

Parents' Estimates of Children's Racial Prejudices

by

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Abstract

Previous research suggests that racial prejudice emerges in the early preschool years, often influenced by parental attitudes. However, many parents, particularly White parents, may be unaware that their children hold racial biases. Research suggests that White parents avoid discussing race with their children; therefore, they remain unaware of their children's ideas about race. However, research has yet to examine exactly how accurately parents predict their children's racial prejudices, and whether the accuracy of these estimates differ for parents of different backgrounds. The purpose of this study was to investigate (1) how early in childhood racial prejudice begins, (2) whether parents underestimate their children's racial prejudices, and (3) which group of parents, based on socioeconomic status (i.e. race and wealth), are most prone to underestimating their children's racial prejudices? Children's ($N = 61$; $M = 7.77$) racial prejudices were assessed through a friendship preference task in which children selected between a fair-skinned and a dark-skinned playmate, eight times. In addition, parents also made predictions about their children's choices in playmates. We compared parents' predictions of their children's selection of playmates with their children's actual selections to evaluate the accuracy of parental predictions. Furthermore, we examined the accuracy of these predictions across socioeconomic status to determine which group of parents were more likely to underestimate their children's racial prejudices. Results revealed that, in contrast to past research, children did not express racial biases in their selection of playmates. Additionally, parents did not underestimate their children's racial biases, and these underestimates did not differ by parents' socioeconomic status. Implications for prejudice development and parenting are discussed.

Parents Estimates of Children's Racial Prejudice

Racism is a form of prejudice in which individuals are discriminated against based on their race. Discrimination is a common and significant experience for many children of color, impacting their sense of belonging, self-perception, and emotional well-being. Often, they face rejection and exclusion from peers solely because of the color of their skin. Research has suggested that children begin to display prejudiced behaviors as early as the age of four (Gollwitzer et al., 2020; Perszyk et al., 2018; Shutts et al., 2013). But how does racism develop? Research suggests that parents are primary socialization agents that inform their children's racial biases (Perry et al., 2019; Rutland & Killen, 2015; Scott et al., 2020; Segall et al., 2015). Essentially, how parents discuss, behave, and socialize with social outgroups plays a role in their children's understanding and evaluations of those groups. However, past studies have found that many families, particularly White ones, avoid discussing race with their children, leading to a lack of awareness about their children's racial prejudices and their own influence on shaping such biases (Abaied et al., 2022; Sullivan et al., 2021). As a result, parents are unable to take concrete actions toward reducing their children's racial biases, leading to their children continuing to display prejudiced behaviors. In the present study, I investigate (1) how early in childhood racial prejudice begins, (2) whether parents underestimate their children's racial prejudices, and (3) which group of parents, based on socioeconomic status (i.e., race and wealth), most severely underestimate their children's racial prejudices.

Racial Prejudice in White Children

The emergence of racial prejudice begins in early childhood, especially among White children, as evidenced by their attitudes that influence their evaluations and perceptions of Black individuals (Gollwitzer et al., 2020; Perszyk et al., 2018; Shutts et al., 2013). Racial prejudice

refers to the negative attitudes, beliefs, biases, and stereotypes individuals hold about a group of people belonging to a different race or ethnic group. Racial prejudice can manifest in various forms, including discrimination, bias, and racism. It often involves individuals making unfair judgments about others based on their race or ethnicity and treating them unfairly and unequally on that basis. Children, specifically White children, commonly begin to express in-group bias and implicit and explicit racial biases as early as the age of 4 (Gollwitzer et al., 2020; Perszyk et al., 2018; Shutts et al., 2013). For example, one study utilized the Affective Misattribution Procedure (AMP) and an explicit liking task to measure implicit and explicit biases in a sample of four-year-old children, predominantly from a White middle-class background (Perszyk et al., 2018). The AMP is known as an implicit attitude measure that assesses people's affective responses based on their tendency to misattribute their emotional reactions from one stimulus to another. In this study, child participants viewed images featuring Black and White girls and boys along with neutral images (i.e., a Chinese individual). Participants tended to utilize negative descriptions, such as "not nice looking," when describing the neutral image if they had previously viewed an image of a Black child. Notably, this finding was more prevalent when the image featured a Black boy over all other targets. Similarly, children displayed anti-Black bias in the explicit liking task, where they rated the faces of Black and White girls and boys on a 6-point scale (*1 = really do not like to 6 = really like*). Replicating findings from the AMP task, children disfavored Black children, but significantly more Black boys. These findings support the idea that White children as young as four years old exhibit both implicit and explicit racial biases in their perceptions of Black children.

Research has found that individuals' aversion toward pattern deviancy can function as a predictor for racial prejudice. Pattern deviancy aversion involves a negative affective response

stemming from the disruption of an established pattern (Gollwitzer et al., 2020). It is important to consider the implications of pattern deviancy aversion in the context of marginalized groups. Initially, marginalized groups are stereotyped as social norm breakers, leading individuals averse to pattern deviancy to perceive them as physically deviant due to preexisting notions that characterize them as violators of social patterns (Gollwitzer et al., 2020). In this study, children between the ages of 4 and 7, the majority of whom were White/European American, were recruited to investigate whether pattern deviancy aversion might motivate racial prejudice in children, driven by their dislike of statistical minorities. Researchers conducted a nonsocial pattern deviancy aversion task, where participants stated their preference between broken and unbroken geometric shape patterns. In addition, participants' liking of novel statistical minorities and majorities on six different planets was evaluated using a 7-point Likert scale (*1 = not at all to 7 = a lot*). Moreover, researchers assessed racial prejudice by asking participants to indicate their preference between images of Black and White individuals. Researchers found an indirect link between children's nonsocial pattern deviancy aversion and racial prejudice through their dislike of statistical minorities. Taken together, these results suggest that in children as young as four years old, pattern deviancy aversion may lead them to disfavor those who are infrequent (minorities) within their population compared to those who are frequent (majorities) because they perceive them as atypical or deviant for diverging from the majority. This, in turn, motivates prejudice against Black individuals, who represent the minority as they differ from the established pattern of typical in society.

The formation of racial attitudes begins in early childhood but becomes less explicit as children mature, often evidenced by their social preferences and perceptions of racial groups. Research has shown that children begin to demonstrate an understanding of the concept of race

at the age of four years and achieve a more concrete understanding of the concept of race between the ages of five and six (Aboud, 1988; Baron & Banaji, 2006). However, research indicates a discrepancy in the developmental trajectory of children's explicit and implicit bias. For instance, studies have shown that children's negative explicit attitudes towards out-group members decrease approximately at the age of 7 (Aboud, 1988), and their implicit attitudes tend to remain relatively stable during childhood (Baron & Banaji, 2006). One study assessed 6-year-old and 10-year-old children from a predominately middle-class European background and their implicit and explicit racial attitudes. Participants were tasked with choosing between White children's faces and Black children's faces. The results of this study replicated past findings with 6-year-olds selecting the White child 84% of the time, and 10-year-olds selecting the White child 68% of the time (Baron & Banaji, 2006). Similarly, participants displayed implicit racial attitudes in the Implicit Association Test (IAT), which is used to measure one's implicit biases by recording their response time when associating two concepts together: in other words, the faster and more accurately one pairs two concepts together, the stronger the associative strength, thus stronger implicit bias is revealed. In this experiment, participants were presented with 8 attribute stimuli that consisted of four images of White children and four images of Black children, where they had to pair each image with a positive (e.g. good, nice, fun, happy) or negative attribute (e.g. bad, mean, yucky, mad). Children were instructed to press one of two jellybean buttons when target concept B was associated with attribute A (e.g., White face and positive word) or when target concept A was paired with attribute B (e.g., Black face and negative word). The findings revealed that 6-year-olds and 10-year-olds demonstrated pro-White/anti-Black bias to the same extent evidenced by their quicker response times to pairings of White faces with positive words and Black faces with negative words. In essence, the evidence

from this study suggests that racial attitudes are formed early in childhood, manifested through children's social preferences and perceptions of racial categories, although explicit biases tend to diminish as children age.

Parents' Contributions to the Development of Racial Bias

Understanding the origins of racial prejudice involves recognizing and examining the role that parents play in the socialization of children, particularly in shaping their children's racial attitudes. Parents are known to be primary socialization agents in their children's lives, guiding and assisting in the development of their attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors. For example, research has shown that parents are the main determinants of their children's attitudes, including religious and political attitudes (Dalhouse & Frideres, 1996; Glass et al., 1986; Granqvist, 1998, 2002; Jennings et al., 2009; Valentino & Sears, 1998). Thus, research has theorized that the development of intergroup attitudes and prejudiced behaviors should undergo socialization processes similar to the development of religious and political beliefs (Degner & Dalege, 2013). Research has determined that learning through observation (Bandura, 1977) and parental management of children's environments are known as the primary and most efficient methods of socialization (Grusec, 2011). In many ways, racial prejudice begins to manifest in children because of the way parents manage their children's environments (Elenbass et al., 2024; Kang & Bodenhausen, 2015; Pahlke et al., 2012). A study conducted by Elenbass & Colleagues (2024) found that parents from both Black and White racial backgrounds were more comfortable with their children engaging in activities with children from their own racial backgrounds. The findings suggested that this comfort stemmed from parents' viewing children from similar backgrounds as more positive, such as being friendly, respectful, and kind, and seeing similarities with their own child. Moreover, a study by Pahlke and colleagues (2012) revealed

that European-American mothers who had more non-European-American friends had children who exhibited fewer racial biases than mothers with predominantly European-American social circles. Ultimately, parents play a crucial role in shaping their children's racial attitudes by facilitating their social interactions or exposure, potentially reinforcing ingroup bias, and shaping their perception of racial outgroups.

Parents' racial attitudes are relevant in the development of children's racial attitudes, as children are like sponges, highly receptive to the beliefs and behaviors modeled to them, and in turn, replicating them. Research has suggested that parents play a crucial role in the development of racial prejudice in their children; therefore, it is expected for similarities between the attitudes held by parents and their children to exist (Adorno et al., 1950; Allport, 1954; Kinder & Sears, 1981). A study conducted by Castelli & Colleagues (2009) measured White parents and their children's racial attitudes to see how closely related their attitudes were. Both parents and children were tasked with associating positive and negative characteristics to White and Black figures, except children were also tasked with selecting between a White-presenting and a Black-presenting playmate. The results demonstrated that children's and mothers' implicit attitudes aligned, with both subjects associating more positive traits with White figures and negative traits with Black figures. Similarly, children tended to prefer White-presenting playmates over Black playmates. Furthermore, the results suggested that mothers' implicit biases significantly predicted children's preferences in playmates and their distribution of positive and negative characteristics. Researchers propose that children's racial attitudes are often shaped by their mothers' attitudes, primarily because mothers typically serve as primary caregivers and spend more time with their children. Consequently, they have greater opportunities to influence their children's racial socialization. This study highlights the pivotal role of primary caregivers in the

early development of racial prejudice in children, as evidenced by the similarities in social group perceptions between children and their mothers.

Children's expectations and understanding of their parents' racial attitudes play a crucial role in shaping their own views, often leading them to adopt similar attitudes. Research has shown that parents with more positive racial attitudes tend to have children who exhibit positive racial attitudes (Degner & Dalege, 2013). It is plausible that children are observant of the behaviors modeled to them; therefore, leading to them mirroring the behaviors they observe in their environments. In a similar study conducted by Castelli and colleagues (2007), children's beliefs about their parents' racial attitudes were assessed and compared to the racial attitudes held by the child. Children participated in a friendship preference task and rated their desire to play with each target (a White child and a Black child) separately on a 4-point scale (*1 = not at all to 4 = very much*). Additionally, they attributed positive and negative characteristics, as used in the previous study, to both targets. Child participants were then prompted to consider what their parents would think in this situation (e.g., would their mother prefer them to play with the White or Black child and how happy would their parents be with their selection of playmates). Finally, the participants were given the same friendship preference and attribute tasks but asked to answer from the perspective of their parents. Ultimately, the results demonstrated that children preferred White playmates over Black playmates, and children attributed more positive traits to White-presenting figures. Children's racial preferences aligned with those they predicted their parents would have, indicating that they perceived their parents to hold prejudiced attitudes similar to theirs. However, children's expectations of their mother's attitudes were a stronger predictor than their father's, symbolizing that mothers' attitudes might be a bigger contributor to the formation of children's racial attitudes. Notably, this study highlights the influential role of

mothers in the emergence of racial prejudice in children, evidenced by children's understanding of and alignment with their mothers' attitudes.

White and Wealthy Parents' Contributions to the Development of Racial Bias

White parents frequently avoid race-related conversations within their homes, resulting in a lack of awareness regarding their children's racial attitudes and an inability to effectively educate their children's racial biases. Many White parents believe that addressing race within their households will expose their children to the harsh realities of racism (Abaied & Perry, 2021; Pahlke et al., 2012; Vittrup & Holden, 2011). Additionally, many parents are under the impression that their children are innocent and incapable of holding racial biases as they "do not see color," and are too young to comprehend race (Abaied et al., 2022; Underhill, 2017; Wu et al., 2022); therefore, due to this belief, they do not see the purpose of addressing race with their children. For example, one study examined how parents discuss social groups and current race-related events (Abaied et al., 2022). The results of this study found that White parents felt less inclined to discuss race within their household because the topic was not prompted by their children. Essentially, White parents refuse to take the lead in socializing their children's ideas about race, and instead, they leave it up to their children. In addition, many White parents excused their lack of race-related conversations within their household with the fact that these conversations were not applicable or relevant to their household. Similarly, Vittrup and Holden (2011) found that only one-third of White parents had in-depth race-related discussions (e.g., discussing skin color, stereotypes, or discrimination) with their children, and it was found that children whose parents reported discussing race held more positive out-group attitudes compared to those whose parents did not discuss race. Ultimately, this shows that how parents expose their children to race influences their perceptions and attitudes towards racial outgroups, demonstrating their

contributions to their children's racial attitudes. Additionally, a study conducted by Pahlke and colleagues (2012) examined how European-American mothers use children's literature to discuss race with their children. The results of this study demonstrated that European-American mothers avoided discussing race after the read-aloud, matching their at-home behaviors. For instance, one of the books used, *David's Drawing*, tells the story of David, an African American, who attends a diverse school, and how he collaborates with his friends to create a picture. The purpose of the book was to elicit conversations about racial and ethnic diversity, but European mothers didn't meet that expectation. Similarly, mothers read a book, named *What If the Zebras Lost Their Stripes?* a book designed to evoke conversations about relations between African Americans and European Americans (e.g., one page asks, "Could Black and White friends still hold hands?"), yet only 11% of the mothers addressed interracial interactions among groups and rather discussed pro-social behaviors that disregarded race. Ultimately, White parents are less inclined to discuss race within their household, causing them to remain unaware of their children's racial attitudes and making it difficult to educate their children's racial biases.

White parents often adopt a colorblind stance in their approach to discussing race with their children, inadvertently contributing to the development of racial prejudice by neglecting to address systemic inequalities and White supremacy, and instead perpetuating a false sense of equality (Abaied et al., 2022). Colorblind comments are those that insinuate that everyone is equal, downplaying the importance of race, and disregarding systemic racism, White supremacy, and structural barriers that harm social outgroups. For example, Abaied & Perry (2021) examined the extent to which White parents communicate messages about race and their reasons behind the presence or absence of these messages within their household. Within this study, it was found that 50% of White parents made statements that implicitly or explicitly undermined

the reality of race, such as suggesting that racial and ethnic differences are merely surface-level and what holds importance are the internal qualities of someone. In addition, parents admitted to teaching their children to 'not see color' as a form of reducing racial prejudice; however, a colorblind stance may diminish children's awareness about discrimination, perpetuate racism, and reduce intergroup empathy (Apfelbaum et al., 2010). Similarly, Underhill (2017) conducted a study analyzing White middle-class parents and their conversations about current race-related events (e.g., Michael Brown's death and the Ferguson protests). The study found that White parents disregarded the race of Michael Brown when discussing the implications of his death, as well as how Ferguson's protests were directly informed by racial concerns. Many parents avoided addressing these events in the context of race because they wanted to protect their children from the realities of it, as well as out of fear that exposing their children to race may lead to potential consequences (e.g., offending someone). Essentially, White parents are hesitant to engage in direct, explicit discussions about race or racism with their children, even in the presence of pressing significant current events.

The intersection of Whiteness and wealth, caused by the racial wealth gap, often contributes to the manifestation of racial prejudice in children. The racial wealth gap, along with historic redlining policies, has resulted in racial neighborhood segregation, with White families frequently residing in wealthier, affluent neighborhoods. Consequently, this leads to White and wealthy families having limited exposure to racial outgroups and their cultures and lifestyles. Ultimately, individuals will internalize biases that they regularly encounter within their environment, thereby strengthening their essentialist beliefs (Ramsey, 2008). For instance, Aboud and Doyle (1996) illustrate how parents opting to live in a community with good schools and a predominantly White population can influence children's perceptions of racial outgroups

and their level of intelligence, deeming White individuals as more academically inclined or intelligent. Studies have shown that children are capable of interpreting social cues that link wealth and power to specific racial groups, including linking Whiteness with a higher socioeconomic status (Mandalaywala et al., 2020). Consequently, these perceived associations, often stemming from systemic disparities, can create barriers to interracial interactions. As a result, children may develop biased attitudes toward racial outgroups based on these limited interactions and their understanding of racial dynamics within their environment. Research has shown that when children are exposed to racial outgroups, they are more inclined to engage in efforts to dismantle systemic inequalities, thereby positively affecting their racial attitudes toward these outgroups (Elenbass, 2019). Elenbass (2019) discovered in their study that White children aged 5-8, who had more contact with low-income individuals, were more likely to allocate resources to a child from a low-income neighborhood than to another child from a higher status due to their access to fewer resources. Ultimately, research suggests that children are capable of recognizing racial disparities in contrast to their parent's beliefs, and exposure to racial groups can serve as a method to educate children about race. Although there is limited research on how family wealth may influence children's racial prejudices, existing research supports the conclusion that limited interracial interactions that arise from wealth disparities can negatively impact children's racial attitudes.

The present study

I anticipate that White and wealthy parents' failure to address race within their households informs their children's racial biases, as well as equally informs parents' estimates of their children's racial biases, as they remain unaware of them.

The present study will shed new light on the consequences of parents' failing to address race within their households. I investigate three research questions: First, how early does racial prejudice begin in childhood? I predict that racial prejudice will be visible in the early preschool years, replicating past research. Second, do parents underestimate their children's racial prejudices? I predict that they will. Finally, which parents most severely underestimate their children's racial prejudices? I predict that White and wealthy parents will underestimate their children's racial prejudices most strongly.

Method

Participants

A total of 61 children participated ($N = 61$), including 32 girls (52.5%) and 29 boys (47.5%) ranging from 6.0 to 9.9 years ($M = 7.77$, $SD = 1.24$). Roughly half (46.7%) were children of color, including Asian (23.7%), Black (13.6%), and multiracial (9.4%) children. Household income levels ranged from under \$40k/year (six families) to over \$200k/year (eight families), with a median household income of around \$100k/year (though one-third of families chose not to report their income). Parents also came from across the political spectrum, including 30 who identified as "liberal" or "very liberal", 12 who identified as "conservative" or "very conservative," and 16 who identified as either "moderate" or "not political." (Ten other families did not report their political orientation).

Materials

The study utilized a series of PowerPoint slides featuring cartoon-like images of children created using Vyond. Specifically, there were eight slides designed for a friendship preference task aimed at assessing child participants' prejudice toward Black-presenting

children. Additionally, participants viewed numerous other slides that were not the primary focus of this paper. The friendship preference task is described below.

Each of the eight friendship preference slides depicted a pair of children, one Black-presenting and the other White-presenting. In each slide, both children wore similar outfits and had similar facial expressions, but there were differences in skin color, eye color, hairstyle, and hair color. For instance, as illustrated in *Figure 1*, one slide featured a blue-eyed White-presenting child with slightly curly blonde hair, wearing a red hair bow, red shirt, black skirt, and sandals. In contrast, the brown-eyed Black-presenting child is wearing a similar white shirt, a green skirt, boots, and black curly hair with a pink hair bow.

Figure 1. Example of friendship preference slide.



Procedure

To begin the study, the child participant and the parent/guardian were given basic instructions about their virtual appointment. This included information about the duration of the study (approximately 15 minutes), the questionnaire, and consent form designed for the parent/guardian to fill out, and the compensation for their participation in the study (\$5

Amazon gift card). After the instructions, parents/guardians were provided with a link and asked to complete the consent form and questionnaire.

After completing the consent form, parents/guardians completed a questionnaire that included demographic questions about their children and family (age, gender, race, family income, and zip code). Similarly, parents were asked demographic questions about themselves, covering gender, race, level of education completed, and political leaning. Subsequently, parents/guardians completed the IMRP Scale, which included questions aimed at explaining why they might behave in nonprejudiced ways. The IMRP was a 7-point scale, ranging from *1 = strongly disagree* to *7 = strongly agree*, and included questions such as 'According to my personal values, using stereotypes is OK.' Next, parents were presented with an example of the friendship preference task their child would undergo and were asked to predict their child's preferences in playmates on an 8-point scale (*0 = all fair-skinned children* to *8 = all dark-skinned children*). Additionally, parents were asked the same question but about different scenarios and characteristics, such as disabilities, social status, family structure, and weight. Lastly, parents were requested to list the initials of five people whom their child regularly encounters and respond to questions regarding all five people. For example, parents were asked to indicate how many of the five listed were white, had a disability that the child is aware of, were gay, and were thin or average-weight.

Next, it was the child's turn to participate. Children's participation included two phases: A training phase and a racial friendship preference assessment phase.

In the training phase, child participants were given two practice slides to demonstrate how they would answer questions in the study over Zoom. The first practice slide presented participants with a logical question of choosing to eat a banana (above a blue box) or a chair

(above a red box). The experimenter said, "Which one of these would you eat? Red or blue?" The next practice slide used the same procedure but showed participants a lamp (above a blue box) and a hat (above a red box). The researcher asked the participant, "Which one of these would you put on your head? Red or blue?"

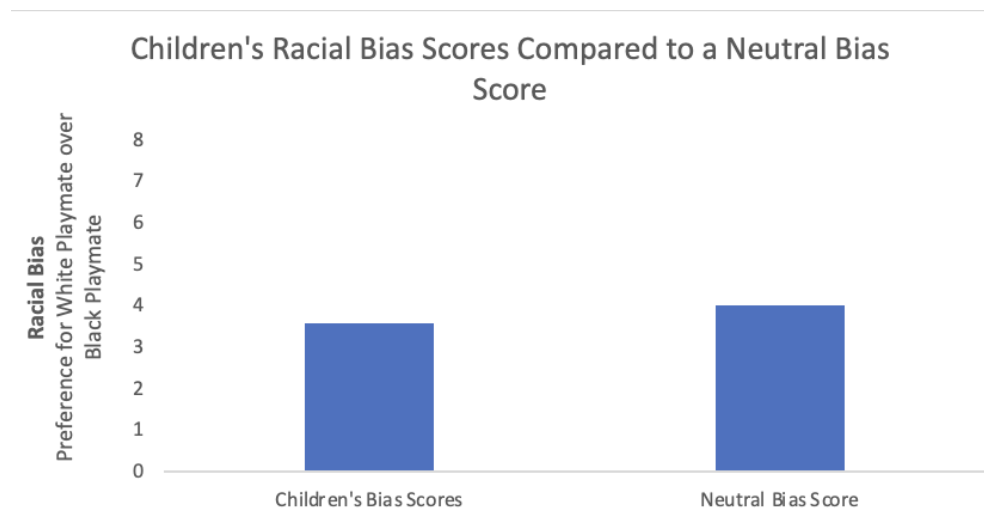
Next, in the friendship preference assessment phase, child participants were instructed that they would be shown different images of different kids and asked who they rather play with. Participants were shown eight trial slides each featuring a White-presenting child and a Black-presenting child (each above a red or blue box), and asked "Who do you want to play with? Red or blue?" (Note that participants also viewed other trials featuring children who differed in family structure, disability, weight, and social class. These are not the focus of this study).

Finally, children and their parents/guardians were given the opportunity to ask questions to the researcher, and the study was complete.

Results

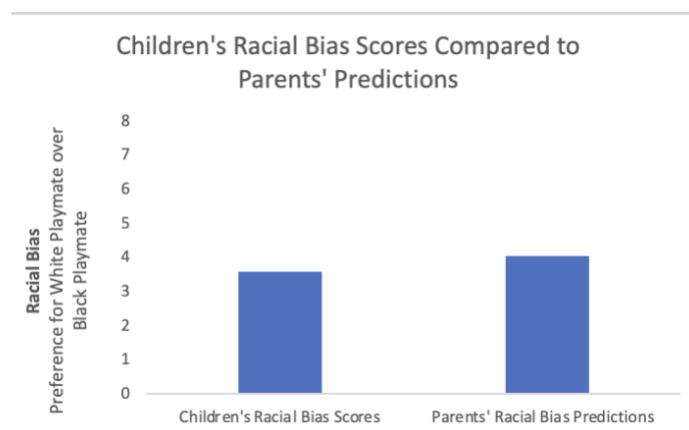
First, I investigated my hypothesis that racial prejudice will be visible by the early preschool years. A one-sample t-test was conducted to determine whether the number of White-presenting playmates child participants selected in the friendship preference task was different from 4 (the value representing no racial preference, given 8 total trials). As shown in *Figure 2*, children's racial prejudice was not different from 4, $t(60) = -1.79, p = 0.079$. In particular, children's racial prejudice was not significantly less than 4 ($M = 3.56, SD = 1.94$), suggesting that children tended to select more Black-presenting playmates than White-presenting playmates. These results suggest that children did not exhibit racial biases in their selection of playmates, in contrast to my hypothesis.

Figure 2.



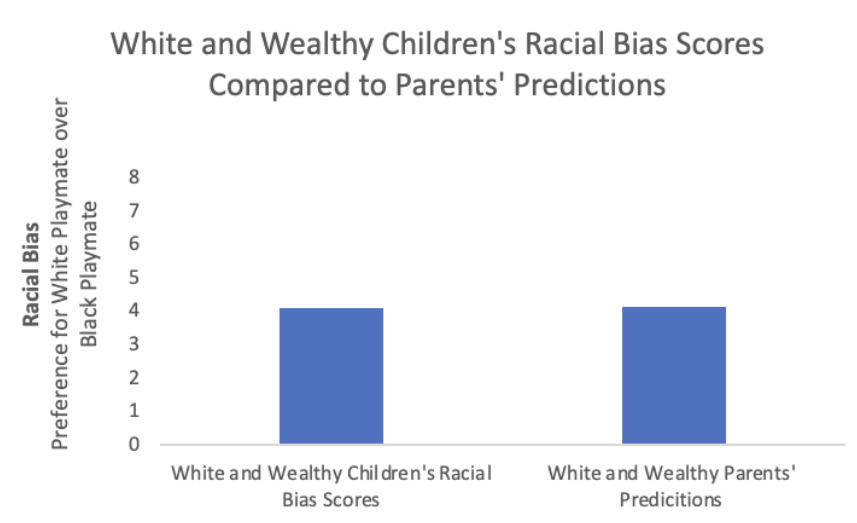
Next, I investigated my hypothesis that parents would underestimate their children's racial prejudices. A paired samples t-test was used to determine whether parents' estimates of their children's racial prejudice in the friendship preference task were less than their children's actual racial prejudices in the task. The results revealed that parents did not underestimate their children's racial prejudices in the task. The results revealed that parents did not underestimate their children's racial prejudices, $t(58) = -1.63, p = 0.108$. As known in *Figure 3*, Parents' estimates of their children's racial prejudices were not significantly less ($M = 4.02, SD = 1.31$) than their children's actual racial prejudices in the task ($M = 3.68, SD = 0.85$). In contrast to my hypothesis, these results suggest that parents do not underestimate their children's racial prejudices.

Figure 3.



Lastly, I investigated my hypothesis that White and wealthy parents would most strongly underestimate their children's racial prejudices. A paired samples t-test was conducted again, focusing only on the sample of parents who identified as both White and wealthy (defined as those whose yearly income was over \$100k). As shown in *Figure 4*, White and wealthy parents did not underestimate their children's racial prejudices, $t(15) = 0.196, p = 0.847$. Parents' estimates of their children's racial prejudices were not significantly less ($M = 4.06, SD = 1.48$) than their children's actual racial prejudices in the task ($M = 4.11, SD = 2.17$). In contrast to my hypothesis, these results suggest that White and Wealthy parents do not underestimate their children's racial prejudices.

Figure 4.



Discussion

The goal of this study was to investigate how early racial prejudice begins in childhood, whether parents underestimate their children's racial prejudices, and which parents, based on socioeconomic status, most severely underestimate their children's racial prejudices. The results revealed that children did not exhibit racial prejudice in their selection of playmates; they did not prefer White-presenting playmates over Black-presenting ones. Additionally, parents did not

underestimate their children's racial prejudices; instead, they overestimated them. These results were replicated among White and wealthy parents, as they did not overestimate their children's racial prejudices. Now, let's discuss the implications of these findings, some future directions, and limitations. These results challenge previous findings that have concluded that children hold racial biases, highlighting the importance of primary socialization agents, including parents, to foster open discussions about race and model non-prejudiced behaviors. These approaches effectively guide children's racial attitudes and evaluations of social outgroups, promoting more inclusive environments, such as classrooms and playgrounds, where all children are accepted, valued, and included regardless of racial differences. Ultimately, these efforts can actively combat racism, working towards a society that treats individuals, regardless of race, with fairness and respect. Despite discrepancies between parents' estimates of their children's racial prejudices and children's actual scores, it's crucial to acknowledge that parents are aware of the possibility of racial prejudice in their children, a vital step in mitigating their racial attitudes.

The discrepancy between past studies and the present study's findings on children's racial attitudes and parents' estimates of them raises questions about the methodology used and its potential limitations in assessing racial prejudice in early childhood, prompting consideration of alternative approaches that could accurately replicate past findings. Most research has suggested that children begin to demonstrate racial biases in early childhood; however, this finding was not found in the present study. Consequently, it raises the question of whether 8 trials of the friendship-preference task were sufficient to measure racial prejudice in children. It is plausible that more trials of the friendship-preference task could have provided a more comprehensive understanding of children's racial attitudes, capturing a wider range of responses. In addition, would using a group of White-presenting children and Black-presenting children rather than a

singular child have been more effective in measuring bias? Essentially, this would have provided a more comprehensive understanding of how biases could manifest in social contexts, allowing for a more real-world application. Notably, this methodology could have shed light on how group dynamics shape biases, particularly in-group bias, which research has shown is common among children.

Race is a socially constructed category, influenced by historical, cultural, and institutional factors; however, the figures used in the friendship preference task excluded social context (e.g. socioeconomic status); in other words, racial categories were not contextualized but rather presented in isolation. Whiteness is usually associated with a high socioeconomic status, while Blackness is associated with a low socioeconomic status. Thus, would the results have differed if race was contextualized? For example, by portraying White children standing alongside wealthy-looking houses, while Black children stood alongside poor-looking houses? Incorporating such contextual cues could have provided a more realistic representation of the social dynamics surrounding race and socioeconomic status. This approach might have yielded insights into how structural factors may play a role in the development of racial biases and provided a more real-world application of the experiment, as race is contextualized within broader social and economic dynamics.

Another limitation of the study concerns the authenticity and reliability of the child participants' responses to the friendship preference task, influenced by external factors and assumptions regarding the study's nature. For example, the participants may have become aware of what the study was measuring (racial prejudice) after undergoing several trials and provided socially acceptable responses, potentially failing to depict their true racial prejudices. Similarly, parents had the option to be present during the study, which could have influenced the child

participants' responses. Children might have adjusted their answers to align with their parents' expectations or standards, potentially concealing their actual racial attitudes.

Existing research conducted on children and their racial biases' primarily focuses on White children and their families, overlooking other racial groups and their racial attitudes. Research has shown that racial prejudice in childhood cannot be solely attributed to ingroup preference among White children. Specifically, status cues that establish a racial hierarchy, deeming the White race as superior, can act as contributors to racial prejudice in Black children. Research has shown that children recognize certain racial groups as being deemed higher in status, contributing to their social preferences (Horwitz et al., 2014; Raabe & Beelmann, 2011; Sigelman, 2012), as demonstrated by studies conducted on South African children. For example, Newheiser and Olson found supporting evidence in their study that a child's explicit preference for high-status individuals was a predictor of their implicit preference for White individuals. Fundamentally, the early emergence of racial prejudice in Black children can be predicted by their awareness of status cues, as they tend to make more positive associations with higher-status groups; therefore, preferring White/ high-status groups over Black/low-status groups. This challenges the expectation of ingroup favoritism in children, especially among Black children.

Since the study's materials were Black and White children presented in isolation without context, this might have led children to ignore the socioeconomic differences between White and Black children, which drives the formation of racial prejudice. One example of a study that shows how socioeconomic differences drive racial prejudice was conducted by Marshall and colleagues (2022). In this study, the researchers conducted a study to assess whether pro-White racial bias can emerge in a homogeneous Black community with minimal exposure to modern media, White people, and less regular discrimination. In this study, children aged 5-12

participated in a status task and racial bias measure. The ladder-based status task required placing one Black and one White child on a ladder, associating top positions with wealth (e.g. new clothes and toys) and leadership (e.g. group leader in a game setting), while bottom positions were linked to low economic status (e.g. no new clothes and toys) and non-leadership role. The racial bias measure consisted of 8 trials, during which participants selected their preferred playmate, a White or Black Child. The results replicated past results, revealing that Black children overwhelmingly exhibited pro-White bias by preferring White playmates. For the status task, the participants placed White children higher than Black children on the ladder, and this increased with age. Ultimately, researchers found that Ugandan children who perceived White children as higher in status were more likely to prefer White playmates. Despite this study being conducted in a homogenous Black community, children still displayed pro-White bias, which researchers attribute this bias to Uganda's colonization by the British. Although the participants were not present during that era, this may reveal the lingering effects of colonialism, such as internalized oppression and the adoption of stereotypical beliefs about race and status. Additionally, while these participants have limited interactions with White individuals, the most common interaction is primarily through humanitarian aid. Researchers propose that these experiences may have shaped children's perception of social groups, viewing White individuals as "saviors" and higher in status. In essence, this study suggests that young children recognize socioeconomic differences, which influence their perception of racial groups and contribute to their development of racial bias.

Ultimately, I think a future direction in investigating the development of racial bias in children could be examining the racial attitudes of children from low socioeconomic backgrounds, regardless of race. This study would use the same friendship preference task but

contextualize race using status cues (e.g., nice clothes and wealthy houses). Essentially, this could extend past findings by investigating whether status cues influence pro-white bias, replicating past studies, or determining if in-group bias is more common among this demographic. On the other hand, another potential future direction for investigating the development of racial prejudice in children is investigating the role of teachers in either mitigating racial prejudice or negatively contributing to it. This could be measured by observing how teachers facilitate interracial interactions and address race within their classrooms (e.g., do teachers encourage interracial play? How do teachers address race? Do teachers model nonprejudiced behaviors? Do teachers correct their students if they display prejudiced behaviors?). Then, using the same friendship preference task to measure children's racial attitudes to investigate whether teachers' methods used in the classroom positively or negatively contribute to the development of racial biases in children. Teachers are known as primary socialization agents in the lives of children; therefore, understanding how they influence children's attitudes and behaviors toward race can provide valuable insights into the development of racial prejudice and how to positively mitigate racial attitudes.

In conclusion, this study suggests that children do not exhibit racial prejudice in their selection of playmates, and parents, regardless of socioeconomic status, do not underestimate their children's racial prejudices. These findings underscore the crucial role of parents as primary socialization agents in educating their children from a young age about race through ongoing conversations and by modeling non-prejudiced behaviors. Such efforts are essential for shaping children's attitudes towards racial outgroups and cultivating an inclusive environment. However, to further understand the development of racial prejudice in children,

it is important to investigate factors such as socialization, status, exposure, and environmental influences that contribute to racial biases in children.

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