Preservice teachers' racialized emotion recognition, anger bias, and hostility attributions

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ABSTRACT

Differential treatment of students by race is well documented, and potentially driven by implicit processes relating to racial prejudice. To better understand some of the pathways by which racial prejudice may be activated, we examined preservice teachers' racialized perceptions specific to emotion. Forty preservice teachers identified the emotions expressed in 20 Black and White male and female faces in order to assess racialized emotion accuracy and anger bias; participants also judged hostility in videos of 4 Black and White boys' misbehaviors with peers in school in order to assess racialized attributions. We conducted a series of multilevel models with assessments of Black and White faces (or boys) nested within preservice teachers. Results indicated that emotions in Black faces were less accurately recognized than emotions in White faces; Black faces were more likely to be seen as angry even when they were not, compared to White faces; and boys' misbehaviors were perceived as more hostile than those of White boys. Together, these results consistently suggest that racialized emotion-related perceptions may enter the classroom with preservice teachers. Implications, as well as limitations that may be resolved in future studies, and extensions of these findings to other minority status populations are discussed.

1. Introduction

Differential treatment by race continues to be a problem in education, with documented differences in the provision of resources, such as exclusion from gifted programs as well as over-identification for special education of Black children (who are later found to not need, and to be educationally slowed by, such services; Ford, 2013; Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; Harry & Anderson, 1994).[1] There are also racial gaps in suspensions and expulsions, which persist even when controlling for racial differences in disproportional rates of teacher referrals for misbehavior or equalizing the assessed events (e.g., Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). For example, in a study of 272 elementary schools, Black children were more than twice as likely to receive discipline referrals overall than White children, and when type of infraction was examined, Black children were almost four times as likely to be suspended or expelled for minor infractions from elementary school than White children (Skiba, et al., 2011). Further, the proportion of Black students in the school is associated with

suspension and expulsion rates, even when controlling for school rates of delinquency, drug use, teacher victimization, and perceived school risk, suggesting that school disciplinary responses are activated by more than school misbehavior (Welch & Payne, 2012). Poverty and other confounding variables do not account for these effects, as disproportionality by race is still revealed even when controlling for various economic indicators (Pigott & Cowan, 2000; Skiba et al., 2002; Strand, 2013).

Differential receipt of and removal from school resources, as well as other outcomes such as lower grades and behavioral assessments, may be sourced from the differential expectations teachers have for Black students compared to White students (McGrady & Reynolds, 2013; Ready & Wright, 2011; Skiba et al., 2001, 2002). Racialized expectations have been found to be robust, persisting over time and across geography, and are not insubstantial; in conservatively conducted meta-analyses of teacher expectations, behavioral and academic referrals, and teachers' use of inquiring, encouraging speech with students, the effect sizes for group differences ranged from 0.21 to 0.31

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[1] We chose the currently-used terms of "Black" and "White" although they falsely dichotomize groups, because our focus is on judgments people in American society tend to make based on visual perceptions of individuals as being "same" and/or "other" race.

(Cohen's *d;* Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007).

Even when controlling for students' actual achievement, a large study in six urban elementary schools revealed an effect size of 0.27 (Cohen's *d*) for teacher expectation solely on the basis of race, while controlling for other factors (McKown & Weinstein, 2008). Of great concern is that Black elementary school-age children appear quite responsive toward their teachers' differential treatment from fall to late spring achievement testing, and in racialized ways: African American children were 2.53 and 10.40 times *more* likely to confirm teachers' underestimates than their overestimates in third and fifth grade, respectively, whereas European American children were *less* likely to confirm teachers' underestimates than overestimates in both grades (ORs = 0.47 and 0.78, respectively; McKown & Weinstein, 2002). Other work also highlights race as a powerful moderator, with double to triple the expectancy effect sizes for Black compared to non-Black students (Jussim & Harber, 2005; Jussim, Eccles, & Madon, 1996) and substantially lower expectations of Black students by non-Black compared to Black teachers (Gershenson, Holt, & Papageorge, 2016), suggesting that Black students are particularly vulnerable to receiving and reacting to lowered expectations from their teachers (McKown, 2013).

In addition to, or perhaps because of such expectations, how teachers engage with students may inadvertently contribute to disparities as well. White teachers (81.9% of teachers in the U.S.; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2012) report more conflicted and distant relationships with Black compared to White students, and Black students agree (Harmon, 2002; Hughes, Gleason, & Zhang, 2005; Hughes, Wu, Kwok, Villareal, & Johnson, 2012; Jerome, Hamre, & Pianta, 2009). That these effects are small-to-moderate in size (i.e., Cohen's *d*s = 0.21 to 0.40) supports the idea that White teachers' expectations may contribute to differential outcomes for Black and White students. Importantly, these features of greater conflict and distance seem less frequent in relationships between Black teachers and Black students (Dee, 2004; Downer, Goble, Myers, & Pianta, 2016; Downey & Pribesh, 2004; Saft & Pianta, 2001), suggesting that these problems do not reside in the children so much as in either the teachers or the interactions between teacher and child.

Three kinds of research traditions (experimental, classroom observations, and teacher narratives) can help us to understand these molar patterns related to teacher bias. Experimental studies using written or videotaped descriptions of students' performance or behavior provide strong evidence for the existence of racialized responses in teachers' initial thoughts about students (e.g., Elhoweris, Mutua, Alsheikh, & Holloway, 2005; Fish et al., 2017; Gilliam, Maupin, Reyes, Accavitti, & Shic, 2016; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015; Parks & Kennedy, 2007). Classroom observations demonstrate that these initial responses persist in classroom settings; in one large study of 701 pre-kindergarten classrooms, Black boys were reported as more disruptive and problematic, but only by White and not Black teachers (Downer et al., 2016). Narrative studies also indicate that teachers perceive Black boys as more relationally challenging and more aggressive, troublesome, and disruptive than their White counterparts (Collier & Bush, 2012; Ferguson, 2001; Rowley et al., 2014). These descriptors may well reflect the tendency of teachers and educational staff to interpreting Black children's expressive behaviors as disrespectful and indicative of "emotional willfulness" rather than expressions of frustration or distress (Hill, 2004; Tyson, 2003). Further, this last set of findings may also hint at the importance of teachers' interpretations of emotion as a pathway toward more conflictual relationships. That is, the emotion-related behaviors of Black and White children may be differently interpreted, particularly by White teachers, as reflective of the cultural "memes" of Black people as relatively more troublesome and disruptive than White people.

In some ways, these findings are not surprising, given how culturally embedded racial prejudice is, with persistent representations of Black adults as less "good", more threatening, and more aggressive than White adults across various types of media (Burgess, Dill, Stermer, Burgess, & Brown, 2011; Coltrane & Messineo, 2000; Dixon, 2008; Tyree, 2011), and the number of White supremacist websites depicting African Americans as violent and threatening to White Americans (Hale, 2012; Simon Wiesenthal Center, 2009). Although some studies search for individual differences in those who are prejudiced versus those who are not, many studies reveal that racialized perceptions are endemic, at least in the United States, and are reflected in fairly automatic, implicit associations (Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002; Eberhardt, Goff, Purdie, & Davis, 2004; Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998; Greenwald, Poelhlman, Uhlmann, & Banaji, 2009; Payne, 2001), general explicit judgments (Devine, 1989), and behavioral tendencies (Correll et al., 2007; Dovidio et al., 2002; Greenwald, Oakes, & Hoffman, 2003; McConnell & Leibold, 2001). This large body of work suggests pervasive and implicit perceptions of Black people as more disruptive, hostile, and aggressive than White people. Our goal in the present study was to identify if these broad but automatic types of perceptions are present in preservice teachers, and, specifically, within the changeable domain of emotion judgments.

1.1. Theoretical framework

In the present study, we build on a substantial body of primarily descriptive data and seek to verify a set of pathways that explain the differential treatment received by Black and White students in elementary school. These data suggest that teachers have a racialized lens with which they view others, and that this lens, created over the decades of living in a racialized society, activates in teachers a set of self-perpetuating and racialized expectations about students' emotions. Our work is embedded in the interconnections between classic teacher expectancy theory (which asserts that a teachers' expectations of or beliefs about students influence teachers' interpretation of students' behaviors and performance in the classroom; de Boer, Bosker, & van der Werf, 2010; Friedrich, Flunger, Nagengast, Jonkmann, & Trautwein, 2015; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968) and the social-cognitive theories of stereotype activation that highlight how implicit associations unknowingly perpetuate racist ideologies (Devine, 1989; Greenwald et al., 1998).

We are not the first to note the value of amalgamating teacher expectations with implicit bias; several notable studies precede us in theorizing how teachers' implicit beliefs and unconsciously conveyed attitudes create a lens through which teachers observe, encode, and interpret students' behavior (Kozlowski, 2015; Peterson, Rubie-Davies, Osborne, & Sibley, 2016; Thys & Van Houtte, 2016; van den Bergh, Denessen, Hornstra, Voeten, & Holland, 2010). These theoretical and empirical studies highlight how easily race differentially activates teachers' expectations and inadvertently biases teachers' behavior toward students of different races. Our contribution is to apply this body of work to teachers' racialized expectations and stereotypes about emotion, and to test whether emotion-related behaviors are viewed differently when engaged in by Black or White students.

We also recognize that activated stereotypes are embedded in cultural practices and situated within cultural understandings and misunderstandings. These stereotypes may then be revealed by teachers through the "signal influences" described in Social Equity Theory; signal influences are the negative overt behaviors or ambiguous behaviors that "signal" to ethnic-racial minority students that they are devalued because of their group membership (McKown, 2013). That children recognize the beliefs that others hold about them is evident from both the stereotype threat (McKown & Strambler, 2009; Steele & Aronson, 1995) and "thin slices" literatures. For example, "thin slices" research in nonverbal communication demonstrates that fourth- and seventh-grade students can recognize teachers' expectations from 10-second videoclips of teachers' descriptions of students about whom they have low- or high-expectations (Babad, 2005; Babad, Bernieri, & Rosenthal, 1991). Thus, Social Equity Theory identifies how teacher expectancies are transmitted to and transform students' self-concepts;