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# **Predictors of Racial Apathy among Emerging Adults**

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No: 2018-3  
<http://RARE.rice.edu/>

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### ABSTRACT

Forman (2004) and Forman and Lewis (2006, 2015) theorize that the expression of contemporary white racial prejudice often assumes the form of *racial apathy* (i.e., not caring about racial inequality). Extending their work, the current study introduces a new measure of racial apathy and considers its correlates. Analyzing nationally representative survey data from 13 to 17 year old white respondents in the 2003 National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR), we examine previously identified correlates of racial apathy. We also examine new correlates. Results suggest that previously identified correlates (e.g., gender and parental education) appear robust, and new correlates (e.g., interracial dating and living in a multi-race household) deserve attention. In addition, supplementary analyses confirm that racial apathy expression remains stable at the population level over time and there is considerable variance left in racial apathy to explain. We conclude that changes in the expression of white racial prejudice mandate use of myriad measures to assess how whites feel about non-whites, and egalitarian principles and ameliorative policies.

**KEYWORDS:** correlates; National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR); racial apathy; racial attitudes; white racial prejudice

## Predictors of Racial Apathy among Emerging Adults

### BACKGROUND

Systematic and sustained study of white racial prejudice occupies a place of crucial significance in disciplines including political science (Huddy and Feldman 2009; Kinder and Sanders 1996), psychology (Allport 1954; Sears and Henry 2003), and sociology (Blumer 1958; Krysan 2000; Schuman et al. 1998). In fact, research on white racial prejudice represents a long-standing area of inquiry and an interdisciplinary one, attracting scholars from different disciplines and compelling those scholars to consider theories outside their home fields. These scholars typically attempt to describe white racial prejudice by analyzing survey data. These scholars hypothesize that white racial prejudice reveals critical information about race relations (Allport 1954; Feagin and Eckberg 1980; Krysan 2000), whites' behavior (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975; Greenwald, Banaji, and Nosek 2015; Huddy and Feldman 2009; LaPiere 1934), the health of the U.S. democracy (Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith 1997; Kluegel and Smith 1982; Myrdal 1944), and durability of racial conflict (Blumer 1958; Brown et al. 2009; Kinder and Sanders 1996).

In terms of race relations, the United States has changed dramatically over the past 60 years. Similarly, how whites express racial prejudice has changed dramatically. Across that time span, blatant attitudes yielded to subtle and seemingly principled anti-black antipathy, and situational expressions of ill-will (e.g., aversive prejudice, Dovidio and Gaertner 1996). In general, it became socially unacceptable for whites to speak negatively about non-white racial groups. Thus, concerns about response bias caused by social desirability in surveys are justified. Moreover, a recent study by Wodtke (2016) invokes *ideological refinement theory* to predict

that intelligent whites understand what race-related survey questions are *really* asking and thus, provide sophisticated answers that mask their true beliefs. Along those lines, some scholars characterize survey data as unreliable sources of information regarding white racial prejudice, as confirmed by the increasing popularity of the semantic priming paradigm (Fazio et al. 1995) and indirect, unobtrusive measures (e.g., the Implicit Attitude Test, Greenwald and Banaji 1995; Greenwald, Nosek, and Banaji 2003; Greenwald et al. 2015). Whether priming and indirect measures capture white racial prejudice remains an open question. Still, problems specifying white racial prejudice ensure social scientists stumble when explaining its significance, and constructing valid and reliable measures of it. We turn next to describing historical changes in how whites express racial prejudice.

#### CHANGES IN HOW WHITES EXPRESS RACIAL PREJUDICE

In the United States 60 years ago, it was commonplace for white respondents participating in surveys to express “mean-spirited,” old-fashioned, blatant, overt, cruel, and hostile anti-black feelings, and supremacist beliefs (Bobo et al. 1997; Brown et al. 2009; Forman 2004; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Mueller 2017; Schuman et al. 1998). Survey researchers asked without hesitation whether whites felt disgust for blacks, would marry blacks, would live near blacks, believed whites were smarter, despised blacks, felt coldly toward blacks, would move from a neighborhood if black families moved into it, would send their kids to schools with blacks, and so on. White respondents would willingly divulge their black antipathy and state that racial integration, contact, and equality were unnecessary, immoral, and repulsive. Presently, such prejudicial expressions are not socially acceptable. However, behind closed

doors, it is not unreasonable to suspect that whites routinely express prejudice in a manner scholars would label old-fashioned (see Picca and Feagin 2007).

Whites' racial attitudes are complex, multidimensional, and ambiguous. For example, whites can express negative feelings and hold discriminatory policy positions, while simultaneously emphasizing their support for equality of opportunities and outcomes. In addition, it is now commonplace for white respondents in surveys to express racial prejudice in line with the *new racism* paradigm. According to this paradigm, whites today gravitate toward ideological positions supporting cultural and value-based deficiencies in blacks (e.g., low levels of work ethic, individualism, self-reliance, self-discipline, etc.), rather than endorsing biological deficiencies as the primary explanation for why blacks have not achieved a high status in society (Bobo et al. 1997; Kluegel 1990). The principle-implementation gap or principle-policy paradox is one example of how the new racism paradigm makes the study of white racial prejudice more complex (Bobo et al. 1997; Schuman et al. 1998; Wodtke 2016). Whereas most whites will no longer openly express hostile feelings toward blacks, those same whites are unlikely to support ameliorative policies that redistribute scarce resources.

The new racism paradigm led to a conceptual and measurement revolution resulting in aversive racism (Dovidio and Gaertner 1996), symbolic racism (Henry and Sears 2002; Sears and Henry 2003), subtle prejudice (Meertens and Pettigrew 1997; Pettigrew and Meertens 1995), modern prejudice (McConahay and Hough 1976), racial resentment (Kinder and Sanders 1996), laissez-faire racism (Bobo et al. 1997), and color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Mueller 2017). Actual measures accompany some of these concepts (e.g., symbolic prejudice, Henry and Sears

2002), whereas other concepts (e.g., laissez-faire racism and color-blind racism) embody ideological positions regarding how whites can express racial prejudice.

Scholars consider contemporary forms of white racial prejudice insidious because they are hard to identify and blend anti-black affect, political conservatism, and support for principled values, in unknown quantities. But overselling the significance of white racial prejudice can be dangerous--attitudes are just attitudes. To sharpen that point, racial stratification involves a material reality (e.g., health, wealth, education, and incarceration disparities) representing legacies and modern ramifications of racism, implicating mechanisms like institutional discrimination (Carmichael and Hamilton 1967; Feagin and Eckberg 1980), which occur on a level far above individual attitudes. Further, studies confirm a weak or heavily mediated relationship between whites' attitudes and behavior (Allport 1954; Dovidio and Gaertner 1996; Fishbein and Ajzen 1975; Huddy and Feldman 2009; Lapiere 1934).

In addition, emergence of modern forms of racial prejudice does not mean that "mean-spirited" and hostile forms are irrelevant (Brown et al. 2009; Huddy and Feldman 2009), although some scholars assume that position. Every form of white racial prejudice, even those with low levels of expression in the twenty-first century, conveys something about racial animus and white privilege (Blumer 1958). For example, Kleinpenning and Hagendoorn (1993:24) theorize that white racial prejudice exists on cumulative dimensions moving, in sequence from non-racist attitudes, aversive racism, ethnocentrism, symbolic prejudice, and ending with biological racism. As another example, Brown and colleagues (2009) demonstrated that belief in biological race differences predicts whites' expressions of traditional and modern prejudice. Yet, the question remains: *What is the most productive way to study white racial*

*prejudice when white respondents understand that expressing prejudice is socially*

*unacceptable?* The next section summarizes what we know about racial apathy (Forman 2004; Forman and Lewis 2006, 2015)--a new and socially acceptable form of white racial prejudice.

#### RACIAL APATHY--A NEW FORM OF PREJUDICE

Validating arguments in prior sections, Forman and Lewis (2006:196) wrote: "No longer taking the form of explicit racial animosity, racial prejudice is instead increasingly expressed more subtly and indirectly (Bobo et al. 1997; Forman 2004; Pettigrew and Meertens 1995). As a result, the continued focus on traditional, overt anti-black or anti-Latino prejudice as the main form that racial antipathy takes limits our understanding of a key factor in the perpetuation of racial and ethnic inequalities." They argue that *racial apathy*, defined as not caring about racial inequality, is the foundation of contemporary white racial prejudice.

Using data from the 1976-2003 Monitoring the Future (MTF) study, which includes repeated, nationally representative, cross-sectional surveys of high school seniors (17 and 18 year olds), they measured racial apathy as agreement with the following statement: "Maybe some minority groups do get unfair treatment, but that's no business of mine." The response categories ranged from 1. "Strongly disagree" to 5. "Strongly agree." Similarly, using data from the 2005 Chicago Area study (CAS), they measured racial apathy as agreement with this statement: "First, it's not really my problem if racial minority groups experience unfair treatment and need help." The response metric ranged from 1. "Strongly disagree" to 4. "Strongly agree."

When analyzing MTF data, Forman and Lewis (2006) reported that more young whites in 2003 (17%) as compared to 1976 (10%) expressed racial apathy (i.e., agreed that minority groups may receive unfair treatment but it is not their concern). In addition, when analyzing CAS data, racial apathy correlated positively with opposing interracial marriage; cold feeling thermometer scores toward black and Latinos; symbolic racism; perceived threat; and negative stereotypes about blacks and Latinos (i.e., they are unintelligent, prefer to live off welfare, are hard to get along with, and do not supervise their children). Specifically, Pearson correlation coefficients between racial apathy and these measures ranged from .17 to .37 and averaged .29, net of age, gender, family income, education, home ownership, and political ideology. Moreover, racial apathy positively predicted opposition to race-targeted policies.

Forman and Lewis (2006) conclude that racial apathy demonstrates convergent validity and racial apathy manifests a new form of white racial prejudice. At this point, it is fair to conclude that racial apathy appears a viable concept. It is also fair to conclude that we need more information about its measurement, distribution, and correlates.

## CURRENT STUDY

The current study extends work by Forman (2004) and Forman and Lewis (2006, 2015), who described racial apathy and declared it a new, socially acceptable form of white racial prejudice. Specifically, we introduce a new measure of racial apathy and investigate its distribution and correlates using survey data from 13 to 17 year old white respondents in the 2003 National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR). The research question that motivates the present study is: *What are correlates of racial apathy among white youth?*



## METHODS

### *Data*

The 2003 National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) was a nationally representative, random-digit-dial (RDD) telephone survey of 3,290 English and Spanish-speaking respondents between 13 and 17 years old, and their parents. The field period lasted from July 2002 to April 2003. The American Association of Public Opinion (AAPOR) response rate was 57 percent. The study investigated: (1) the influence of religion and spirituality in young people's lives; (2) effective practices in religious, moral, and social formation; and (3) perceived effectiveness of religious programs and opportunities for adolescents (see Denton, Pearce, and Smith 2008 for more information). The questionnaire included an array of questions about religiosity, religious participation, morality, problem behaviors, dating, attachment to school, and so on.

Analyses comparing the 2003 NSYR data with U.S. Census data including households with adolescents, and with comparable national adolescent surveys such as Monitoring the Future (MTF), confirmed that the 2003 NSYR exhibited no identifiable sampling and non-response biases. For additional information on the research design, sampling frame, and data collection process, see <https://youthandreligion.nd.edu/>. To view the questionnaires and codebooks or download the data, see <http://www.thearda.com/Archive/NSYR.asp>.

### *Measures*

*Racial apathy.* We measured racial apathy with this question: "How much do you personally care or not about equality between different racial groups?" Responses were 1.

“Very much,” 2. “Somewhat,” 3. “A little,” and 4. “Not really.” See Table 1. Because racial apathy is defined explicitly as *not caring* (see Forman 2004; Forman and Lewis 2006), the NSYR measure manifests face validity and better captures the construct. Yet, the measure probably underestimates racial apathy because respondents understand that caring about racial equality is a socially desirable thing to do.

*Correlates of racial apathy.* Forman and Lewis (2015) classified correlates of racial apathy into two categories: (1) social values and (2) academic orientation. Replicating their approach and including the same correlates, we created two categories: (1) social background and (2) academic orientation. Gender, parental education, region, and daily importance of faith captured social background. Parents reported their children’s gender. Parental education captured the highest level of educational attainment either residential parent attained. We coded parental education: 1. “Less than high school,” 2. “High school completed,” 3. “Some college,” 4. “College completed,” and 5. “Graduate or professional degree.” Four categories indicated region: 1. “Northeast,” 2. “Midwest,” 3. “South,” and 4. “West.” This question tapped daily importance of faith: “How important or unimportant is religious faith in shaping how you live your daily life?” We recoded the responses to: 0. “Not important,” 1. “Not very important,” 2. “Somewhat important,” 3. “Very important,” and 4. “Extremely important.”

Three correlates measured academic orientation: (1) grades, (2) educational aspirations, and (3) school difficulties. Grades was a dichotomy comparing students who earned “all As or mostly As” to their peers. The following question measured educational aspirations: “Given realistic limitations, how far in school do you think you actually will go?” Responses included: 1. “No farther in school,” 2. “Some high school,” 3. “High school graduate,” 4. “Vocational-

Technical school after high school,” 5. “Some college or Associate's degree,” 6. “College graduate,” and 7. “Post-graduate or professional school.” Ever suspended, expelled, or dropped out in the last two years measured school difficulties. The question was: “In the last two years, how many times, if any, have you been suspended or expelled from school?” We coded this question as “yes” and “never.” Respondents who dropped out of school were skipped out of the suspension/expulsion question, but we coded them as “yes” for school difficulties.

We considered five new correlates capturing *interracial contact and relationships*. We modeled: (1) multi-race household, (2) interracial dating, (3) different race mentor, (4) homogenous religious services, and (5) volunteer in diverse communities. This question captured multi-race household: “Are all the members of your household of the same race or ethnic group as you, or not?” Respondents who lived in multi-race households were coded “yes,” otherwise they were coded “No.” Interracial dating combined three items: (1) “How many total different people, if any, have you dated since you turned 13 years old?,” (2) “If only dated one person since turning 13 years old, was the person you dated of a different race, or not?,” and (3) “If dated more than one person since turning 13 years old, how many, if any, of these people you dated were of a different race?” The final constructed variable included two responses: “Yes,” which meant the respondent dated interracially, and “Never,” which meant the respondent never dated *or* never dated interracially. Different race mentor combined three items: (1) “Roughly how many total adults, if any, do you have in your life that you can turn to when you need support, advice, or help-not including your parents?,” (2) “If only one adult to turn to for support and advice, is this person of a different race than you, or not?,” and (3) “If more than one adult to go to for support and advice, of those adults that you can turn to, how

many, if any, of them are of a different race than you are?" The final constructed variable included two responses: "Yes" and "No." "Yes" meant having at least one adult mentor of a different race and "No" meant having no adult mentor *or* no adult mentor of a different race.

We combined two questions to capture attending homogenous religious services: (1) "In the last 12 months, how often have you been attending religious services, not including weddings, baptisms, and funerals?" and (2) "If attend religious services more than twice a year, about how many of the people in the religious services that you normally attend are the same race as you?" The response categories for the second question were: 1. "All," 2. "Nearly all," 3. "Most," 4. "About half," 5. "Few," and 6. "None." The final constructed variable included three response categories: 0. do not attend "more than twice a year", 1. mixed race services (i.e., not "All"), and 2. same race services (i.e., "All").

We combined two questions to measure volunteering in diverse communities: (1) "In the last year, how much, if at all, have you done organized volunteer work or community service?" and (2) "If you have done volunteer work or community service a few times, occasionally, or regularly in the last year, how much, if at all, did your volunteer or service activities bring you into direct contact with people of a different race, religion, or economic class?" The final constructed variable included four response categories: (1) those respondents who never volunteered, (2) those who volunteered but had no contact, (3) those who had some or a little contact, and (4) those who had a lot of contact.

### *Analytic Strategies*

We restricted analyses to white respondents and deleted cases listwise. We also deleted

respondents from a Jewish oversample (n=80), which was not part of the original nationally representative, RDD telephone sample. We applied a sampling weight (i.e., `rweight2`) that adjusts for differential probabilities of selection and incorporates post-stratification adjustments for census region and household income to correct for sampling bias related to these variables (see <http://www.thearda.com/Archive/Files/Descriptions/NSYRW1.asp> for more information about the sampling weight).

Our estimation sample size equaled 1,935 white respondents out of an available sample size of 2,091 white respondents--see Table 2. Unlike Forman and Lewis (2015) who modeled racial apathy as a discrete numeric dependent variable, we treated racial apathy (appropriately) as an ordinal variable, which necessitated application of regression models for ordered outcomes. The most popular of which is the cumulative ordered logit model. Appropriateness of the cumulative ordered logit model depends upon not violating the proportional odds assumption (Williams 2006). Sensitivity tests indicated that our initial models violated the proportional odds assumption, confirming that treating racial apathy as a discrete numeric variable creates bias. As a work-around, we fit *partial* proportional odds regression models (Williams 2006) using *gologit2* in Stata 14.2. These models allowed estimates (i.e., odds ratios and standard errors) to vary across ordinal thresholds.

We predicted racial apathy using correlates that were mostly categorical. The final Stata \*.do file is available upon request. We labeled estimates with *p-values* less than .10, .05, and .01 as statistically significant. Given that we could find but two prior empirical studies of racial apathy, we think it is appropriate to report *marginal significance* (i.e.,  $p < .10$ ).

## RESULTS

Table 1 reports the weighted univariate distribution of racial apathy among white NYSR respondents. Most respondents expressed little racial apathy. Specifically, in regard to caring about racial inequality, 50 percent responded “Very much,” 28 percent “Somewhat,” 6 percent “A little,” and 16 percent “Not really.” The 16 percent category coincides with estimates of racial apathy reported in Forman and Lewis (2006) using the 1976-2003 Monitoring the Future (MTF) data and the 2005 Chicago Area Study (CAS) data.

Table 2 presents weighted descriptive statistics for the racial apathy correlates. The estimation sample was split evenly by gender. On average, respondents’ parents had some college education. Most respondents lived in the South. Respondents said faith was “Very” important to “Somewhat” important in their daily lives. Roughly 24 percent reported earning “all As or mostly As” in school. In our estimation sample, educational aspirations were high: respondents hoped to graduate from college. Only 15 percent of respondents had school difficulties. Interracial contact was uncommon. Few (5 percent) respondents lived in a multi-race household. Approximately 23 percent reported ever dating interracially or having a different race mentor. About 18 percent did not attend religious services regularly. For respondents who did attend, 14 percent attended homogeneous religious services whereas 68 percent attended mixed race services (see Table 2). About one-third of respondents never volunteered. When respondents volunteered, 23 percent had a lot of contact, 40 percent had some or a little contact, and 7 percent volunteered but did so outside diverse communities.

Table 3 presents weighted estimates (i.e., odds ratios and standard errors) from partial proportional odds regression models linking racial apathy with correlates representing *social*

*background* and *academic orientation*. Three models are shown: Model 1a, Model 1b, and Model 1c. Model 1a compares respondents stating they cared “Very much” to respondents who said “Somewhat,” “A little,” or “Not really.” Model 1b compares respondents who cared “Very much” or “Somewhat” to those who said “A little” or “Not really.” Model 1c compares respondents who cared “Very much,” “Somewhat,” or “A little” to respondents who said “Not really.” Estimates in bold were variant, showing different associations by threshold.

Compared to caring “Very much,” girls had 35 percent smaller odds than boys of caring “Somewhat,” “A little,” or not at all. As tendency to express racial apathy increased, girls had 1.07 larger odds (n.s.) of saying “Not really.” High parental education predicted smaller odds of expressing racial apathy across all thresholds. Living in the West predicted marginally larger odds of endorsing racial apathy, compared to living in the Northeast.

Daily importance of faith predicted smaller odds of expressing racial apathy. This association was invariant across thresholds. Respondents earning “all As or mostly As” had 28 percent smaller odds than their peers of saying “Somewhat,” “A little,” or “Not really” compared to saying “Very much.” But, the odds varied across thresholds, becoming even smaller as expressed racial apathy intensified. High educational aspirations correlated with 20 percent smaller odds of saying “Somewhat,” “A little,” or “Not really,” compared to “Very much.” This association was invariant across thresholds. School difficulties associated with 29 percent smaller odds of caring “Somewhat,” “A little,” or saying “Not really,” compared to responding “Very much.” Although not significant, school difficulties associated with larger odds of expressing racial apathy at higher thresholds.

Table 4 presents weighted estimates (i.e., odds ratios and standard errors) from partial proportional odds regressions models linking racial apathy with correlates representing social values, academic orientation, and *interracial contact and relationships*. Three models are shown: Model 2a, Model 2b, and Model 2c. Model 2a compares respondents who said they cared “Very much” to those who said “Somewhat,” “A little,” or “Not really.” Model 2b compares respondents who cared “Very much” or “Somewhat” to those who said “A little” or “Not really,” Model 2c compares those respondents who cared “Very much,” “Somewhat,” or “A little” to those who reported not caring at all. Adjusting for the social background and academic orientation correlates, the interracial contact and relationships correlates significantly ( $p < .0000$ ) improved overall model fit (design-based F-statistic 6.22 with 10 and 2,973 df).

Compared to boys, girls had 31 percent smaller odds of saying “Somewhat,” “A little,” or “Not really,” as opposed to saying “Very much.” However, girls and boys had similar odds of expressing racial apathy at high thresholds. High parental education associated with .86 smaller odds of expressing racial apathy. But, parental education’s odds became smaller as expressions of racial apathy intensified. Compared to respondents living in the Northeast, those in the West and South had larger odds of expressing racial apathy. Daily importance of faith predicted .78 smaller odd of endorsing racial apathy. Its association was invariant. The influence of grades was invariant: Respondents with “all As or mostly As” had 38 percent smaller odds of expressing racial apathy, compared to their peers. High educational aspirations associated with .82 smaller odds of expressing racial apathy across all thresholds. In Models 2a, 2b, and 2c, school difficulties was statistically insignificant.



Living in a multi-race household marginally predicted .63 smaller odds of caring “Somewhat,” “A little,” or not at all, compared to caring “Very much.” This association was invariant. Dating interracially was associated with 37 percent smaller odds of saying “Somewhat,” “A little,” or “Not really” compared to saying “Very much.” The influence of interracial dating varied by threshold, with odds becoming larger but insignificant when racial apathy expression intensified. Respondents with a different race mentor had 22 percent smaller odds of expressing racial apathy across all thresholds. Compared to their counterparts who did not attend religious services, attendees of homogeneous religious services had 64 percent larger odds of expressing racial apathy. This was true across all thresholds. Volunteering in diverse communities was not a statically important predictor of racial apathy.

## DISCUSSION

We introduced a new measure of *racial apathy*, which Forman (2004) and Forman and Lewis (2006, 2015) theorized is an emerging form of white racial prejudice. Perhaps more pointedly, they theorized racial apathy represents a contemporary, socially acceptable form of racial animus. In addition, we investigated correlates of racial apathy identified initially by Forman and Lewis (2006, 2015). We used the same correlates they investigated, and sorted them into two categories: (1) social background and (2) academic orientation. For social background, all correlates were statistically significant and consistent with published results. The exception was region, which was not as robust a correlate in this study. Because we treated racial apathy (appropriately) as an ordinal variable, we could estimate whether correlates’ associations were invariant to thresholds defining racial apathy expression. For example, girls

rejected racial apathy at low thresholds, but were more apathetic than boys at high thresholds of racial apathy. For academic orientation, respondents' grades, educational aspirations, and school difficulties were statistically significant. In general, high performing students were more likely to express low racial apathy. For example, high aspiration students consistently expressed low racial apathy. The influence of having school difficulties depended upon the threshold for racial apathy, but at high thresholds it appears that white youth experiencing school difficulties are more likely to express racial apathy.

Further contributing to the existing literature, we introduced predictors related to *interracial contact and relationships*. Specifically, we modeled: (1) multi-race household, (2) interracial dating, (3) different race mentor, (4) homogeneous religious services, and (5) volunteer in diverse communities. All were statistically important predictors except volunteer in diverse communities. Specifically, white youth from households where different races lived, who dated interracially, and who received support and advice from a non-white mentor had smaller odds of expressing racial apathy. In contrast, youth who attended homogenous services were more likely to express racial apathy. Introducing these new correlates alongside the social background and academic orientation correlates altered associations of parental education, school difficulties, and grades with racial apathy. Specifically, high levels of parental education consistently reduced odds of expressing racial apathy, but its association became even stronger at high thresholds of racial apathy when interracial contact and relationships correlates were entered into the model. Having school difficulties became statistically insignificant, and the association between grades and racial apathy became invariant across thresholds. Thus, conclusions in prior studies of correlates of racial apathy (Forman and Lewis 2006, 2015) that

ignore interracial contact and relationships may not be robust. Consistent with intergroup contact theory (see Allport 1954; Pettigrew 1998; Pettigrew et al. 2011), correlates capturing interracial contact and relationships predicted low expression of racial apathy.

Extrapolating from the regression models (see Tables 3 and 4), we deduce that the typical white youth endorsing racial apathy is a boy, whose parents had less than a high school education, who lives in the West or South, is not religious, has poor academic outcomes, and avoids interracial relationships or contact. To sum, the present study's findings corroborate previously identified correlates and suggest that new correlates capturing interracial contact and relationships are important.

Moving forward, we suggest scholars studying white racial prejudice include myriad measures of racial antipathy in surveys. That means old-fashioned, modern, symbolic, affective, cognitive, policy support, etc. measures and racial apathy. By including multiple manifestations of white racial prejudice, scholars could construct a nomological net specifying latent relationships and observed connections among forms of prejudice (see, for example, Brown et al. 2009; Forman and Lewis 2006; Kleinpenning and Hagendoorn 1993; Meertens and Pettigrew 1997; Sears and Henry 2003; Williams et al. 1999). Also necessary is concurrent inclusion of social desirability scales (e.g., Marlowe and Crowne 1961) in future studies of racial attitudes.

### *Why Racial Apathy Matters*

Anderson (2016) hypothesizes that black progress causes *white rage*. She argues that when blacks make important gains (broadly defined) in society and their lot in life improves, whites become angry and resentful. Following that logic, it seems reasonable to suspect that

black progress also leads to racial apathy. Apathetic whites may believe that highly visible black athletes, celebrities, politicians, and scholars who are well off financially signal that the playing field is level. These would be whites who exist in a habitus where interracial contact is rare. Hence, their views of black progress may be shaped by images of black athletes who earn hundred million dollar contracts and the myth of able-bodied, black welfare recipients who cheat the system to avoid work. These would be whites who have no first-hand knowledge of racial disparities in health, wealth, education, and incarceration. Their knowledge about the meaning and significance of racial inequality is often anecdotal, sensationalized, and hearsay. They believe racism to be a historic relic and evidence suggesting that racism operates today is *fake news*. These would be whites who state, 'Why are you blaming me, I never owned slaves.' Forman and Lewis (2006:179-180) and Mueller (2017) make a similar point when they assert that racial apathy and racial ignorance share a symbiotic and synergistic connection. Both attitudes work in concert to protect and obscure white privilege.

If our logic rings true, then the presidential election of Obama increased racial apathy among whites. It is clear that some whites today think: 'How hard can it be to be black when Barack Obama proved that a black person could get elected to the nation's highest office.' Related, it is not unreasonable to assert that racial apathy has important political consequences. For example, projections indicate that 70 percent of U.S. citizens will live in 15 states by 2040, thus 30 percent of voters will choose 70 of 100 U.S. Senators (Bump 2018). That 30 percent will be older, whiter, more likely to be men, and more likely to live in rural places compared to the 70 percent. That demographic group may fit the high racial apathy profile.

Racial apathy therefore matters because it is an inertia that prevents acknowledgement and redress of persistent racial inequality (Forman and Lewis 2006:177; Mueller 2017). Racial apathy also coincides with the cherished American value of rugged individualism, expecting that blacks and other non-whites should take responsibility for improving their own lives, rather than invoking concepts like white privilege, institutional discrimination, micro-aggressions, racial trauma, resource hoarding, and so on. We speculate that racial apathy may show psychological benefits for some whites because it could reduce their guilt and frustration. Finally, racial apathy matters theoretically because it fits under the color-blind ideology umbrella (see Bobo et al 1997; Bonilla-Silva 2003; Forman 2004; Lewis 2004; Mueller 2017).

### *The Origins of Racial Apathy*

As previously alluded to, scholars should theorize about the origins of racial apathy. Is racial apathy taught at home? Is it learned from family members? Descriptions of how adults act to reinforce structural inequality by “not caring” might be informed by what we know about race socialization in white homes (Brown et al. 2007; Lewis 2004). Alternatively, is racial apathy created by structural conditions and/or lived experiences? Whites who express racial apathy could have been blocked from economic opportunities when the manufacturing sector collapsed and the service sector expanded in the new economy. Racially apathetic whites may share experiences such as not achieving high socioeconomic status and not having interracial contact. These experiences ultimately render blacks as threatening or invisible (Lewis 2004). Older whites, who attended an integrated high school during the civil rights movement, confirm

this sentiment when describing why they support a culture of *racial avoidance* (Forman and Lewis 2006:188-90).

One way to address whether racial apathy is learned or contingent upon structural conditions and/or lived experiences would be to trace its prevalence across biographical time using longitudinal data. Therefore, we investigate population level and individual level stability of racial apathy using data from the 2003 National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) and 2007-8 NSYR follow-up survey. Respondents were 18 to 24 years old in 2007-8. Specifically, we compared weighted distributions of racial apathy and then concordance in racial apathy at two time points (n=1,614). We applied a longitudinal sampling weight (i.e., `rweight2_w3`) that adjusts for changes in the distribution of NSYR respondents by census regions and income groups resulting from sample attrition.

At the population level, 50 percent of NSYR respondents cared “Very much” about racial equality in 2003, whereas 48 percent cared “Very Much” about racial equality in 2007-8. Roughly 27 percent and 26 percent said they cared “Somewhat” in 2003 and 2007-8, respectively. In 2003, 6 percent cared “A Little,” whereas in 2007-8, 8 percent cared “A little.” The percent of whites who did not care at all increased from 16 to 18 over time. Net of sample attrition, the univariate population level distribution of racial apathy remained virtually unchanged. When we tested whether the distribution of racial apathy varied across time, the unadjusted Pearson  $\chi^2$  statistic (4.93 with 3 df) and the design-based F-statistic (1.71 with 3 and 9,674.39 df) were not statistically significant ( $p=.3190$ ). These statistics confirm population level stability in racial apathy over time.

At the individual level, however, whites' expressions of racial apathy changed considerably over time, meaning respondents were likely to respond differently in 2003 versus 2007-8. Table 5 shows a weighted cross-tabulation of racial apathy measured at two time points. Row percentages and their standard errors are shown. About 60 percent of whites who cared "Very much" in 2003 cared "Very much" in 2007-8. Therefore, 40 percent of NSYR respondents who cared "Very much" in 2003 cared less in 2007-8. The majority of respondents who cared "Somewhat" in 2003 cared "Very much" in 2007-8. About 25 percent of respondents who cared "A little" in 2003 did not care at all in 2007-8. Although 36 percent of respondents saying "Not Really" repeated that response five years later, 30 percent who did not care in 2003 cared "Very much" in 2007-8, representing a dramatic shift. It appears that racial apathy is dynamic and responsive to lived experiences. Confirming that, the unadjusted Pearson  $\chi^2$  statistic (159.64 with 9 df) and the design-based F-statistic (12.80 with 14,021.40 with 9 df) were statistically significant ( $p < .0000$ ).

### *Limitations and Future Directions*

In this study, we introduced a new (and arguably better) measure of racial apathy. We also validated previously investigated correlates and modeled new correlates of racial apathy. Further, we provided evidence that racial apathy is stable at the population level while unstable at the individual level over time, a conclusion beyond the reach of prior studies that strictly analyzed cross-sectional data. Still, this study is not without limitations and those limitations should direct future research.

First, researchers must explore racial apathy using longitudinal data--the NSYR provides an ideal data source for such analyses. A logical next step would be consideration of what predicts prospective changes in racial apathy at the individual level. Further, longitudinal data are necessary to disentangle certain associations. For example, respondents' grades negatively predict racial apathy. However, its influence could be a function of schooling broadening worldviews and increasing empathy, or a function of ideological refinement and mastered social desirability. Second, existing studies of racial apathy often examine white youth. Thus, future research should include older whites (see Forman and Lewis 2006) and consider the role of birth cohort and period effects. Third, the NSYR did not include measures of political orientation or urbanicity. These correlates were included in a prior study of racial apathy (Forman and Lewis 2015), on which we modeled the current study. Related, Forman and Lewis (2006) analyzed additional measures of white racial prejudice not available in the NSYR data.

Fourth, we know nothing about correlates of racial apathy among non-whites. White racial prejudice is indeed crucial to racial stratification. However, non-whites can internalize views that whites express. Future studies should examine if certain racial minority groups are likely to express racial apathy. Fifth, Forman and Lewis (2006) were unable to demonstrate a relationship between racial apathy and behavior. This is the singular greatest weakness among studies of white racial prejudice and we suffer it too. Sixth, the sociopolitical climate is different today compared to when publications describing racial apathy were originally published. The election and presidency of Obama happened and we live presently during Trump's first term. The unwavering popularity of the latter among certain demographic groups, despite his expressions of many forms of prejudice, confirms for some scholars that color-blind ideologies



are far less potent than imagined. It seems that whites today are less hesitant to express publicly what scholars would call old-fashioned racial animus. In fact, one could argue that the white nationalist wave that washed Trump into the Oval Office in fall 2016 called upon whites to disregard social desirability and speak openly about their hostile feelings toward blacks, immigrants, religious minorities, women, etc. These changes may signal another shift in the expression of white racial prejudice. What this latest shift may mean for the expression of racial apathy is an open question.

### *Conclusion*

Quite possibly because of its dynamism, white racial prejudice remains an important area of inquiry for social scientists across several disciplines. Ignoring its dynamism, the fundamental truth is that whites still feel negatively toward non-whites and ameliorative policies. Hence, in some ways, little has actually changed about white racial prejudice over the past 60 years. Nevertheless, some scholars argue that negativity today takes the form of racial apathy, but that form should not be viewed as an improvement over old-fashioned and blatant racial animus. Instead, scholars must designate “not caring” as dangerous because it means widespread interracial coalitions are not the mechanism by which racial stratification will be challenged. Scholars must also prepare for an increase in racial apathy following counter-movements where people of color ask whites to acknowledge their whiteness and its associated privileges, and to choose sides in the permanent struggle to make every form of prejudice non-ignorable.

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Table 1. Distribution of Racial Apathy among White Respondents in the 2003 National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR)

	Proportion	SE
Care Very much	.50	.01
Care Somewhat	.28	.01
Care A little	.06	.01
Do Not really Care	.16	.01

*Notes:* Analyses are weighted for the probability of selection and non-coverage. Listwise estimation sample size equals 1,935. Available sample size for these analyses equals 2,091.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Social Values, Academic Orientation, and Interracial Contact and Relationships among White Respondents in the 2003 National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR)

	Mean or Proportions	SE	Missing cases
Gender (1=girls; 0=boys)	.49	.01	0
Parental Education (5=graduate or professional degree; 1=less than HS)	3.60	.03	4
Region			0
Northeast (1=yes; 0=no) <sup>a</sup>	.16	.01	--
Midwest (1=yes; 0=no)	.27	.01	--
South (1=yes; 0=no)	.37	.01	--
West (1=yes; 0=no)	.21	.01	--
Daily importance of faith (4=extremely important; 0=not important)	2.39	.03	2
Grades (1=all A's or mostly A's; 0=no)	.24	.01	3
Education Aspirations (7=post-graduate or professional school; 1=no farther in school)	5.81	.03	53
School difficulties (1=yes; 0=never)	.15	.01	0
Multi-race household (1=yes; 0=no)	.05	.01	0
Interracial dating (1=yes; 0=never)	.23	.01	27
Different race mentor (1=yes; 0=no)	.24	.01	33
Homogenous religious services			15



Do not attend (1=yes; 0=no) <sup>a</sup>	.18	.01	--
Mixed race services (1=yes; 0=no)	.68	.01	--
Same race services (1=yes; 0=no)	.14	.01	--
Volunteer in diverse communities			11
Never volunteered (1=yes; 0=no) <sup>a</sup>	.30	.01	--
No contact (1=yes; 0=no)	.07	.01	--
Some or a little contact (1=yes; 0=no)	.40	.01	--
A lot of contact (1=yes; 0=no)	.23	.01	--

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*Notes:* Analyses are weighted for the probability of selection and non-coverage. Listwise estimation sample size equals 1,935. Available sample size for these analyses equals 2,091.

<sup>a</sup> Represents excluded groups in the regression models.

Table 3. Estimates from Partial Proportional Odds Regressions of Racial Apathy on Social Values and Academic Orientation among White Respondents in the 2003 National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR)

	Model 1a	Model 1b	Model 1c
	Very much vs. Somewhat, A little, Not really	Very much, Somewhat vs. A little, Not really	Very much, Somewhat A little vs. Not really
Gender (1=girls; 0=boys)	<b>.65**</b> (.08)	<b>.85</b> (.12)	<b>1.07</b> (.16)
Parent Education (5=graduate or professional degree; 1=less than HS)	.83** (.04)	.83** (.04)	.83** (.04)
Region			
Northeast (1=yes; 0=no)	1.00	1.00	1.00
Midwest (1=yes; 0=no)	.95 (.16)	.95 (.16)	.95 (.16)
South (1=yes; 0=no)	1.26 (.20)	1.26 (.20)	1.26 (.20)
West (1=yes; 0=no)	1.36+ (.25)	1.36+ (.25)	1.36+ (.25)
Daily importance of faith? (4=extremely important; 0=not important)	.81** (.04)	.81** (.04)	.81** (.04)
Grades (1=all As or mostly As; 0=no)	<b>.72*</b> (.10)	<b>.49**</b> (.10)	<b>.39**</b> (.10)
Educational aspirations (7=post-graduate or professional school; 1=no farther in school)	.80** (.04)	.80** (.04)	.80** (.04)
School difficulties (1=yes; 0=never)	<b>.71*</b> (.12)	<b>1.02</b> (.18)	<b>1.27</b> (.24)

Constant	14.57** (5.42)	3.37** (1.25)	1.92+ (0.71)
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*Notes:* Bold estimates violate the parallel lines assumption. Standard errors are reported in parentheses underneath odds ratios. Analyses are weighted for the probability of selection and non-coverage. Listwise estimation sample size equals 1,935. Available sample size for these analyses equals 2,091.

+  $p < .10$       \*  $p < .05$       \*\*  $p < .01$  (two-tailed tests)

Table 4. Estimates from Partial Proportional Regressions of Racial Apathy on Social Values, Academic Orientation, and Interracial Contact and Relationships among White Respondents in the 2003 National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR)

	Model 2a	Model 2b	Model 2c
	Very much vs. Somewhat, A little, Not really	Very much, Somewhat vs. A little, Not really	Very much, Somewhat, A little vs. Not really
Gender (1=girls; 0=boys)	<b>.69**</b>	<b>.82</b>	<b>1.00</b>
	<b>(.08)</b>	<b>(.11)</b>	<b>(.15)</b>
Parent Education (5=graduate or professional degree; 1=less than HS)	<b>.86**</b>	<b>.73**</b>	<b>.71**</b>
	<b>(.05)</b>	<b>(.05)</b>	<b>(.05)</b>
Region			
Northeast (1=yes; 0=no)	1.00	1.00	1.00
Midwest (1=yes; 0=no)	.93	.93	.93
	<b>(.16)</b>	<b>(.16)</b>	<b>(.16)</b>
South (1=yes; 0=no)	1.33+	1.33+	1.33+
	<b>(.22)</b>	<b>(.22)</b>	<b>(.22)</b>
West (1=yes; 0=no)	1.51*	1.51*	1.51*
	<b>(.28)</b>	<b>(.28)</b>	<b>(.28)</b>
Daily importance of faith? (4=extremely important; 0=not important)	<b>.78**</b>	<b>.78**</b>	<b>.78**</b>

	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)
Grades (1=all As or mostly As; 0=no)	.62**	.62**	.62**
	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)
Educational Aspirations (7=post-graduate or professional school; 1=no farther in school)	.82**	.82**	.82**
	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)
School difficulties (1=yes; 0=never)	.95 (.16)	.95 (.16)	.95 (.16)
Multi-race household (1=yes; 0=no)	.63+	.63+	.63+
	(.17)	(.17)	(.17)
Interracial dating (1=yes; 0=never)	<b>.63**</b>	<b>.89</b>	<b>1.23</b>
	<b>(.09)</b>	<b>(.13)</b>	<b>(.20)</b>
Different race mentor (1=yes; 0=no)	.78*	.78*	.78*
	(.10)	(.10)	(.10)
Homogenous religious services			
Do not attend (1=yes; 0=no)	1.00	1.00	1.00
Mixed race services (1=yes; 0=no)	1.15	1.15	1.15
	(.17)	(.17)	(.17)
Same race services (1=yes; 0=no)	1.64*	1.64*	1.64*
	(.33)	(.33)	(.33)
Volunteer in diverse communities			

Never volunteered (1=yes; 0=no)	1.00	1.00	1.00
No contact (1=yes; 0=no)	1.41	1.41	1.41
	(.31)	(.31)	(.31)
Some or a little contact (1=yes; 0=no)	1.18	1.18	1.18
	(.15)	(.15)	(.15)
A lot of contact (1=yes; 0=no)	.78	.78	.78
	(.12)	(.12)	(.12)
Constant	11.49**	4.37**	2.61
	(4.51)	(1.72)	(1.06)

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*Notes:* Bold estimates violate the parallel lines assumption. Standard errors are reported in parentheses underneath odds ratios. Analyses are weighted for the probability of selection and non-coverage. Listwise estimation sample size equals 1,935. Available sample size for these analyses equals 2,091.

+ p < .10      \* p < .05      \*\* p < .01 (two-tailed tests)

Table 5. Cross-tabulation of Racial Apathy among White Respondents Participating in the 2003 and 2007-8 National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR): Examining Individual Level Change over Time

2003 Racial Apathy	2007-8 Racial Apathy				Row Total
	Care Very Much	Care Somewhat	Care A little	Do Not Really Care	
Care Very Much	.60 (.02)	.24 (.02)	.04 (.01)	.11 (.01)	1.0
Care Somewhat	.39 (.03)	.31 (.03)	.11 (.02)	.18 (.02)	1.0
Care A little	.34 (.06)	.24 (.05)	.17 (.05)	.25 (.05)	1.0
Do Not Really Care	.31 (.03)	.25 (.03)	.09 (.02)	.36 (.04)	1.0

*Notes:* Standard errors are reported in parentheses underneath percentages. Analyses are weighted for the probability of selection, non-response, and non-coverage. Listwise estimation sample size equals 1,614.