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Race Talk Amongst White Families During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Levitt Center Summer Research Project

Steven Campos

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Introduction

The year 2020 was a time of struggle, difficulty, and fear for many individuals due to the COVID-19 pandemic as victims of the virus increased dramatically throughout the year. As a result, many families have had to stay close together under the same roof to avoid the risk of infection. Along with the concern of the virus, protests against police brutality rose around the world after the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor in May and March, respectively, of 2020. The media heavily covered the protests throughout the summer, making the topic almost impossible to ignore, sparking conversations among families. But as I will argue further, talking about race and racism is new for many of the white parents we interviewed (Dow, 2019).

With the pandemic practically forcing all families to stay home for everyone's safety, families who may not be used to talking to their kids about race and racism are put into a situation where they must. Unlike families of color, most white families do not have to think about how their race may negatively affect how they are perceived by others around them based on their race. Scholars have written articles on how white families and families of color view and talk about race with their children. The articles establish well thought-out ideas for how families have discussions with their kids, with most focusing on people of color specifically and some focusing on white families. While these articles are great for analyzing families' discussion of race, not all can focus on how these conversations are shaped during a global pandemic. While racial injustice is heavily tied to people of color as a result of being oppressed by systemic racism in the U.S., it is equally important to understand how those with racial privilege, white

folks, discuss and understand race. Their ideas can be shaped by color-blindness that do not allow them to fully understand how they are the ones benefitting from racial disparities before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. To address the topic, I pose the following research question: how have white parents navigated conversations regarding race with their children during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Literature Review

Navigating conversations about race differentiates for most if not all families. Important factors for how families view race can be based on a variety of factors such as race, social class, beliefs, and others. For example, Alex Manning's research (2019) demonstrates the various practices Black parents take to teach their kids about race and racism. Black parents teach their kids how to navigate "white spaces" and how to interact in an environment where they are the minority. Manning follows up on research done by Annette Lareau (2011) by critiquing her argument that race did not play as important of a role as race did when it came to parenting. Manning points out in his article that the Black respondents in her research, no matter their social class, still talked about the police with their children. Discoveries such as these provide great insight when comparing the similarities or differences between families of color and white families. While this paper will mostly focus on how white parents had discussions about race and racism with their children, articles that focus on families of color can still help researchers understand some of the reasons of why people have specific beliefs.

Not only are parents of color concerned with how their children will navigate a “white space,” but they also worry about the discrimination they may face in a public setting. When analyzing Ed Collom’s research (2005), Collom briefly mentions how parents of color would rather have their children homeschooled because they fear the discrimination their child may face and the fear that the school may not acknowledge inequalities based on race. Additionally, Cheryl Field-Smith’s (2013) article further explores Black parents’ reasonings for homeschooling. Reasons varied from their children being discriminated against, not receiving the proper nurture, and being affected by labels that may stick with them, either it be academically, or behavior related. When comparing the information of what motivates families of color to homeschool their children compared to white families, white families are more concerned that their children is not getting the best education they possibly could at the schools nearby them. White parents are more likely to criticize the education system for wanting to provide their child with the best possible education and are therefore not afraid to speak their voices. While one group of families focus on the well-being and safety of their children, another focuses on the best possible opportunity for their child to be successful in the future. This is not to say that families of color do not want their children to be successful, but rather they are more concerned about possible misinformation and discrimination their children will face in a public school. While white families have the privilege of not having to worry about how their race affects the way they are viewed in society, families of color do not share the privilege. Families of color need to consistently think about how they must navigate systemic racism and constantly think about how to teach their children about racial inequalities. When thinking about how white families discuss

race, if people are not exposed consistently to racial inequalities and have the privilege to not think about race, their ideology may be based on color-blindness.

When focusing on white families, some families have different beliefs about whether race matters today. In her article, Margaret Hagerman (2014) explores conversations about race among white families, noticing some similarities between people in their respective communities. Hagerman explores the ideas of color consciousness and color blindness to assist in distinguishing certain beliefs by white families. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2015) originally coined the term color-blindness when researching how racial domination is reproduced and how there are multiple amounts of racial ideologies contribute reproducing racial domination. A color-blind perspective is defined as a person believing that race is no longer an issue that affects how people are viewed and therefore, ultimately everyone and everything is equal and fair. A color-conscious perspective is the opposite of color-blindness, where the individual may recognize that their race may give them privileges that other people of color do not have (Hagerman, 2014: 2599). By recognizing their privilege, they believe that not everyone is treated equally based on a person's race. Families who had a color-conscious perspective attempted to expose their children to a diverse environment in their neighborhood and in school to make their children aware of people with different experiences from them. However, Hagerman discovers that white families with a color-blind perspective were living in a neighborhood that one family claimed "valued education" with most of the respective neighborhood being white. While white families who have a color-blind ideology claim that everyone is treated equally, families make distinctions of other races by claiming if people are not like them living in a specific community that hold specific beliefs, such as valuing education, no one else values education like they do.

Word choice for white families discussing race becomes very important, as will be demonstrated in this paper, when analyzing how respondents discuss race and the beliefs they hold when thinking about race during the pandemic.

While the paper will mostly focus on how white families have had conversations about race and racism because of the increase of protests in the summer of 2020, it is also important to note the inequalities people of color have faced around the globe because of the pandemic as well. Taking into consideration how families of color have been affected differently around the world provides insight for how they experiences differ from privileged white American families, particularly class advantaged families, and whether Americans recognize the advantages they hold. Analyzing Juliana Teixeira's article (2020) provides readers with two different experiences where a Black domestic worker was the first victim to die of COVID after her employer brought the virus from a vacation and passed it on to her. The other experience involved a Black domestic worker's child that lost his life when he fell from an elevator after he was left unsupervised by the mother's employer while she worked. While many Americans have been vaccinated at the time this paper is written, others have not had the same opportunity and continue to worry about how becoming ill may affect their families. When the virus began affecting the U.S., there was already coverage in how people of color were the ones being affected when they had to go to work in person, putting them at a higher risk of being exposed to the virus (Gould and Wilson, 2020). Whether or not white families acknowledge their privilege when it comes to their health, the conversations can speak as to how far they have thought about race not only when media covers police brutality, but also when it comes to the pandemic as a whole. Taking into

consideration the privileges white American families have allows us to analyze how white families think about race and privileges they hold compared to other nations.

While many American citizens have taken their privilege for granted, there are still numerous amounts that are affected through their line of work. As Teixeira explained in her article, many Black domestic workers have been affected by the pandemic along with their children based on their line of work and the racist history behind the occupation. How do Brazil's difficulties compare to families of color in the United States? Mignon Duffy (2007) explores reproductive labor and how it has changed throughout the history of the country in her article. While some parents were able to work from home, some have taken this opportunity for granted as they can continue to work and support their family from home while others either expose themselves to the risk of the virus or cannot provide for their family. Duffy mentions how reproductive labor has changed throughout history with most people of color, specifically, Latinx folks have taken more public service jobs. This information will be important to keep in mind when thinking once again on how white families think about race and the privilege they have, whether they think about it or not.

Methods

Our project began in the summer of 2020, focusing on families with children who were in 3rd to 5th grade living in central New York. Participants for our project were recruited by the primary investigator of the project, who put up flyers and sent out emails to look for interested participants. The information on the flyers and emails had a basic overview of the project,

explaining the purpose of the project, that being to gain an understanding for how families in central New York have handled the pandemic with their family. Emails also included a link to a survey that asked parents for demographic information and asked a final question if they were willing to participate in an interview. Participants who showed interest in the interview were required to fill out a consent form, either by online signature, or a picture of a printed signature. More participants were recruited in the fall/winter after the summer of the same year. In total, there were a total of 52 participants who were interviewed in the summer and fall/winter of 2020.

For the summer of 2021, all 52 respondents were emailed with a link to a survey to fill out demographics as well as any changes they have gone through since the last time we spoke with them as well as if they would be willing to participate in a second interview. Out of the 52 respondents, 31 filled out the survey with only one saying that they would not like to participate in a second interview. From the 31 respondents who were willing to be interviewed a second time, there were only 18 of the 31 that we could reach out to schedule a second interview. Upon looking at the transcripts, there was one transcript from the second wave of interviews that was cut early due to technical difficulties with the audio and will therefore be excluded for this paper. For this paper, I will only be analyzing the transcripts from the second wave of interviews with the exception of a few of the transcripts from the first wave (the first waves of transcripts will only be analyzed if the participants partook in the second interview).

Important factors we took into consideration when looking at our respondents were their socioeconomic status, whether they were more or less advantaged, and their race. When thinking who is more or less advantaged, we looked at the parents' educational achievements and occupations. If one or both parents had a college degree and a professional career, the family was

considered more advantaged compared to those who had no college degree and were working in blue/pink collar jobs (less advantaged). All respondents who were more advantaged had an annual income of \$75,000 or higher, while some who were less advantaged could make as much as families who were more advantaged, but were also likely to be making as little, or less than \$20,000. Of the 17 interviews I will be analyzing, seven were more advantaged while the other 10 were less advantaged. When analyzing race, 16 respondents identified as white, with one of those respondents being from Bosnia, and the last respondent identifying as Black. Lastly, all respondents in this paper were mothers with the exception of one father.

For our interviews, we utilized an interview script to assist us in navigating conversations with the participants, as well as asking clarifying questions to some responses. Interview scripts were split into 3 different sections: 1. schooling and parenting, 2. family and friends, and 3. how have the protests that rose in the summer of 2020 affected their family. Interviews lasted from a range of 20 minutes up to close to an hour. Participants who took part in the second interview were incentivized with a \$50 gift card upon completing the interview that could either be emailed or mailed to them by their own choice. After the interviews, the audio was transcribed for us to code in Dedoose and search for specific data that we would use for our paper. This paper will focus on how parents talk about race with their children, therefore, most of the transcripts will focus on the specific part of the transcript where respondents were asked how they were affected from the protests and how they view race.

Findings

The Demographics

To understand how white families navigate conversations about race during a global pandemic, it is important to consider what their community looks like. To provide them with an idea as to where our interview was shifting, we provided respondents with background information of the Black Lives Matter movement that happened in the summer of 2020 before asking, “How do you think your race, ethnicity, social class or other factors influences your relations with other families? With teachers/schools?” followed by, “Can you describe the demographics of your children’s friend/peer groups in terms of race, ethnicity, social class, or other factors (that you think are important)?” When giving their answers, more than half (9) of the respondents mentioned that central New York was either not diverse or primarily white and another six respondents mentioning that it was primarily middle-class families living in the area. Why is this important? The demographics of central New York play an important role as to how conversations about race are shaped in a white household. As one of our respondents, Andrea, claimed, “... we are, in our general lives... not exposed to a whole lot of diversity, so, they [her children] could not comprehend at all how these things actually happen and why they would happen.” As Hagerman mentioned in her article (2014), white parents with a color-conscious perspective tend to put their children in a more diverse setting so they can be aware of how their experiences may be different from others. It is very possible that other respondents’ answers have been shaped by the lack of diversity in the community as they are not exposed to other peoples’ different experiences. However, while the lack of diversity in the community is out of the families’ control, their decision to live in a segregated community is not. Andrea and other respondents in the community may be aware of the lack of diversity, but unlike parents who in

Hagerman's research (2014), who want their children to be exposed to diversity, our respondents do not send their children to a school that is more diverse in a city about 20 minutes away from their community. When their children are exposed to people from different backgrounds, white parents are likely able to have conversations regarding race if kids have questions about why they see people of color treated differently. However, if white parents want to be surrounded by people that share color-blind "values" as them, as Hagerman (2014) explained in her article, white parents shelter their kids from being aware of racial injustice by living and schooling in white spaces. These white families wanting to be surrounded by people who are like them can further support their own beliefs that they hold specific values more than others, separating themselves from other families. Doing so results in an idea that there as an "us" and a "them," resulting in families not being able to understand one another's' experiences. The lack of diversity and understanding of other peoples' experiences can cause white parents to be color-blind and not think about how their race has benefited them throughout their life and how racism persists.

Uncertainties on Talking About Race

With white families not realizing their privilege, they also gain the privilege of not having to think about race and racism. Thinking about the first question posed to our respondents on how they thought race, ethnicity, social class or other factors have influenced their relations, 7 out of 17 respondents mentioned that they did not think about how specific factors about themselves influenced their relations, while others either acknowledge their privilege or focused on avoiding the question and providing an answer irrelevant to the question. When reading the

respondents' transcripts, many respondents demonstrated that they were uncertain on how to talk about race based on their vocabulary when answering. For example, one of our respondents, Tami, was unsure if she was using correct terms to refer to people:

“There’s a couple of African-Americans, a couple of Caucasians. I hope I’m using the right terms, so excuse me if I’m not.”

Tami clearly shows some uncertainty when addressing people of specific races and is not certain if she is appropriately talking about race without offending a specific group of people. To provide more context to the interview, I was the interviewer that asked Tami the questions in a Zoom meeting. It is possible that she felt pressure to be careful when talking about race in front of a person of color in order to not offend me and for me to criticize her during the interview.

As for another two respondents, Jennifer and Adam, both used words that demonstrated a similar doubt to Tami but in a more subtle way. Jennifer is concerned about being incorrect when thinking about how her race has impacted the relations she has made:

“I don't think, I mean, maybe I'm naïve, I don't think it affected me at all because I mean, I personally, my family, we're pretty open-minded about everything.”

Jennifer is not aware of how her race has impacted the relations she has made with others outside her household as demonstrated with the opening words, “I don’t think.” However, Jennifer is aware that she is not very educated on the topic about race when she mentions “maybe, I’m naïve...” demonstrating that she understands she may be incorrect in assuming how her race has impacted the connections she has made. The possibility of Jennifer having heard an argument where her race has impacted her daily life could have been presented to her, but color-blindness may not allow her to understand the argument.

The second respondent, Adam, admitted to not believing his race playing an important role to the relations he has made, but also acknowledged he may not understand it because he has privilege:

“I guess this is coming from a perspective of privilege, but I feel like my race hasn't had much effect on my relationships with people or things. Yeah. I don't know. I guess I don't have a good answer to that because I don't think that it has affected me personally.”

Adam starts his answer with “I guess...” demonstrating there is already doubt when answering the question. Although Adam does mention he has white privilege, the uncertainty in the start of his response portrays that he has also not had many conversations about the topic to respond with confidence. Adam also continues with the response demonstrating further uncertainty when claiming “Yeah, I don't know. I guess I don't have a good answer to that...” The lack of conversations about the topic makes it difficult for respondents like Adam to form a strong, confident argument because they are not fully educated on the topic. Lastly, as Adam claims, he does not think race has affected him personally, meaning that Adam has not had to carefully think about how his race has affected him and his daily life.

These false starts demonstrate some discomfort, which suggest that these respondents have not had to thoroughly think and talk about race with others to establish a confident answer. However, while some respondents have not had to think about race, they are aware of their privilege but do not know how to talk about it as seen with Adam when he acknowledges he “is coming from a perspective of privilege.” As one of our respondents, Andrea, mentioned earlier, she cannot have thorough conversations because she cannot explain to their kids about racial issues when they are not exposed to people of color in a given setting. While most of our

respondents have similar experience with having the privilege to not have to think about race, comparing how families constantly think about race compared to those who do not can allow us to understand how different families view privilege.

“And one bad apple can make things, that’s what I think the media focuses on” Talking About Police Brutality

Along with the large coverage of police brutality came a variety of opinions and arguments for either defending or criticizing the police. Protests around the country began demanding to defund the police after multiple deaths of Black folks at the hand of officers, including Floyd’s death. One of the main arguments for defending police is the analogy of the existence of good and bad apples. To put briefly, Derek Chauvin, the officer who killed George Floyd, does not represent every officer in the country with the actions he took. We asked respondents, “Since the pandemic began, we have seen much news coverage of excessive use of force by police towards unarmed Black Americans, as well as protests around the country in regard to this, we have also seen a spike in hate crimes towards Asian Americans. How has this affected you?” Respondents’ answers varied no matter their socioeconomic status or whether they were more or less advantaged, but rather simply on what they believed and how they viewed the topic of race and racism.

When thinking about how the pandemic has affected families, some respondents believe that having conversations about race is one of the negative effects of COVID-19. For example, in Tami’s transcript, she portrays a color-blind perspective by claiming her child never saw race and was something he never focused on when talking to people. Tami claims:

That's got to be one of the downfalls of the pandemic because I feel like why did I have to make him aware of something he never saw because now he's aware of it, and that's not something we ever ... We like the fact that he saw people as people and not as color.

Tami was satisfied with the fact that her son did not have to worry about the appearance of other people, but rather, he could just view them as people no matter their race. While the idea seems fair where no one should judge others based on their race, the lack of conversation of racial injustice and bias does not allow for people to understand discrimination in the country. Unlike Brenda, our one Black respondent, Tami and other respondents can choose to not focus on talking about race if they want to, but with the events that occurred during the pandemic, Tami felt forced to talk about the issues with her child. Along with the discomfort Tami felt when talking about race, she mentions her child wants to be an officer when he grew up. She understands that there are good and bad officers, but she claims that her son would be a “fair one.” Tami makes this claim because as she stated before, her son never saw people for their race and believes he never judged others because of how they looked.

Another respondent, Jennifer, mentions that her son would want to be an officer when he grows up. Jennifer explains a situation where her son posted a picture on social media of a “police blue line flag” supporting the police and claiming that “there are good and bad people in all races, professions, everything.” Her son was faced with criticism by peers from school and claimed that he was a racist for supporting the police, but Jennifer also claims, “it’s funny because he has probably the most diverse friends out of my kids, and even has a lot of friends that are either Black, Mexican, Puerto Rican, whatever, and I’m like, he’s so far from racist, it’s not even funny.” Jennifer indirectly claims that a racist person would not associate themselves with people of color if they were racist and would therefore not make her son racist. However,

Jennifer is not aware of the fact that the reason why people are critical of the police is because the criminal justice system is utilized to incarcerate many people of color. They have done so with policies such as the War on Drugs (Taifa, 2021) and stop and frisk (The Sentencing Project, 2018). Jennifer also portrays a color-blind perspective by believing some people “are bad and some people are good, it doesn’t matter if you’re Black, Asian, whatever.” When following a color-blind ideology, an individual may believe that race no longer matters in how people are viewed and whatever position they are in is the result of their own actions, denying the biases and discrimination people of color face. For example, Asian Americans have experienced nearly a 150% increase in hate crimes (Cheng, et.al, 2021), while Black people make up a large percentage of the prison population (Nellis, 2016). People who use color-blind logics are more than likely not able to understand the criticism towards police when they believe everyone is treated equally.

For people that are color-blind, ideas about equality are held heavily for everyone, where everyone is treated in the same way, no matter if people are treated fairly or not. Some people believe because they see police abusing their power towards people of color then the same will happen to white folks. Like Jennifer, another one of our respondents, Barbara, mentions “there’s good and bad in all people, all groups, all race, ethnicities, jobs, however you want to classify people.” Once again, the idea that anyone is capable of doing good or bad is used again, but the lack of clarity as to why a group of people are perceived as “bad” is not mentioned or explained. Barbara mentioned that she attended a protest for George Floyd after his death, but also mentioned that the police are still the people one needs to call in the case of an emergency. The media has covered police abusing their power and has concerned many people of color as they

have fallen victim to this brutality for many years. However, for Barbara, she fears that her children will grow up to fear the police and does not want her children to assume that all police are bad. Barbara claims, “And especially as far as police go, I don't want them to be scared when they see police... And I don't want them to automatically assume that this is a bad guy or something.” As previously stated, people of color are more likely to have encounters with police when compared to white people, but because of color-blindness, some white folks may be aware of police brutality but also believe that their families will be affected by police encounters. While some white parents understand that the actions of specific officers do not represent an entire group of people, they are not exposed to or do not fully understand the fact that the criminal justice system has and continues to unfairly target people of color. While most of our respondents have similar experience with having privilege to not have to think about race, taking other people’s different experiences into consideration and how they differ with having to constantly think about race.

Brenda's Experience as a Black Mother

The one Black mother we were able to interview had a different experience with race than her white counterparts. Brenda is a Black mother with a white husband and biracial kids living in central New York. When asked about how protests have affected her and her kids, she believes her kids have been affected by the demographics, and often talks to her kids about the difficulties her children have had to face because of their skin color:

“And a couple of times my son has had racial statements made toward him from students at his school and the school handled it appropriately. The child was suspended for the statement that they made. And another time he was accused of saying a word that we

don't use in our household, the N word and then he was accused at 5 years old on the school bus for saying that. And so I remember thinking, 'The bus driver has an issue. Why is he targeting my son?'"

Brenda later mentions concerns she has had about how people would view and judge her for having biracial kids. She gives an example of having to pick them up from school, only for the school to not allow her to take her kids home because of her race:

"And so I remember and I had such guilt about it but I remember thinking, 'Oh my God, I'm going to try to pick them up from school and they're not going to let me pick him up. And they're going to...' You know what I mean? I was just thinking all these thoughts... but they [Brenda's children] are starting to become more aware."

Along with her concerns about having to face racism, Brenda was concerned about how she may be judged on her race, she felt guilty for believing that other people would be racist towards her. While she may be aware of how she and her kids may be treated differently because of their race, Brenda does not want to believe people are racist. Compared to white families who are color-blind and believe race does not matter in how people are treated, for Brenda and consistent with existing research with other Black mother (Dow, 2019), she has had to constantly think about how her race will affect her and her children's daily life compared to white respondents who have not mentioned how they think their race will impact how they are perceived.

Along with Brenda having to think about race, her children are becoming more aware of their race and how their family may be different from others at school. As previously stated, some white respondents mentioned that they or their children do not see race when making connections, whereas Brenda's children do not have to talk about it but realize differences as they grow older. The rise in protests in 2020 has led for her children to think more carefully about race and wonder why people of color face discrimination and racism. For a better

illustration, Brenda mentions a heart-felt moment where her son wrote a poem but also demonstrates that he is becoming more aware of racism in the country:

“And he was writing because he had just learned about Dr. King. And he said... ‘You know what? People tell kids to have a dream.’ He's like and I, ‘I want to dream. I want to be like Martin Luther King. And I know that if he were here he would support me...’ But at the same time he's hearing about people like George Floyd and he's hearing about all these things that are going on, Breonna Taylor, and he's confused and he's not understanding why this is happening in our country.”

The media has heavily covered the deaths surrounding George Floyd and Breonna Taylor and has been heard by practically everyone. The events affect everyone differently, including children when some are coming to an age where they are starting to understand the racial inequalities in the country. This can be further portrayed when Brenda also explains that her children have had to experience racial remarks directed towards them by peers and others at school. Not only are children of color exposed to racism through media but by the people around them as well who are targeted with racist remarks. People of color are exposed to race and racism because they are the ones being targeted based on their race. For these reasons, Brenda has to talk to her children about racial inequalities as it will continue to affect their lives as they age. When referring to Manning's article, Black parents feel the need to educate their children on how to navigate white spaces and discrimination. Manning (2019) explains that some Black parents educate their children by preparing them for bias when explaining racial navigation because of their race. Similarly, when looking at Collom's article (2005), when Black parents wanted to homeschool their children, they wanted their children to not be misinformed about racial inequalities compared to white parents who were just concerned about the best education for their children. Fields-Smith (2013) also explains the various difficulties Black parents must take into consideration when thinking what is best for their children when they are put into an

environment where they may be discriminated against. Consistent research continues to demonstrate that parents of color do not have the privilege of not having to think about race and must learn to navigate system racism and teach those skills to their kids (Manning, 2019). The rise in protests has led to further urgency for Black parents to have conversations with their kids about the racism they will face. Parents of color continue to worry about how race will continue to affect their family's lives and want to make sure their kids are prepared to handle a situation when they experience racism.

“I have the privileges, I do, and things are going well for me...” Color-consciousness and Being Aware of Privilege

While there may be respondents and others outside of the study that are not comfortable having to talk about race and racism during a global pandemic, others feel the situation is a benefit. When people with a color-conscious perspective answer the same question posed to respondents who are color-blind, respondents mention their privilege before proceeding with their response. While the comparisons between people who are color-blind and color-conscious are clear, it is interesting that people who are color-conscious recognize their privilege before proceeding with the questions. While color-conscious respondents do not have to think about how their daily lives are affected by their race, they acknowledge that they have thought about how they are privileged in not having to think about racial issues and how they connect with others. Being color-conscious also means for some respondents have had meaningful conversations about race and racism with other people and are able to handle these conversations with their kids. One perfect example of this situation is with Marianne who has been able to

navigate conversations about race with her kids as well as talking to friends of color and family.

After Marianne acknowledges she is aware of her privilege, she goes on to explain the conversations she's had with those around her:

I mean, I am painfully aware that I'm pretty privileged in all respects. I mean, from my race to my income, to my ... So I guess I am aware of the privilege that that affords me, with all institutions... So, I had some pretty difficult conversations with some people that I called out, some family members of mine, I called out, to think about where they really stood on these issues. Had some equally great and open conversations with my black friends too, to just hear perspective and learn and grow.

Marianne is open to have conversations about race with people of color and people that are close to her in order to learn and be more educated about the topic and talk to others about it as well.

When mentioning how she has conversations with her kids, Marianne claims, "being able to watch the news together, and just being around each other 24 hours a day opens up a lot of time for conversations." When some people are afraid to talk about race, either because they do not know how to navigate the conversations or think race no longer matters in how people are treated, people who have experience talking about the topic and feel educated are more comfortable to have these conversations. However, while Marianne feels comfortable talking about the topic, she believes the question asking how her identity has affected her relations is a "big question." Although, Marianne has experience having conversations about race, she may still feel pressure on how to talk about the topic as did the color-blind respondents. Manning's article (2019) demonstrates that white folks are not exposed to having these conversations as much as do people of color knowing that police unfairly target Black folks. While she may still be careful about how to talk about race with others, Marianne recognizes the importance to have conversations about race with the people around her to educate and grow more aware of race.

When respondents thought about privilege and how it has affected their relations with others, some went further to think about how they were able to navigate the pandemic. As demonstrated with Patricia, where she is aware that she has also had privileges in terms of having others to rely on to take care of children, technology, and other factors:

Well, I mean, I think we're privileged to be honest with you. You know, um, I feel like covid made it clear that like, it's really difficult for, for certain people, people of color, people with a lower socioeconomic class, I mean that was... Covid was impossible I think for some people to navigate, if you didn't have a really strong safety net... If you didn't have family that could help you out. If you didn't have like another parent at home to help you with your kids. There were just so many um inequalities just really showed through. Um, I felt grateful everyday for the situation that we were in with our kids. Um, because, when I looked around, I felt like it would've been impossible for most families to navigate covid and all of the hurdles they were facing. You know, we had access to the internet for our kids, for zoom, um, you know we had spaces where they could each be in a separate room.

Patricia has been able to think carefully about how she has been able to navigate the pandemic based on the privileges she has had as a white middle-class family. When thinking about how others have navigated the pandemic outside of the U.S., Teixeira (2020) explains the racial injustice Black Brazilians have had to endure even during the pandemic based on the history of the country and how Black domestic workers and their children have been greatly affected by the pandemic. When comparing how people of color have navigated the pandemic in the U.S., Duffy's article (2007) portrays the history of reproductive labor since the late 19th century and the group of people that have participated in these jobs. The rise in the number of people of color in public service work has increased throughout the decades from the time Duffy has been researching who is participating in reproductive labor. When taking into consideration that public service jobs have been taken up by people of color, they would be the ones that could face the consequences much more heavily than white folks (Duffy, 2007). Black folks are much more

likely than white folks to be unemployed during the pandemic, or if they were still employed, they were required to work in a front-line jobs, putting their lives at risk in order to keep providing for themselves (Gould and Wilson, 2020). While our questions were more focused on how the protests have affected our respondents when it comes to conversations with their kids, some were able to think further about how the whole pandemic has affected people of color differently. Taking into consideration their privilege, our respondents are more aware of the racial injustice towards people of color and how they may be affected differently not only in terms of police brutality, but employment, childcare, and other important factors as well.

Respondents who were aware of their privilege also expressed great emotion and passion when it came to talking about race with the interviewers. When thinking about the effects of protests, Megan expressed feelings of hopelessness amongst the media coverage of police brutality against Black people. Megan expresses feelings of confusion along with her hopelessness by relating the current events to past decades where racism was also focused on by the media:

It's been just crushing, like lose faith in humanity crushing. How is it possible we're still having the same arguments? How is it possible that even Black Lives Matter as a statement has to be said in the 21st century?... Nothing's changed. It just felt like how is it possible that people are still behaving the way that they did 50, 60, 70 years ago?

Megan mentions her lack of hope in how the country has navigated racial inequalities for the fact that Black people are continuously being mistreated. Megan had more to say about the protests and the racial inequalities that the U.S. still allows to happen. When talking to her children about race, she is very clear in how her son should navigate a situation where one of his friends may say something racist. Megan explains to the interviewer of such a situation by when she told her

son, ““look buddy, you have a really crappy friend here who’s acting this way. I know you’ve been friends since age four, but he’s said some stuff that is not acceptable.”” Not only is Megan comfortable with telling her son her thoughts on the station, but her son felt comfortable to tell his mom about the experience he witnessed. Megan also mentions that she is proud of her son for standing up for his friends that are minorities or are liberal that share different opinion than others. Lastly, Megan demonstrates feelings of frustration of having to hear how George Floyd’s death was something to be expected.

We knew things were not great, but somehow seeing what happened this past year, and just not only the scope of it but also people's visceral response to it where people were like, “Well George Floyd wasn't actually a good person so why are you standing up for him? He committed this other crime, so you're pretending he's a martyr but in fact he's this bad guy.” You're like, why are we having this conversation where somebody designed to uphold the law literally murders somebody, and instead of people getting up in arms and saying, “This isn't allowed,” they stand up and say, “Well yeah, but he wasn't an angel so what are you complaining about?”

Megan cannot comprehend why people do not want to stand against racial injustice, but unlike her and other respondents who are color-conscious, some families fail to recognize their privilege because they do not have discussions about race unless if conversations are inevitable. From Megan’s transcript, she feels comfortable talking about race and racism as well as being able to acknowledge her privilege and how she benefits from her race and share this perspective with her children.

Discussion

When protests about race around the nation begin to grow and media continuing to report on events amidst a global pandemic, discussions about the topic are bound to happen within

families. Parents with different beliefs about race navigate conversations differently with their kids if they are color-blind or color-conscious. Most respondents claim that central New York was predominantly white and middle-class, meaning that the area was not diverse that could lead to how people talked about race. Parents who have a more color-blind perspective believe that their race has not played a factor in how they make connections with other people, whereas people who are color-conscious acknowledge their privilege and are aware that their race gives them an advantage over people of color. However, for our one respondent of color, Brenda has constantly had to think about how her race will affect how she is viewed in her daily life. She has also had to think how to explain to her children about race and racism once they grow older and become more aware of the racial inequalities that occur in the country. As Manning (2019) and Lareau (2011) claim, Black folks, no matter their social class, are still very likely to explain to their children about racism for them to be aware of the injustice they will have to face when they are older and how to navigate the situations. Compared to people of color, white folks have the privilege to not have to consistently think about how race has affected their daily lives.

People who hold a color-blind ideology may understand and argue that racism did exist in the history of America but believe that it is no longer an issue in the present. As Hagerman explains in her article, white parents hope to put their kids in a setting where parents hold the same values for their children (Hagerman, 2014). Most white parents who homeschool their children may also share the same values such as education and making sure their child gets the best opportunity possible to make sure they are prepared for their future when they are older (Colloms, 2005). However, Black parents consider what is the best option for their children to not have to be discriminated against by taking into consideration possible experiences their child

may face because of their race (Fields-Smith, 2013) The lack of diversity in central New York does not allow for people in the area to understand other people's experience in how they handle relations based on race. As our respondent, Andrea, claimed, the lack of diversity makes it difficult for her to explain racism to her kids because they are not exposed to people from different backgrounds as them. Not only does the lack of diversity make it difficult for parents to explain to their children about racism, but it does not allow for conversations of racial inequality to occur.

When other respondents were asked the same question of how the protests have affected the way they parent, white parents who are more aware of the racial inequalities recognized their privilege by knowing their race allows them to navigate their daily lives before and during COVID. When thinking about how the pandemic has affected people of color and others who are from a lower socioeconomic status, color-conscious respondents mentioned they are grateful to be in a situation where they are able to get by every day. They acknowledge that people of color are in a situation where they may be less fortunate to not have employment or are at a higher risk of being exposed to COVID and spreading it to the rest of their families (Gould and Wilson, 2020). When thinking of how people around the globe are being affected, Teixeira (2020) explains the racist history of Brazil and how Black domestic workers and their children are greatly impacted by COVID. Similarly, Duffy (2007) also explains her findings in how the history of public reproductive labor has been taken up by mostly people of color, leading them to be most affected by the pandemic (Gould and Wilson, 2020).

When color-conscious respondents thought about the rise of protests, some grew frustrated with the state of the country on where it stood when it came to racial injustice. While

they may have the privilege of not having to worry about how their race will affect how they are perceived, they have had conversations with others to allow them to understand the struggles people of color face and have discussions with family members that do not share the same ideas. Having conversations about race not only makes them comfortable to talk about race with others, but with their children as well. Feeling more confident, parents can explain to their children the racial inequalities in the country and with the pandemic and protests occurring at the same time, for some respondents, it made sense to have these conversations during the pandemic. However, for other parents who are color-blind, they may have felt forced to have conversations about race and is therefore one of the negative outcomes of the pandemic. Color-blind parents felt the events that occurred in the summer of 2020 were one of the negative effects of the pandemic as it exposed their children to racial issues, believing it would affect how they view and judge people. The discussion of police also affected some children more than others if they aspire to be part of the police when they are older. Color-blind believe the police were heavily portrayed as being bad by the media and made the argument that anyone is capable of being good or bad, no matter their race, socioeconomic status, or occupation. Having this perspective means that everyone is treated fairly, even if there are people who may abuse their power, some may believe their children may be affected the same way if police come into contact with their children. Despite being privileged, Barbara claimed that she did not want her children to fear the police even though it is mostly young Black men that are confronted by the police (Nellis, 2016). Overall, conversations regarding race are viewed differently by our respondents based on their not so diverse community since the exposure to different ideas are not present. The lack of conversations and diversity does not allow for white parents to fully comprehend the racial

injustices that occurred during the pandemic. However, if parents were aware of the racial injustice based on friends they have made, the parents may be aware and more comfortable to have conversations about race with their child whenever necessary.

Conclusion

The unjustified deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor have led to many conversations within white households. For some, the conversations were difficult to navigate due to the lack of experience on the topic or because they felt forced to talk to their children about the issues surrounding racial inequality. For others, the conversations may still not have been easy to navigate, but had more experience talking about the topic and could talk to their family about the issues more comfortably and with confidence. While the paper did discuss how one parent of color navigated conversations with her children when they become more aware of their race, my findings would be more concise with more respondents of color. Understanding perspectives from people who are color-blind or color-conscious during the summer of 2020 allows us to understand how some parents were willing or felt forced to have conversations about racial injustice with their children. Further research could be conducted to investigate how the pandemic continues to affect families and the way they handle conversations about race. The media continues to cover deaths of people of color at the hand of police such as Daunte Wright and Adam Toledo in 2021. How these conversations will shape amidst the continuation of the pandemic and a more controversial political atmosphere is yet to be known, but one that has yet to be discovered.

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