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April 4, 2022

PSY 392

Schools are a central fixture in many American children’s’ lives. From middle childhood to adolescence, the influence of parents and other caretakers decreases as they interact more with peers, teachers, and other adults in their communities (Aldana & Byrd 2015; Bradshaw 2014). **Consequently, schools facilitate children' formations of core identities and beliefs.** Historically, analysts have explored these developments with Black students' educational experiences such as their academic placement, relationships with teachers, and discipline, and their influence on their identities, racial attitudes, educational performance, and life outcomes (Bañales et. al 2020; Francis & Darity 2021; Pena-Shaff et. al 2019; Brown 2007; Hughes 2009). Other studies extend these issues to Latino, Asian American, and multi-racial individuals (see, e.g., Brega & Coleman, 1999; Phinney & Chavira, 1995; Stone 2017). However, white American students remain largely absent from these inquiries due to the seemingly invisible and white-centering logic of colorblind ideology, which posits that race does not matter, all people are equal, and that racism is a relic of the past (Bonilla-Silva 2018). Because of their dominant position in the United States' contemporary racial order, colorblindness serves an **ego-protective function** for white individuals. It allows white people to enjoy the material advantages and "psychological wages" of whiteness while minimizing the role of race and racism (cite Dubois). Few studies explore how this white children share, reproduce, and rework these beliefs in school context. This paper specifically focuses on how white adolescents interact with curricula, teachers, and peers to absorb, contest, and rework colorblind ideology in school contexts. By drawing upon previous scholarship documenting white adolescents' perceptions in survey data, interviews, and ethnographic observations, analysts can understand the content of their narratives about racial identity, racism, and oppression.

Past studies on RES in school contexts often recruit parents and teachers to report students' racial practices (e.g. interracial friendships, standing up to racism, etc.) and racial beliefs revealed through conversations (Onyekwuluje 2000; Hagerman 2017). Shifting the focus of this scholarship from parent's to children's perceptions can illuminate aspects of children's behaviors and beliefs that are often obstructed from their parents' view. Students' experiences in schools are one such example. Omi and Winant (1986, 67 cited in Thomas 2015) also point to the importance of understanding racial ideologies as a reciprocal process between "micro level and macro level social interactions." **analysts using child-centered methods can more easily develop existing theories about the reproduction of dominant racial ideologies and inform anti-racist teaching strategies and school policies** (Rogers 2021).

Since individuals' understandings of race evolve with age, I narrow the subject of this article to white adolescents. Throughout their lives, white individuals interact with the *white habitus*, a "racialized process of socialization" through which they develop beliefs, perceptions, tastes, and behaviors (Bonilla-Silva 2018, 73). The strength of the white habitus persists despite historical efforts towards racial integration as many white people continue to grow up in white neighborhoods, social networks, and schools. The socializing and racializing work of such environments, for example, helps explain how children develop a sense of racial identity at very young ages and prefer peers or toys based on race (Clark & Clark 1939; Aboud 1988; Stokes-Guinan 2011**find more recent examples**). In schools specifically, curricular standards about history and literature transmit messages about how **racial groups are treated and the role of racial power dynamics**. While curricula dictate what is taught, teachers informally decide *how* these lessons are transmitted. Teachers can, for example, minimize the influence of racism with messages of abstract egalitarianism (e.g. “everyone is the same” and “race does not matter”). **By adolescence, individuals racial identities and beliefs crystallize and differentiate from the adults around them. One's teenage years, in short, are critical to identity formation and the construction of ideological attachments.**

To be sure, schools provide a limited view into the lives of adolescents. Past analyses have revealed the unique niches of parents, the media, and neighborhoods that are not easily separable from each other (Vitrup 2011). Likewise, studying adolescence alone ignores earlier life experiences that shape individuals' views and sense of self. As such, policies and practices intended to disrupt colorblindness must also target earlier stages of development (Hagerman 2020). Finally, since white individuals are socialized differently, conclusions from studies recruiting adolescents and their perceptions of schools cannot be generalized to white teenagers overall; factors like geographic region, class, sexual orientation, and gender also shape perceptions and beliefs about race and racism (Grossman 2009; Ghavami & Mistry 2019; Hatchell 2004). Despite these limitations, the material conditions produced by whiteness cannot be discounted; its allocation of privileges and resources in schools ultimately shapes narratives about race that many white adolescents share.

This paper begins with a review of racial and ethnic socialization, particularly among white adolescents, and directs it towards a discussion of how schools exist as race-making and socializing institutions. I then introduce informal and formal components of public high schools and use meta-analysis to produce conclusions [after this part is written, I can include my conclusions here].

**Background**

In the United States, "race" is a dynamic social construction contingent on the country's unique history of white domination and the marginalization of African American, Asian American, and Indigenous peoples (cite). Population geneticists contend that human variation does not satisfy discrete biological "races," yet race remains socially real (Royal ; Graves \_\_\_). Today, racialized practices and social relations continue to shape Americans' life outcomes across areas of housing, wealth accumulation, health, and education. However, significant associations between race and educational outcomes, for instance, like graduation rates, grades, discipline, and educational attainment do not reflect racial groups' inherent characteristics. Instead, the "main effect" of race, as well as other racialized measures, are sensitive to the racialized structure in American schools.

Children learn about race before their school years through racial and ethnic socialization (RES), “a social, cognitive, and developmental process through which individuals transmit, negotiate and acquire beliefs, values, social norms and behaviors to engage appropriately with society” (Loyd & Gaither 2018, **page number**). Parents and other primary caregivers play a central role in RES early in childrens’ development. Throughout their lives, but especially during their children’s preschool and elementary school years, many White parents avoid conversations about race and racism, or communicate to their children that such issues are taboo (Bartoli et al., 2016; Pahlke et al., 2012; Vittrup, 2016). As early as age \_\_\_, individuals can categorize both their own and others' physical appearances into races (Spencer 2008). By middle childhood, these observations obtain stronger subjective relevance (). In the contemporary United States, primary school-aged children shift from explicit attitudes on race (e.g. “”) to subtler ones once they learn that it is less … Finally, adolescents crystallize these racial identities and use ideological frames to make sense of matters like racism, diversity, and racial privilege ().

One such ideology acquired by many individuals throughout socialization is colorblind or color-evasive ideology, which attributes racial inequality to non-racial phenomena [BE SPECIFIC]. Bonilla-Silva (2018) theorizes four "frames" of colorblindness, including abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism. Abstract liberalism describes messages justifying racial inequality with the vague language of equal opportunity, individual freedom, and meritocracy. For example, some individuals use abstract liberalism to argue against school integration policies (e.g. bussing, redistricting) by framing them as violations of parent choice. The second frame, naturalization of racism, can be found in messages that attribute the exclusion of students of color from white peer networks to *self-segregation*, which Beverley Tatum discusses in *Why are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*. [EXPLAIN MORE HERE]. Cultural racism levies stereotypes about communities of color to inequality. One such case of this frame arises in Hagerman's (2020, 184) interview with an adolescent girl who claimed that while "even a poor black kid could… move up," in society, Black childrens' success are hampered by Black families' supposedly-inferior financial habits.

As previous examples regarding school choice and peer networks suggest, colorblind messages circulate schools on an everyday basis. and influence children’s development of racial ideologies during their development. These ideas can be transmitted explicitly, in the case of prescribed educational content about history and literature, for example. However, they also exist more subtly in the communication between teachers and peers and students with each other. The rest of this paper focuses on these three arenas of socialization to

## Curricula