Anti-bias or Not: A Case Study of Two Early Childhood Educators

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The anti-bias early childhood curricular approach advocates for the discussion of issues such as discrimination, privilege, oppression, sexism, and racism with young children so they can develop skills to identify and challenge unfairness, prejudice, and stereotypes (Derman-Sparks & the A.B.C. Task Force, 1989; Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010; Scarlet, 2016). Anti-bias educators view children as active agents who can confront sexism, racism, and other forms of oppression. The anti-bias curricular approach calls for early childhood educators to be intentional and proactive about addressing human diversity and injustices, prejudices, and misunderstandings with young children (e.g., Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010; Kemple, Lee, & Harris, 2016). Educators are urged to intentionally, critically engage with children to counteract discrimination and stereotyping, while celebrating diverse identities (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010). Derman-Sparks (1989) defines the anti-bias curricular approach as:

> …an active/activist approach to challenging prejudice, stereotyping, bias, and the 'isms.' In a society in which institutional structures create and maintain sexism...it is not sufficient to be non-biased (and also highly unlikely), nor is it sufficient to be an observer. It is necessary for each individual to actively intervene, to challenge, and counter the personal and institutional behaviors that perpetuate oppression. (p. 3)

Advocates of the anti-bias curricular approach argue that when educators implement anti-bias practices, they need to take children's level of cognitive development, interests, and needs into account; encourage children to ask questions; and, engage children in critical thinking and problem solving (e.g., Swadener & Miller-Marsh, 1995). However, there are very few empirical studies (e.g., Bullock, 1996; Duffy & Gibbs, 2013; Swadener & Miller-Marsh, 1995; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 1996) that have directly examined the anti-bias curricular approach in action.

One exception is a qualitative study, conducted in rural Northwestern United States, which investigated anti-bias beliefs and practices of 6 directors and 20 early childhood educators working with White children (Bullock, 1996). Educators' anti-bias training consisted of participating in workshops and conferences, reading articles, and discussing anti-bias practices with one another. Interviews, document analysis, and participant observations revealed that although educators addressed gender diversity, age, and special needs, they struggled to address racial and cultural diversity. Some educators espoused a colorblind or color-denial approach and believed that children did not notice differences or that bringing up differences fosters prejudice (Bullock, 1996). Most educators in Bullock's (1996) study used a "tourist or tokenistic approach" (Derman-Sparks, 1989), meaning that they relied on "safe topics," such as holiday celebrations, to discuss cultural differences. Furthermore, educators reported that they struggled to address racial or cultural diversity because most of their students were White.

Similarly, in an ethnographic investigation of an anti-bias preschool classroom (59% Children of Color), Van Ausdale and Feagin (1996) found that educators often overlooked, misperceived, and denied children's use of race and acts of racism. Educators, in their eagerness to squash prejudice, misunderstood and silenced children's expressions regarding race (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 1996). In one instance, when a White child told an Asian child that "You can't pull this wagon, only White Americans can pull this wagon" (p. 78), the educator told the child who was using exclusionary language to apologize and to not hurt a friend's feelings. Next, the educator asked both children, "Can you guys be good friends now?" (p. 78). In sum, even at a center with an explicitly anti-bias mission, early childhood educators may struggle to discuss race and racism with young children.

In another ethnographic study about the anti-bias approach in an enriched, predominantly White (70%) kindergarten classroom in the Midwestern United States, children demonstrated a high level of interest in anti-bias activities (Miller-Marsh,1992; Swadener & Miller-Marsh, 1995). Children organized a peace march and wrote a letter to the school expressing their concern about the lack of Black boy crossing guards. The educator-researcher (Miller-Marsh) noted that children's keen interest level in the anti-bias curriculum led her to do more anti-bias activities throughout the year.

Although children may show an interest in anti-bias activities, given their strong sense of fairness and justice (e.g., Rochat et al., 2009), educators often stay silent around issues of race and racism. However, educators quite vocally label gender (e.g., Loyd & Duveen, 1992), and as the findings of the present study indicate, are more comfortable addressing gender and sexism than race and racism with young children. Educators use gender to organize activities, and to manage and verbally label children in their classroom (e.g., Chapman, 2016; Chen & Rao, 2010; Chick, Heilman-Houser, & Hunter, 2002; Hilliard & Liben, 2010; Lloyd & Duveen, 1992). For instance, educators may line children up by gender (Chen & Rao, 2010; Lloyd & Duveen, 1992), promote competition between boys and girls (Chen & Rao, 2010; Thorne, 1993), and make comments about girls' appearance and boys' strength (Chick et al., 2002). These practices may reinforce gender stereotypes in young children (Bigler & Liben, 2006; 2007). Some educators may demonstrate "gender-bending" behaviors. For instance, educators may reinforce girls' interest in athletics and male-dominated professions, as well as support boys' engagement in dress-up activities (Chick et al., 2002), encouraging children to defy gender stereotypes.

In terms of gender socialization in anti-bias contexts, in an ethnographic study of two child care centers implementing multicultural education, Swadener (1988) found that some attempts were made to use non-sexist language (e.g., "firefighters," "police officers," "mail carriers") and to counter gender-stereotyping. Teachers provided alternative evidence to sexist assumptions, such as "girls can't carry heavy stuff." They also frequently presented men and women performing a variety of jobs. However, few activities were planned around racial diversity, beyond using books and dolls. The current study[1] adds to the literature on gendered and racialized classroom practices by examining gender and racial stereotype-reinforcing and stereotype-breaking teaching practices in early childhood classrooms.

Anti-bias classrooms are an ideal context for studying gender and racial socialization as educators familiar with the tenets of the anti-bias approach may be especially sensitive

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to and aware of the need to address race and gender in the classroom. This paper examines how two early childhood educators, who are familiar with the anti-bias approach, address race and gender with young children in the Southwestern United Sates. One educator indicated that she was "somewhat familiar" with the anti-bias approach, and the other educator indicated that she was "very familiar" with anti-bias approach. At the time of the study, the educators were participating in a diversity professional development support group that emphasized the anti-bias approach. Although the anti-bias curricular approach addresses diversity based on a wide range of human differences, such as culture, language, abilities, and family structure, the current study solely focuses on gender and race.

The Study

The study was guided by the following research questions:
Question 1: How do two early childhood educators, who are familiar with the anti-bias approach, address race and gender in their classrooms?
Question 2: What classroom practices and activities do these early childhood educators rely on to address race and gender in their classrooms?

Methods

Participants

Purposive sampling was used to recruit two early childhood educators who were familiar with the anti-bias approach. Purposive sampling is a form of deliberate, non-random sampling method (Patton, 2002). Two early childhood educators, working for a corporate, center-based child care provider in the Southwestern United States participated in this study. The educators worked in separate centers but were both part of the same professional development support group, focusing on diversity and anti-bias education. As part of the support group, six early childhood educators (two of whom participated in the present study) and one director met 4-5 times a year to discuss readings from *Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves* (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010), and to share and discuss incidents that came up with children and families surrounding various aspects of diversity. At the time of the study, the group was on Ch. 5 of the book (*Learning about Culture, Language, & Fairness).* The educators blogged about the anti-bias book, discussed current events, personal biases, participated in team building activities, and shared resources. The educators also participated in regional phone calls and attended an annual conference about diversity.

One educator was a 30-year-old, who self-identified as White, gay, and female, who had participated in the diversity professional development program for two years. The other educator was a 45-year-old, who self-identified as White, heterosexual, and female, who had participated in the diversity professional development program for one year. Both educators had their Child Development Associate (CDA) credential. Children in the two focal classrooms were between 4.5-5 years-of-age. The majority of children (70%) were White. In Classroom 1, there were 9 boys (2 Indian; 1 Korean/White; 1 Latino; 5 White) and 4 girls (all White). In Classroom 2, there were 10 boys (3 Black; 1 Latino; 6 White) and 14 girls (2 Black; 1 Latina; 1 Middle Eastern/Moroccan; 10 White).

Data Collection

A case study design was used. A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 2003). Case studies provide detailed descriptions and rich accounts of real-life phenomena (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). Educators were interviewed before any classroom observations took place. The semi-structured interviews focused on how educators addressed race and gender in their classrooms, the rewards and challenges of practicing the anti-bias approach, and educators' experiences in the diversity professional development support group. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

Each classroom was observed for about 50 hours over the course of 9 weeks. The researcher took a non-participant, observer role, and closely followed the lead educator in each classroom, noting any incidents related to race, gender, and anti-bias activities and practices. The researcher used a "scan and focus" observation technique (Swadener, 1988), to observe and listen for exchanges among children and educators, and among children and other children, related to the research questions. Occasionally, follow-up questions were asked from the children when an incident arose regarding race or gender. At the conclusion of the study, the educators filled out an online survey about their attitudes and classroom practices regarding race and gender, including topics such as colorblindness, sexism, and multicultural teaching practices (for details about the survey see Farago, 2016).

Data Analyses

Interviews were coded for salient themes, keeping the research questions in mind. The first step of the coding process was generating a list of descriptive codes and statements that could be helpful in answering the research questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). After listing all possible significant statements and descriptive codes, the statements were classified based on similar meanings or themes (Creswell, 2007). The codes were compared to the transcripts to ensure that the grouped codes remained reflective of the data. The final phase of coding involved interpretation and meaning making in which the researcher looked for patterns and themes among the data (Creswell, 2007). An inductive thematic analysis approach was used to code observational field note data, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The first step in this iterative process involved the researcher immersing herself in the data by reading field notes multiple times and typing them up. Next, the raw data gathered through field notes were coded, and the codes were categorized according to themes for further analysis.

Results

Gender More Salient than Race

One of the educators mentioned, at the beginning of the interview that, "…something big for me is like gender norms." This educator disclosed in the survey that,

> I address gender diversity in my classroom all the time. It is the most frequent topic that arises naturally. Children seem to think that color has gender or toys have gender and I make sure to let them know that anyone can like or play with anything no matter if they are a boy or a girl. I have a diversity board[2] in my classroom and I make sure to have pictures of people in non-traditional gender roles. Example: A male dancer and a female construction worker.

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[2] Diversity boards were designated bulletin boards depicting visuals representing human diversity (e.g., families of color, multi-racial families, male ballerinas, female construction workers, same-sex families, children with special needs, tattooed professionals). The boards were visible to children, however, were not at children's eye-level and were non-interactive.

Educators were more likely to label gender than race. Both educators and the majority of the children in the study were White; this may have played a role in the silence surrounding race. White educators and parents are less likely to discuss race compared to educators and parents of color (e.g., Hamm, 2001). Although both educators have been exposed to the anti-bias approach, race or racism was rarely explicitly addressed.

Use of Gender Labels

Educators often relied on gender labels such as "bud," "buddy," "sir," "gentlemen," "boy/boys," "papi," "dude," "guy," "man," and "fellow" to label boys or male characters, and used labels such as "ladies/lady," "girl/girls," "woman," "ma'am," "mamma," "mami," "madamme," "girlfriend," and "missy" to label girls or female characters. On three occasions, one of the educators used the term "bud" or "buddy" to address a girl. Additionally, educators occasionally referred to children as "Mr." or "Miss," and children addressed educators by their first names, preceded by "Miss," such as in "Miss Judy." All these linguistic markers render gender salient to young children, who learn gender labels as early as infancy (e.g., Zosuls et al., 2009). Gender salience has been implicated in gender stereotype development (Bigler & Liben, 2006; 2007).

Interestingly, in their survey responses, both educators indicated that the frequent use of gender labels was "untrue" for them (2 or 3 on a scale of 1-*Very Untrue* to 7-*Very True*). It is likely that the use of gender labels is outside of educators' conscious awareness, and therefore, they underestimate their use. Using gender labels is a ubiquitous practice, such as using gender to greet children (e.g., "Good morning boys and girls"), hence it is plausible that educators are not fully aware of the frequency of the use of gender labels.

Educators used some gender-neutral terms, such as "firefighters" and "police officers," in combination with their gendered counterparts (e.g., "policeman"). Educators often repeated when a child used a term like "fireman." At times, educators offered gender-neutral versions of gendered-specific terms used by children. On a few occasions, educators emphasized gender when managing children, such as separating girls and boys to sit at different tables. Additionally, the bathrooms were marked by gender markers. Although the bathrooms were single-stall to be used by any child one-at-a-time, the stalls had ceramic signs demarcating gender: a blue moon with yellow stars for boys, and a blue and pinkish red bumble bee for girls.

The Use of Diversity Boards

The use of diversity boards reflected that anti-bias messages surrounding gender were more salient than messages surrounding race. Educators disclosed, and were later also observed, using their "diversity boards" to prompt discussions with children. One of the educators displayed a photo of a man with long hair and a female construction worker to help children "break" gender stereotypes about appearance. This educator also had a picture of a family with two fathers to expose children to same-sex families. The other educator showed a man wearing a pink shirt to demonstrate that colors do not have gender, and mentioned it was important for children to have visuals to draw on:

> One of the things that is really common, especially at this age, is children looking at colors as if there is a gender attached to the color. So that's one of the things that we try to explain to them is that colors don't have a gender. Pink is for boys too. Purple is for boys. So there is no gender attached to a color. Our diversity board is going to show a man wearing a pink shirt and stuff like that, so that they can have a visual with it.

Educators demonstrated being aware of children's need for concrete examples to counter-stereotypes about appearance, families, and colors. The diversity boards in both classrooms depicted males and females in non-traditional gender roles (e.g., female construction worker, male nurse, male ballerina) and with non-traditional appearance (e.g., boy with long hair, man wearing pink). The photos depicted were germane to conversations surrounding gender-nonconformity and gender flexibility.

In one classroom, the educator referred to the diversity board when countering an incidence of gender exclusion. Two boys and a girl were digging in the woodchips, and one of the boys told the girl that only boys could dig. First, the educator asked the boy why he thought that. The child replied, "Because girls are not strong." The educator pointed out that she was strong, and that girls could be just as strong as boys. The boy replied, "Yes, but you are a teacher." The educator then asked if the boy remembered the diversity board with the female construction worker. She then said, "It's OK if you don't remember, but I wanted to let you know that she can play with you too."

In this incident, the educator used questions and concrete examples, namely herself and a picture of a female construction worker, to counter a child's stereotype that "girls are not strong." However, the difficulty in countering established, rigid stereotypes can be seen: the boy viewed the educator as an exception to the stereotype that "girls are not strong." This finding is similar to an incident described by Swadener, Cahill, Marsh, and Arnold (1995) in which children asserted that boys cannot have long-hair and pierced ears, even though their male educator had long-hair and pierced ears. When the educator pointed this out, children replied, "You're not a boy; you're a teacher!" (p. 397). Cognitive-developmental research suggests that children may distort or misremember counter-stereotypical information and remember stereotype confirming information (e.g., see Bigler, 1999; Bigler & Liben, 1993). In this case, children viewed the educator as an exception to the rule.

Diversity in Gendered Domains

Classroom observations, interviews, and survey responses revealed that educators both countered and reinforced children's stereotypes in the domains of appearance, traits/abilities, occupations, colors, gender exclusion, and pretend play/toys. Educators' anti-bias responses usually arose in response to children's stereotypical statements or curiosity. Occasionally, educators responded to gender-exclusion.

Appearance stereotypes. One of the educators mentioned that children expressed stereotypes about appearance, such as "boys have to have short hair" and "girls have to have long hair." She disclosed that she uses herself as a counter-stereotypic example to demonstrate that girls can have short hair. This educator also put a picture of a man with long hair on her diversity board. This demonstrates that the educator was making anti-bias information concrete and explicit for young children, who have difficulty understanding abstract terms and thinking in concrete ways (e.g., Nicholls & Miller, 1983). Swadener, Cahill, and colleagues (1995) also suggest that children need "concrete proof" of gender equity, such as seeing actual women in traditionally male-dominated fields (rather than just hypothesizing about it). In another incident, the other educator directly countered a child's stereotype that "boys do not wear dresses" as follows:

> Educator and children were dressing up felt figures
> Child (girl): Boys don't wear dresses.
> Educator: Why can't a boy wear a dress?
> Child (girl): I don't like it.
> Educator: Some boys wear dresses …how do you
> know that's a boy?

Traits/abilities. Another domain of gender stereotypes was related to strength. In one instance, mentioned earlier, a little boy told a girl she cannot dig with him "Because girls are not strong." In response, the educator pointed out that she is a girl, and she is strong. In another instance, a boy told the educator that she, the educator, was not strong. The educator replied, "Why am I not strong? I lifted these cots. Does that not make me strong?" to which the boy flexed his muscles and said, "*I'm* strong."

Occupations. Educators made an effort to address gender stereotypes related to occupations. One educator mentioned that she countered children's gender stereotypes about occupations, by stating,

> I want them to see that they may think that doctors are only males but there are female doctors or vice versa. There's male nurses, [when] a lot of people think [about] nurses, they think women. So, I try to break that stereotype because it's just not true.

Regarding the diversity boards described earlier, educators mentioned that they posted photos of and pointed out male nurses, female doctors, female firefighters, and female construction workers to counter children's occupational stereotypes. One of the educators mentioned the following way in which she addressed gender diversity in her classroom:

> …only boys can like Batman, Spider Man, and other male super heroes. We created a lesson around this about real-life heroes and showed the children males and females in different careers that are looked at as gender-specific. We created super hero shirts for all the children.

Colors. Classroom observations as well as interviews revealed that children stereotyped colors, and assumed that pink is a "girl color." One of the educators mentioned,

> Another thing…is a lot of times like when they're coloring…you know pink is a girl color. And I just try to tell them, colors don't have gender. They're not "boy" or "girl". They're for everyone. There's colors in the world everywhere and they're not specifically yours or mine. If you're a boy, you don't own these colors.

Gender exclusion. Classroom observations confirmed that children occasionally excluded a peer from an activity, due to gender. For instance, boys told a girl that only boys can play a game involving a math puzzle, and the educator told the girl that girls can play, too. The girl repeated this to the boys, and as a result, all children started playing together. In another instance, an educator saw that girls were not permitting a boy to join their game involving dogs, so the educator asked if boys also liked to play with dogs. One girl kept repeating that only girls could come to the table, but in the end allowed the boy to join saying, "Only girls can come to the table…but I guess he can because he is James." In other words, the child made an exception for a particular boy. Further, the educators recorded the following incidents, all involving gender exclusion:

> Child 1 (boy): You have to stop, only boys can play football!
> Child 2 (girl): No, I can play too!
> Educator: (Stepped in and talked about women's professional football.)

> Child 1 (boy): Boys can't be ballerinas.
> Child 2 (girl): Yeah only girls.

> Educator: Actually, boys can! (Showed a video clip of the
> Nutcracker.)

As the excerpts above indicate, when children explicitly excluded another child from play, educators stepped in and directly addressed the exclusion. In some cases, the educators directly countered children's gender stereotypes. In other cases, the educators told children that girls and boys can both play with a game or a toy.

Missed opportunities for gender inclusion. A subtler form of exclusion involved educators failing to notice that children, particularly girls, did not have opportunities to play with tools. Boys flocked to activities that involved tools, and by the time girls showed interest, the centers would be "full." In one of the classrooms, two boys were unscrewing screws placed in pumpkins, and used tools, such as screwdrivers, to practice their fine motor skills. A girl walked up to the center and asked to join, to which the educator responded, "Not right now…because we have two people here." The two people in this case were two boys. A similar incident took place in the other classroom, where two boys were taking a radio apart at the "take-apart station" and a girl asked to join. The educator responded, "We already have two people there." In a sense, this form of gender exclusion was a by-product of children's gender-typed play choices and educators' classroom management rules about the number of children who were (or not) allowed to play at each center.

Pretend play and toys. Another domain of gender stereotyping involved pretend play and toys. One educator disclosed that,

> I mean obviously, yes, like "mother" is a term for
> women…But when they're playing and if a boy is like, "I
> want to be the sister," and then they're like "sisters are girls,"
> I say "Yeah, sisters are girls but you know he can pretend
> that he is the sister. You know, if he wants to."

In the excerpt above, the educator is encouraging gender role flexibility. The same educator was overheard discussing gender roles pertaining to Halloween costumes, as follows:

> Educator: What if you wanted to pretend to be Spiderman for
> Halloween?
> Child (girl): I'd die …because someone would hit me in the face.
> Educator: Did you know Frankie is a boy?
> Child (girl): You are a girl.
> Educator: I am, but I'm pretending to be a boy. Because I really
> wanted to be Frankenstein. Have you ever dressed up in Peter's play
> costume? (Peter is the child's brother).
>
> Child (girl): He doesn't let me because he is a boy …and those are
> boy costumes.
> Educator: Superman or Batman….?
> Child (girl): No.
> Educator: Are you allowed to dress up like that?
> Child (girl): No….
> Educator: You don't know…who tells you that you are not allowed
> to? Your dad?
> Child (girl): Shakes her head.
> Educator: He doesn't tell you….?

In the excerpt above, the educator raised a hypothetical question to a girl, whether it would be permissible for her to dress up as Spiderman. The child responded "no," and upon further questioning, told the educator that it would not be permissible for her to dress up in her brother's costumes. Although the educator initiated the discussion of gender non-conformity, and even pointed out that she herself was pretending to be a

male character, Frankenstein, the educator did not challenge the child's stereotypical responses. However, the phrasing of the questions may have also resulted in stereotyped responses. The way the educator posed the questions may have elicited a stereotyped response from the child – in this sense, the questions may have been "leading" the child in a particular direction. This scenario, especially asking the child who is telling them that they are not allowed to dress up in a gender non-conforming manner, could potentially reinforce gender stereotypes. Educators are thus advised to be mindful of and reflect on the ways in which they asses and respond to children's understandings of gender (and race).

In another instance, the educator asked a child to tell her about female superheroes, and then asked if it would be acceptable for his mom to dress up as Captain America, a male superhero. The child responded that his mom would be a "girl Captain America." The educator pointed out that she herself is a "boy" Frankenstein, and then asked the child, who was dressed as Captain America, if it would be okay for him to dress as "Elsa" (a Disney princess). The boy responded that he does not like dressing as a girl. The educator mentioned that this is OK, and asked if it would be OK for another boy to dress as a girl. In other words, the educator emphasized gender non-conforming roles (boy dressing as a girl and vice versa), and used questioning to encourage the child to consider possibilities that he may not have thought of.

Regarding toys, one of the educators mentioned that she liked to make children aware that gender stereotypes about toys are not true, and mentioned that she challenged children to think, "Like…did you know that's not true, that girls *can* play with trucks and boys *can* play with dolls?" This educator also mentioned persistence in addressing gender stereotypes:

> …boys can do this and girls can't or you know things like that, and I try really hard to stop that. Pretty much immediately. And I'll talk about it every single time it comes up, even if it's with the same kid all the time. I'm not going to just stop because I think it's not getting through to them. Because eventually that one time it might.

Persistence in addressing stereotypes is likely to be key in anti-bias education. Children are bombarded with stereotype-confirming information on a daily basis; to counter this information, routine, persistent, and prolonged exposure is likely needed to stereotype-disconfirming and anti-bias information.

Race and Racism: The Silence of Early Childhood Educators

Classroom observations confirmed previous findings that children notice skin color in early childhood settings (e.g. Van Ausdale & Feagin, 1996; 2001). Two children were playing with light and dark felt figures, and one of them, a Black boy, pointed to the dark figure and said, "That's my guy." A few minutes later he said, "Look it, I found my brown. Look it, I found my brown. I found my brown. I found my brown," indicating that he was enthusiastic about finding a figure that matched his own skin color and looked like him. At another time, a White boy separated the felt figures by color, placing the "peach" or "light" figures, and "brown" or "dark" figures, in separate piles. The following conversation was overheard between children:

> Child 1 (White girl): He has a dress and a hat. "A girl hat."
> Child 2 (Black girl): A dark skin doll is being dressed up.
> Child 3 (White boy): Dark one is a girl. And light one are the boys.
> Child 2 (Black girl): The dark one are girls and white ones are boys.

These excerpts demonstrate that children noticed both gender and skin color, and were apt to categorize human figures along these dimensions. Observations also indicated that children, both White children and Children of Color, chose dolls to play with that

matched their own skin color.

Race: Silence and Missed Opportunities

Educators rarely explicitly addressed race or racism, even when children's comments opened up opportunities for such discussions. These findings support previous findings about colorblindness and colormuteness of early childhood educators (e.g., Van Ausdale & Feagin, 1996; Vittrup, 2016). One of the educators read a book to the children titled *Somewhere Today: A Book of Peace* (Thomas, 1998), a book illustrated with photos of multi-ethnic children and adults. The premise of the book is that all over the world, people are helping each other, and in doing so, they are bringing about peace. During the book reading, children noticed that a family was eating with chopsticks and that a piñata was present; also, a White girl pointed out that the characters in the book "don't look like us." However, the educator did not respond to any of the children's comments, aside from repeating what children said.

Another time, a Black boy exclaimed, "Police officers kill people. Police officers are bad," to which the educator responded, "Well, police officers are good. They protect people. Wouldn't you call a police officer if you were in trouble?" Although the educator mentioned in the interview that the anti-bias professional support group emphasized the importance of addressing current events, she simply negated the child's comment about police brutality and moved on. The study was conducted in fall of 2015, at a time when police brutality impacting communities of color, and the shooting of unarmed Black men in particular, were making national headlines. The Black Lives Matter[3] movement was picking up momentum, and conversations surrounding race, racism, and racial bias in police shootings were salient in the news. However, the educator did not take the child's comment as an opportunity to delve into current events and inquire why the child may have thought negatively of police officers. This example demonstrates a "missed opportunity" for a teachable moment. One educator noted,

> Ummm you know racial diversity, it is kind of funny, because it is a big topic. Yet, I don't really see it coming up in my classroom as much. I mean, I intentionally try, and I think a lot of this is the diversity professional development program aspect of it and everything, I want to include all the families, but right now, especially, I mean…. I have a pretty diverse group. But like I had a woman come in and read in Spanish because her son, they only speak Spanish at home.

The excerpt above indicates that this educator took racial diversity to mean linguistic diversity. As a White educator, discussing cultural or linguistic diversity may be deemed as a safer topic than addressing race or racism. The other educator, when asked about how race or racial diversity is addressed with children, described an incident with a parent who expressed discrimination towards a Latina educator; the parent asked for Spanish to be removed from the classroom. The educator referenced ways in which parents took issues with linguistic or racial diversity, however, she rarely mentioned incidents of directly addressing race or racism with children herself.

In terms of classroom materials, Classroom 1 largely lacked dolls, books, and materials that represented racial diversity; on the other hand, Classroom 2 had plenty of multicultural supplies and books representing racial and cultural diversity, and books depicting racism. Interestingly, regardless of the materials present, *both* educators were largely silent on the topic of race. Even activities and books that held the potential to facilitate discussions about race and racism were used in ways that avoided explicitly addressing these topics. For instance, one of the educators discussed teaching children

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[3] #BlackLivesMatter was created in 2012 after Trayvon Martin's murderer, George Zimmerman was acquitted for his crime, and dead 17-year old Trayvon was posthumously placed on trial for his own murder in the U.S. Rooted in the experiences of Black people who actively resist dehumanization. #BlackLivesMatter is a call to action and a response to the virulent anti-black racism that permeates U.S. Society (www.blacklivesmatter.com)

about the Civil Rights Movement and about picketing in particular:

> I'll give you an example, from the civil rights, we're celebrating 50 years…It was a big thing for the families that were in the classroom at the time, so I thought to myself, "How can we get them [children] to understand what a picket line was, and what they had to go through?"…we made our own picket, so the children made signs of things that they would like to see changed at the center, and then picketed, so their voice was heard… they wanted more fruit at lunch, and a bit more variety of fruit. [Our director] took that into consideration, and she changed it…and not only did we walk with our picket signs throughout the center, we walked all through the campus...It's not purposeful, me sitting down and saying, "this is what racism is," but them seeing it…children need visuals and the activity hands-on to go with it. Just sitting down there, and talking to them about it isn't going to work.

Although the educator recognized that children need hands-on activities and visuals to reinforce what is being taught, it is unlikely that children will make the connection between picketing and racism on their own. Young children think in very concrete terms and have difficulty understanding abstract concepts unless these concepts are explicitly demonstrated *and* verbally labeled (see Ramsey, 2009). Therefore, children likely do not make the connection among civil rights, picketing, and racial discrimination, unless explicitly stated so.

Discussion

Findings indicate that even educators who are familiar with the anti-bias approach and are motivated to use it, struggle with its implementation, particularly regarding race and racism. Educators were more comfortable with countering gender stereotypes and sexism as compared to racial stereotypes and racism. One reason for this may lie in educators' identities and past experiences with discrimination. Both educators identified as female and have presumably been the victims of sexism at some point in their lives. Therefore, their personal identities and experiences may have motivated them to break down gender barriers for children. On the other hand, both educators identified as White, and therefore likely have limited personal experiences with racism and related motivations to address race and racism in the classroom.

Additionally, educators' comfort level with addressing racial issues is likely rather low. As other studies indicate, early childhood educators often feel unprepared or uncomfortable discussing race and racism with young children, and need support and training in this area (Bullock, 1996; Farago, Sanders, & Gaias, 2015; Priest et al., 2014; Vittrup, 2016). Even when educators *do* report feeling comfortable addressing race in the classroom, there is often a disconnect between their comfort level and reported practices, which tend to be colorblind or tokenistic (Vittrup, 2016). Scholars urge early childhood educators to reflect on their own biases and prejudices (D'Angelo & Dixey, 2001; Murray & Urban, 2012), to take instances of racism very seriously, and to invite community members who are engaged in anti-racist work to the classroom (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). It is also important for educators to examine how current racial ideologies are used to maintain White privilege, and how anti-racist practices can bring awareness to and counteract racial privilege (Earick, 2009). Teacher preparation and professional development programs can assist in identifying and interrupting educators' privilege and biases.

It seems that educators need to be aware of societal inequalities to be able to address them in the classroom. For instance, current findings as well as previous research have shown that boys gain access to scarce resources in the absence of an adult, whereas resources are shared more equitably when an adult is present (Powlishta & Maccoby, 1990). Educators may need to put on gender-conscious (and race-conscious) proverbial glasses, and be aware of the limited opportunities girls have in science and engineering,

to implement anti-bias practices. In the present study, educators could have offered children the opportunity to take turns at the "take-apart station," to encourage gender equitable access to playing with tools.

A note about the use of gender or race labels is that, although their use has been implicated in stereotype development (e.g., Bigler & Liben, 2006), the use of race or gender labels in "anti-bias" contexts may reduce prejudice (Hughes, Bigler, & Levy, 2007; Lamb, Bigler, Liben, & Green, 2009; Pahlke, Bigler, & Martin, 2014). It is impossible and undesirable to avoid the use of labels when dispelling stereotypes associated with race and gender. Research indicates that when social categories are emphasized in the context of anti-bias or prejudice reduction interventions, children's gender and racial prejudice decreases (Hughes et al., 2007; Pahlke et al., 2014; Lamb et al., 2009).

Although it is encouraging that educators explicitly addressed gender exclusion and gender stereotypes, they tended to rely on indirect methods, such as questioning children, rather than providing children with explicit anti-bias information. Educators may have felt that it is not developmentally appropriate to explicitly engage children with topics of racism and sexism, and to "impose" anti-bias views on children. However, as discussed by Patricia Ramsey (2009), young children think in concrete terms and may not understand implied or abstract messages about gender and race; these messages need to be explicit, both verbally and visually. The connection among unfairness, racism, and sexism needs to be made explicitly *for* and *with* children; this is why the role of early childhood educators is indispensable to anti-bias education (Farago et al., 2015).

Limitations and Future Directions

Although this study adds to literature documenting the realities and challenges of implementing the anti-bias approach (e.g., Bullock, 1996; Duffy & Gibbs, 2013; Swadener & Miller-Marsh, 1995), certain parameters of the research warrant examination. Due to the difficulty of identifying and recruiting educators who labeled themselves as "anti-bias" educators, the participating educators were only "familiar with" and "exposed to" the anti-bias approach. The educators, at the time of this study, had not fully read the book about the anti-bias approach (by Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010). Therefore, the findings should be interpreted with caution and may not be generalizable to educators who are self-described "anti-bias educators," fully committed to social justice work. It is possible that in explicitly social justice oriented early childhood classrooms, more would have been done to address race, racism, gender, and sexism. However, the educators included in this study most likely possessed a more in-depth understanding of the anti-bias approach than the vast majority of early childhood educators in the U.S., who are largely unfamiliar with anti-bias education (e.g., Farago & Swadener, 2016).

Regarding future work, researchers should assess children's perceptions of educators' anti-bias practices and link anti-bias practices to children's well-being. It is important to take children's cognitive development level, unique life circumstances, and personal histories into account when planning and evaluating the anti-bias approach (Farago & Swadener, 2016). Future studies should include children's voices and understandings of the anti-bias approach to better understand the impact this approach has on *all* children.

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