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Recommended Citation

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The Effect of Early Cross-race Socialization on Black Lives Matter Attitudes

by

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Honors Thesis

Submitted to:

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Richmond, VA

April 28, 2022

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Abstract:

The present study investigated the effect of early cross-race socialization within the family, school, and neighborhood on current support for Black Lives Matter and anti-racist attitudes. Specifically, this study will examine the variables of whether participants' families talked about race and the diversity of schools and neighborhoods. 98 female participants, 36 male participants, and 2 n.a. participants were recruited from the University of Richmond's Introduction to Psychology class (N= 136) and were asked to complete an anonymous survey on their attitudes regarding Black Lives Matter. Based on the results, there was no clear influence of early cross-race socialization on current support for Black Lives Matter. The only significant correlation found was that being raised to not see race correlates with less support for Black Lives Matter. However, there were significant correlations between talking to your family about race and anti-racist attitudes variables. There were no significant effects of early cross-race socialization within schools and the neighborhood on anti-racist attitudes. It is suggested that more research is needed to better understand the impact of early cross-race socialization on BLM and anti-racist attitudes.

Keywords: Early-cross race socialization, Black Lives Matter, racism, anti-racist attitudes.

Despite advances to combat racism in the United States, it continues to plague our society and is integrated into our institutions. Yet, its existence continues to be denied by many Americans (McCoy, 2020). Racism in America was brought back into the public eye during the year 2020 when the COVID-19 global pandemic spread across the U.S. With Americans being forced to stay at home, the use of media was at an all-time high. Therefore, when a Black man named George Floyd was murdered by a police officer in Minneapolis, the news spread rapidly. The gravity of the Black Lives Matter Movement was brought back to center stage.

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) Global Network was founded in 2013 (About, n.d.), following the acquittal of George Zimmerman, a security guard who shot and killed Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old unarmed Black teenager. This tragedy fed BLM's ambition to combat incidents of police brutality and racially motivated violence against Black people. Since its creation, there have been additional murders of Black people by U.S. law enforcement including Ahmad Aubrey and Breonna Taylor. Despite this, many Americans dismiss BLM with responses of "All Lives Matter" (McCoy, 2020). The ALM movement seems to deny that Black people are systematically disadvantaged due to the color of their skin. This relates to the ideology of color-blindness, which denies the presence and significance of racism within our society, leaving no room to discuss and change biases that one may have (Burke, 2017). Therefore, it appears that one's opinions on Black Lives Matter reveal one's racial attitudes. To reduce American racism, it is important to examine and understand the socialization and developmental factors that shape it (Roberts and Reggo, 2021).

The Development of Racism

Humans are not born with racial attitudes and categories in mind, instead, they must be learned (Roberts and Reggo, 2021). According to social learning theory, influential role models

such as parents, teachers, peers, and the media influence children's attitudes and behaviors (Rosenfield and Stephan, 1981). This theory has been offered as an explanation for how prejudice is formed. It suggests that prejudice is learned due to racial socialization, which refers to the process by which parents or significant adults transmit implicit and explicit attitudes about the meaning of one's race in a broader social context (Coard and Sellers, 2005). Racial prejudice has been found in children as young as three years old in terms of ingroup favoritism and outgroup discrimination, and it appears to peak in middle childhood around seven to eight years old (Aboud, 1988; Dweck, 2009).

Effects of family

Children's racial attitudes are crucially dependent on early socialization experiences, and thus, are influenced greatly by their families (Carlson and Iovini, 1985; Bigler and Liben, 2007; McGlothlin and Killen, 2010). Several studies have supported strong correlations between parents and children's racial attitudes (O'Bryan et al., 2004; Jaspers et al., 2008; Rodriguez-Garcia and Wagner, 2009; Dhont and Van Hiel, 2012; Dhont et al., 2013; Meeusen, 2014). Moreover, adults may shape these racial attitudes of their children by direct use of group labels or indirectly using intergroup differentiation. For example, parents may make clear distinctions between different racial groups (Castelli et al., 2009). Children are likely to observe and imitate these racial labels and their associated emotions, so preadolescent prejudice is considered an imitation of their parents' views (Allport, 1954). This is consistent with Rosenfield and Stephan (1981) social learning theory. In contrast, it has been found that the racial attitudes of African American children do not reflect those of their parents, as results have found that Black sons' racial attitudes do not reflect those of their fathers. Thus, showing evidence that Black families play a different role in the socialization process than white families (Carlson and Iovini, 1985).

There also is evidence that the family unit has an influence on adolescents' racial views. Specifically, adolescents whose parents engage in more racial socialization have a greater likelihood to question the racism within their society (Marshall, 1995), express greater appreciation for Black culture (Stevenson, 1995), and are more likely to befriend someone from a different race (McHale et al., 2006; Wills et al., 2007). Therefore, adults can powerfully influence their younger and older children's perceptions about racial outgroups either negatively or positively through what they say and how they behave towards those outgroups.

Influence of Peers

A Reuters poll found that white Americans are far less likely to have friends of another race than non-white Americans, with around 40% of white Americans having only white friends, while about 25% of non-white Americans are surrounded by people of their own race (Dunsmuir, 2013). Despite this relative rarity, cross-race friendships are an important factor in reducing racial prejudice; friends are important socializing agents for influencing racial attitudes in children. For instance, Aboud et al. (2003), found that white students with higher levels of prejudice put more cross-race classmates in their non-friend categories and had fewer cross-race companions. Moreover, having a close cross-race friend in childhood is associated with positive racial attitudes into adolescence and adulthood (Ellison and Powers, 1994; Jackman and Crane, 1986; Patchen, 1982). Therefore, cross-race friendships have an influence on racial prejudice in children.

Simply talking about race with your peers was found to have a significant influence on racial attitudes. Aboud (1993) placed two children with differing racial attitudes in a context where they talked about their racial perceptions and attitudes. The results showed that more prejudiced children became significantly less prejudiced in their evaluations after their

discussions. These changes were greater in children whose low prejudice peers made statements about cross-race similarity such as “everyone can be mean sometimes”. Meanwhile, low-prejudice children remained unprejudiced after discussions with high prejudiced peers (Aboud, 1993). Moreover, Aboud and Doyle (1996) found that children were more like their nonfriends in their white/Black bias scores, showing children conform more to non-close classmates on cultural stereotypes and biases compared to close friends. Overall, this exemplifies how socialization with peers within school settings has a significant influence on the level of prejudice in children.

Influence of Neighborhood

The neighborhood is another socialization agent that influences the development of racial attitudes. Even though racial residential segregation has modestly declined over the last three decades, it remains at high levels in places like Detroit, Chicago, and other older cities (Bobo, 1989). Research shows that residential preferences found that whites are willing to live with only a small number of Black neighbors, while Blacks are open to a quite diverse range of neighbors (Farley et al., 1994; Clark 1992; Bobo and Zubrinsky, 1996). Krysan et al. (2009) found three explanations for the racial differences in neighborhood preferences: economic status, segregation in the housing market, and the history of whites wanting to be segregated from Blacks. They also found that whites’ attraction to all-white neighborhoods is mostly influenced by exclusion and anti-Black feelings, as opposed to closeness or attraction to one’s own group (Kyson et al., 2009). In other words, it is influenced by prejudice.

Past research has found evidence that neighborhood composition shapes racial attitudes, specifically the number of Black people in the neighborhood has a significant influence on whites’ racial attitudes. Despite the research on the positive effects of cross-race socialization on

prejudice, studies have found that white Americans report greater racial prejudice when living in neighborhoods with a high Black population (Fossett and Kiecolt, 1989; Quillian, 1996; Taylor, 1998). This is due to threat factors induced by the presence of minorities such as economic, political, and status competition. Physical threats are also evoked due to the stereotypes that Blacks are dangerous (Taylor and Mateyka, 2011). Thus, cross-race socialization does not seem to decrease white people's prejudice within mixed neighborhoods among adults, contradicting the alleged benefits of cross-race socialization. Although Crystal et al. (2008) found that children who had high contact with children of other races were more likely to rate scenarios of race-based exclusion as wrong. Therefore, promoting contact in neighborhoods among children of different races is likely to decrease children's prejudice and increase their sense of moral transgression in the face of racism.

The Present Study

Although the literature has mostly found that early cross-race socialization has a positive effect on decreasing prejudice in children, it is not known whether these effects last into early adulthood. The present study will examine whether the developmental factors of early cross-race socialization within the family, school, and neighborhood have a significant effect on current support for Black Lives Matter. Specifically, this study will examine the variables of whether participants' families talked about race and the diversity of schools and neighborhoods. It is hypothesized that early cross-race socialization within the social agents of the family, school, and neighborhood, along with positive conversations regarding race within the family, will have a positive correlation with support of Black Lives Matter and anti-racism.

Participants

We recruited participants from the University of Richmond's Introduction to Psychology class (N= 136). The students' ages ranged from 18 to 22 years. The mean age was 19 years old.

There were 98 female participants and 36 male participants. There were 71 white participants, 14 Black participants, 11 Latinx or Hispanic participants, 25 Asian or Asian American participants, 1 Native Hawaiian or another Pacific Islander participant, 10 multiracial participants, and 3 participants with a race not listed. There were 29 participants from an urban area, 100 from a suburban area, and 7 from a rural area. Participants were given class participation points for their participation in our study. Participants were asked to complete an anonymous survey on their attitudes regarding Black Lives Matter.

Design

This study set out to determine the influence of early racial socialization on young adults' views on Black Lives Matter using a self-report survey. Specifically, this study focused on the developmental factors of how often did participants' families talk about race, how diverse their grade school, middle school, and high school were, and how diverse their neighborhood was. This study then examined how these developmental factors influenced participants' current racial attitudes regarding Black Lives Matter.

Materials

Participants completed a survey in a quiet testing room. The survey was developed collaboratively by Dr. Berry's honors and other research students. The survey examined factors such as participants' attitudes toward Black Lives Matter, if their family talked about race, the diversity within their schools and neighborhoods, racism and microaggressions, and how their views and attitudes have changed over time. For instance, the items included, "Growing up, how often did your family talk about race?" and participants responded with "At least once a day," "At least once a week," "At least once a month," "Rarely," or "Never." Another item was, "How racially diverse was your neighborhood growing up?" Responses could range from 1 = "Hardly

at all” to 5 = “Very Diverse.” Participants also had the opportunity to type explanations for their answers.

Procedure

Dr. Berry’s research students worked together to add questions to a survey that was developed in Fall 2020 which assessed attitudes toward and experiences with the Black Lives Matter movement. The survey was developed and edited over an 8-week period and designed to take about one hour for each participant. Researchers received IRB approval from the University of Richmond. Data collection began on October 26, 2021 and concluded on November 27th, 2021. The survey reopened on January 10th, 2022 for six weeks and concluded on February 27, 2022.

Psychology 100 students were asked to complete the survey for class credit. They signed up for one-hour slots and arrived at the lab. Research assistants set up computers with the surveys, greeted participants, and prompted them to leave their belongings and phones outside of the testing room. They were then asked to complete the consent form on the front page of the survey, told it would take approximately one hour, and told that they could stop at any time or ask the research assistants questions if they had them. After completing the survey, research assistants thanked and debriefed participants, explained the procedure for ensuring that their responses remained anonymous, explained what the survey was designed to measure and what would be done with responses, and asked if they had any questions or concerns. Responses were analyzed using SPSS version 27 and included correlational and frequencies analyses.

Results

Descriptive statistics

Frequencies indicate the number of participants who engaged in early cross-race socialization. See Figures 1-8 for frequency distribution.

Correlations

A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between early cross-race socialization with support for Black Lives Matter and other measures of anti-racism. There was a moderately significant and negative correlation between being raised to not see race and support for Black Lives Matter ($N = 136$, $r = -.20$, $p = .017$). Therefore, participants who were raised to not see race were more likely to not support Black Lives Matter.

The remaining correlations between early cross-race socialization variables and support for Black Lives Matter were not significant, but there were significant correlations between early cross-race socialization and support for anti-racism. See Table 1 for correlation matrix. Overall, these results support the hypothesis that cross-race socialization increases support for Black Lives Matter and anti-racist attitudes.

Qualitative Data

Diverse guests explanations

Participants had the opportunity to provide explanations for their answers to “Did your family have friends of other races who came to your home to visit, have meals, socialize, other?” Explanations were selected to display the range of positive, neutral, and negative responses.

Black Participants.

Participant A wrote, “I’ve always lived in predominantly black communities. All my family friends that have come to my home have been black.” Participant B wrote, “Our home was always open to everyone and my parent had friends from different races.” Participant C wrote, “My family had mostly black people come to the house, but my dad hunts and fishes, and

since that is usually a whiter crowd, we saw them sometimes too. When I was younger, I did not realize that many of these people are racist and didn't actually like black people, but saw my family as the exception. I became extremely turned off from them when I realized this..."

White Participants.

Participant D wrote, "Now that I think about, my family's friends who have come to our house to visit, have meals, and socialize were all white. I can't recall anyone who wasn't white."

Participant E wrote, "We had family friends and family members of different races. It was not

made a big deal it was normal growing up." Participant F wrote, "Many of my closest friends from elementary, middle, and high school are not white and we would often hang out and spend our summers together when we were not at school. Our neighborhood was predominately white, but we did have some families of other races and everyone was invited to block parties/gatherings".

Talking about race with family explanations

Participants had the opportunity to provide explanations for their answers to "How often did your family talk about race?" Explanations were selected to display the range of positive, neutral, and negative responses.

Black Participants.

Participant G wrote, "Some conversations are dark and some are about being proud about being Black and about what it means to have Black culture and why we should be proud of that.

Some dark conversations involve personal racist experiences and also things that were seen

within the media." Participant H wrote, "When I was younger they were more positive because

my family is very proud to be Black, but as I've grown older they've gotten more serious and grave in tone because I'm more aware of and able to understand the injustice of how Black

people are treated in the world...” Participant I wrote, “Neutral mostly. A lot of Matter-of-fact conversations growing up about the potential impact that the color of someone's skin can have on their life. A lot of matter-of-fact conversations about the historical impact of race/racism and how that translates to the present day”.

White Participants.

Participant J wrote, “My mother would tell me that we are all created equal and that our race does not define if we will be a good or bad person. However, discussion of race with my family never included white privilege and it was made to seem like skin color didn't matter and that we all were created the same and had the same opportunities...” Participant K wrote, “The emotional tone of those conversations were often negative because I would always argue with my mom when she would claim that she does "not see color." Sometimes the tone was positive because she would acknowledge the existence of racism but not in herself which made it negative again.” Participant L wrote, “We had positive discussions regarding race centering around equality and love for all people”.

Diversity explanations

Participants had the opportunity to provide explanations for their answers regarding the diversity of their childhood environments. Explanations were selected to display the range of positive, neutral, and negative responses.

Black Participants.

Participant M wrote, “I was never around many white people growing up, which caused me to be very wary attending a PWI. Often times, I find myself nervous or anxious around white people, especially those my age. I always wonder if they judge me based on my Blackness, or if I need to change how I act to make them feel less nervous (if they feel nervous at all).” Participant

N wrote, "Growing up a diverse community and environment made me open minded and accepting of people from different backgrounds." Participant O wrote, "Growing up you don't see race as color. At a certain point you began to realize that white people have an advantage in life. That didn't stop me from making friends with people from all races. Many people cultures/ the way they brought sometime make them have misconception about another race. It isn't until you have a friend of that race when you realize does are misconceptions. Having friends from multiple culture not only helps me socially it helps me academically".

White Participants.

Participant P wrote, "Compared to my high school and middle school, my college is extremely diverse. I went to a Jesuit private school where nearly everyone was a white conservative. The University of Richmond has come under fire not being diverse, but compared to my high school it is remarkably diverse." Participant Q wrote, "I never spent a lot of time with Black people in my childhood. This contributed to my viewing them as foreign or confusing as a child." Participant R wrote, "I think the lack of diversity at my schools has been upsetting to me. It makes me wish I had been able to grow up in a more diverse area where the school cafeteria was not segregated by race. But my schools situation with diversity did not influence my attitude and relationships with people of different races".

Discussion

My hypothesis was somewhat supported by the evidence. I hypothesized that early cross-race socialization would predict current support for Black Lives Matter and anti-racism amongst college students. Based on the results, there was no clear influence of early cross-race socialization on current support for Black Lives Matter. The only significant correlation found was that being raised to not see race correlates with less support for Black Lives Matter.

However, there were significant correlations between early cross-race socialization and anti-racist attitudes variables. For instance, being raised to not see race correlated with less talking with your family about race and thinking that race does not impact the way police treat you. Moreover, talking about race with your family correlated with fewer beliefs of colorblindness, less support for All Lives Matter, and more beliefs that race is socially determined. Likewise, talking about race with your family correlated with having a more diverse neighborhood and middle school, and less with having a more racially diverse college. It was also found that believing in color-blindness correlated with having a more racially diverse college. This is interesting because participants were all students from the University of Richmond, which is not a racially diverse college as 59% of its students are white. Students with early cross-race socialization and anti-racist beliefs were able to acknowledge the lack of diversity on campus, while students with more racist beliefs rated the campus to be more diverse. Thus, overall, it was supported that early cross-race socialization within the family leads to more current anti-racist attitudes.

There were no significant effects of early cross-race socialization within schools and the neighborhood on anti-racist attitudes. This is inconsistent with the literature that has shown that peers within schools are important socializing agents to create positive racial attitudes (Aboud et al., 2003; Ellison and Powers, 1994; Jackman and Crane' 1986; Patchen 1982). It is also inconsistent with the literature that states that having high contact with children of other races within the neighborhood increases anti-racist attitudes (Crystal et al., 2008). Also, it is inconsistent with the finding that having a diverse neighborhood increases prejudice in white Americans (Fossett and Kiecolt, 1989; Quillian, 1996; Taylor, 1998), as there was no effect at all

found. This study's results were most likely inconsistent with the literature due to having a small and non-diverse sample size.

There was a significant effect of early cross-race socialization within the family on anti-racist attitudes, which is consistent with the literature. For instance, it supports the finding that there is a strong correlation between parents and children's racial attitudes (O'Bryan et al., 2004; Jaspers et al., 2008; Rodriguez-Garcia and Wagner, 2009; Dhont and Van Hiel, 2012; Dhont et al., 2013; Meeusen, 2014). It is also consistent with Marshall (1995) that found that adolescents who engage in more racial socialization are more likely to question the racism within their society. Therefore, this study provides support to the theory that early cross-race socialization within the family increases anti-racist attitudes. It also adds to previous literature as it shows that early racial socialization within the family later affects college students' current racial attitudes.

Limitations

There were multiple limitations within this study that may have influenced the results. The first limitation is the study's sample size. There were only 136 participants in this study, and most participants were white and female. Likewise, all participants were students at the University of Richmond. Therefore, this study lacks external validity, and it cannot be generalized to the population. Another large limitation of this study is that the "How often does your family talk about race?" variable did not quantitatively assess the attitudes behind these conversations. This study interpreted the variable of talking about race with your family as positive cross-race socialization. Although, as seen within the qualitative data, some of these conversations were negative and could have amplified prejudice. Therefore, the relationship between "How often does your family talk about race?" and anti-racist attitudes could be unclear. Moreover, another limitation is that we assessed racial attitudes using a self-report

measure. Surveys have several weaknesses such as dishonest answers, it is hard to convey feelings and emotions, participants may be confused by the questions and answer inaccurately, and participants may have rushed through the survey. Likewise, because this survey dealt with sensitive topics, participants may have had response bias where participants may have been dishonest with their answers so they would appear to be socially acceptable. This could have skewed the results which is a threat to the validity of this study.

Future Directions

In future studies, researchers can conduct a longitudinal study where they track the same children into adulthood and continually give them the survey to assess how early cross-race socialization affects their racial attitudes over time into young adulthood. This would allow researchers to accurately see the development of and changes in racial attitudes in participants extended beyond a single moment in time. Another future research idea would be to recruit participants from racially diverse and non-racially diverse populations, allowing researchers to compare the results of participants from racially diverse neighborhoods versus not racially diverse neighborhoods to assess how racial attitudes differ due to the diversity of the neighborhood and schooling. Lastly, researchers could also add a measure of racial attitudes using the online Implicit Association Test. This test measures participants' associations between people of color and racial attitudes or stereotypes (Schimmack, 2021). Researchers could assess the disadvantages and differences of explicit attitudes as measured by a survey and possibly increase the validity by comparing it to implicit racial attitudes.

Conclusion

In 2020, the Black Lives Matter movement highlighted the racism and injustice that is ingrained within our society. The results of this study showed that early cross-race socialization

within the family increases young adults' anti-racist attitudes. This research is important for the public to know because it supports that people are not inherently racist, these attitudes are learned. These attitudes have been shown to be heavily influenced by children's families. Therefore, parents should teach and talk to their children early on about race and racism. It is important for children to know that it is acceptable to talk about race to help them understand, respect, and celebrate the differences between people. This research can teach parents that they can do this by talking about race within their family, along with socializing their children with children of other races and ethnicities. This will help children build empathy and compassion for people of all backgrounds. These children will then grow up to better see and understand injustice in the world which will allow them to do something about it. Hopefully, this could help decrease the racism that plagues our society.

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Figures

Table 1

	N	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. BLM Support	136	8.70	1.77										
2. Not See Race	136	2.39	1.24	-.204*									
3. Talk About Race	136	2.92	1.01	.007	-.247**								
4. Race Impact Police	136	4.11	1.00	.622**	-.232**	.060							
5. Color-Blind	136	1.21	.416	-.264**	.164	-.230**	-.220**						
6. Diverse College	136	2.64	1.05	-.135	.092	-.243**	-.264**	.331**					
7. Diverse Neighborhood	136	2.26	1.33	-.077	-.034	.170*	.056	-.113	-.278**				
8. Diverse Middle School	136	2.46	1.31	-.074	-.016	.174*	-.028	-.139	-.114	.404**			
9. ALM Support	136	3.28	2.96	-.354**	.118	-.304**	-.458**	.242**	.380**	-.101	-.072		
10. Race Social Construct	136	4.60	1.93	.281**	-.126	.226**	.334**	-.167	-.142	-.080	-.034	-.205*	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed.)

Note: 1. BLM Support had a 1-10 scale; 2. Not See Race had a 1-5 scale; 3. Talk About Race had a 1-5 scale; 4. Race Impact Police had a 1-5 scale; 5. Color-Blind had a 1-2 scale; 6. Diverse College had a 1-5 scale; 7. Diverse Neighborhood had a 1-5 scale; 8. Diverse Middle School had a 1-5 scale; 9. ALM Support had a 1-10 scale; 10. Race Social Construct had a 1-7 scale.

Figure 1

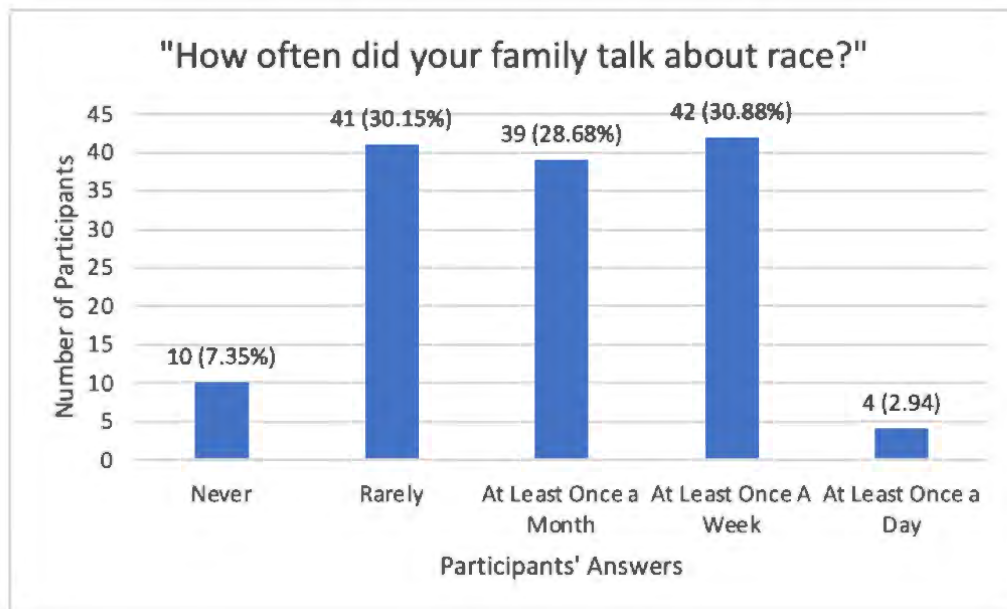


Figure 2

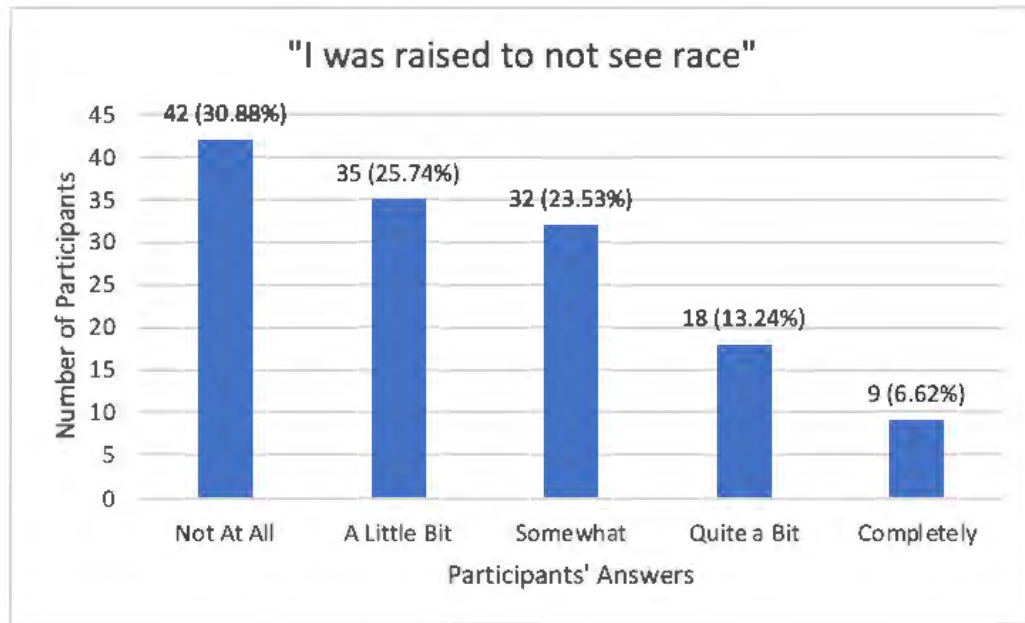


Figure 3

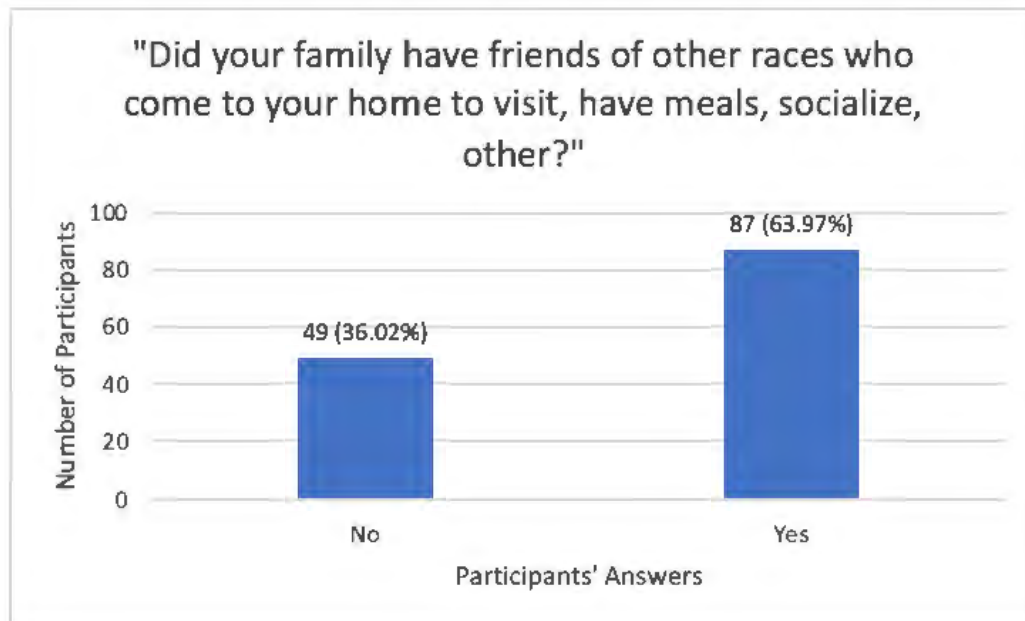


Figure 4

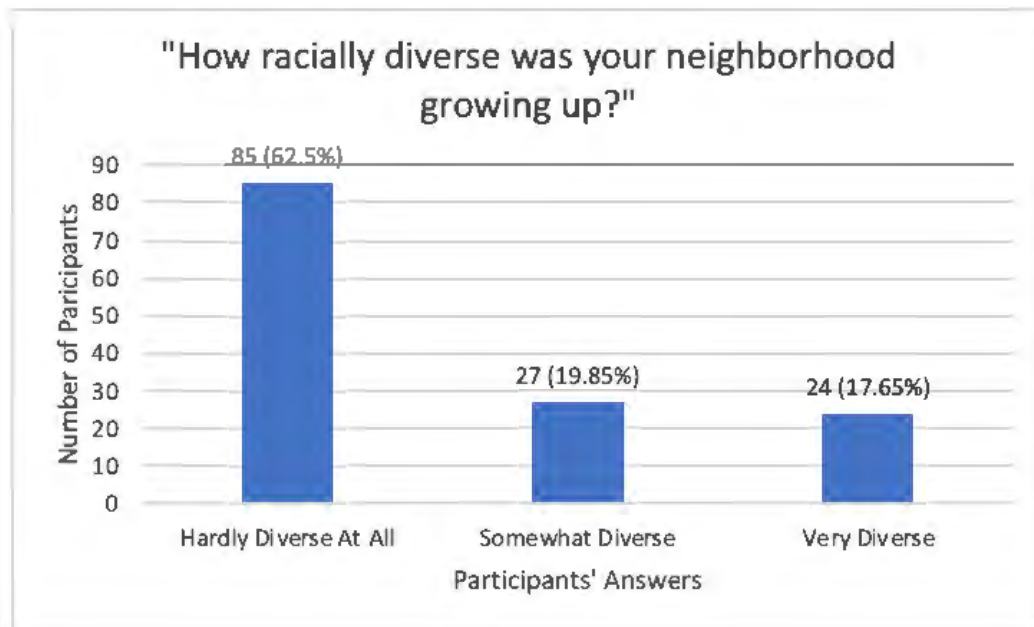


Figure 5

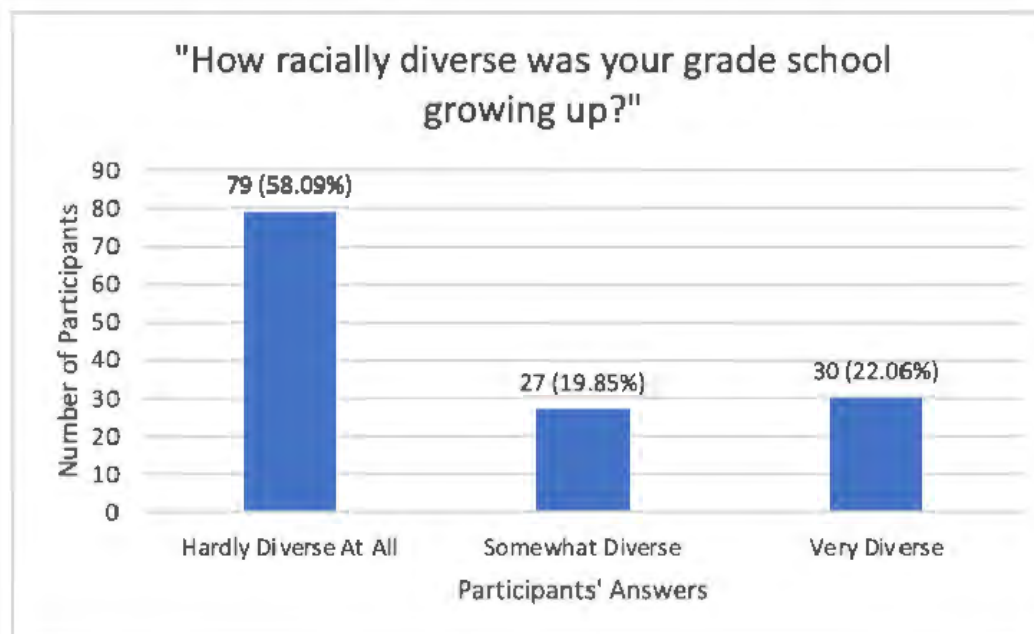


Figure 6

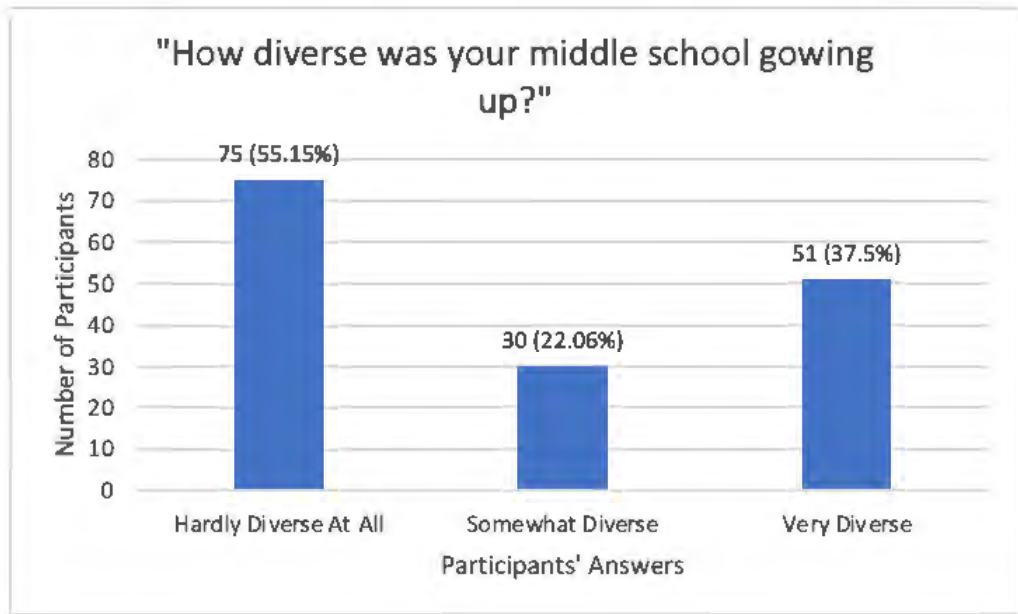


Figure 7

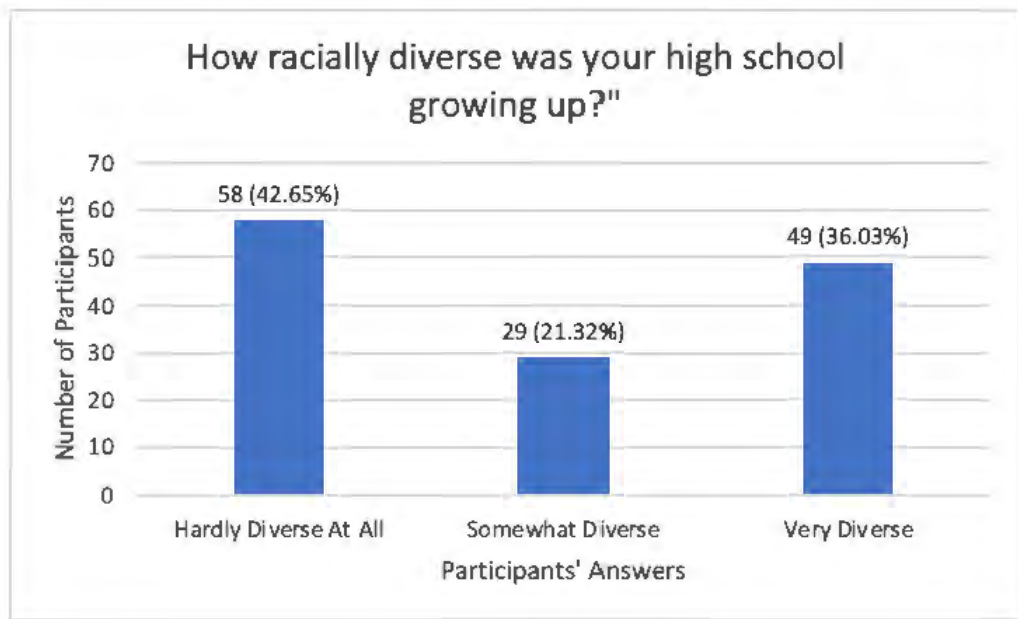


Figure 8

