauker, & Ambady, 2009).

In addition, the segregation of races in different television shows sends the message that racial groups are meant to be segregated and that interracial interaction is not important (see e.g., Bigler & Brown, 2002). Children with limited exposure to members of other racial or ethnic groups will then be lacking appropriate role models for interracial interactions.

On the other hand, television can serve positive functions. Frequent positive portrayals of minority group members interacting with majority group members in a friendly and cooperative manner can send the message that minority group members are just as important and should be regarded as equals. Children may imitate these prosocial interactions modeled on television, thus making television a constructive influence for the development of positive attitudes toward others.

Indeed, social learning theorists consider television to be an important influence on behavior simply because it provides examples of categories of individuals (e.g., Bandura, 1986). When these examples are portrayed as normative, they will be especially influential (Comstock, 1993). Similarly, relevant adults portraying positive nonverbal behaviors during interracial interactions can influence children to hold less-biased racial attitudes (Castelli et al., 2008).

Positive Influences of Racially Diverse Television

Ethnically diverse educational programming may aid in the improvement of children's attitudes toward other racial groups. Considering how influential television is in children's lives, educational programming can be an important tool for teaching children positive messages about other racial groups. In fact, several studies have documented the positive effects of exposure to interethnic television programs. Studies on both the U.S.-based *Sesame Street*, as well as a Canadian version of the show, revealed that after watching episodes from *Sesame Street*'s race curriculum, which promoted cross-racial friendships, minority children developed a more positive self-image, and White children reported more positive attitudes toward Blacks and Latinos (Fisch, Truglio, & Cole, 1999; Lovelace & Scheiner, 1994).

Results from a study on the prejudice-reduction program *Different and the Same* indicated that the televised curriculum was effective in changing children's knowledge about possible sources of prejudice and interpersonal conflict, as well as teaching them strategies for resolving prejudice-based interpersonal conflict (Graves, 1999). Furthermore, students who watched the educational videos focusing on fairness, awareness, inclusion, and respect reported more positive attitudes toward cross-race relationships, and were more likely to make cross-race friendship selections compared to controls.

The *Different and the Same* curriculum, and a similar curriculum titled *Groark Learns About Prejudice*, was specifically designed as a prejudice prevention curriculum, but no similar programs have been identified as currently being aired on television. Parents and educators can purchase the prejudice prevention videos, but they are expensive² and most parents are not aware of them. Although some television programs for children are advertised as promoting diversity and reducing prejudice, a problem with many of them is that their messages are too subtle. If the messages are not explicit enough, children may not get the intended message. This is the likely explanation of failed attempts to show significant results in several previous prevention efforts. For example, Persson and

² The *Different and the Same* videos (from Family Communications, Inc., www.fci.org) are sold as a set of nine 15-minute videos for \$292, and *Groark Learns About Prejudice* from the *Getting Along with Groark* series (available through Live Wire Media, www.livewiremedia.com) is \$70 for one tape.

Musher-Eizenman (2003) conducted two studies to investigate the impact of an in-school prejudice prevention program on children's ideas about race. The researchers assessed children's racial attitudes after watching a 10-minute segment of one of three television programs (Study 1) or after four viewings of the same 20-minute prejudice prevention program over a period of 3 weeks (Study 2). They found no change in children's pro-White bias from pretest to posttest assessments. The authors concluded that explicit discussion about the content was needed.

Similarly, Lovelace and Scheiner (1994) found that although White children who watched the *Sesame Street* race curriculum videos stated that they would like to be friends with a Black child, they still thought that their mothers, as well as the mothers in the videos, would be sad or angry about the friendships. Thus, these children perceived the parents to be prejudiced, although the episodes had portrayed hospitable, friendly, and inviting depictions of the parents. Without explicit positive and supportive communication about the cross-race friendships, the children did not perceive the parents as being supportive of such relationships.

Parents' ability to influence children's media habits is important in terms of intervention efforts. Parents have the opportunity to curb their children's exposure to negative media portrayals and instead encourage the children's exposure to positive role models via educational programs featuring cast members from different racial backgrounds displaying interracial friendships and cooperation. Such portrayals of interracial friendships may count as the vicarious experiences proposed by the "extended contact" hypothesis (Cameron, Rutland, Brown, & Douch, 2006; Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe, & Ropp, 1997). Parent-child discussions alone may not be enough to persuade children to modify their attitudes. However, if the parents' statements are backed up by televised portrayals of interracial friendships, children may find their parents' messages more credible.

The Present Study

Based on findings from previous research, the present study combined the use of parent-child discussions and educational television in an effort to improve White children's racial attitudes. Children aged 5-7 years old were targeted because this age range is a time at which White children start to express particular in-group favoritism and some out-group derogation (Aboud, 2005; Bigler, 1999; Castelli et al., 2007; Katz & Kofkin, 1997). The two main hypotheses for the study presented here were: (1) White children who watched the racially diverse programs provided and discussed the content with a parent were expected to report more-positive attitudes toward Blacks; (2) White children who had race-related discussions with their parents were expected to be better able to predict their

parents' racial attitudes following the experimental manipulation, compared to children who did not have such discussions.

Method

Participants

A total of 99 White families with 5- to 7-year-old children were recruited. The families were recruited from a database of birth records maintained at a university research laboratory. Three families withdrew from the study after the initial visit because they became "too busy" and were unable to complete the tasks or to schedule the follow-up interview. Two families withdrew after they were assigned to a group and given instructions about required race-related discussions, because the parents did not want to have such conversations with their children. Additionally, one family's data were excluded from the analyses because their child was not White.

Of the remaining 93 participants (50 boys, 43 girls), there were twenty-nine 5-year-olds, thirty-two 6-year-olds, and thirty-two 7-year-olds. Almost all (95%) of the parents were married or living together with a partner. Eighty-one percent of mothers and 87% of fathers had earned a 4-year college degree. Nearly three fourths of the families (69%) had annual family incomes exceeding \$75,000.

Materials

Background information and pretest racial attitudes were collected and assessed through parent surveys and child interviews. The intervention was conducted with videos and home diaries. Finally, the posttest racial attitudes were assessed with child interviews. The materials used for each of these components are described below.

Parent questionnaire about television and race. This questionnaire (developed specifically for this study) consisted of 20 questions concerning parental involvement in children's television use, diversity of the children's surroundings, and parent-child discussions about race and television content. The full questionnaire is available from the first author.

Pro-Black/Anti-Black Attitude Questionnaire (PAAQ). This was a modified version of the questionnaire originally developed by Katz and Hass (1988) to measure racial attitudes in adults. It consisted of 10 Likert scale items, half of which were worded to be consistent with humanitarian-egalitarian values (e.g., *This country would be better off if it were willing to assimilate the good things in Black culture.*), and the other half consistent with the belief that the problems experienced by Black people are due to their own shortcomings (e.g., *Blacks don't seem to use the opportunities that are given to them.*). Responses to the

statements were scored on a scale of 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 6 (*Strongly Agree*). The statements indicating positive and egalitarian racial values formed the pro-Black subscale, and the statements indicating some bias or prejudice formed the anti-Black subscale, both subscales have a possible range of 5–30. Cronbach's alpha coefficients, in this sample for the pro-Black subscales, were .56 for the mothers and .58 for the fathers. Alpha coefficients for the anti-Black subscales were .75 and .71, respectively. For the purpose of analysis, aggregate attitude scores were combined for mothers and fathers by subtracting the negative subscale from the positive subscale.

Black/White Evaluative Trait Scale (BETS). For the child interviews, the BETS (Hughes & Bigler, 2007), was used. The BETS measures children's positive and negative attitudes toward Black and White people. The scale consists of 12 items, including positive (e.g., nice, honest), negative (e.g., unkind, dishonest), and neutral (curious, trusting) traits about each racial group. Children were asked how many people within each racial group possessed these traits. Examples of questions include, "How many Black people are nice?" and "How many Black people are dishonest?" Response options were on a 5-point Likert-type scale, and children's responses were scored on a scale of 0 (*Hardly Any*) to 4 (*Almost All*). Four subscales were derived from this measure, calculated as follows: the positive items (nice, pretty, honest, generous, happy) for Blacks were added to form the Positive Black subscale, the negative items (selfish, cruel, unkind, awful, dishonest) were added to form the Negative Black subscale, and the neutral items (curious, trusting) were disregarded. The same was done to obtain the positive and negative subscales for Whites.

The BETS is likely to produce a more valid measure of children's racial biases compared to previous measures, such as the Preschool Racial Attitude Measure (PRAM/PRAM II; Williams, Best, Boswell, Mattson, & Graves, 1975) or the Multiresponse Racial Attitude measure (MRA; Doyle & Aboud, 1995), because it measures separate positive and negative evaluations of both the in-group and the out-group, thus not confounding in-group positivity with out-group derogation (Cameron, Alvarez, Ruble, and Fuligni, 2001), and it includes the option for children to choose multiple targets or no targets for each of the adjectives.

For this sample of children, Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the positive attitude subscales were .53 and .59 (for evaluations of Blacks and Whites, respectively), and for the negative attitude subscales were .75 and .71, respectively. Composite in-group and out-group attitude scores were also computed based on the BETS subscales. In-group attitude scores were calculated by subtracting Negative White from Positive White, and out-group attitude scores were calculated by subtracting Negative Black from Positive Black.

Prediction of Parental Attitudes (PPA). This 14-item questionnaire, developed for this study, asked children to predict their parents' attitudes toward Blacks

and Whites, as well as to state whether they or their parents have friends of other races. The adjectives used on this questionnaire were a subset of the items from the BETS and answer choices were “Yes,” “No,” or “I don’t know” (e.g., *Does your Mom/Dad like Black people?*, *Does your Mom/Dad think Black people are dishonest?* etc.). The questionnaire items were read to the children by an interviewer and their answers were circled on the questionnaire. The answers were scored as follows: “Yes” on positive statements and “No” on negative statements were given a score of +1, “No” on positive statements and “Yes” on negative statements were given a -1, and “Don’t know” was given a 0. The responses were then combined to form the PPA variables for responses about parental attitudes toward Black people (PPA-Black) and toward White people (PPA-White).

Videos. Five different video segments were chosen for this study, each lasting 10–15 minutes in length. Previous studies have included fewer videos or shorter segments (e.g., Lovelace & Scheiner, 1994; Persson & Musher-Eizenman, 2003). However, by watching five programs—one per day—children would be exposed to racially diverse programming for almost a week, and they would be exposed to different formats and different characters, which should result in greater generalizability. The segments were episodes of *The Puzzle Place*, *Sesame Street* (two episodes), *Little Bill*, and *Zoom*.³ These videos were carefully chosen based on a racially diverse cast, the portrayal of interracial friendships, and a focus on positive relationships. Several of the videos have been used in previous research studies on racial attitudes (see e.g., Fisch et al., 1999; Lovelace & Scheiner, 1994; Persson & Musher-Eizenman, 2003).

Instructions and home diaries. Parents in all three experimental groups were given a set of instructions for the screening of the videos and for having the conversations with their children along with a home diary. Parents in the video-only group were instructed to let the children watch the videos by themselves and not talk to their children about the videos unless the children specifically asked them questions about the content. Parents were instructed to record in the diaries the essence of conversations they had with their children during or after the screenings or discussions. Parents in the video-and-discussion and discussion-only groups were given an additional handout containing instructions on what topics to discuss with their children each night, such as pointing out how children of different racial groups can be great friends and have a lot in common, teaching them the importance of showing respect for people regardless of race or skin color, asking children about cross-racial friendships (real or hypothetical) in the neighborhood or at school, and pointing out that children of each race,

³ The *Sesame Street* videos were obtained directly from the Sesame Workshop. *Little Bill* and *Puzzle Place* were purchased online, and *Zoom* was a recent television recording.

ethnicity, and skin color are all special. All parents were asked to note in their diary specifically what they talked about (if applicable), what questions their children asked, and their perceived depth of the conversation. Diary information was coded by two independent coders. Coders agreed 95% of the time, and in the few instances where they did not, codes were assigned based on the agreement of a third coder.

Procedure

At their initial visit to the research lab (Time 1), parents were asked to fill out a consent form, and the 7-year-old children were asked to sign an assent form after the study was explained to them by a researcher or parent. Parents then filled out the questionnaires. While parents were filling out questionnaires and receiving instructions, their children were interviewed in a nearby room with the BETS and PPA instruments.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of four groups. There were three experimental groups: video-only ($n = 26$), video-and-discussion ($n = 26$), and discussion-only ($n = 24$). The final group was a control group which only completed the pretest and posttest questionnaires and interviews, and did not take part in the intervention ($n = 17$).

At the end of the Time 1 session, parents in the two video groups were given a videotape with the five episodes and instructions on screening the episodes; parents in the discussion groups were given a handout with race-related topics to discuss with their children. Parents in all three experimental groups were also given the instructions and home diaries for their assigned group and verbal instructions on how to fill out the diaries. In addition, parents who were married or living with a partner were asked to take home a packet of questionnaires for their partner to fill out independently.

Parents in the two video groups were asked to show one program (out of the five on the video) on each of five different nights during the course of 1 week. Parents in the discussion-only group were asked to discuss the assigned topics once a day for 5 days during the course of 1 week. Finally, all parents were asked to schedule a second appointment (Time 2) after the tasks had been completed, approximately 1 week after the initial lab visit.

At Time 2, parents returned the videos, home diaries, and their partner's questionnaire. The children were interviewed again, using the same instruments as in Time 1. Most (91%) parents and children showed up for the second interview 6–8 days after their first appointment. The remainder waited 9–12 days. At the end of the second session, the parents and children were thanked and the children were given a \$10 gift card and a toy.

Table 1. Reported Parent–Child Conversation Topics Related to Race

Topic	Percent
Everybody is equal/God loves everyone	32
Don't discriminate/skin color doesn't matter	21
Everyone is different/what matters is what's on the inside	16
Languages/traditions of other countries	16
Historical issues (slavery, segregation)	8
Other/no answer	7

Results

Parents' and Children's Racial Attitudes

Mothers' and fathers' racial attitude scores were significantly correlated on both the pro-Black and anti-Black subscales, $r_s = .33-.45$, $p_s < .05$. Mothers' and fathers' composite out-group scores were also positively correlated, $r(52) = .48$, $p < .05$.

Children reported significantly more positive attitudes about Whites than about Blacks, $t(93) = -5.91$, $p < .05$ ($M_s = 15.77$ and 14.01 , respectively). Their negative attitudes of Black people were not significantly different from their negative attitudes of White people, $t(93) = .68$, $p > .05$ ($M_s = 6.20$ and 6.00 , respectively). Children's positive and negative subscales were uncorrelated, $r_s = -.09$ to $-.15$, $p_s > .05$. On the composite scores, the difference in in-group and out-group attitude scores was significant, $t(89) = 3.80$, $p < .05$ ($M_s = 9.85$ and 7.87 , respectively). Children's in-group and out-group attitudes were not significantly correlated with their parents' attitudes, $r_s = .04-.20$, $p_s > .05$. Correlations and descriptive statistics for the subscales and composite measures are available from the first author.

Sixty percent of parents reported that their children had at least one Black friend. Sixty-three percent of the children also reported having a Black friend. Most (87%) of the children who said they had a Black friend indicated the friend was a classmate. Only 4% of the children revealed that they had gone to one of their Black friends' home or had the friend over to their home. Children who reported having Black friends showed slightly more positive out-group attitudes ($M = 8.09$) compared to the children without Black friends ($M = 7.40$); however, the difference was not significant, $F(1, 85) = 0.31$, $p > .05$.

A majority of parents (69% of mothers and 78% of fathers) reported having Black friends. However, only 53% of the children reported they were aware of these friendships. Children who were aware that their parents had Black friends evaluated Blacks more positively ($M = 9.29$) than children who reported that their parents did not have Black friends ($M = 5.83$) or that they were unaware ($M = 7.50$), $F(2, 85) = 3.88$, $p < .05$.

Sixty-five percent of mothers and 42% of fathers reported discussing race-related issues with their children. However, only 33% of mothers and 20% of fathers had explicit discussions that included racial labels, skin color, stereotypes, and discrimination. For a list of discussion topics and frequencies, see Table 1. Children whose mothers and fathers reported discussing race had more positive out-group attitude scores ($M_s = 8.22$ and 7.90) compared to those whose mothers and fathers did not discuss race ($M_s = 4.91$ and 3.71), $F_s = 3.43$ – 3.49 , $p_s = .06$. These discussions did not significantly impact their children's in-group attitudes.

Parental Compliance with Intervention Instructions

Home diaries were inspected to assess whether parents had complied with instructions given to them regarding the videos and instructions. All parents in the video-only and video-and-discussion groups indicated that they had shown all five video segments to their children. However, the home diaries revealed a lack of compliance with the instructions when it came to the discussions. All parents were asked to rate their level of discussion each day, indicating whether they "just mentioned" the topics provided to them, had "some" discussion with the child, or had an "in-depth" discussion with the child.

In the groups assigned to discussion with their children, 50% ($n = 25$) admitted that they only briefly mentioned the comments and did not have any further discussion with their child. In addition, two families acknowledged that despite the instructions, they had no discussion with their children. Thirty-eight percent ($n = 19$) indicated that they added a couple of comments or questions, but only 10% ($n = 5$) engaged their children in in-depth conversation about the provided topics. For the purpose of further analysis, parents were divided into "Discussion" (those who had "some" or "in-depth" discussions) and "No Discussion" (those who had no discussion or only brief mentions) groups.

Effects of Videos and Discussions on Children's Posttest Attitudes

In order to assess the effects of educational videos and parent-child discussions on children's posttest racial attitudes, a 2 (Video: yes [$n = 49$], no [$n = 38$]) \times 2 (Discussion: yes [$n = 24$], no [$n = 63$]) \times 3 (Age: 5, 6, 7) analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted with pretest out-group attitude scores (based on the Positive Black and Negative Black subscales on the BETS)) as the covariate, and posttest out-group attitude scores as the dependent variable. A significant video \times discussion interaction effect was found, $F(1, 74) = 5.71$, $p > .05$. Children who watched the videos without discussions showed more positive out-group attitudes ($M = 10.67$, $SD = 5.38$) than children in the control group who did not watch videos and did not have discussions with their parents ($M = 7.85$, $SD = 5.11$), and similarly, children who did not watch videos but whose parents discussed the

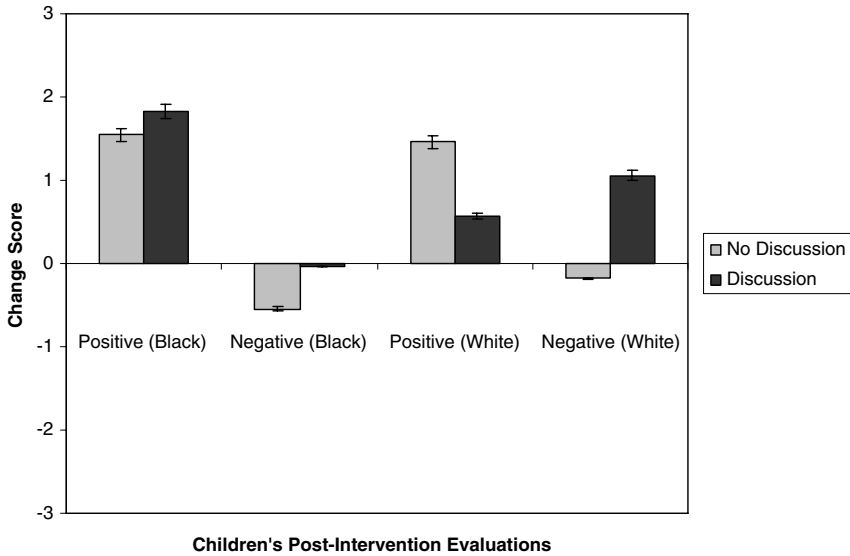


Fig. 1. Change scores in children's affective evaluations of Blacks and Whites, based on discussion level (video-and-discussion group).

topic of race showed more positive out-group attitudes ($M = 12.18$, $SD = 4.87$) than the control group. For those who watched the videos, discussion level did not significantly impact the posttest attitude scores ($M_s = 10.67$ and 9.77).

A 2 (Video: yes, no) \times 2 (Discussion: yes, no) \times 3 (Age: 5, 6, 7) ANCOVA was conducted with pretest in-group attitude scores (based on the Positive White and Negative White subscales on the BETS) as the covariate, and posttest in-group attitude scores as the dependent variable. Again, a significant video \times discussion interaction effect was found, $F(1, 75) = 4.26$, $p > .05$. Children who did not watch videos showed improved in-group attitudes when parents discussed the topic of race ($M = 10.55$, $SD = 3.53$) compared to the control group that had no discussion ($M = 8.96$, $SD = 4.86$). But interestingly, children who watched the videos and had race-related discussions showed less positive in-group attitudes ($M = 10.14$, $SD = 5.00$) than those who watched videos and did not have discussions ($M = 12.36$, $SD = 4.38$). A depiction of change scores based on discussion level can be seen in Figures 1 and 2.

Children's Ability to Predict Parents' Attitudes

Children's posttest scores on the PPA-Black variable were significantly different from their pre-test scores, $t(89) = 5.34$, $p < .05$, indicating that children

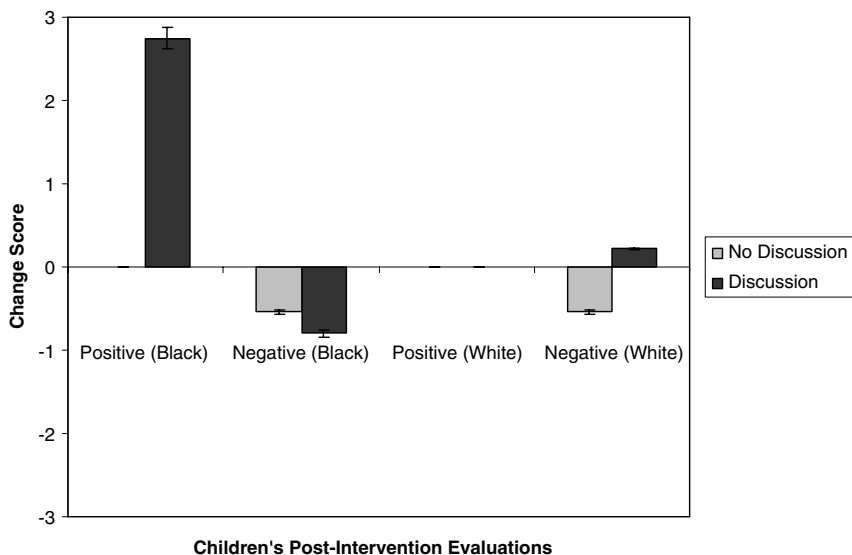


Fig. 2. Change scores in children’s affective evaluations of Blacks and Whites, based on discussion level (discussion-only group).

perceived their parents’ attitudes toward Blacks as more positive at posttest. Pretest and posttest scores on the PPA-White variable did not differ significantly, $t(84) = 0.70, p > .05$.

PPA-Black scores were positively correlated with children’s out-group attitudes, both at pretest and at posttest, $r_s = 0.28-0.32, p_s < .01$. Children’s pretest PPA-Black scores were not correlated with their mothers’ and fathers’ composite racial attitude scores, but at posttest they were, $r_s = 0.28-0.30, p_s < .05$.

Following the intervention, children in the discussion groups were less likely to answer that they were unsure of whether their parents liked Black people (19% vs. 40% pretest). Similarly, those in the video groups were also less likely to answer at posttest that they were unsure (19% vs. 44% pretest). A multinomial logistic regression analysis with video group (yes/no) and discussion group (yes/no) as the independent variables, pretest answer (yes/no/don’t know) as the covariate, and posttest answer as the dependent variable revealed that the difference was significant, $X^2(6, n = 94) = 21.78, p < .05$.

Similarly, children who watched videos or had discussions were less likely to indicate that they did not know if their parents would approve of them having a Black friend (video: 10% vs. 22% pretest; discussion: 3% vs. 24% pretest), or that their parents would disapprove of them having a Black friend (video: 9% vs. 14% pretest; discussion: 3% vs. 8% pretest). The multinomial logistic regression

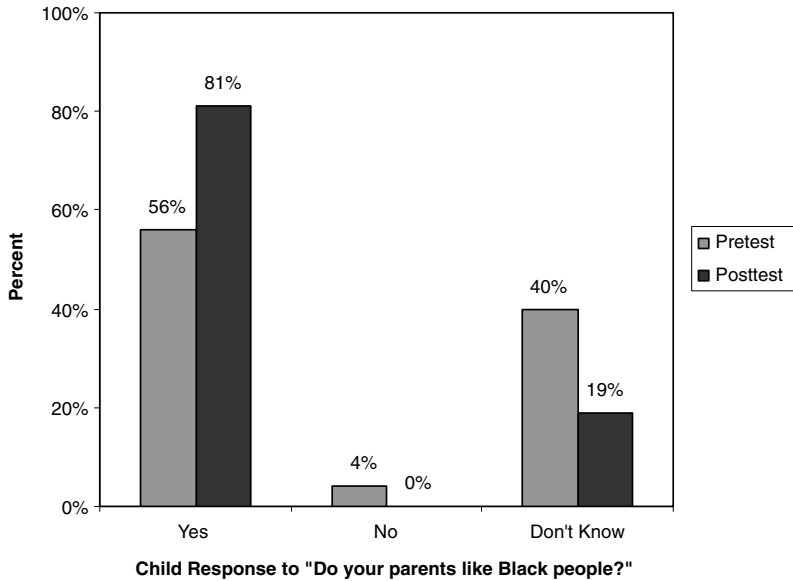


Fig. 3. Discussion group children's reports of whether their parents like Black people, before (pretest) and after (posttest) the intervention.

model was significant for these results as well, $X^2(6, n = 94) = 20.65, p < .05$. For an overview of children's pretest and posttest responses, see Figures 3 and 4. Comparatively, 94% of children said their parents liked White people, and 6% said "No."

Discussion

Multiple agents of socialization influence children's development of racial attitudes. This study was designed to investigate the specific impact of educational television and parent-child discussions about race-related topics. Television is often referred to as a "window on the world" (Barcus, 1983; Graves, 1999), and Wynter (2002) claimed that young people today are "the first generation that can truly be defined by the television they watch" (p. 182). Therefore, it is important to look at how children may learn about society through the television lens. In addition, it is necessary to look at the role parents play in terms of interpreting the messages children may be exposed to through television.

An important source from which children gain knowledge about other racial groups is the family. Looking at the associations between family members' racial attitudes, this study found that mothers' and fathers' self-reported racial attitudes

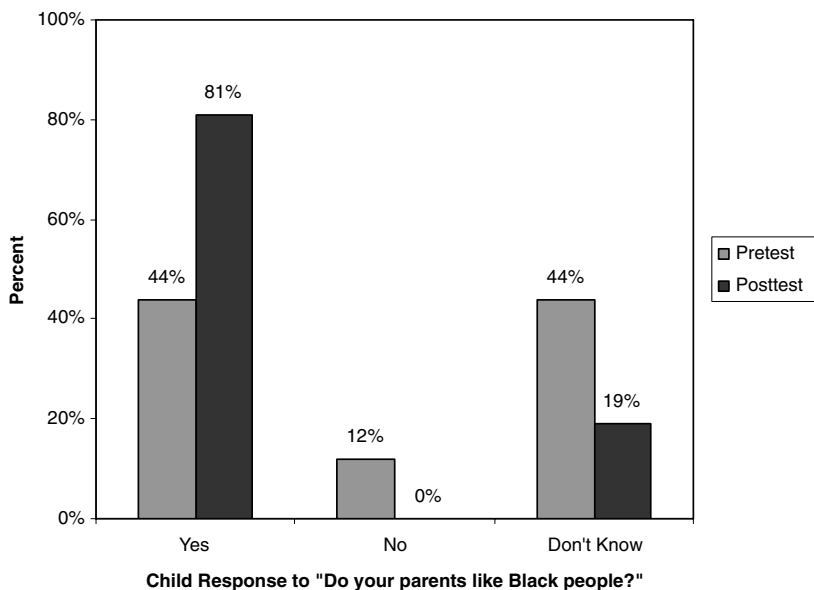


Fig. 4. Video group children's reports of whether their parents like Black people, before (pretest) and after (posttest) the intervention.

were found to be positively correlated. However, as found in previous research, parents' explicit racial attitudes were uncorrelated with those of their children. Thus, despite parental claims of egalitarian viewpoints, their children seemingly did not automatically adopt these same attitudes. Without having measures of the parents' implicit attitudes, we were unable to determine if those may have been associated with the children's attitudes.

Results of this study also confirmed prior research on in-group bias (e.g., Bigler & Brown, 2002; Sigelman, Miller, & Whitworth, 1986; Yee & Brown, 1992). The White children in this study rated White people more positively than they rated Black people.

Although approximately three fourths of the parents reported having Black friends, only about half of the children were aware of such friendships. Children who were cognizant of their parents' interracial friendships showed more positive and less negative evaluations of Blacks. This finding may reflect the role of observational learning in children's development of racial attitudes. If children observe positive encounters between their parents and people of other races, they may be positively influenced (Castelli et al., 2008). However, this would predicate children being able to make such observations. If the friendly interracial interactions occur outside of the children's home (such as at the work place),

children are not privy to these relationships. This may be the reason fewer children reported awareness of their parents having Black friends.

Children who reported having Black friends showed slightly more positive attitudes toward Blacks, although the difference was not statistically significant, possibly due to the confounding of classmates and friends. Future research can benefit from asking the children more details about these reported friendships to determine whether the closeness of the friendship (e.g., a playmate from the neighborhood versus a classmate in school), as well as the number of Black friends, influences children's attitudes.

Only a few parents indicated that they had explicit discussions with their children about race. Children of parents who did showed more positive out-group attitudes at a level that approached significance. A larger sample size with more parents reporting substantive discussions may yield stronger results. Future research also needs to look at the effects of specific types of race-related conversations.

Effectiveness of Intervention

It was hypothesized that the intervention would be successful in influencing children's racial attitudes, such that children who were exposed to racially diverse television programs and discussions about race would show more positive attitudes toward Blacks. Both videos and discussions influenced children's out-group attitudes. Compared to children in the control group, children who watched videos and/or had discussions with their parents showed more positive out-group attitudes. Generally, the influence of videos was more significant when parents did not have discussions, and the influence of discussions was more significant when children did not watch videos, thus indicating that both contributed to a change in children's attitudes. However, the two methods combined did not prove to be superior to either method alone. This could indicate a possible ceiling effect for change, or it could be related to the apparent lack of compliance on the part of the parents (see below).

Children's in-group attitudes also improved when parents discussed the topic of race, but only for those who did not watch videos. In the video groups, children whose parents had race-related discussions with them showed less-positive in-group attitudes. This could indicate that children were perceiving inequality based on the discussions, although the diaries the parents turned in did not reveal a specific pattern in that direction.

After inspecting parents' reports of the level of depth of their discussions with their children, it appeared that many parents did not engage in the discussion part of the procedure. Almost half of the parents who were assigned to discuss admitted that they only briefly mentioned some of the topics. Only 10% of the parents reported that they engaged their children in substantive discussions, thus

indicating reluctance to discuss the topic of race. Similarly, two families chose to withdraw from the study after being instructed to have such conversations. Such reluctance may be due to discomfort with the topic and not knowing how to approach it, and further research should explore parental thoughts about this issue. It is also possible that parents are not motivated to have race-related discussions with their children, because they believe that their children are not biased and therefore the discussions do not seem necessary to them. Further research needs to be conducted on parents' perceptions of their children's racial attitudes. For the purpose of intervention research, procedures may need to be included to motivate parents to engage in the topic and realize the importance of it. Parents may need a demonstration on how to conduct the discussions, and it may be necessary to require them to commit, either verbally or in writing, to having the discussions. Results from an intervention study with increased participant compliance might produce stronger effects, as well as more valid and reliable outcomes.

Prior to the intervention, many children were not aware of their parents' racial attitudes, which is likely an outcome of the parents' reluctance to discuss the topic. This is significant because children's perceptions of their parents' attitudes toward certain groups of people likely influence their own attitudes toward such groups. This assumption was supported by results of this study. Whereas children's racial attitudes were not shown to be significantly correlated with their parents' reported racial attitudes, children's *perceptions* of their parents' racial attitudes were significantly associated with their own reported attitudes. Children who perceived their parents to have more-positive attitudes toward Black people were more likely to report more-positive out-group evaluations themselves. Many parents reported that they would rather have their children learn through observation than through direct discussion about race; however, our results indicate that many children either have not had the opportunity to observe positive interracial interactions, or they have somehow formed the idea that their parents may not be supportive of such interactions.

It was expected that children who had race-related discussions with their parents would be better able to predict their attitudes. After the intervention, children in the discussion groups were more certain of their parents' attitudes compared to children who did not have race-related discussions with their parents. This indicates the utility of explicit parent-child discussions about race. Parents often assume that their children have racial attitudes that are similar to their own, and they are surprised to find out that often their attitudes do not match (Katz, 2003). Without explicit parent-child conversations about race, children are more likely to learn from other sources, such as peers or the media that, as mentioned, can be highly biased. Allport (1954) commented that racism is more likely to be "caught" rather than taught directly, and this study speaks to his observation. Children indeed may pick up on implicit negative messages about other racial

groups because their parents are not willing to discuss this sensitive topic and do not expose their children to positive adult interracial interactions.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

One limitation was the length of time for the intervention. Due to time limitations, as well as to parents' time constraints, the intervention was only conducted for 1 week, and no follow-up data were collected on children's racial attitudes. Children may need more exposure to the vicarious interracial interactions and have more discussions with their parents before significant long-term improvements can be seen.

Furthermore, this study may be limited in its generalization to other groups of the population due to the fact that only White families participated and most of them were middle-class families. Different results may be found with participants from other racial and socioeconomic groups.

A great deal of research has been conducted on various prejudice prevention programs implemented in schools (see e.g., Bigler, 1999). However, there is a gap in research on interventions focusing on family involvement. Thus, there is a need for more experimental research looking at how parents can influence improvements in children's racial attitudes. Interventions in the schools may be easier to implement due to greater compliance of teachers compared to parents. However, a prejudice prevention program will likely be more effective if it includes discussions or activities in the child's home environment as well.

Future research would benefit from attending to associations between parents' and children's *implicit* racial attitudes, as well as nonverbal cues expressed by parents, other adults, and television characters in children's programming, in order to investigate the more subtle influences on children's attitudes. Most adults prefer to view themselves as unprejudiced (Monteith, 1993), which can explain the dissociation between explicit and implicit attitudes (Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998). If they fear being viewed as prejudiced, they may become focused on constructing, maintaining, and defending desired images of themselves as unprejudiced, and such "ecosystem goals" may lead to impaired intergroup interactions (Crocker & Garcia, 2009). This could lead to avoidance of contact with out-group members, further creating a segregated environment that does not allow children to view positive interracial interactions. However, Crocker and Garcia suggest that when people have "ecosystem goals," they are more likely to focus on what they can learn, contribute, or do to support others, and that can lead to increased understanding and improved intergroup interactions. Creating interventions that promote ecosystem goals may make parents more willing to cooperate and could in turn promote more long-lasting effects.

There is also a need for more research looking at the effects of multiple socializing agents on children's development of racial attitudes. A child's development is impacted by a multitude of interdependent systems, including the child's family, peers, neighborhood, school, media, and societal values (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Thus, when it comes to influencing a child's racial-attitude development, it is not enough to look at effects from only one of these systems. Change may need to occur at several levels, and future research needs to investigate the types of interventions that are most effective.

Conclusion

Prejudice continues to be a problem in our society, and in order to decrease its occurrence, it is important to intervene with children when they are young. As children get older, their racial attitudes and behaviors are likely to become more negative and harder to change (Stephan & Vogt, 2004). Children who adopt more egalitarian views will likely display less racial bias, and this in turn may lead to less racial tension in our society. As this study has documented, many parents choose not to discuss the topic of race with their children. For some parents, television programs promoting positive interracial interactions may be useful as a way to approach the subject, because they can use the television content to initiate conversations with their children about race. Although it appears that a number of parents are uncomfortable in discussing with their children the topic of race and discrimination, this study sheds some light on the role parent-child conversations may play in enlightening children about their parents' racial attitudes. It is hoped that this study can be a springboard to future investigations into the impact parents and educational television can have on improving children's racial attitudes.

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