Racial Socialization Messages and the Quality of Mother/Child Interactions in African American Families

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Racial socialization messages were examined within a particular ecological niche: two-parent, African American families with a child in early adolescence. The linkage between mothers' provision of racial socialization messages and family process components (e.g., communication, warmth, negativity, child monitoring, and involvement) of the mother/child relationship was examined. Sixty-six African American mothers and their early adolescent sons and daughters participated in videotaped mother/child interactions and completed questionnaires regarding family demographics and parenting. Based on the frequency of their provision of proactive responses to discrimination items, mothers were categorized into three groups (high, moderate, and low). Results indicated that mothers in the moderate socialization group exhibited the most positivity, were the most involved, and monitored their child's activities the most. Mothers in that group also displayed the lowest levels of dyadic negativity. Mothers in the moderate socialization group had children who exhibited the most positivity and displayed the lowest levels of negativity.

Parents and children in racial/ethnic minority families face unique challenges and complexities throughout the family life course. Indeed, researchers devoted to the study of parenting and child development in minority families have underscored myriad ways in which those parents possess values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that share some overlap with but are quite distinct from the dominant culture in the United States (Garcia Coll, Meyer, & Brillon, 1995; Harrison, Wilson, Pine, Chan, & Buriel, 1990). Garcia Coll

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and colleagues' integrative model of child development in minority families (Garcia Coll et al., 1995, 1996; Garcia Coll & Magnuson, 1997) highlighted a central theme that emerges from the literature on minority parenting. Specifically, the notion that although minority parents, like all parents, must socialize their children to function competently in the broader society, minority parents are faced with that task in the context of a racist environment that marginalizes or discriminates against minority group members. To understand families and children of color within a broad ecological context, it is necessary to examine the ways that minority families cope within the family sphere with instances of discrimination and racism (Cross, 1992; McAdoo, 1993). Consequently, researchers have sought to understand the processes that surround racial socialization in minority families (e.g., Branch & Newcombe, 1986; Peters, 1985; Thornton, Chatters, Taylor, & Allen, 1990).

Broadly defined, racial socialization refers to messages and practices that provide information concerning the nature of race status as it relates to (a) personal and group identity, (b) intergroup and interindividual relationships, and (c) position in the social hierarchy (Thornton et al., 1990). Most of the research conducted in the area of ethnic and racial socialization has focused on the experience of African American families (Peters, 1985; Spencer, Brookins, & Allen, 1985). In that area, investigations generally (a) have highlighted the demographic correlates of African American parents' provision of racial socialization messages, (b) described the nature and content of racial socialization messages, and (c) examined the associations among mothers' provision of racial socialization messages and children's developmental outcomes. Noticeably absent from those research foci, however, are any investigations that have been designed to examine the ways in which parents' racial socialization practices relate to other aspects of the parent/child relationship. The research described here addressed that void by systematically linking mothers' provision of racial socialization messages with specific features (i.e., positivity, negativity, monitoring, and involvement) of the parent/child relationship.

Review of Racial Socialization Research Domains

First, data from the National Survey of Black Americans have revealed that conveying racial messages is associated with the gender, marital status, and education of the parents (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Thornton, 1997; Thornton et al., 1990). Specifically, mothers were more likely than were fathers, and married parents more likely than were their never married counterparts to provide socialization messages to their children. Thornton et al. (1990) also reported a significant age by education interaction term for

women such that mothers who were older and highly educated were particularly likely to impart racial socialization messages. Furthermore, Thornton et al. reported that African American mothers living in neighborhoods that are mixed racially were more likely to socialize their children to racial matters than were mothers who lived in predominantly African American neighborhoods.

A second line of inquiry has focused on understanding the nature and quality of the racial socialization messages that African American parents provide to their children (Phinney & Chavira, 1995). Boykin and Toms (1985) offered a conceptualization of the socialization of Black children in which parents must socialize their children into three distinctively differing realms of experience: socialization to the mainstream of American society, socialization informed by minority status, and socialization to the Black cultural experience. Therefore, according to Boykin and Toms, parents' racial socialization practices will have myriad attitudinal and behavioral expressions across the three domains. In line with those findings, qualitative results reported by Thornton and colleagues (Thornton, 1997; Thornton et al., 1990) indicated that socialization messages centered around minority status (e.g., "Accept your color"), the mainstream experience (e.g., "You must work hard to get a good education"), and the Black cultural experience (e.g., Black heritage, history, and traditions).

Several other researchers have attempted to articulate elements of the racial socialization construct. For example, qualitative interviews by Peters (1985) revealed that mothers emphasized self-esteem, positive feelings about ethnicity, self-respect, lack of fair and honest treatment from White Americans, and education. Demo and Hughes (1990) described a socialization theme termed *integrative/assertive*, which involved both African American pride and getting along with Whites. Hughes and Chen (1997) identified two themes that underlie conceptualizations of racial socialization that were endorsed frequently by parents: teaching about African American history, culture, and heritage and preparing children for future encounters with racial discrimination.

Turning to the third research focus, empirical studies indicated that racial socialization might have important influences on minority children's development. Bowman and Howard (1985) demonstrated that to the extent that youth were socialized to be aware of racism and racial barriers, the adolescents performed better in school and had a greater sense of personal efficacy (indexed as a four-item motivational measure). In a qualitative analysis of interview data from 28 urban African American eighth graders, Sanders (1997) reported that students who expressed a strong awareness of racism

and the concomitant challenges it presents exhibited increased academic motivation and effort. In a study with 9- and 10-year-old African American children, Marshall (1995) reported that parents who address race in their parenting practices appear to have children who are at a more advanced stage in their racial identity development. In particular, children of parents who report higher ethnic socialization are more likely to espouse racial identity views characteristic of the Cross (1991) encounter stage in which children begin to question allegiance to majority standards and values.

Despite the accrued research findings in those areas, studies as yet have not linked parents' provision of racial socialization messages with process elements of the parent/child relationship. Furthermore, parental socialization regarding race and minority status is particularly important during early adolescence. During this developmental span, identity issues in general are moving to the forefront (Marcia, 1980), and in particular, minority youth are beginning to examine the meaning of race and minority status (Aboud, 1988; Phinney, 1989). Indeed, Hughes and Chen (1997, 1999) acknowledged that parents' racial socialization efforts are sensitive to their children's developmental shifts, namely, a consolidating of racial knowledge and ethnic group identity during middle childhood and adolescence.

Guided by an ecological model, and in particular by the integrative model outlined by Garcia Coll and colleagues (1996), it seems imperative that a fourth research domain must be explored. That is, does the frequency of racial socialization messages provided to children vary systematically as a function of parent/child relationship components? Specifically, parent/child communication, warmth, and negativity should be examined because elements such as those, which comprise the overall emotional climate of parent/child interactions, have been linked to children and adolescents' social development (Cohn, Patterson, & Christopoulos, 1991; Harrist & Pettit, 1994; Putallaz & Heflin, 1990). Likewise, because of their association with child and adolescent competence, two parenting practices, monitoring (e.g., Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1986; Rollins & Thomas, 1979; Spencer, Dupree, & Swanson, 1996) and involvement (Muller, 1995; Stevenson & Baker, 1987), were examined.

The present study provided a direct examination of the association between mothers' provision of racial socialization messages and components of the mother/child relationship. As noted in the preceding review, whereas the racial socialization construct is clearly multidimensional and has been operationalized in numerous ways, the present study focused on mothers' provision of proactive responses to discrimination. Thus, this analysis considered the following three central questions:

Research Question 1: To what extent do African American mothers provide racial socialization messages dealing with proactive responses to discrimination to their children?

Research Question 2: Is the provision of these messages related to demographic characteristics, such as mothers' education level, family income, and child gender?

Research Question 3: How does provision of racial socialization messages relate to aspects of the parent/child relationship such as warmth, communication, negativity, monitoring, and involvement?

METHOD

Participants

The subsample used in this study was drawn from a larger longitudinal project designed for examination of the transition to early adolescence and the experiences in family and school contexts that are predictive of social and academic adjustment. Participants were 66 African American early adolescents and their mothers. Number of children in this sample of families ranged from one to five, with a median of two.

Procedures

Rosters provided by the central administrative offices of the county school system were used to identify children transitioning into middle schools in two midsized cities (population = 197,733 and 73,764) in the southeastern United States. Research assistants contacted families by telephone, and the purposes for the research project were explained to the mother. All families recruited for participation had a child living with both biological parents. After consent was obtained, the mother and her child, who was transitioning into sixth grade, were scheduled for data collection at a family research center.

Interviewer training. Graduate and undergraduate college students from the departments of human development and family studies, psychology, social work, and related fields were recruited to conduct family interviews at the family research center. Interviewers participated in training sessions in which the scope of the project was explained, research measures were introduced, and the interview protocol was outlined. A detailed training packet that contained information on the presentation and introduction of each of the measures was given to each interviewer. As part of the training process, new

interviewers assisted a more experienced interviewer for a series of family visits. A new interviewer then assumed full responsibility for a family interview while under observation of the project director. Feedback was then provided to the interviewer based on criteria in an interviewer checklist. Periodic observations of interviews were conducted to ensure quality control.

Interview protocol. Each participant family in the project was greeted on arrival at a family research center. A written description of the project was discussed and signed, with dated consent/assent forms collected both from the mother and the child, respectively. Information pertaining to three general areas, family demographics, parenting, and child psychosocial competence, was collected from the mother and child separately. After completing the survey instruments, each mother/child dyad participated in a 20-minute, videotaped interaction task. The entire session lasted approximately 2 hours. Families were compensated $35 for their participation in the assessments.

Measures

Demographics. Mothers completed the Family History Inventory (MacKinnon-Lewis, 1990), which provided demographic information such as parent education level, ethnicity, income, family composition, and marital status. The response set for education level, measured as the highest grade completed, included nine levels that ranged from 1 (grade school) through 9 (Ph.D., Ed.D., and M.D.). Income was measured in increments of $10,000, ranging from 1 ($0 to $9,999) to 10 ($90,000+).

Racial socialization: Proactive response to discrimination. Mothers completed the Parent Management Questionnaire (Eccles, 1993), which contains a seven-item subscale to assess proactive response to discrimination (α = .89). Items are presented in Table 1. Response categories ranged from 1 (*the issue of discrimination has not come up*) through 6 (*daily*). Factor analytic strategies were employed to determine whether separate factors existed within the seven-item scale. A maximum likelihood factor analysis, constrained to two factors, was conducted with the seven items. Only one item loaded above .40 on the second factor. A principal components factor analysis demonstrated that the items formed a unidimensional construct with loadings ranging from .61 to .88 and a total variance explained of 64.7%. Given those findings, the proactive response to racial discrimination subscale was retained as a unitary scale. For this inquiry, the mean value of mothers'

TABLE 1: Responses to Survey Questions Regarding Proactive Responses to Racial Discrimination

	Response Set[a] *and Frequency (%)*					
Item	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*
"How often do you suggest to your child that a good way of dealing with racial discrimination he/she may face is to . . . "						
1. Do better than everyone else in school?	6.2	24.6	4.6	30.8	16.9	16.9
2. Have faith in God?6.1	16.7	10.6	9.1	13.6	43.9	
3. Do your best and be a good person?	4.5	13.6	7.6	9.1	18.2	47.0
4. Work harder than others?	4.6	36.9	6.2	13.8	16.9	21.5
5. Stand up and demand your rights?	6.2	49.2	10.8	20.0	6.2	7.7
6. Try hard to get along with other people?	4.5	19.7	9.1	22.7	18.2	25.8
7. Not blame yourself when you experience discrimination?	6.1	33.3	16.7	21.2	10.6	12.1

a. 1 = *the issue of discrimination has not come up*, 2 = *almost never*, 3 = *once a year*, 4 = *once a month*, 5 = *once a week*, 6 = *daily*.

responses to the seven items served as an index of racial socialization messages relating to discrimination, with higher values reflecting more frequent provision of racial socialization messages.

Family processes: Mother/child relationship. The mother/child relationship was assessed using observational data derived from a 20-minute mother/child dyadic interaction task developed by Conger and associates (1992). The dyads were provided with 15 cards, each containing one to three questions to discuss regarding parenting practices, household chores, schoolwork, and other family events. The questions used in the discussion were developed to assess parent/child relationship quality and were designed to elicit information about positive and negative affect and positive and negative parenting practices. Sample questions included: "What do I think has been my child's biggest accomplishment during the past year?" and "What are some of the rules or things that my mom expects me to do or not to do?" Mother and child take turns reading the cards and being the first to answer each question. The mother/child dyads were alone in the room during the session, and their interactions were videotaped and later coded using a global coding system adapted from the Iowa Family Interaction Scales (IFIS) (Melby et al., 1993).

The IFIS is a global coding system designed to measure the quality of behavioral exchanges between family members. Mother and child observable behavior was coded using dyadic interaction scales. Dyadic interaction scale ratings are determined by the following three components: (a) the frequency of the behavior, (b) the intensity of the behavior, and (c) the context in which the behavior occurs. Verbal statements and nonverbal cues (physical and affective behavior) are used to code behaviors.

Graduate and undergraduate college students were trained to administer the family interaction scales. During training, coders (a) observed tapes with a coding trainer who describes the behaviors that are relevant for each scale as they occur and (b) coded practice tapes until intercoder reliability, assessed by percentage agreement on the scales, reached 85%. Ongoing reliability assessments were provided on 25% of the coded sessions. Furthermore, coders who had met the reliability criteria were given periodic skill enhancement assessments to test their working knowledge and ability to apply the scales.

The coding system has a 7-point scale that ranges from 1 (*not characteristic*) through 7 (*mainly characteristic*). A score is assigned to each mother and child for the five behavioral scales.

Negativity. Negativity is operationalized as the degree to which the mother or child resists, defies, or is inconsiderate of others by being noncompliant,

insensitive, or obnoxious. The mother or child is rated as being characteristically self-centered, egocentric, tends to act out in inappropriate ways, or in some other way demonstrates a lack of age-appropriate behaviors.

Warmth. Warmth is operationalized as the degree to which the parent or the child has a favorable reaction toward the other person, takes an interest in the other person, and enjoys being with the other person. In general, this scale assesses how much the mother or child cares about, shows interest in, and/or is supportive of the other.

Communication. Communication is operationalized as the parent or child's ability to express (neutrally or positively) his or her own point of view, needs, wants, and so on in a clear, appropriate, and reasonable manner and to demonstrate consideration of the other's point of view. The good communicator promotes rather than inhibits exchange of information.

Involvement. Involvement is operationalized as the extent and/or quality of the parent's involvement in the child's life. Regular involvement with the child in settings that promote opportunities for conversation, companionship, and mutual enjoyment were assessed. The cards used in the dyadic observation task contain several questions to trigger discussion of involvement in the child's life: "What sorts of things do I usually do with mom?"; "What do I especially enjoy doing with her?"; and "What would I do with just mom if we had more time to spend together?"

Child monitoring. Child monitoring is operationalized as the extent of the parent's specific knowledge and information concerning the child's life and daily activities. This scale indicates the extent to which the parent accurately tracks the behaviors, activities, and social involvement of the child. To trigger discussion of child monitoring activities, the interaction cards contain several relevant questions: "How do I know what's going on in my child's life, like in school, with friends, or other activities?" and "What does my child do after school and on weekends?"

The intercorrelations of the family process variables were examined, and strong correlations emerged between measures of warmth and communication both for mothers ($r = .78$, $p < .01$) and for children ($r = .72$, $p < .01$). Therefore, a data reduction step was employed in which scores for mother warmth and mother communication were averaged to form a mother positivity score. Likewise, the average of child warmth and child communication was labeled *child positivity*. Accordingly, subsequent analyses focused on the fol-

lowing family process elements: mother positivity and negativity, child positivity and negativity, involvement, and child monitoring.

RESULTS

Descriptive Analyses

The first research question of this investigation addressed the extent to which mothers provided socialization messages concerning proactive responses to discrimination. The mothers' response frequencies for each of the seven discrimination items are provided in Table 1. The mean of the overall index of mothers' racial socialization (average of the seven items) was 3.84 (*SD* = 1.29), indicating that the mothers provided messages concerning proactive responses to discrimination. The two items most commonly addressed on a daily basis were "have faith in God" (43.9%) and "do your best and be a good person" (47%). It appeared that a confrontational style was not endorsed for dealing with discrimination as 49.2% of mothers reported almost never giving advice to "stand up and demand your rights." Also, across the seven items, only 5.5% of mothers in this sample reported that the issue of discrimination had not come up.

Demographic Correlates of Racial Socialization Messages

Mothers in this sample possessed a median education level of 4, which corresponds to some college work, no degree. A range of education levels was evident in this sample, from completion of grade school through completion of a master's degree. Family incomes ranged from under $10,000 (3% of families) to $80,000 to $89,000 (3% of families), with the median family income between $30,000 and $39,000.

To address the second research question, based on the demographic data, the association of mothers' education, family income level, and child gender as correlates of racial socialization messages was examined. Pearson product-moment correlations revealed no association between mothers' education level and provision of racial socialization messages. Similarly, family income level was not associated with mothers' provision of racial socialization messages. To examine whether mothers provided more racial socialization messages to girls as compared to boys, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted with gender as the grouping variable and mothers' mean racial socialization score as the outcome variable. Results indicated

that the mean values for messages provided to sons ($\overline{X}$ = 4.00, *SD* = 1.15) were not significantly different from, $F(1, 64) = 1.11$, $p = ns$, the mean value of messages mothers provided to daughters ($\overline{X}$ = 3.67, *SD* = 1.42).

Family Process Correlates of Racial Socialization Messages

The third research question addressed whether provision of racial socialization messages is associated with aspects of the parent/child relationship, such as positivity, negativity, monitoring, and involvement. To investigate those associations, the distribution of mothers' mean scores on the racial socialization scale was divided into three equal-sized groups. Accordingly, mothers were assigned to one of three socialization groups, ranging from high, medium, to low message frequency. That is, mothers in the upper one-third of the sample provided the most frequent racial socialization messages, mothers in the lowest third provided racial socialization messages the least, and the middle third of mothers provided an intermediate amount. This trichotomizing strategy allowed for the examination of parent/child relationship variables at differing levels of mothers' socialization practices. The three-group model allowed for the most differentiation in the racial socialization index without reducing cell (group) sizes below the recommended minimum levels (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998).

Multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs) were conducted with mothers' socialization category (high, medium, and low) as the independent (grouping) variable and mother/child relationship components as the dependent variables. Those analyses were followed by univariate ANOVAs with post hoc analyses (Tukey's honestly significant difference) to determine the specific measures on which the socialization groups differed. The first MANOVA was used to examine the main effect of socialization group on the four dependent variables that comprised the mother/child interaction (mother positivity, mother negativity, child positivity, and child negativity). A second MANOVA was used to examine the main effect of socialization group on the parenting practice variables, child monitoring and involvement.

In the first MANOVA, results indicated a significant effect for socialization group, $F(8, 112) = 2.06$, $p < .05$ (see Table 2). Univariate analyses indicated that in the mother domain, mothers' positivity did vary as a function of socialization group such that mothers in the moderate group exhibited more positivity (average of warmth and communication) than did mothers in either the low or high groups, $F(2, 63) = 6.01$, $p < .01$. Mothers' level of negativity, however, did not vary as a function of socialization group.

Analyses of variance likewise were conducted to examine differences in children's dyadic behavior as a function of mothers' socialization group

TABLE 2: Multivariate and Univariate Analyses of Variance for Parent-Child Interaction Measures

		Univariate			
Source	*Multivariate F*[a]	*Mother Positivity*[b]	*Mother Negativity*[b]	*Child Positivity*[b]	*Child Negativity*[b]
Socialization group	2.06*	6.01**	2.51	5.05**	3.91*
Mean square		8.88	3.84	9.08	5.26

NOTE: Multivariate *F* ratio is derived from Hotelling's trace.
a. Multivariate *df* = 4, 62.
b. Univariate *df* = 3, 64.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$.

membership. First, differences across the high, medium, and low socialization groups were observed for children's positivity, $F(2, 63) = 5.05$, $p < .01$. Mothers in the moderate socialization group had children that exhibited the most positivity in the observed interaction task. Children's negativity varied across socialization groups such that mothers in the moderate socialization group had children who displayed the lowest levels of negativity, $F(2, 63) = 3.91$, $p < .05$. Table 3 contains the means and standard deviations for mother/child interaction components as a function of racial socialization group.

The second MANOVA, which used socialization group as the independent variable and monitoring and involvement (parenting practices) as the dependent variables, examined the differences in mean levels of involvement and child monitoring as a function of mothers' socialization group status (see Table 4). MANOVA results indicated a significant effect for socialization group, $F(4, 122) = 3.09$, $p < .05$. Significant mean differences were detected for mothers' involvement scores, $F(2, 63) = 3.20$, $p < .05$. Mothers in the moderate group reported more involvement with their children than did mothers in the high socialization group. Furthermore, significant differences were detected for level of child monitoring such that mothers in the moderate socialization group displayed the highest level of child monitoring, $F(2, 63) = 5.77$, $p < .01$. Table 5 includes means and standard deviations for each parenting practice as a function of racial socialization group.

DISCUSSION

The findings that emerged for the measures of family process (positivity, negativity, monitoring, and involvement) demonstrated a fairly consistent pattern. That is, the mothers in the moderate socialization group exhibited the

TABLE 3: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Mother/Child Interactions as a Function of Racial Socialization Group

	Mother/Child Interaction							
	Mother Positivity		*Mother Negativity*		*Child Positivity*		*Child Negativity*	
Socialization Group	$\bar{X}$	*SD*	$\bar{X}$	*SD*	$\bar{X}$	*SD*	$\bar{X}$	*SD*
High	4.89[a]	1.50	2.25	1.23	4.36[a]	1.60	2.30[a]	1.33
Medium	6.09[a, b]	0.79	1.57	0.65	5.40[a, b]	1.07	1.43[a, b]	0.52
Low	5.02[b]	1.21	2.05	1.49	4.15[b]	1.27	2.31[b]	1.38

NOTE: Means in a column sharing superscripts are significantly different based on post hoc Tukey's honestly significant difference at $p < .05$.

TABLE 4: Multivariate and Univariate Analyses of Variance for Measures of Parenting Practice

		Univariate	
Source	*Multivariate F*[a]	*Child Monitoring*[b]	*Involvement*[b]
Socialization group	3.09*	5.77**	3.20*
Mean square		6.64	6.20

NOTE: Multivariate *F* ratio is derived from Hotelling's trace.
a. Multivariate *df* = 4, 122.
b. Univariate *df* = 2, 63.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$.

TABLE 5: Mean Values and Standard Deviations for Parenting Practices as a Function of Racial Socialization Group

	Parenting Practice			
	Child Monitoring		*Involvement*	
Socialization Group	$\bar{X}$	*SD*	$\bar{X}$	*SD*
High	4.50[a]	1.23	3.73[a]	1.20
Medium	5.59[a]	0.85	4.77[a]	1.63
Low	5.16	1.11	4.09	1.31

NOTE: Means in a column sharing subscripts are significantly different based on post hoc analyses using Tukey's honestly significant difference at $p < .05$.

most positivity (highly communicative with a high degree of warmth), were the most involved, and monitored their child's activities the most. Mothers in this group also displayed the lowest levels of mother/child dyadic negativity. The pattern was evident as well for children's contribution to the dyadic mother/child relationship: Mothers in the moderate socialization group had children who exhibited the most positivity and displayed the lowest levels of negativity. Overall, it appears that the best adjusted mother/child dyads were those in the moderate socialization group.

These findings lend support to the notion that the relation between racial socialization messages and family process variables is not linear. Provision of too few or too many racial socialization messages might be detrimental to the parent/child relationship. Although other investigations have not examined directly the association of racial socialization with the parent/child relationship, Marshall (1995) examined racial socialization and children's achievement. The investigation found an inverse relationship between racial socialization messages and children's reading grades. It is possible that in the moderate socialization group, mothers might have achieved a balance of

medium (interactive climate of the parent/child relationship) and message (discussion of proactive responses to discrimination).

It might be the case that mothers who are high socializers in the domain of race socialization would be found to be high (or low) in all aspects of child socialization. Accordingly, the three-group analysis strategy used in this study might have identified mothers who might focus repetitively or even excessively on various aspects of child socialization. The converse holds true as well: Mothers that provide a paucity of directive advice or prosocial socialization messages in general might be those in the low socialization group.

The age of the children in this particular sample must be considered in interpreting the study findings. Children entering middle school increasingly are becoming part of larger social networks including family, school, and work domains. Mothers in the moderate socialization group might be those who are providing situation-specific responses to children's queries and experiences relating to discrimination. In contrast, mothers in the low socialization group might not be responding to the early adolescents' information-seeking efforts regarding racial socialization. Mothers in the high socialization group could be offering unsolicited information or suggestions. As such, the socialization mechanism is parent directed rather than adolescent initiated and consequently might be less effective.

Similar to the logistic regression findings of Thornton et al. (1990), in the current study, mothers' education and family income level were not associated with variations in the frequency of mothers' racial socialization messages to their early adolescents. Although not detected in the current study, Thornton and colleagues, however, did find an age by education interaction such that mothers who were older and possessed higher levels of education were particularly likely to impart racial socialization messages to their children.

Regarding differences in the amount of racial socialization messages provided to boys as compared to girls, in general, a consistent relation between child gender and frequency of parental racial socialization has not been found (McLoyd, Cauce, Takeuchi, & Wilson, 2000). The current inquiry did not detect a significant mean group difference. Bowman and Howard (1985) found that female participants (41%) as compared to males (36%) reported a slightly greater likelihood that their parents had taught them nothing about their racial status. The clearest gender differences have emerged in the emphasis that parents place on various race-related socialization themes for boys as compared to girls. Specifically, researchers (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Thomas & Speight, 1999) have found that parents tended to emphasize racial pride more for girls and racial barriers more for boys. Because the racial barrier theme addresses an awareness of racism and prejudice, it is

quite consonant with the proactive response to discrimination subscale used in this inquiry. However, in the current inquiry, a significantly differing group mean difference was not detected for racial socialization messages provided to girls as compared to boys. Inconsistencies in the overall pattern of findings in regard to racial socialization messages provided to girls as compared to boys might be explained partially by the complex and multidimensional nature of the racial socialization construct. That is, studies have been conducted using the gender comparison based on examinations of differing aspects of racial socialization.

The findings of the current study must be couched within the methodological limitations of this inquiry. It is important to note that only a small subset of the overarching racial socialization concept was tapped here, namely, proactive response to discrimination. As outlined earlier, numerous other dimensions and components of racial socialization exist (e.g., teaching about culture and history and discussion of minority status). Furthermore, there are limitations inherent in the use of a self-reported, closed-format measure to assess the breadth and multidimensionality of racial socialization. Qualitative approaches might yield important distinctions that can provide more depth to the current understanding of race/ethnic socialization in African American families. Another concern is that although it has been reported that mothers are more likely to educate children regarding issues of race/ethnicity (Thornton et al., 1990), a limitation of the current inquiry was the absence of data on fathers' role in racial socialization processes. Clearly, investigations also should document more carefully the roles of African American fathers in child rearing, with attention given to the distinctive contribution that fathers make to race-related socialization.

The results of this study indicated, however, that further research could continue to specify the relations among aspects of the parent/child relationship and parents' racial socialization practices. A developmental analysis (perhaps using a longitudinal design) is needed to understand age-related shifts in parents' attempts at racial socialization as youth transition from childhood into adolescence. Further studies can be used for the examination of specific domains of adolescent development that are associated with highly specific racial socialization messages. More study is needed to delineate both the specific processes and contexts that relate to racial socialization practices in minority families.

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