Caucasian Parent-Child Communication Regarding Racial Identity

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Introduction

Interpersonal communication and psychology scholars (Grebelsky-Lichtman, 2014a; 2014b; Rowe & Casillas, 2011; Stafford 2013) have studied communication between parents and children. Researchers have focused on verbal and nonverbal communication between parents and their children (Grebelsky-Lichtman, 2014a; 2014b), how parents talk to children based on the intended long and short-term goals the parents have for the children (Rowe & Casillas, 2011), and how parents use control and warmth when communicating with children (Stafford, 2013).

Communication scholars (Caughy, Nettles, & Lima, 2011; Clark & Clark, 1939; Csizmadia, Kaneakau, Miller, & Halgunseth, 2013; Hughes & Chen, 1997; Hughes & Johnson, 2001) have studied how parents communicate to their children in regard to race and racial identity using different methods of communication such as preparation for bias, promotion of mistrust, silence about race or colorblindness, and cultural socialization. Several researchers (Caughy et al., 2011; Clark & Clark, 1939; Hughes & Chen, 1997; Hughes & Johnson, 2001) have focused on African American parents' communication about racial identity with children. Some researchers (Csizmadia et al., 2013; Njoroge, Benton, Lewis, & Njoroge, 2009) have concentrated on parent-child communication among all minority groups. Other researchers (Klein & Shiffman, 2006; Larson, 2002) have even looked at how children's television shows and commercials communicate racial identity, measuring the characters shown on television of various races and identifying how the television show or commercial portrayed minority children versus Caucasian children however, few researchers (Pahlke, Bigler, & Suizzo, 2012) studied Caucasian parents' communication about racial identity with children.

Researchers (Caughy et al., 2011; Clark & Clark, 1939; Csizmadia et al., 2013; Hughes & Chen, 1997; Hughes & Johnson, 2001) have focused on African American parents' communication with their children in regard to racial identity with a focus on situations where the parents promote mistrust or prepare children for bias. Scholars (Caughy et al., 2011) studied how parents convey racial identity to children based on gender differences, promoting cultural socialization to girls and promoting mistrust to boys. Scholars (Grebelsky-Lichtman, 2014a; 2014b; Csizmadia et al., 2013) have discussed how verbal and nonverbal communications have a significant influence on messages sent from parents to children. Csizmadia et al. (2013) specifically discussed how the tone of verbal and nonverbal messages regarding how the parents feel about their culture or racial identity significantly effect the children's own view of their culture or racial identity.

Pahlke, Bigler, and Suizzo (2012) researched European-American mothers' approaches to communicating racial identity when reading story-books to their children, however, Pahlke et al. indicated colorblind approaches and extensive research about Caucasian parents approaching the topic of race with their children using other methods does not exist. Researchers (Hughes & Chen, 1997; Hughes & Johnson, 2001) have reported the practice of cultural socialization to be the most common way to discuss racial identity with children, however, no research on methods used by Caucasian families supports the use of cultural socialization, instead the researchers (Pahlke et al., 2012) only discussed colorblindness and silence in regard to race.

Literature Review

Researchers have studied parent-child relationships writ large (Clark & Clark, 1939), the use of warmth and control in parent-child communication (Stafford, 2012) and, emotions in relationships conveyed through verbal and nonverbal signals between parents and infants

(Fitness, 2013). Many scholars (Caughy, Nettles, & Lima, 2011; Hughes & Chen, 1997) have focused on communication among minority groups in regard to racial identity with specific attention to preparation for bias and promotion of mistrust. Caucasian parents tend to utilize the cultural socialization method of communication with their children, however, few researchers (Pahlke, Bigler, & Suizzo, 2012) focused on the Caucasian demographic. I wish to further communication studies research to identify how Caucasian parents discuss racial identity with their children. I will review research and literature that addresses parent-child communication, the study of whiteness, and pluralism/socialization.

Parent-Child Communication

Parent-child communication methods regarding racial identity differ among various races. A majority of researchers (Caughy et al., 2011; Hughes & Chen, 1997; Hughes & Johnson, 2001; Njoroge, Benton, Lewis, & Njoroge, 2009) have focused on minority groups' communication. The strategies minority parents use include preparing children for bias, promoting mistrust, and cultural socialization or pluralism. Despite the various ways a minority parent could address racial identity with their children, cultural socialization proves to be used the most frequently followed by preparation for bias and promotion of mistrust (Hughes & Johnson, 2001). In addition to cultural socialization, preparation for bias, and promotion of mistrust researchers (Pahlke, Bigler, & Suizzo, 2012) also described parents' (primarily Caucasian) use of colorblind, or silent, approaches in the discussion of racial identity with their children.

The circumstances under which parents choose to discuss or to avoid the topic of racial socialization vary. In one study, researchers (Hughes & Johnson, 2001) administered surveys to parents and children and analyzed how parents who previously experienced discrimination

discussed racial identity with their children. The researchers concluded that parents who experienced discrimination tends to promote mistrust and racial bias when communicating with children. In another study, researchers (Pahlke et al., 2012) observed the ways parents communicates racial identity to their children while reading picture books with messages/stories relating to racial discrimination. The researchers found when presented with an opportunity to guide the conversation with their children to racial identity or cultural socialization, most parents choose to be silent about race or promote colorblindness, which can devalue the history and experiences of racial minority groups. In a third study, researchers (Apfelbaum, Pauker, Ambady, Sommers, & Norton, 2008) asked children to play a game and asked children to narrow down cards with pictures of various people on them using yes or no questions to identify the single card the researcher had in mind. Apfelbaum et al. (2008) concluded children perceive silence about race as the norm and can discriminate at a young age. Researchers (Apfelbaum et al., 2008; Hughes & Johnson, 2001; Pahlke et al., 2012) have highlighted the role parents play in a child's idea of race and racial socialization and emphasize the importance of having racial identity communication between parents and children because the way a parent discusses race and culture with their children has a significant impact on the outcome of the views of the child.

Researchers (Grebelsky-Lichtman, 2014a; 2014b) have discussed verbal and nonverbal communication among parents and children and found children tend to model after their parents' actions. Grebelsky-Lichtman also found verbal cues from parents to children do not always match nonverbal cues from parents to children such as a verbal challenge from a parent accompanied by nonverbal support when attempting to complete a joint task with the child. Scholars (Castelli, De Dea, & Nesdale, 2008) also found the impact parent's nonverbal behaviors have on children are significant and affect the child's attitudes independent from the effects of

verbal behaviors from parents. Other researchers (Rowe & Casillas, 2011) observed parent-child communication during daily activities and found parents communicate to their children differently based on the goals parents have for their children. Scholars (Grebelsky-Lichtman, 2014a; 2014b; Rowe & Casillas, 2011; Castelli, De Dea, & Nesdale, 2008) have stressed the influence parents have on children and emphasize the different ways parents can communicate with their children based on the parents' cultural identities and ideals.

Many scholars (Apfelbaum et al., 2008; Grebelsky-Lichtman, 2014a; 2014b; Hughes & Johnson, 2001; Pahlke et al., 2012) have determined parents' influences on children through communication are significant and aid in developing the child's identity and how the children perceive other races as well as the children's own races. Researches (Csizmadia, Kaneakua, Miller, & Halgunseth, 2013) discussed how cultural socialization, pluralism, preparation for bias, and promotion of mistrust are utilized in different types of families, who come from various backgrounds, and value distinctive aspects of individual culture. Researchers (Apfelbaum et al., 2008; Pahlke et al., 2012) have outlined the effects Caucasian parents can have on children in regard to racial identity through communication, yet because researchers focused on white parent-child dyads primarily being colorblind or silent in regard to race, next I will review literature pertaining to the study of whiteness and how Caucasian parents' socialization methods differ from socialization methods of minority parents.

Study of Whiteness

The study of how parents communicate with their children depends on various situations and methods of parenting as discussed above, how the concept of whiteness influences parent-child discussions will be addressed next. Researchers (Bahk & Jandt, 2004; Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002) have studied the effects of whiteness, or white privilege, in America. One

researcher (Lewis, 2011) studied the presence of whiteness in an elementary school over the course of the school year. Lewis (2011) found that white students depended on stereotypes to identify with other races since the white students had an absence of knowledge regarding the racial identities of others. Lewis (2011) also found white students in a homogenous school need to better understand their role in situations of racial inequality because white people who grow up in prominently Caucasian areas are at risk of not understanding what role their lives play in a racial context. Lewis emphasizes the lack of communication between parents and children in regard to communication about racial identities. The author discusses one mother depending on the school to teach her child about racial identities and to sooth her child when conflict arises. However, the mother never discusses addressing the problems in depth with her child to Lewis.

Other researchers (Bahk & Jandt, 2004) discussed how Caucasian people are often unaware of the dominant white culture existing in America. Bahk and Jandt also stated the concept of white privilege is more obvious to non-while people than the Caucasian population. Dovidio, Kawakami, and Gaertner (2002) argued the overall bias white people pose against people of color is based on implicit and explicit attitudes and influences on verbal and nonverbal actions. Scholars (Grebelsky-Lichtman, 2014a; 2014b) state the importance of verbal and nonverbal communication congruency, however, researchers (Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002) argued verbal and nonverbal attitudes are contrasting when observing implicit and explicit attitudes creating an inconsistency in parent-child communication. Researchers (Bahk & Jandt, 2004) also discussed the concept of whiteness being constructed through every day communication exchanges between Caucasian people and people of color. Researchers (Bahk & Jandt, 2004; Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002; Lewis, 2011) have looked at parent-child

communication, both verbal and nonverbal, as well as the study of whiteness, now pluralism and cultural socialization will be discussed.

Pluralism and Cultural Socialization

The study of whiteness highlights the privileges among Caucasian Americans regarding race in a unique way, as white people appear to be the only race at liberty of not having to discuss race yet still having the ability to be culturally proud. Next, we will discuss pluralism and cultural socialization. With this research in mind, I posit the following questions.

RQ1:   How do Caucasian parents discuss racial identity with their children?

RQ2:   In what ways, if any, do Caucasian parents address aspects of cultural
       socialization/pluralism?

<div align="center">Rationale</div>

Researchers (Patterson, Pahlke, & Bigler, 2013; Njoroge et al., 2009) have discussed children's awareness of racial differences begins at a young age however, even the earliest researchers (Clark & Clark, 1939) focused on the minority perception of race. The scholars (Grebelsky-Lichtman, 2014a; 2014b; Rowe & Casillas, 2011; Stafford 2013) have conducted research regarding parent-child communication in general but the specific focus on the controversial topic of discussing racial identity is scarce among communication scholars, especially in regard to the Caucasian population. Researchers (Caughy et al., 2011; Clark & Clark, 1939; Csizmadia et al., 2013; Hughes & Chen, 1997; Hughes & Johnson, 2001) have demonstrated African American and other minority's methods to approaching racial identity, cultural socialization is the most practiced method, however, promotion of mistrust is a method used as well. My research will expand the current research by filling the gap of Caucasian parents' communication to their children in regard to racial identity. I seek to demonstrate how

this study is potentially significant because the research results will contain information

regarding the methods used by Caucasian people when race is discussed. The knowledge I will

find is potentially significant because Caucasian people are the only race with the potential to

have the privilege of not discussing race, however, my research will address the racial identity

conversation among parents and children and identify the preferred methods Caucasian

Americans use. Information I gain from the research could also benefit out culture by attempting

to accomplish true equality, because if parents can discuss racial identity with children, children

can grow up with open minds and learn to celebrate each other's cultures instead of

discriminating others.

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