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# Racist Babies? Resisting Whiteness in Parenting

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## Abstract

Whiteness has evolved in the way that mostly white parents teach their children to embrace and normalize it. Whereas within the United States previously, white families employed explicitly racist tactics to maintain whiteness in their children, today white, neoliberal families have adapted their whiteness to be more implicit and socially acceptable. This chapter draws on literature and narrative inquiry to describe how whiteness is passed down, generation by generation. The author looks particularly at white, neoliberal, and color evasive families of today to deconstruct these myths. The author closes by offering strategies and examples for parents who want to raise critically conscious and socially just children and grow these traits within themselves as well.

**Keywords:** ParentCrit, critical race parenting, whiteness, critical consciousness, family development

## 1. Introduction

Recently, a white<sup>1</sup> mother of a white, 3 year old son told me she was planning to talk to her son soon about race and so, given my scholarship in race and parenting [1], she'd want to have a conversation with me before she brought it up because she did not know what to say. She went on to note that her son's best friend was Black, and she was so glad that her son had not brought up the race of his friend because "he just doesn't notice race." As she related this, I sensed a touch of pride from this mother that her small son did not see race.

Even though this mother seemed self-assured that her child had never heard or seen a racist or racially discriminate comment or action, I explained to her that children as young as her son not only can see color or race difference, but they are already forming social meaning and value based on that difference. The white mother's face turned grim as I mentioned that oftentimes children, even though they are starting to think about race, learn from their white parents that it is rude or embarrassing to point out someone's race. It is this taboo avoidance, as much if not more, than her son not noticing race that could be why her son had said nothing within earshot of his parents about his friend's or his own race or color.

In this critical theoretical essay, I discuss literature related to white parenting and racialization as well as draw on autoethnographic mother writing [1–3], to show how whiteness is passed down intergenerationally particularly in the United States.

<sup>1</sup> To resist symbolic forms of whiteness, I choose to capitalize identifiers for People of Color, including Black, and opt to use the lower case for white [1].

Autoethnographic mother writing is a methodology that draws on mothers' experiences and observations rooted in their roles as both mother and having been mothered [1, 2]. Although autoethnographic mother writing is radically specific [3], it is rich with lived experience and sense-making. By pairing this methodology with other existing scholarship related to whiteness and parenting, this essay offers practical anti-racist explanations and strategies immersed in theory, research, and narrative.

This essay also falls within a larger body of scholarly work known as Critical Race Parenting or ParentCrit [1, 4–9]. ParentCrit falls within Critical Race Theory work as it applies to parenting children within racial realism and to be critically conscious. For Parents of Color and/or white parents of Children of Color, ParentCrit often focuses on parenting to teach self-love and how to combat racism in parenting Children of Color [4, 5, 7, 8]. For white parents, it often involves reflection on and combating whiteness in oneself and in one's white or white-presenting children [1, 6, 9]. Yet, one of the tenets of ParentCrit is the continued learning and growing toward social justice in both parent and child [10], as well the way that this growth happens in relationship with parent and child [1].

Given this, the essay focuses on intergenerational whiteness in the midst neoliberal movements that insist that race is no longer socially significant [11] and where color evasive [12] stances twist the words of those working to increase critical consciousness around race and instead call them racist for even bringing up the word "race." I end by offering several strategies for parents wanting to disrupt the cycle of whiteness in their parenting and in so doing, begin to reverse the complicity of most white parenting with white supremacy.

Before moving into this discussion, it is helpful to give starting definitions of whiteness and neoliberalism, although this essay delves into different dynamics of both. I define whiteness as a sociopolitical ideology, held mostly by white people, that is used to normalize and promote white supremacy [13]. Whiteness is embedded in systems through traditions and spoken and unspoken rules that privilege [14] or immunize [15] white people, protecting them from the racialized violence that is the reality for People of Color. This includes white people retaining amassed wealth particularly from ancestors who stole land from Native peoples or profited from African enslavement, access to quality education, and exemption to discrimination, microaggressions and larger acts of aggression due to race.

Whiteness is not a static phenomenon. White people constantly evolve their performances of whiteness to best normalize and uphold it and white supremacy [16]. Given this, one of the latest flavors of whiteness, particularly in the United States lies in white post-racial and neoliberal belief systems. Giroux shows how the racism of today or new racism [11, 17] is entwined with neoliberalism, and demonstrates how this neoliberalism is an individualistic endeavor, focused on free market that, in its pursuit toward these, has relied on pretense and a color evasive political project that denies how race and racism work in our world, particularly to benefit white people. Instead, neoliberalism and its users have adapted a language that explains white beneficiaries as meritorious and uses a cultural racism [17] to blame People of Color for their own disenfranchisement.

## **2. The evolution of generational whiteness**

In the 1950s, Black Psychologists, Kenneth and Mamie Clark [18] conducted a series of experiments studying how children interpreted race. In these experiments, children of different races were presented with two dolls, a Black doll with black

hair and a white doll with yellow hair. The children were then asked a series of questions, like which doll is beautiful, which doll is the good doll, or which is the bad doll. Most of the children, regardless of the child's race chose the white doll when asked which was beautiful, and similarly most children chose the white doll when asked which was the good doll and, conversely, the Black doll when asked which was the bad doll. The Clarks at the time used their research to demonstrate the damage to self-identity and self-esteem of Black children in the then segregated US school system. The Clarks even testified compellingly in the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) case [19] in support of school desegregation.

The Clarks' doll study was significant in the way that it showed that not only did small children recognize race, but they also made social value judgments based on race at that same young age. Although the Clarks' original studies were published in the 1940s and 1950s, similar experiments with children's perceptions of race have since been replicated, with results being similarly troubling [20, 21]. One significant difference is that Black children identify the Black doll as the bad one to a lesser extent [21], perhaps signaling improved self-image for those Black children whose parents diligently provide them with dolls, books, toys, etc. that are positive representations of Black people and Black culture. However, white children in the 1950s and today in the US, despite the national rhetoric touting a post-racial society where color no longer matters, still tend to make value judgments based on race that favor white people [20, 22]. But, why? Most children in the US today have grown up with a Black President, they have seen Doc McStuffins on TV, they have worn Black Panther costumes for Halloween. Certainly, these Black role models have had some impact on children's racial values. So, why would a white boy wearing a t-shirt with the latest Spider-verse Spiderman character (a Black, Latinx boy) still say the Black doll is bad [20, 22]?

Thandeka, a Black scholar and Theologian wrote the book **Learning to Be White**, [23] published in 1999. In the book, she describes how white parents pass down whiteness to their white children or "teach them to be white" by withholding love or shaming their children when those children engage with Children of Color. For instance, white parents berating their children for playing with the Black child next door or refusing to talk to their child when they show up at home dating a Person of Color are examples of the punishment some white parents impart when their white children do not keep to their own. All of these subtle and not-so-subtle reprimands of white parents signal to their white children that if they have relationships with People of Color, the cost will be the ending of their relationship with their parents. Thandeka describes this withholding of love or this race-conditioned love as akin to child abuse, and shows the damage done to white children, as they are groomed to be the next generation of whiteness keepers.

Thandeka captures the white parenting process and also touches on how white people teach themselves to avoid thinking of themselves as white or even part of a racialized system. White people tend to think that race is something possessed by People of Color. It is in this belief that white people then begin to found the normalization of whiteness. Things that are white are normal; everything else is different, diverse, exotic, strange...race. Thandeka describes a game she created where she invites white people for a week to identify each person they talk about as white (if they are), e.g., My white neighbor, Sally, stopped by for a cup of coffee with my white friend, Angie, and all of our white kids played out back. Thandeka relates how none of the white people she invites to play this game can manage to do it for more than a day. They all find themselves embarrassed or shamed to racialize themselves and other white people and cannot stand the looks of disdain from other whites when they are breaking this cardinal rule of never racializing whites and, in so doing, maintaining the normalization of whiteness.



Thandeka does elucidate multiple elements of whiteness and the intergenerational passing on of whiteness in her book. And, what she describes is still very much at play in many white families. However, her book was written over 20 years ago, and what critical whiteness scholars show, is that whiteness and white tactics evolve to best uphold white supremacy. [13, 16, 24] Whiteness is slippery in the way that it's hard to get a handle on. As soon as you think you have nailed down how whiteness is operating, whites have already morphed how they perform and maintain it. As soon as you have developed an antiracist training to confront the problem of whiteness, white people have already taken a diversity training and are employing the same language to instead promote white norms. My point is that Thandeka, at the time of her book's writing could not foresee how white neoliberal parents of the next generation were going to mold the principles of whiteness they'd learned from their parents. When these younger neoliberal parents were raised by the Baby Boomers, it was socially acceptable in many white communities to forbid your child to play with the Black kid next door. Today, in many places, this is not socially acceptable. So, white parents (often unconsciously) employ a more tactful maintenance of whiteness, one that no one can call you racist for. This leads to a whiteness performance that creates a scapegoat of racist Uncle Donald at the holiday dinner table while quietly allowing today's white parents to go about affirming white norms and superiority with their children, all the while assuring themselves that they and their children aren't racist.

Thandeka captured the shame that white people have when asked to racialize themselves and acknowledge their whiteness, but in addition to whites' aversion to identifying their own race, today's neoliberal white parent also does not want to identify anyone else's race; it's uncouth. Beverly Tatum, in her book, **Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria: And Other Conversations About Race**, [25] points out that white people consider race talk taboo. She remarks on how white people tend to whisper that a person is Black or Latinx as if identifying the race or ethnicity of a Person of Color is an insult or a dirty secret that nobody dare say. This taboo of identifying anyone's race is rooted in early colonization and enslavement where white people, and particularly white women taught themselves to fear Black people, and particularly Black men. Black Psychologist, Frantz Fanon, in his book **Black Skin, White Masks** [26] vividly describes a moment of walking down the street in Martinique, when a white child points at him and cries to his mother, "Look, a negro!" His mother gasps and pulls her son to the other side of the street and out of harm's way. Fanon analyzes this action and names the fear behind both the white child's utterance and his mother's response. This illustration although written about in the 1950s feels uncannily relevant today. A white child, particularly one who has not been around People of Color because he/she was raised in a white suburban enclave, upon first seeing a Black person, points and says in a loud voice, "Mommy, look that person is Black!" The white mother then swiftly teaches the child the race taboo by shushing the child, getting embarrassed, or even scolding the child for identifying something new they are seeing – race [1]. Although, as Tatum discusses, there is nothing negative about identifying a Person of Color's physical attributes, the white mother out of embarrassment, and perhaps deep-rooted fear or disdain tries to distance herself from the Person of Color the child has pointed out. But, even though these may be deep-rooted racist reactions to a Person of Color, today's nice white neoliberal parent instead rationalizes their reaction because their child has not intuited the cardinal rule of color evasion, which the parent justifies is all about equality [1].

Sociologist, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva identified this white neoliberal race evasion in his book, **Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America**. [17] Although Bonilla-Silva coins this phenomenon as "color-blind racism," I opt for an expression that does not use ableist language as

recommended by Annamma, Jackson, and Morrison [12]. I refer to this concept as color evasive racism or color evasion. Bonilla-Silva's book is based on interviews with white adults. Through these, he identifies several ways that white people employ color evasion. These include making false justifications for the evidence of racism that do not sound explicitly racist, for instance describing gentrification and racial segregation of schools as being a natural result of people just wanting to be around people who are like them. Bonilla-Silva also identifies what he describes as "abstract liberalism," which gets at the heart of color evasion. White people, when asked a question about race often default to "Oh, I don't even see race." Or, as Bonilla-Silva showed, when asked about affirmative action, i.e., preferences for people from under-represented racial groups in higher education or the job market, white people would often say they were against it because they thought everyone should be treated equally. Of course, this abstract liberalism sounds nice. How can you call the person speaking racist when they have just said they want everyone to be treated equally? Yet, this nice, color evasive talk is perpetuating racism in the way that it denies the lived reality of People of Color and instead blames their disenfranchisement on People of Color, themselves.

It will come as no surprise then, that these same white adults, use the same color evasive approaches if and when they teach their children about race. The white parents focused on in Thandeka's book are in no uncertain terms telling their white children to stop playing with Kids of Color, if they want to remain in the family. But, currently, there is a growing crop of neoliberal parents who are avoiding conversations about race with their children, but if their child asks a question about race or color, white parents resort to canned abstract liberalism, assuring their kids that everybody is equal and color does not matter.

Years ago, I was conducting research with focus groups of white kindergartners in the rural Midwest of the United States. I had their white teacher read them several multicultural picture books and then asked the children a series of question about the books. I wanted to know how white children in a mostly white setting understood race and culture through the books. As we began the study, the kindergarten teacher went off script. She asked all of the children to hold out their hands. A plentitude of beige, pinkish, and peachy little hands all reached into the circle where the teacher also held out her hand. "Are we all the same color?" she asked. "No," replied most of the kids, identifying freckles or the slight variations of shade in their hands. "That's right!" congratulated the teacher, "we all have different color skin, but we're still all the same!" I remember thinking at the time that this teacher might as well have concluded her mini race lesson with, "So, there's no reason for us to ever talk about color or race again!"

As mentioned, one of the core problems with teaching white children to be color evasive is that color evasion ignores the reality of racism and white supremacy. While the color evasive parent will read children's books about Martin Luther King Jr. to their children, particularly on MLK day, most of those books read as though when the 'white only' signs came down racism ended and today we are all treated equally. Racism, as it were, is a thing of the past and a thing of the US south. This is the message that well-intentioned, neoliberal white parents teach the next generation about race. And this serves white families well, as they continue to normalize themselves and their dominant narratives. This is also why we frequently see white college students demonstrating what Robin DiAngelo refers to as *white fragility* [27] when they are first confronted with the racial realities of People of Color in a course that deals with race. Or a white student is assigned a roommate who is a Person of Color and not willing to go along with the shallow color evasive framework the now white young adult has embraced and managed not to question [22], in part cause they knew how upset their white family would get if they went and brought up a nasty topic like race.

### **3. Strategies for critical race parenting**

I titled this chapter, “Racist Babies?” to get at the paradox of whiteness in parenting, which is this: Although we know kids see race and make value judgments about it, children are not born racist. White children are parented into racism. Yet, given how whites have constructed whiteness norms within their families, the first time a child makes an observation about race, the parent is shocked at the audacity of their child breaking the taboo and worries that the child is racist instead of examining themselves and how whiteness is at work [28] in their parenting.

White neoliberal parents tend to avoid conversations about race with children. They do this possibly because they are in denial that race and racism are real and relevant. Perhaps they do not know what to say about race and are uncomfortable breaking the race taboo that they were raised to uphold. Or, maybe they think their children will just naturally grow up to “do the right thing.” These same parents are thrown into upheaval the first time their child makes a comment on or asks a question about race. This is when, as a race scholar and white mother, my niece, white neoliberal friends come to me and explain that their child is racist and can I recommend some good kids’ books that will teach their children to not be racist? One white friend’s child did not like his brown-skinned swim instructor. One child pointed at a Black woman, saying she looked like a brownie. Neither of these statements are inherently racist. These white children are noticing skin color and trying to make sense of it, particularly when they have not been around many People of Color previously. My own child, when he began a new preschool class, declared that he did not like one of his teachers. “Which teacher don’t you like?” I asked. “The Black one,” he answered. I’ll admit, even as a person who studies race and whiteness in parenting, I was taken aback with my 4 year old’s comment. But, I was careful not to scold him for identifying race, which we had discussed. “You don’t like Ms. Andrea?” I clarified, identifying his teacher who I’d noted was the most strict, and as he had identified had the darkest skin of all of his teachers. We then went on to have a conversation where I encouraged him to learn all of his teachers’ names and also began a conversation about racism and how white people treat Black and Brown people unfairly. “That’s why it’s super important for us as white people to respect Black and Brown people and especially our teachers by knowing their names,” I concluded.

To be honest, on the fly, I’m not sure how well I articulated any of this or how much my son understood. But, what is important is that I continue to have conversations with my children about race and racism to ensure that we are not participating in color evasive racism. This also allows me to continue to guide my children’s interpretations and understanding of race and racism as they grow. Although I have a leg up on many white parents given that I am a researcher of race, racism, and whiteness, it is still crucial for all white parents, including me, to continue our work to understand how whiteness is working in ourselves, in our partners, and in our children.

Below, I offer some ParentCrit strategies, particularly for white parents who are working to parent critically conscious, socially just people, and are they themselves working to be the same. It’s important to note that parenting is not the only influence that children receive that teach them about race. Certainly, a child’s experience at school, in social settings, and with various media also convey messages about race to white children and Children of Color. When we as parents work with our children to develop a critical consciousness around systems of oppression, we must be working with them to interpret, critique, and dismantle those systems whether they manifest in their classroom or in their Saturday morning cartoons.



### 3.1 Diversify your environment

The United States is highly racially segregated in our neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, etc. This is not coincidental or natural. It is by design [29]. Historical and current processes and legacies have continued to disenfranchise People of Color in the United States and maintain white privilege and power. Systems such as redlining and gentrification to mass incarceration and school privatization go to work every day to keep most white Americans in their bubble.

Although this allows most white children in the US to be surrounded by other white children, white teachers, and white community, Families of Color are forced to navigate the white world to participate in systems such as economic, education, medicine, law, etc. Thus, white children raised in white enclaves develop an understanding of their white identities and their whiteness as normal, which Children of Color do not have the luxury of doing [30]. This allows for white children to then see anything that is not within these white norms as different, weird, exotic, or even deviant or bad.

Once, after I had offered a community training on ‘dismantling whiteness,’ I had a white father approach me. He and his wife were upper class and white and were raising their two biological children in a wealthy white suburb. We were discussing white children and their understanding of race, and he said, “My 7 year old, Skyler, said to me yesterday, ‘Dad, why are all Black people famous?’” Upon sharing this, he offered me an incredulous look in which I think he expected me to share in his utter confusion. “Does he know any Black people?” I asked. The man furrowed his brow, and said, “No, just those he sees on TV.” After describing the painfully obvious connection between his child thinking all Black people were famous and how it was because he only saw Black people on TV, I went on to discuss the importance of children having relationships and engaging with racially diverse communities so as not to stereotype People of Color. The father nodded, but then added, “It’s just that our neighborhood is so white.” With that, he shrugged and our conversation ended. This Dad could not envision making choices about where his family lived or learned that considered his children’s critical consciousness and racial awareness. Subsequently, his white son was learning about Black people from TV. This meant that the source of his son’s race knowledge was and would continue to be formed by mass media, and all the racist stereotypes therein. The intergenerational whiteness was being almost perfectly maintained in this nice, white, neoliberal family.

My point here is that environment matters when you want to raise critically conscious, socially just children. Within the higher education Affirmative Action<sup>2</sup> struggle, those defending Affirmative Action have argued about the importance of a *Critical Mass* of Students of Color within the college classroom. They argue that this critical mass is important for all students to have a rich and diverse college experience. Part of this idea is that if you have only one or two Students of Color in an otherwise all-white classroom, the white students are more likely to tokenize and stereotype the few Students of Color. This argument fairly suggests that white college students upon meeting a Student of Color (often one of the first People of Color they have met) are likely to make sweeping generalizations about an entire racial group based on the experiences with that one Person of Color. Thus, a critical mass is achieved when there is enough diversity in the diversity (coded as People of Color) [31].

<sup>2</sup> Affirmative Action is a legal precedent in the United States that has allowed for race to be considered in Higher Education admissions, historically to allow access to People of Color. Since its inception, it has been continuously challenged and dismantled in the Supreme Court [31]



I bring this up, because if knowing and working with People of Color is actually important to the white neoliberal groups that largely serve as the leadership, faculty, staff, and students of predominantly white institutions of higher education, why is it not important to raise those same white children in community with People of Color? My point is that, of course, environment is crucial in raising critically conscious, socially just children and families.

### **3.2 Engage in race and racism talk**

When I began talking with my first child at three about race, I was shocked at how color evasive my descriptions were. Things like “People have different skin colors but we’re all the same” or describing racism as “People treating people with other skin colors bad,” just fell out of my mouth. I was quick to correct myself, particularly on the latter comment to say “When white people treat people with Black or Brown skin bad...” But, horrified, I stumbled through conversations while my preschooler quickly lost interest in my race lessons. I realized that like any good educator, I needed to plan out what I wanted my child to understand and then back track to identify and teach the building blocks to that concept. I wanted my kids to understand racism at the individual but also the systemic levels and I also wanted them to confront it when they saw it.

I started by identifying key concepts, equating race with skin color while simultaneously reading books and talking about the US enslavement of Africans and the stealing of native lands. I then introduced the concept of racism. This worked as a good transition. When my son understood race and also the history of race in the US, particularly around enslavement, it was easier to show how racism only went in one direction, given that white people had historically created the concept of race and used it to steal rights and power [32]. Yet, my previous research helped me understand that white kids often understand racism as happening only in the past and only in the south. So, I also offered my children examples of racism, including those from the news or even comments or things I noticed. We would discuss police shootings of Black people. We would discuss how racism was working in our leaders’ justification of separating Latinx children from their parents at the US/Mexican border. My partner and I and our friends would discuss race and racism openly in front of the kids, whether or not they were paying attention. These ongoing race conversations not only helped my children build their understanding of race and racism, but it also gave them permission and even encouragement to bring up race topics and to ask questions of their own.

### **3.3 Engage intersectionality**

As a critical race scholar, I was laser focused on my white-presenting boys’ understanding race and racism. When they would talk about gender or something being a girls’ toy, I would say little more than “There is no such thing as a girls’ toy.” Shortly after my oldest son began public elementary school, a fourth grade Latinx boy within our school district died by suicide shortly after he had come out as gay. Immediately, all of the heteronormative and gender-binary school traditions that I had kept quiet about became urgent to correct. As I saw it, the public school system of which we were part was scapegoating children as bullies and letting themselves off the hook for all of the practices that said “you (cisgender conforming child) are normal, and you (nonconforming child) do not belong and deserve your isolation.” These practices included the lining up after the school bell by binary gender, no bathroom options for trans or gender nonconforming students, and allowing the gender policing of children (e.g., teasing a boy who used a pink crayon).

Interestingly, we had family friends who were laser-focused on gender and LGBTIQ+ issues to the detriment of discussions of other systems of oppression, including race. I think it's difficult for parents who hold multiple forms of privilege and dominant identities to hold these all together at the same time, whereas parents who combat multiple forms of oppression, do not have the luxury of isolating one with their children. Indeed, intersectionality is meant to combat the rendering of queer Black women as invisible [33, 34] Reading Audre Lorde's words [35] makes this clear. She simultaneously holds her identities as mother, scholar, Black, woman, and lesbian as she navigates raising her Black children. There is no moment where she forgets that she and her children are Black or that she is raising her children as a lesbian woman. She holds them all and navigates them simultaneously.

This is not the case for white, heteronormative parents. So, we must do the work to understand how these systems of white supremacy, patriarchy, classism, heteronormativity, ableism, etc. are all working simultaneously for or against our children. Holding our understanding, oppression, and dominance together as we raise our kids, and not letting one system or another go because they will not oppress our kids directly today is vital. The point here is that we cannot teach anybody, including our children, how any system of oppression really works without understanding and offering an intersectional approach. We cannot fully understand white supremacy without understanding patriarchy, nor can we understand patriarchy without ableism, or ableism without classism and so on. So, as we work to build critical consciousness in our children, we must not set aside any part of the story.

### 3.4 Critique child media with kids

It feels like new kids' movies come out by the week these days, and, luckily, there is generally a critique of each new film. I actually included my racial critique of *Zootopia* in a 2018 article [1], showing how it drew on white saviority, racial stereotypes, and color evasive racism to form its storyline. By most accounts, children's movies seem to be getting better and more thoughtful. For example, consider the 1995 Disney film, *Pocahontas*, along with its stereotyping of indigenous people as noble or savage with the 2017 Pixar film *Coco*, which is a beautiful and thoughtful depiction of a Mexican story.

Yet, when we take a comprehensive look at child media we still see the same problematic depictions of race, i.e., racial stereotypes, color evasions, and other racial fictions. For instance, while the first *Frozen* movie, happily avoided race by making every notable character in it lily white, *Frozen II* tried to make up for it by depicting a racially ambiguous indigenous group that was having their way of life stolen by an unambiguously white king. While this may have paralleled the settler colonialist history and stolen lands of the United States, the movie ends with the two white granddaughters of the colonizer-king saving the day, the land, and restoring justice, which included one of the white sisters (Elsa) becoming queen over the indigenous peoples and land.

The point I want to make here is that I do not think we should keep children from seeing the latest Disney or Pixar film, but we should be diligent about critiquing storylines and messages within media with our kids. We should be deconstructing both the explicit and hidden messages in children's movies with our kids. This demonstrates to them that they cannot take what they see at face value even in their seemingly morally resplendent movies. When we describe what we see in the movies and critical interpretations of the media our children are watching, they learn to not only question what they see and understand, but learn that it's important to do so. Soon enough, we will not need to bring up racist stereotypes or white savior storylines in the movies our children are watching; pretty soon, they'll catch it and point it out before we do.

These discussions also reinforce that race talk is okay and encouraged. My white-presenting son received a Black Panther costume as a gift from his grandparents around Halloween last year. Although he already had planned to be a video game character for trick or treating, he told me he thought he might wear his Black Panther costume to school. My son's school is made-up of mostly Black and Brown students, and I worried about my son co-opting one of the few Black heroes available to Kids of Color.

"I actually don't think you should wear your Black Panther costume out of the house," I said to my son. "Why not?" he asked. "Well, because Black Panther is a Black super hero, and because of racism, there aren't a lot of Black super heroes that look like Black and Brown kids. But there are a whole bunch that look more like you, so I think we should treat Black Panther as a special super hero that just Black and Brown kids get to dress up as at school." "Ok," my son resolved quickly, "I think I'll be a Harry Potter character for school then." "Perfect!" I said.

#### **4. Concluding thoughts**

When we normalize race and racism conversations with our children, we build their skills and critical consciousness. In Beverly Tatum's book [25], she mentions a white kid that asked her Black son if his skin was brown because he drank too much chocolate milk. Children, including white children, are trying to make sense of their world and their social interactions. They pick up on who gets included and who does not, on who's considered beautiful, and who is not, on who's considered smart and who is not. If we do not advise them in this sense making process, we should not then be surprised when, in the next round of doll studies they tell us that the white doll is good and beautiful and the Black doll is bad.

White parents have got to set aside their fear of race talk, shrug off the taboo, and educate themselves on how race works in the US and how they and their white skin are normalized and privileged. Only then can we educate the next generation of children to resist whiteness and make strides toward equity and justice, instead of just reframing whiteness to trick ourselves as we raise the next generation of racist babies.

#### **Acknowledgements**

I dedicate this chapter to my children and those of the next generation. May we invest in you critical consciousness and social justice, along with our hopes and dreams.

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