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Elementary School Parent Perceptions of "Critical Race Theory" in the Curriculum

by

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Honors Thesis

Submitted to:

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Abstract

Critical Race Theory (CRT) implementations within educational settings is a controversial and polarizing concept in the American political climate. Many Americans are strongly opposed to the idea of CRT within the classroom due to a misguided belief that children have no idea what race or racism is until it is taught to them explicitly. On the other hand, proponents of CRT argue that teaching children to ignore race further perpetuates racial discrimination and prevents children from adequately understanding racial injustice. There is currently a lack of research investigating perceptions of CRT implementations in education among parents. This research aimed to assess what psychological factors might motivate parents to oppose, or support, CRT in educational settings by presenting a sample of parents with lesson plans about Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech that had either a status-quo (racially colorblind) interpretation or a CRT-inspired (racially conscious interpretation). In particular, we hypothesized that for parents with a stronger endorsement of status-legitimizing beliefs, a set of beliefs encapsulating the idea that the status hierarchy is fair, permeable, legitimate, and anyone who works hard enough can succeed, exposure to a CRT-inspired lesson plan will prompt feelings of threat (decreased support and comfort, and higher negative emotions with the lesson plan condition). As predicted, parents who more strongly endorsed, or less strongly rejected, SLB statements were more opposed to, uncomfortable with, and felt more negatively (*increased feelings of threat*) about the CRT lesson plan condition compared to the status-quo condition. Discussion focuses on the potential real-world implications of endorsement of SLBs and opposition to CRT within educational settings.

Elementary School Parent Perceptions of "Critical Race Theory" in the Curriculum

The phrase "Critical Race Theory" (CRT) may prompt immediate and emotionally charged reactions, particularly when discussing the theory's implementation within education. I was motivated to examine the psychological factors that may underlie opposition to or support for CRT applications in educational curricula. Wilkins and Kaiser's (2014) exploration of the relationship between anti-White bias, status-legitimizing beliefs (SLBs), and perceived threat in response to racial progress influenced the development of this study. I was interested in the perspectives of parents since they are the individuals who interact the most with their children and have a significant impact on their development. The current study is going to explore the psychological factors that may motivate parental support or opposition to CRT implementations within educational curricula. In the introduction, we will review the existence and role of racial colorblindness within the American education system, how children comprehend and conceptualize race, racial socialization by parents, and how CRT would operate within educational settings.

Racial Colorblindness and Education

Racial colorblindness, which is the belief that race holds no significance and racial discrimination is virtually non-existent, is widely supported within the American education system (Apfelbaum et al., 2010). While many people believe that endorsing racial colorblindness is an act of anti-racism, advocating for this ideology is associated with decreased support for affirmative action, confronting racism, awareness of cultural diversity issues, and openness to learning about different racial/ethnic groups (Mekawi et al., 2017). For White individuals, unawareness of racial privilege and institutional discrimination is further associated with less

openness to taking others' perspectives (Mekawi et al., 2017). Individuals who believe America is in a "post-racial" era explain the presence of racial disparities as the result of behaviors or characteristics of the afflicted group rather than the effects of systemic and institutional racism (Carter et al., 2017). The implications and nuances of race and ethnicity in America are difficult to confront, but ignoring racial disparities allows injustices to persist within educational settings.

Individualism is one value or ideology that supports colorblind narratives and mentalities, as its core concept—that each person is responsible for themselves and their outcomes—denies the significance and systemic nature of racial inequality (Ullucci & Battey, 2011). Individualism emphasizes that hard work will result in positive outcomes, whereas laziness will lead to demise; this ideology supports the notion that factors outside of one's personal characteristics, such as race, do not impact an individual's ability to succeed or achieve success (Ullucci & Battey, 2011). Choosing to reject the importance of race allows individuals to ignore the presence of racial inequities and other challenges faced by non-White individuals in a culture dominated by Whiteness. Although, it is plausible that some educators may refrain from explicitly teaching about race and racism due to the complexity and difficulty of understanding and teaching the subject.

Teachers, particularly those who are White, may avoid discussions regarding race or racial topics in the classroom (Carter et al., 2017). White educators may be hesitant to speak about race and racially motivated issues for fear of appearing racially insensitive (Fine et al., 2004). However, racially colorblind classrooms cannot adequately acknowledge how cultural identity and heritage shapes students' beliefs, attitudes, and approaches to education (Fine et al, 2004). Teachers who foster educational environments in which students' cultural socialization and prior experiences are accepted and considered help their students become critical thinkers who are passionate to learn from one another (Fine et al., 2004). The experiences of non-White

students and its impact on their educational experience may be undermined or dismissed if colorblindness and individualism is emphasized within the classroom. Recognizing the presence of racial injustice and the experiences of students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds is not possible without first examining race and its role within American society, a concept that has proved to be difficult within educational institutions.

Colorblindness has permeated various levels of the American education system, with state standards for school curricula neglecting to adequately address race and its implications (Mekawi et al., 2017). An analysis of California's State Standards for the U.S. History curriculum revealed that a state generally considered progressive in America reinforces White supremacy and erases the history of non-White racial groups' contributions to America in their educational standards (Huber et al., 2006). "Whiteness is presented as the normalized standard, and People of Color are therefore rendered as abnormal" (Huber et al., 2006, p. 196). Black people are only referenced 24 times in the U.S. History Standards, Indigenous groups 14 times, Asian groups only twice, and Mexicans, the only Latinx ethnic group mentioned, 7 times. Huber and colleagues found that not only are non-White groups referenced a handful of times throughout the curriculum, but they are also only referenced and portrayed as extensions "to a recount of a white dilemma, need, or desire" (Huber et al., 2006). White-washed portrayals of history, coupled with a refusal to discuss the significance of race and the existence of racial injustice within educational settings, push the normalization and maintain standards of White supremacy.

The United States education system's commitment to racial colorblindness has "conflated acknowledging race with being racist," thereby deeming race an inappropriate concept to discuss in the classroom and educational settings (Annamma et al., 2017). Educators have embraced color-blind language and approaches to teacher education and educational policy decisions. The

notion that “race does not matter” and that everyone “is the same” is common rhetoric found within American classrooms (Apfelbaum et al., 2010).

The notion that ‘race does not matter’ or that everyone ‘is the same’ is common rhetoric found within American classrooms as educators and the system behind them embrace color-blind language (Annamma et al., 2017; Apefelbaum et al., 2010). These types of colorblind lessons can have consequences on children’s abilities to recognize racial bias. Research conducted on upper elementary-aged children found that children exposed to a racially colorblind lesson condition (core message emphasizing that race is not important and that similarities between individuals should be prioritized) compared to a value-diversity lesson condition (core message highlighting that racial differences make every individual special) were significantly less likely to perceive discrimination in a less explicit context (Apfelbaum et al., 2010). In other words, colorblind rhetoric could prevent children from identifying racial discrimination that is not explicit, and, unfortunately, most racial injustice today occurs in more subtle forms. Colorblind lesson plans and curricula may hamper children from recognizing the shapes that racial injustice often takes.

Middle Childhood Development and Race

The cognitive and social developments that define middle childhood, 7 to 10 years old, facilitate a more nuanced and complex understanding of social categories (Rogers et al., 2012). Children first notice physical differences, such as skin color, between groups of people, and categorizations are created to label individuals based on these observable traits. During middle childhood, children start developing categories for race based on intangible features, such as behaviors (Rogers et al., 2021). Children’s understanding of racial identity is established “within an environment of socially constructed narratives about race,” which contributes to how children perceive the social position of racial groups (Rogers et al., 2021). Research on middle childhood

and perceptions of race has suggested that children's understanding of race and racial injustice is based on lessons emphasizing racial colorblindness. Children in one study reported viewing race as a relevant historical topic; however, these children of various racial and ethnic identities saw race and racial injustice as no longer relevant (Rogers et al., 2021). Critical consciousness, which describes an individual's awareness of oppressive systemic forces and ability to engage in action against injustice, is a tool that can benefit marginalized groups (Heberle et al., 2020). Research suggests that critical consciousness is promoted through educators' commitment to critical education and maintaining a school climate that prioritizes the critical examination of inequalities and social justice issues (Herberle et al., 2020). Whether it is intentional or not, children taught colorblind rhetoric may be learning that the racial and ethnic discrimination that they witness is not relevant or important to address.

Critical Race Theory in Education

The primary objective of Critical Race Theory (CRT) education is to educate American society on the hidden forms that racism takes and how it has detrimentally impacted the success and well-being of Black and other historically marginalized Americans, and how it has contributed to White privilege (López, 2003). This education must occur in the classroom, in the classrooms of children going through the American school system, and in the classrooms where future educators are taught. Current educators must also understand the ramifications of racism and how to become antiracist educators for the sake of their students. CRT aims to "expose and unveil" the normalization of racism within institutions and personal biases to generate a genuine understanding of how racism exists today and how it has continued to flourish and benefit White Americans (López, 2003). CRT pushes individuals to understand how racism did not disappear after the Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964; it simply took new and more pervasive forms (López, 2003). Racism has become normalized and ingrained within American society, which

can prevent individuals from recognizing how racism functions and shapes institutions, relationships, and ways of thinking.

Martin Luther King Jr and his famous “I Have a Dream” speech is often taught to elementary-aged students, and it has been widely misinterpreted as a message that emphasizes the significance of racial colorblindness. However, King’s sentiment that his “four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character,” (King, 1963) was not a plea for people to ignore race and racial inequities (Ullucci & Battey, 2011). Rather, King was cautioning against making judgements based solely on an individual’s race instead of their character. King was expressing his desire to see his four children grow up in a country that does not discriminate against them because they are Black, not his desire to see Americans ignore race and its profound impact on non-White individuals (Ullucci & Battey, 2011). Individuals with good intentions may endorse racial colorblindness in an effort to fulfill what they perceive MLK’s dream to have been through avoiding the topic of race (Babbitt et al., 2015). While it is a noble goal to become a society where individuals are not treated as racial categories, this cannot be achieved by ignoring race and its implications. It is imperative that the functions of race and racism are named in order for us to strive towards a more equitable society (Ullucci & Battey, 2011), a task that can begin with how children are taught about race and racism.

Some educators believe that children are too young and naïve to understand race and racism and that children should not be exposed to lessons about race because it may teach them to be racist (Boutte et al., 2011). However, children can develop prejudices towards others as early as 3 to 5 years old (Farago et al., 2019). Physical features, including skin color, are recognized and categorized by children. Colorblindness within education teaches children to ignore perceiving race, which is a goal that is not realistic or helpful in combating racial

injustice. It is impossible to recognize and counter racism if individuals cannot admit it exists (Boutte et al., 2011). Rather than educating children to try to see all individuals as the same, teaching children to acknowledge, respect, and appreciate racial diversity may be more effective in combating racial and ethnic injustice. Color-conscious ideology challenges colorblind beliefs by "encouraging children to acknowledge racial prejudice, valuing racial diversity, endorsing equal treatment of different races, and teaching children about how racism occurs in American society" (Abaied & Perry, 2021). For White children, color-conscious racial socialization methods have been found to be predictive of reducing racial biases (Perry et al., 2019). Infusing tenets of CRT into educational curricula, such as color-conscious ideologies that emphasize the value of diversity, may strengthen children's understanding of racially charged historical and recent events.

Racial Socialization by Parents

Previous research has shown that while 81% of White parents expressed that discussions with their children about race are important, 70% reported that they never explicitly had these conversations with their children (Perry et al., 2019). Compared to White families, Black families in America are significantly more likely to inform their children about racial injustice and prepare them for the reality of racism in America. 95% of Black parents reported preparing their children for discrimination by early adolescence (Frabutt et al., 2002). This is likely the result of non-White parents' experiences with racism and their desire to protect their children as much as possible from inevitable future discrimination from White individuals. According to another study, 88% of racial minority early adolescents experienced discrimination at least once, and often these incidents were perpetrated by White children (Pachter et al., 2010). A study by Abaied and Perry in 2021 found that 63% of White parents reported not discussing race-related current events with their children, mainly because they wanted to shield their children from

"negativity due to their young age" or from the violence of the events themselves. The excuse of a young age was present even for parents who had older children (Abaied & Perry, 2021). These events are traumatic and violent for BIPOC families to discuss with their children. Still, these parents must inform their children because the likelihood of their children experiencing discrimination is high. White parents have the privilege of not exposing their children to the "negativity" of certain current events because their children will not be targeted or killed based on race.

Critical Race Theory, Colorblindness, and White Parents

White adults are more likely to endorse colorblind ideology than people of color (Plaut et al., 2018). Many individuals unintentionally contribute to structural or individual racism by holding colorblind beliefs and passing those ideologies to children (Boutte et al., 2011). The avoidance of racial labels and conversations about race and racially motivated injustice by White parents can match the racially colorblind rhetoric and lessons often seen in the American education system. Teaching children about racial events and the nuances of race can often be perceived as insignificant or irrelevant; however, young children have demonstrated the ability to "reproduce and rework societal discourses on race" based on their interactions with adults, various forms of media, and peers (Boutte et al., 2011). If children are not allowed to question their understanding of race in educational settings or with their parents, they may develop and internalize racist rhetoric and narratives (Boutte et al., 2011). CRT-inspired lessons may serve as a tool to educate children on the realities of race and racism to prevent young students from ignoring the importance and nuances of race and racism in America as they age. Unfortunately, CRT within educational settings is incredibly controversial.

Misunderstandings surrounding CRT have labeled the theory as an attack on White individuals for being oppressors and Black individuals as hopeless victims, causing many

Americans to feel threatened by the infusion of CRT in fields such as education (Morgan, 2022). Disinformation aimed at parents purposely portrays CRT as a threat to their children by illustrating the theory as malicious and teaching children to hate one another and the United States (Morgan, 2022). Critics of CRT appear to fear the spotlight it places on racism and social justice, a concept that directly contradicts what racial colorblindness endorses. Parents, particularly White parents, who feel threatened by educators teaching their children about race and racial injustice may be reacting out of fear of losing their position in the status hierarchy. The proportion of White individuals who believe that they are victims of racism has been increasing. White Americans who perceive the status hierarchy as legitimate are more likely to report that Whites were victims of racial discrimination (Wilkins & Kaiser, 2014). Perceptions of the racial progress of Black Americans appear to threaten White Americans with stronger endorsements of status-legitimizing beliefs, and this threat also is associated with greater perceptions of anti-White bias (Wilkins & Kaiser, 2014). With many White individuals endorsing colorblindness as the solution to racism, will a large proportion of White parents express feelings of discomfort and threat if their child is taught a lesson plan in school that is CRT-inspired? Will these feelings of threat lead to increased perceptions of anti-White bias?

Current Study

Our research focuses on parents' perceptions of CRT-inspired educational implementations. Our sample is predominantly White; however, we recognize that endorsing SLBs, perceiving greater racial progress, perceiving higher levels of anti-White bias, and opposition to CRT is not exclusive to White-identifying individuals, therefore, parents of all races and ethnicities were encouraged to respond. We aim to understand the factors that contribute to opposition to CRT-related concepts within educational curricula. Though our lesson plan is aimed at middle elementary level students (third through fifth grade), parents of children

under the age of 18 years old were eligible to participate. We hypothesized that for participants with higher SLBs, exposure to a CRT implementation in elementary school curriculum will prompt feelings of threat and greater perceptions of anti-White bias. The pre-registration for the study can be found at the following link: https://aspredicted.org/FXQ_37W.

Method

Procedure

Participants were recruited from the Richmond and Charlotte metro areas through posts on social media platforms (e.g., Facebook and Reddit) and via word of mouth. Participants were informed that the study was measuring parent support and approval for a hypothetical third-grade lesson plan. Eligible participants were at least 18 years of age and were parents of at least one child under the age of 18. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two lesson plan procedure conditions: either a *status-quo* lesson plan or a *CRT-inspired* lesson plan. Following the lesson plan exposure, each participant completed a battery of measures assessing their support for, comfort with, perceived appropriateness of, perceived accuracy of, familiarity with, and negative emotional responses to the lesson plan procedure. Participants' endorsement of status-legitimizing beliefs, perceptions of racial progress, and perceptions of the prevalence of anti-White bias were measured following the condition-relevant questions. Participants who completed the study in its entirety were compensated for their time by being offered the opportunity to enter in a raffle to win one of ten $50 Amazon gift cards.

This study was approved by the University of Richmond Institutional Review Board (IRB). All participants provided informed consent prior to beginning the survey, which was conducted completely online using Qualtrics software. Participants were debriefed following the study.

Participants

We set a recruitment goal of 350 participants, but fell short with $N = 78$ participants. Participants were predominantly mothers, with 80.8% of the sample identifying as female and 19.2% identifying as male. The gender makeup of the participants' children was more balanced, with 54.9% of children identified as male, 43.2% identified as female, 0.62% identified as non-binary, and 1.23% of children had parents who selected "prefer not to answer " for their gender identity. Participants' racial/ethnic identities consisted of 82.1% European-American/White Anglo/Caucasian, 10.26% African-American/Black/African/Caribbean, 2.56% East Asian-American/East Asian, 2.56% Hispanic-American/Latine(a,o), Chicane(a,o), 1.28% Middle Eastern/North African, 1.28% Native American/American Indian, and 1.28% Bi-Racial/Multi-Racial individuals. Participants' mean age was 41 years old ($M = 41.00$, $SD = 9.23$) and participants' children's mean age was approximately 7 years old ($M = 9.53$, SD = 5.85). Participants' mean income was between $120,000 and $159,999 ($M = 6.84$). Participants' political party affiliation consisted of 70.51% Democrats, 25.64% Independents, and 2.56% Republicans.

Materials & Measures

Lesson Plan Conditions

Participants were randomly assigned into one of two conditions of a hypothetical lesson plan procedure for a third-grade level elementary school lesson about Martin Luther King Jr's "I Have a Dream" speech. The first condition was a "status-quo" type lesson plan (see Appendix A) that emphasized the importance of not acknowledging race (racial colorblind ideology), while the second condition was a CRT-inspired lesson plan (see Appendix B) that emphasized the significance of noticing and respecting physical differences. The first condition indicated that the

Civil Rights Movement was a historical event from the past that has ended, while the second lesson plan emphasized that the fight for civil rights is still being fought today.

Parent Perceptions of Lesson Plan

Assessment of Threat.

Support for the Lesson Plan. Participants' support for the messages conveyed in the lesson was measured with one item ("First, to what extent would you support the lesson plan that you read being taught to upper elementary-aged children?"; 1= *strongly oppose,* 7= *strongly favor*). Higher scores indicate stronger support for the lesson plan condition.

Comfort with Lesson Plan. Participants' comfort with the lesson plan being taught to their children was measured with three items (e.g., "I would be comfortable with my child being taught this lesson plan;" 1= *strongly disagree,* 7 = *strongly agree*). After reverse-scoring the necessary items, responses were averaged together to create a single composite score in which higher scores indicate higher perceived comfort with the lesson plan ($\alpha = .74$).

Negative Emotional Response. Participants' emotional responses after viewing the lesson plan were measured with six items (e.g., "Reading this lesson plan makes me feel angry."; 1= *strongly disagree,* 7= *strongly agree*). After reverse-scoring the necessary items, responses were averaged together to create a single composite score in which higher scores will indicate a higher negative emotional response to the lesson plan viewed ($\alpha = .94$).

Familiarity with Lesson Plan. Participants' familiarity with the content in the lesson plan they were exposed to was measured with two items (e.g., "I am familiar with the content covered in this lesson plan;" 1= *strongly disagree,* 7 = *strongly agree*). After reverse-scoring the necessary item, responses were averaged together to create a single composite score in which higher scores indicate greater familiarity with the content in the lesson plan they were exposed to ($r = .273$, $p < .05$).

Prior Education of Lesson Plan Content. The alignment of participants' prior education on Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech and what they read in the lesson plan was measured with one item ("This lesson teaches a different message about Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech than the one I was taught in elementary school;" 1 = *strongly disagree,* 7 = *strongly agree*). This item was originally intended to measure familiarity, but after inspecting the data, we considered it on its own. Higher scores indicate a greater difference between the lesson plan exposed to the participant and what they learned in elementary school about Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech.

Assessment of Lesson's Accuracy. Participants' assessment of the lesson's accuracy was measured with three items (e.g., "This lesson plan accurately explains ideas about race and society;" 1 = *strongly disagree,* 7 = *strongly agree*). After reverse-scoring the necessary items, responses were averaged together to create a single composite score in which higher scores indicate greater perceived accuracy of the lesson plan condition ($\alpha = .88$).

Assessment of Lesson's Appropriateness. Participants' assessment of the lesson's appropriateness for being taught in an elementary classroom was measured with six items (e.g., "This lesson plan is not appropriate for elementary school-aged children;" 1 = *strongly disagree,* 7 = *strongly agree*). After reverse-scoring the necessary items, responses were averaged together to create a single composite score in which higher scores indicate stronger beliefs that the lesson plan is appropriate for children ($\alpha = .83$)

Status Legitimizing Beliefs. Three sub-facets comprising twelve items assessed participants' status-legitimizing beliefs (i.e., perceived social system legitimacy, perceived system permeability, and belief in the protestant work ethic). After reverse-scoring the necessary items, responses from the three sub-facets were averaged together to create a single composite

score in which higher scores indicate a stronger endorsement of status-legitimizing beliefs (α = .92).

Perceived Social System Legitimacy. Perceived social system legitimacy was measured with four items (Levin et al., 1998) (e.g., "America is a just society where differences in status between ethnic groups reflect actual group differences;" 1= *strongly disagree,* 7= *strongly agree*).

Perceived System Permeability. Perceived system permeability was measured with four items (Levin et al., 1998) (e.g., "Advancement in American society is possible for individuals of all ethnic groups;" 1= *strongly disagree,* 7= *strongly agree*).

Belief in the Protestant Work Ethic. Belief in the Protestant work ethic was measured with four items (Levin et al., 1998) (e.g., "Most people who don't get ahead should not blame the system; they really only have themselves to blame;" 1= *strongly disagree,* 7= *strongly agree*).

Perceptions of Anti-White Bias. Perceptions of anti-White biases were measured with eight items (Wilkins & Kaiser, 2014) (e.g., "Whites are victims of racial bias;" 1= *strongly disagree,* 7= *strongly agree*). After reverse-scoring the necessary items, responses were averaged together to create a single composite score in which higher scores indicate a greater perception of the prevalence of anti-White bias (α = .86).

Perceptions of Racial Progress. Perceptions of racial progress were measured with four items (Wilkins & Kaiser, 2014) (e.g., "Racial minorities now occupy high-status positions traditionally held by White people;" 1= *strongly disagree,* 7= *strongly agree*). After reverse-scoring the necessary item, responses were averaged together to create a single composite score in which higher scores indicate higher perceived racial progress for Black individuals in the United States over the past 50 to 70 years (α = .71).

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Descriptive statistics and correlations for all variables of interest collapsed across lesson plan conditions, are reported in Table 1. To summarize, participants who more strongly endorsed SLBs and had greater perceptions of anti-White bias were significantly more likely to perceive substantial racial progress, to perceive the lesson plan they read as inappropriate, and to report greater negative emotions towards the lesson plan they read. In addition, stronger endorsement of SLBs was correlated with greater opposition to and discomfort with the lesson plan they were exposed to.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

	SLBs	Anti-White	Progress	Support	Comfort	Familiarity	Accuracy	Negative Emotion	Appropriate	Prior Education
SLBs	**2.72 (1.08)**									
Anti-White	.632**	**3.56 (1.31)**								
Progress	.500**	.604**	**4.65 (1.04)**							
Support	-.344**	-.201	-.168	**5.91 (1.59)**						
Comfort	-.244*	-.216	-.235*	.786**	**6.01 (1.25)**					
Familiarity	-.129	-.035	-.028	.030	.049	**6.06 (0.92)**				
Accuracy	-.150	-.142	.008	.613**	.632**	-.058	**4.87 (1.47)**			
Neg Emotion	.346**	.277*	.167	-.885**	-.829**	-.007	-.696**	**2.09 (1.33)**		
Appropriate	-.557**	-.323**	-.188	.756**	.681**	.117	.534**	-.786**	**5.73 (1.05)**	
Prior Education	.053	.152	.103	.150	.120	.140	.052	-.194	.228*	**4.36 (1.71)**

Note. Means and standard deviations (in parentheses) appear in bold along the diagonal. Correlations between variables appear below the diagonal. *** $p <$ .0001, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Moderation Analyses

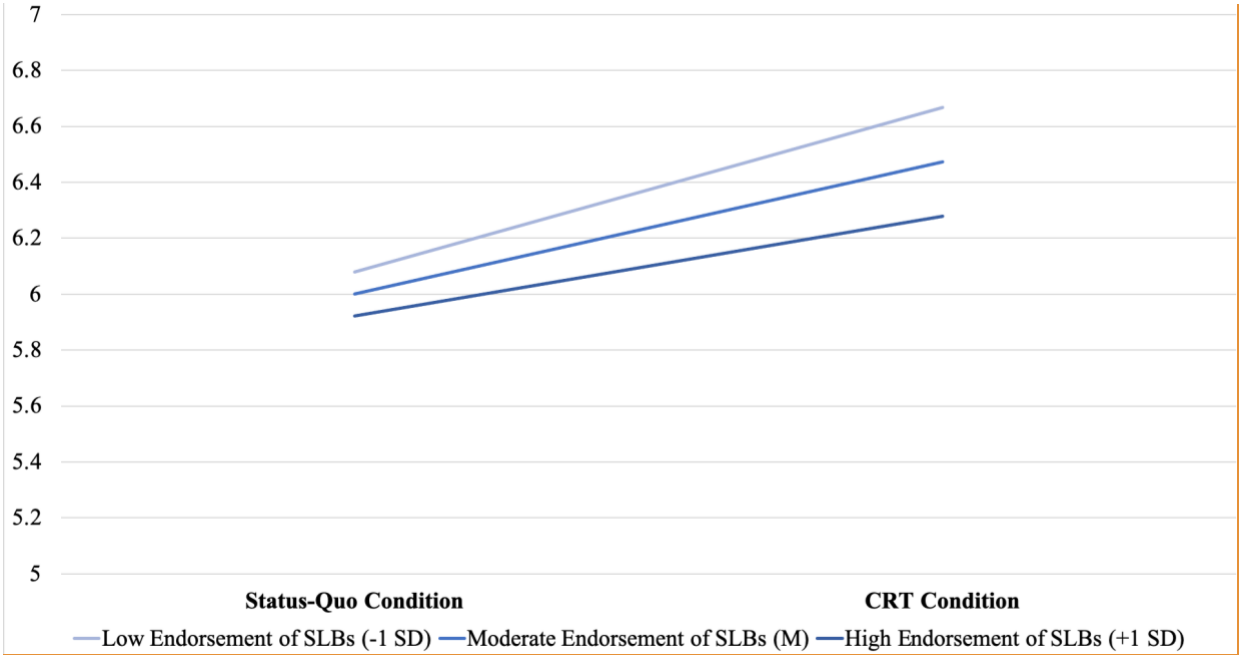
To examine the relationship between condition and each of the four primary dependent variables as a function of SLB endorsement, regression analyses were performed predicting each dependent variable, SLB endorsement, and their interaction term, using an SPSS macro developed by Hayes (2013).

Support

The main effect of SLB endorsement was significant (B = -0.48, SE = 0.16, p = .004), while the main effect of condition was not (B = 0.47, SE = 0.34, p = .17). However, these main effects were qualified by a statistically significant interaction term (B = -0.73, SE = 0.32, p = .027), indicating differences in the magnitude of the relationship between condition and support as a function of SLB endorsement. In further probing this interaction, we found that though SLB endorsement still predicted less support for the lesson plan in the status-quo condition (b = -0.48, SE = 0.16, p = .004), this relationship was stronger in the CRT condition (b = -1.21, SE = 0.33, p = .0004). Equivalently, those who more strongly rejected SLBs also showed the greatest degree of preference for the CRT (versus status-quo) lesson plan (b = 1.26, SE = 0.47, p = .01).

Figure 1

SLB Endorsement as a Moderator in the Relationship Between Support and Condition.



Note. Graph depicting moderation analysis of the relationship between support and condition as a function of SLB endorsement.

Comfort

A similar pattern of results was observed for participants' comfort with the lesson plan condition, as well as participants' negative emotional responses. For comfort, the main effect of SLB endorsement was marginally significant (B = -0.25, SE = 0.13, p = .06), while the main effect of condition was not (B = 0.19, SE = 0.28, p = .50). However, these main effects were qualified by a marginally significant interaction term (B = -0.48, SE = 0.26, p = .07), indicating differences in the magnitude of the relationship between condition and comfort as a function of SLB endorsement. In further probing this interaction, we found that while SLB endorsement still predicted less comfort for the lesson plan in the status-quo condition (b = -0.25, SE = 0.13, p =

.06), this relationship was stronger in the CRT condition (b = -0.73, SE = 0.27, p = .008). Equivalently, those who more strongly rejected SLBs also showed the greatest degree of comfort with the CRT (versus status-quo) lesson plan (b = 0.71, SE = 0.39, p = .07), though the condition difference failed to reach conventional levels of significance.

Negative Emotion

For negative emotion, the main effect of SLB endorsement was statistically significant (B = 0.39, SE = 0.14, p = .005), while the main effect of condition was not (B = -0.21, SE = 0.28, p = .46). However, these main effects were qualified by a marginally significant interaction term (B = 0.52, SE = 0.27, p = .059), indicating differences in the magnitude of the relationship between condition and negative emotions as a function of SLB endorsement. In further probing this interaction, we found that while SLB endorsement still predicted more negative emotions in response to the lesson plan in the status-quo condition (b = 0.39, SE = 0.14, p = .005), this relationship was slightly stronger in the CRT condition (b = 0.92, SE = 0.28, p = .002).

Anti-White Bias

The main effect of SLB endorsement was statistically significant (B = 0.79, SE = 0.11, p < .001), while the main effect of condition was not (B = -0.6, SE = 0.24, p = .79). Contrary to our hypothesis, these main effects were not qualified by a significant interaction term (B = -0.27, SE = 0.23, p = .23).

Discussion

In a conceptual replication of Wilkins and Kaiser (2014), we examined whether parents who more strongly endorse status-legitimizing beliefs will be more likely to oppose the CRT-inspired lesson plan (versus the status-quo lesson plan). Our results support our hypothesis, participants who more strongly reject SLB statements show the greatest degree of preference for the CRT, versus the status-quo lesson plan condition. These findings demonstrate that lessons

that counter SLB beliefs are less likely to be supported by parents who more strongly endorse SLB statements. Although our sample of parents was mostly critical of the SLB statements, participants who were lukewarm about rejecting SLBs, versus participants who more strongly rejected the SLB statements, were significantly less likely to support the CRT lesson plan condition. Our results suggest that parents who strongly reject SLBs may be the strongest advocates for CRT implementations in educational curricula. Fostering a stronger understanding of the factors that contribute to support or opposition to CRT implementations in education can help establish effective interventions aimed to educate adults about the benefits of CRT, which would in turn benefit children in the American education system.

Wilkins and Kaiser's focused on a White adult sample, as White individuals are more likely to be threatened by racial progress and perceive anti-White bias as a prevalent and pervasive issue in America (Wilkins & Kaiser, 2014). White people are also more likely to hold SLBs because it helps them justify their position in the status hierarchy (Knowles et al., 2014). In contrast to past research, our research focused on the parents of children rather than the children themselves. Parents play a crucial role in children's development and, therefore, their attitudes toward CRT implementations appear to be very relevant. Unfortunately, there is a lack of research examining parental perspectives of CRT implementations in educational settings. Our research aimed to help begin to bridge this gap with the intention of understanding what psychological factors may influence opposition to or support for potential CRT implementations in elementary curricula.

Our results replicated Wilkins and Kaiser's finding that stronger endorsement of SLBs was positively and significantly correlated with greater perceptions of anti-White bias and racial progress. Racial progress and anti-White bias were significantly associated with one another in our sample, replicating the results of prior research (Wilkins & Kaiser, 2014). Participants who

more strongly endorsed the belief that the status hierarchy is fair, permeable, and able to be climbed through hard work were more likely to report that Black Americans have made considerable progress and that anti-White bias is prevalent and on the rise. The correlation between anti-White bias and racial progress provides additional support for Wilkins and Kaiser's findings.

While Wilkins and Kaiser manipulated the experience of threat through a self-affirmation exercise that aimed to reduce feelings of threat among participants with higher SLB endorsement, we created a manipulation (the CRT lesson plan procedure) that sought to increase feelings of threat among those with greater SLB endorsement. Contrary to our hypothesis, SLB endorsement did not moderate the relationship between condition and perceptions of anti-White bias in our sample.

Lesson plans that emphasize racial colorblindness, such as our status quo condition, downplay the significance of race and serve to uphold racial hierarchy (Rogers et al., 2021). Previous examinations of children's perspectives of race reveal that the majority of children endorsed the colorblind narrative of race having no significance and racism being an issue of the past, not the present (Rogers et al., 2021). There is a distinct and crucial difference between children recognizing that race *shouldn't* matter versus believing that race *doesn't* matter. Holding the belief that race shouldn't matter "acknowledges and questions the racial injustices," since there is a recognition that race has implications, but it ideally should not determine an individual's opportunities or outcomes (Rogers et al., 2021). On the other hand, believing that race doesn't matter is an explicit dismissal that racism is pervasive and prevalent. Ignoring race is inevitably linked with a denial of the existence of racialized experiences and systemic and institutional racism, which allows implicit racial/ethnic prejudice to permeate virtually every facet of American society (Neville et al., 2013). If children are taught to perceive racism as a

historical issue that is no longer relevant and that race has no importance, it is logical to assume that, without education that teaches otherwise, these individuals will fail to recognize and stand up against racial discrimination and institutional prejudice.

The CRT-inspired lesson plan condition is more consistent with what prior research suggests would be healthy for children in terms of fostering their cultural competence and ability to name and address racial discrimination. Observing children as young as 3 and 4 years old in educational settings has revealed that young children are not naive to concepts such as race and racism. Contrary to the opinion of many adults, previous literature suggests that young children are not racially colorblind and do discriminate on the basis of race (Boutte et al., 2011). Since children notice racial differences and research indicates that children will refuse to interact with individuals of a race different than their own, it is crucial for educators to provide children with opportunities to have conversations about race to help avoid future racial/ethnic discrimination (Boutte et al., 2011). Fostering conversations explicitly about race and racism gives students the ability to express their thoughts and learn to recognize racial/ethnic discrimination and how to not be a bystander to it. If children are not able to openly have conversations about the meaning and implications of race, they will inevitably succumb to racial biases and misguided beliefs that can allow racism to exist without consequence. Racism and racial/ethnic discrimination cannot be addressed and mitigated if children do not learn what race and racism mean.

Limitations and Future Directions

Our sample consisted of predominantly White, female, Democrat-identifying, and financially affluent parents. Participants were sampled from two large cities in the American South; Charlotte, North Carolina, and Richmond, Virginia. These participant demographics can limit the generalizability of this research. Future research could benefit from sampling a wider variety of racial/ethnic, gender, and political identities, as well as parents of lower income. In

addition, we were unable to meet our recruitment goals, limiting the statistical power of our study. Although this sample of participants was primarily Democratic, significant interactions between condition and support as a function of SLB endorsement were still observed among a sample that was mostly critical of SLB statements. Expanding this research to a larger variety of identities could provide a greater range of attitudes to explore the difference between strong endorsement and strong rejection of SLB statements, and the implications of strong SLB endorsement.

The CRT and status quo lesson plan conditions were created with assistance from an elementary school teacher. Although our lesson plans were carefully developed and rooted in knowledge from prior literature and research, these conditions are not to be interpreted as perfect representations of CRT and status-quo lesson plan procedures. There are multiple aspects of CRT and our CRT-inspired lesson plan incorporates one of them: highlighting a racial reality that has often "been filtered out, suppressed, and censored" (López, 2003). Our CRT condition focused on providing a developmentally appropriate lesson with a less racially neutral approach to MLK's famous speech that emphasized the existence of racial discrimination and the importance of standing up against racial injustice today. Nevertheless, there are other ways in which CRT could be implemented within educational settings and curricula. MLK is listed in the social studies state standards for kindergarten through second grade in both North Carolina (*Standard Courses | NC DPI*, 2021) and Virginia (*Standards of Learning for History & Social Science | Virginia Department of Education*, 2015). Although, there are numerous other influential Civil Rights activists, such as Malcolm X or Roy Wilkins, who are not spotlighted in the same manner that MLK is, much less even mentioned in the curricula taught to children and adolescents. Another crucial tenet of CRT is highlighting forgotten stories that do not align with "master narratives" of American history (López, 2003). A lesson plan that educates students

about other influential and significant figures during the Civil Rights Movement is another way in which CRT can be implemented within the curricula and expand children's understanding of the movement. Finally, CRT is not exclusive to highlighting the history and experiences of Black individuals. Other educational implementations of CRT could focus on identifying and teaching students about historical events and people of racial/ethnic identities whose stories are often left out of American history lessons.

The manipulation avoided explicitly labeling its lesson plan as "CRT" in order to observe participants' responses and reactions to the lesson plan uncolored by the controversy and dispute surrounding CRT in popular discourse. Thus, it remains possible that our sample was more supportive of the CRT-inspired lesson plan condition than we expected because our hypothetical lesson plan content with CRT-infused concepts did not register to some participants as an example of CRT in elementary curriculum. Future research could explore the potential differences in support for CRT implementations in educational settings through providing participants with a lesson plan procedure condition that labels a lesson as CRT-inspired, and another identical lesson plan procedure condition that does not.

Conclusion

Although prior research has indicated that children would benefit from an education that allows them to have an open dialogue about race and racism, CRT remains a controversial and polarizing issue in America's political climate, particularly within the field of education. Our results suggest that CRT implementations in elementary education via lesson plans may be threatening to parents who less strongly reject SLB statements. For parents who endorse, or less strongly reject, the belief that the status hierarchy in America is fair, legitimate, permeable, and accessible through hard work, explicit discussions about race and racism may prompt feelings of discomfort, opposition, and negative emotions. These results provide a potential explanation for

psychological factors that may influence a parent's support for implementing CRT tenets within educational settings.

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Appendixes

Appendix A

Condition 1: Status-Quo Lesson Plan about Civil Rights Movement

Instruction
In a moment, you will be presented with a randomly selected lesson plan procedure about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech intended for use by an elementary school teacher.

All the lesson plan procedures we are using in our study are based on real-world examples provided to teachers and designated as appropriate for 3rd and 4th grade students.

Lesson plan procedures guide teachers through how a lesson should progress within their classroom, including the types of activities and conversations that should be facilitated during the lesson. Reading this text will place you in an educator's perspective, giving you a sense of how a lesson plan is intentionally set up to teach specific information and lessons to students.

Please read the lesson plan chosen for you carefully and in its entirety before moving to the next page to answer questions about it.

Remember to please read this lesson plan carefully and in its entirety before moving to the next page to answer questions about it. Thank you!

Lesson Plan Procedure: Hands-on MLK Jr. Egg Diversity Activity for Kids
(Appropriate for 3rd-4th graders)

1. Begin by asking students what they already know about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (MLK) and his "I Have a Dream" speech.

2. Play a portion of MLK's speech, so that students can listen while reading along on a handout with the speech printed out:

"I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

"I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

"I have a dream today!

"I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of 'interposition' and 'nullification' -- one day right there in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and

white girls as sisters and brothers.

"I have a dream today!

"I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight; 'and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together.'"

3. After listening carefully to MLK's speech, students will participate in an activity all together as a class focused on the importance of treating everyone equally: Show two eggs to the class. One egg should be a typical white egg, and the other should be a brown egg. Ask students to look at the eggs and notice their similarities and differences.

4. With your class, discuss these questions:

What physical features do you notice about each egg?

Are there any differences between these two eggs?

Are there any similarities?

5. After this class discussion, crack both eggs and show every student the inside of each egg. With your class, discuss this question: What do you notice about the inside of each of these eggs?

6. Following the egg activity, ask students to turn and talk to their partner or table about the egg activity and MLK's speech. Ask students to discuss the following questions with each other:

What can we learn from MLK's message about wanting people to judge his children by their character and not the color of their skin?

How does the egg activity relate to what MLK was trying to teach people about in his speech?

7. After having students discuss the questions above with each other, bring the class back together to talk about the questions as a class. Give students the opportunity to speak about what they and their partner/group discussed with one another.

8. Following this class discussion, talk with students about MLK's dream for America:

Help students understand that despite the fact that we all look different from one another, just like how the brown egg is a different color than the white egg, what is on the inside is what matters, like how the inside of both of the eggs is the same.

Emphasize how MLK's dream was for people to stop paying attention to our differences on the outside and to see all people as just human beings instead.

Explain to students that our differences on the outside do not mean anything. Our insides, our character, is what is important.

Emphasize that students should try not to see skin color and instead try to see someone's inside and character.

9. Consider reinforcing the lesson by asking students to write a brief paragraph or draw a picture about what they learned.

Appendix B

Condition 2: CRT-Inspired Lesson Plan about Civil Rights Movement

Instruction
In a moment, you will be presented with a randomly selected lesson plan procedure about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech intended for use by an elementary school teacher.

All the lesson plan procedures we are using in our study are based on real-world examples provided to teachers and designated as appropriate for 3rd and 4th grade students.

Lesson plan procedures guide teachers through how a lesson should progress within their classroom, including the types of activities and conversations that should be facilitated during the lesson. Reading this text will place you in an educator's perspective, giving you a sense of how a lesson plan is intentionally set up to teach specific information and lessons to students.

Please read the lesson plan chosen for you carefully and in its entirety before moving to the next page to answer questions about it.

Remember to please read this lesson plan carefully and in its entirety before moving to the next page to answer questions about it. Thank you!

Lesson Plan Procedure: "Find Someone Who": Diversity Appreciation Activity
for MLK Jr. Day
(Appropriate for 3rd-4th graders)

1. Begin by asking students what they already know about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (MLK) and his "I Have a Dream" speech.

2. Play a portion of MLK's speech, so that students can listen while reading along on a handout with the speech printed out:

"I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

"I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

"I have a dream today!

"I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of 'interposition' and 'nullification' -- one day right there in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

"I have a dream today!

"I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight; 'and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together.'"

3. After listening carefully to MLK's speech, students will participate in a classroom activity focused on appreciating and recognizing the importance of racial-ethnic-cultural diversity. To begin the activity, pass out worksheets to each student that contain a list of different physical features that students can observe in others. The worksheet items are listed below:

Find someone who:

- has dimples
- has curly hair
- has freckles
- has a second toe that is longer than their big toe
- has blue eyes
- has a birthmark
- is the tallest person in the room
- has earlobes that are attached to their head
- is left-handed
- can roll their tongue

4. After passing out the worksheets, instruct students to get up from their seats and find students who fit the categories on their worksheets. Tell students that they may not put themselves for any of the categories and only to put one person per question (e.g., a student cannot put the same person for both the freckles category and the birthmark category), so that they may interact with as many of their peers as possible.

5. Following this exercise, bring students back together to discuss what they learned about their classmates from this activity. Ask: Did anyone learn something new about their classmates?

6. After this brief warm-up discussion, ask students what the traits listed in the worksheet have in common.

Explain to students that all the features listed on the worksheet are physical traits. Physical traits, such as the texture of our hair or if we have dimples, are passed down to us from our biological parents. They make us uniquely who we are! And, it's wonderful that we're all so different! But, we cannot control what we look like or the physical traits that we receive.

Importantly, note how these traits don't tell us much about who we are on the inside. Having freckles or not doesn't tell us if a person will be shy or good at math or a kind friend!

Reveal to students that one physical trait that was not on the worksheet but which we often notice—also one of the first things other people notice about us—though sometimes don't talk about is the color of our own skin and each other's skin.

Emphasize to students that people all have different skin colors because we all have different parents and families. Skin color is like other physical traits. It is part of what makes us who we uniquely are, but it doesn't determine our personalities or our abilities.

7. After delivering this information, shift the conversation back to MLK's dream for America.

Explain to students that, just like we are talking about here, MLK wanted people to see that although we differ in skin color and appearance, these differences do not define someone's worth as a person.

Explain to students that MLK and activists were fighting for equal rights for Black Americans because Black people were being treated disrespectfully and terribly because their skin color was not White.

Emphasize to students that this has made life difficult for many Americans who are not White, and it is important to recognize the struggles faced by many Black Americans, and other people who are not White, due to discrimination and unfairness.

Explain that this is why it was important for MLK and other activists to educate others about how Black Americans should be treated equally to White Americans because skin color does not determine someone's character.

8. Wrap up the lesson by explaining to students that, although there has been some progress made toward equality since MLK gave his speech in 1963, the fight for equal rights continues today. Emphasize that MLK wanted us to stand up against injustice and care for one another because someone's skin color is not a reason to treat someone as less than others.

9. Consider reinforcing the lesson by asking students to write a brief paragraph or draw a picture about what they learned. Consider, too, whether a future lesson might include how to recognize and stand up to injustice when you see it.