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Abstract

This investigation examined the factor structure and validity evidence for the Parent Experience of Racial Socialization Scale (PERS). Exploratory factor analysis found four interpretable factors accounting for 40% of the variance in the racial socialization construct. The identified factors were religion and spirituality, alertness to discrimination, mainstream, and cultural pride and coping. Correlation analyses indicated negative relationships between the newly identified PERS factors religion and spirituality and alertness to discrimination and the Teenagers Experiences of Racial Socialization (TERS) factor Alertness to Discrimination. In contrast, a positive relationship was found for the PERS spirituality and religion factor and the TERS cultural endorsement of the mainstream factor. Recommendations for research methods regarding racial socialization scales are provided.

Keywords

African Americans, parents, racial socialization, exploratory factor analysis

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African American parents are instrumental in helping children develop positive identity through racial socialization, the process of raising children to have positive self-concepts in a racist environment (Thomas & Speight, 1999). Research shows that parents transmit several categories of messages, including the presence and reality of racism, preparation for and overcoming racism, cultural heritage, racial pride, self-pride, racial equality and humanistic values, mainstream Eurocentric values, and spirituality and coping (Stevenson, Cameron, Herrero-Taylor, & Davis, 2002). Parents, in general, and mothers, in particular, who have higher levels of education are often more likely to be involved in the racial socialization process (Frabutt, Walker, & MacKinnon-Lewis, 2002; Thomas & Speight, 1999; Thornton, Chatters, Taylor, & Allen, 1990). Mothers are likely to give clusters of messages based on their racial experiences (White-Johnson, Ford, & Sellers, 2010). Finally, the racial socialization process is developmental and perhaps gender specific, with particular messages given according to the age and gender of the child (Hughes & Chen, 1997; Hughes & Johnson, 1998). Research on racial socialization and youth outcomes has highlighted the importance of this process (Hughes et al., 2006) in reducing risk and promoting resilience.

The research in this area is in its infancy but is sure to continue as researchers and clinicians need to understand racial socialization as a process and how children interpret messages from parents. One of the challenges in the literature is the variety of measures that have been used for both children and parents; there are more reliable and valid measures for youth to date, and there is a need to parallel measures for both youth and parents. The Teenage Experience of Racial Socialization (TERS; Stevenson et al., 2002) is a 40-item measure assessing cultural pride, cultural heritage, coping with racism, and messages promoting mainstream values. While the TERS has been validated in studies (Davis & Stevenson, 2006; Stevenson & Arrington, 2009; Stevenson, McNeil, Herrero-Taylor, & Davis, 2005), there is far less research with the Parent Experience of Racial Socialization (PERS). This project is designed to determine psychometric properties and factor analyze the PERS, the companion scale to the widely used TERS. Having a valid and reliable measure for parents with a parallel version for adolescents will allow for correlational and more process oriented studies in racial socialization.

Study I

Method

Participants. There were 474 participants in this study, which is a subsample of a larger National Institute of Mental Health–funded project examining oppression and racism, coping, and health outcomes. There were 316 women

and 152 men. Ages ranged from 18 to 74 years (mean age = 39.11, $SD = 11.95$; parents, grandparents, and legal guardians). The majority of participants was employed at least part-time (82%) and had middle incomes. About 31% reported incomes below \$30,000; 31% between \$30,000 and 49,999; 15% between \$50,000 and 69,999; 12% between \$70,000 and 99,999; and 9% \$100,000 and higher. The sample is also well educated, with 53% reporting college degrees or graduate school experience, about 25% with college experience, and 17% with high school diplomas.

Instruments

Parent Experience of Racial Socialization. The PERS (Stevenson et al., 2002) is a 40-item scale that assesses racial socialization messages given by parents. Items are rated on a 3-point Likert-type scale indicating the relative frequency of messages given to youth (1 = *never*, 2 = *a few times*, 3 = *a lot of the time*). The instrument was developed with five subscales: cultural coping with antagonism (CCA), cultural pride reinforcement (CPR), cultural appreciation of legacy (CAL), cultural alertness to discrimination (CAD), and cultural endorsement of the mainstream (CEM).

Procedure. Participants were recruited through the health fair section of a large exposition, which was geared toward African American women in a Midwestern city in the spring of 2004. Study investigators rented booth space that allowed participants to complete the surveys on site. Participants were told about the objectives of the study and completed consent forms when they approached the booth for information. Students and research assistants also distributed flyers to expo attendees at the entrance. Finally, participants were referred by word of mouth from other survey participants. Participants were compensated \$15 for their participation in the study, and completion of this portion of the surveys took 15 to 20 minutes.

Results

A principal-axis factor analysis with promax rotation was conducted on the 40 items in order to clarify factor structure and provide empirical support for reliability of the instrument. Principal-axis factor analysis was chosen as it often provides a more accurate estimate and is preferred when determining underlying latent factors, and promax variation was used as the items were expected to be correlated (Kahn, 2006). Eight factors met the Kaiser retention criterion of eigenvalues greater than 1.00, and these factors were mirrored in the scree plot. In parallel analysis (O'Connor, 2005), actual eigenvalues greater than the average eigenvalues are suggested for factor retention (see Table 1). Results from both the Kaiser criterion and the parallel analysis

Table 1. Actual and Random Eigenvalues From Parallel Analysis of PERS.

Actual eigenvalues	Average eigenvalues	95th percentile eigenvalues
10.81	1.60	1.67
3.593	1.52	1.58
2.38	1.48	1.52
1.77	1.43	1.47
1.25	1.39	1.43
1.14	1.36	1.39
1.08	1.32	1.36
1.03	1.29	1.32
0.98	1.26	1.29
0.94	1.24	1.26
0.87	1.21	1.23
0.83	1.18	1.20
0.82	1.15	1.18
0.78	1.13	1.15
0.74	1.10	1.12
0.70	1.08	1.10
0.68	1.05	1.07
0.65	1.03	1.05
0.64	1.01	1.03
0.61	0.99	1.00
0.58	0.96	0.98
0.56	0.94	0.96
0.53	0.92	0.94
0.52	0.90	0.92
0.50	0.88	0.90
0.48	0.86	0.88
0.42	0.83	0.85
0.41	0.81	0.83
0.36	0.79	0.81
0.35	0.77	0.79
0.34	0.75	0.77
0.32	0.73	0.75
0.31	0.71	0.73
0.29	0.69	0.71
0.28	0.66	0.69
0.23	0.64	0.64
0.19	0.57	0.59
0.18	0.53	0.56

Note. PERS = Parent Experience of Racial Socialization Scale.

Table 2. Exploratory Factor Analysis: Standardized Factor Loadings of Parent Experiences of Racial Socialization Scale.

Item	Loadings			
3. Close families attend church or mosque.	.50	-.18	.18	.39
6. Religion is an important part of a person's life.	.57	.11	.06	.18
12. God beliefs help us cope.	.67	-.10	-.01	.15
19. Depending on religion and God can help a person make good life decisions.	.73	.04	-.06	-.18
20. Families who talk openly about religion or God are helping their children to grow.	.77	-.20	.05	.04
27. Train up a child and he will not depart.	.44	.08	-.08	.09
37. Only God can protect against racism.	.44	-.01	.01	-.06
7. Racism and discrimination are hard to face.	.39	.41	.08	-.19
15. Racism is real and you have to understand it.	.18	.44	-.07	-.13
28. Has to work twice as hard as Whites.	.02	.55	.09	.23
29. Whites make it hard for Blacks to get ahead.	-.12	.55	.15	-.09
31. Black schools make children feel better.	-.13	.44	-.06	-.14
34. Whites have more opportunities than Blacks.	-.07	.69	-.04	-.00
35. Black child will be harassed for being Black.	-.16	.61	-.06	.03
36. More jobs to Blacks if no racists.	.00	.55	-.03	.03
38. Blacks don't have same opportunities as Whites.	.06	.73	-.04	.10
1. Society is fair to African Americans.	.06	.04	.52	.03
2. Black children feel better in White schools.	.02	-.10	.67	.05
13. Black children learn more in White schools.	.07	.02	.72	-.12
23. Education is only way to survive racism.	.23	.01	-.01	.64
30. Be proud of who you are.	.15	.14	-.08	.62
33. Never be ashamed of your color.	.01	-.01	-.04	.65

Note. Items are abbreviated. The items in bold represent factor loadings for specific factors.

suggest four factors, accounting for 40% of the variance. There was one cross-loaded item, suggesting a need for further examination and/or revision of the item (Legault, Green-Demers, Grant, & Chung, 2007).

Factor 1, religion and spirituality, includes six items that reflect messages on the importance of religion (as defined by the items as a relationship with a higher power and church attendance) and spirituality and for African American children and youth (see Table 2). Internal consistency reliability estimates for this factor is .83. Factor 2, alertness to discrimination, includes nine items that focus on the presence and reality of discrimination and inequity within society. The internal consistency reliability estimate for this factor was .85. Factor 3, mainstream, has three items that focus on messages related to the benefits of being in majority settings. Internal consistency

reliability estimates for this factor is .65. Finally, Factor 4, cultural pride and coping, has three items, 2 of which are positive affirmations of African Americans and 1 that promotes a specific coping strategy. The internal consistency reliability estimate for this factor was .71. The exploratory factor analysis showed a different factor structure for the PERS than what was originally validated for the TERS.

Study 2

Once the factor structure of the PERS was determined, the second aim was to provide validation of the scale and to determine the relationship of the new factors with the TERS in a study with both parents and children.

Method

Participants. Two hundred forty-seven parents and children participated in the study; there were 114 parents and 133 adolescents. Families were included if the family contained youth between the ages of 13 and 17 years. Of the parents/guardians, 80 were mothers (70%) and 34 were fathers (30%). The age of parents/guardians ranged from 26 to 77 years, with a mean age of 44.3 years ($SD = 7.68$). Most of the parents were middle income: 28% reported incomes of \$20,000 or less; 32% reported incomes of \$20,000 to \$40,000; 28% reported incomes of \$40,000 to \$60,000; and 12% reported incomes of \$60,000 or more. Many of the parents reported at least some college experience (40%), 20% had college degrees, and 12% had graduate degrees. No additional demographic information was collected from the youth participants.

Instruments

Parent Experience of Racial Socialization. For Study 2, the full 40-item PERS scale (Stevenson et al., 2002) was given, and both the original factors and the restructured factors from Study 1, religion and spirituality, alertness to discrimination, mainstream, and cultural coping, were used for data analysis.

Teenage Experiences of Racial Socialization. The TERS (Stevenson et al., 2002) is a 40-item scale that assesses racial socialization messages from parents. Items are rated on a 3-point Likert-type scale indicating the relative frequency of messages received (1 = *never*, 2 = *a few times*, 3 = *a lot of the time*). The instrument was developed with five subscales: cultural coping with antagonism (CCA), cultural pride reinforcement (CPR), cultural appreciation of legacy (CAL), cultural alertness to discrimination (CAD), and cultural endorsement of the mainstream (CEM). Reliability coefficients for

Table 3. Correlations.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
PERS									
1. RELSPR	—								
2. AD	.43**								
3. MNSTRM	.08	.31**							
4. CPC	.28**	.17*	.14						
TERS									
5. CPR	.02	-.03	-.02						
		-.07							
6. CCA	-.05	-.00	-.04	-.03	.57**				
7. CAL	-.02	-.00	-.16	.03	.54**	.55**			
8. CAD	-.23**	-.22**	-.13	.03	.25*	.27**	.47**		
9. CEM	.18*	.06	-.06	.16	.14	.18*	.35**	.26**	—

Note. PERS = Parent Experience of Racial Socialization Scale; TERS = Teenagers Experiences of Racial Socialization; RELSPR = Religion & Spirituality (parent variable); AD = Alertness to Discrimination (parent variable); MNSTRM = Mainstream (parent variable); CPC = Cultural Pride (parent variable); CPR = Cultural Pride Reinforcement; CCA = Cultural Coping with Antagonism; CAL = Cultural Legacy Appreciation; CAD = Cultural Alertness to Discrimination; CEM = Cultural Endorsement of the Mainstream.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

the subscales were originally found to be .71 or greater. The overall original reliability estimate was .91. The scale was found in the original published study to be correlated to experiences of racism for girls, familial race communication, and beliefs on racial socialization (Stevenson et al., 2002).

Procedures. Surveys were collected at a predominantly African American school in a mid-size Southern city during a group administration at the school orientation at the beginning of the year (Selders, 2006). All families in attendance were invited to participate; as only one parent/guardian was needed, families were able to independently decide which parent would complete the measures. Each family was given a survey packet with instruments and an instruction sheet and assent/consent forms. Light refreshments were served at the end of the survey administration, and a resource packet was distributed. Survey completion took 20 to 25 minutes.

Results

The purpose of Study 2 was to provide validity evidence of the new factors by examining the relationship between the factors and the TERS. The parents and adolescents were grouped together for correlational analysis. Table 3

lists correlation analyses run with the PERS factors and TERS subscales. Significant negative relationships were found between Factor 1—Religion and spirituality factor and cultural alertness to discrimination—and Factor 2—Alertness to discrimination—and its corresponding TERS subscale Cultural Alertness to Discrimination. A positive relationship was found between Factor 1—Religion and Spirituality—and the TERS subscale Cultural Endorsement of the Mainstream.

Discussion

This study sought to determine psychometric properties of the PERS scale. The purpose was to determine if the factor structure was similar to the TERS. Exploratory factor analysis found four interpretable factors. The four factors were similar to types of messages found in other research studies (Hughes et al., 2006). The first factor, Religion and Spirituality, includes six items that reflect messages on the importance of religion and spirituality for African American children and youth. This factor differs from the TERS Cultural Coping with Antagonism in that the items only reflect religion and do not include items on the role of teachers, extended family, and educational systems. While many researchers do not include spirituality specifically, spirituality particularly as grounded in Afrocentric cultural values seems to be integral to racial socialization. Spiritual beliefs and religious behavior have also been found to be related to positive youth outcomes, including academic performance and achievement (Byfield, 2008), religiosity, positive self-esteem, sexual health, and psychological functioning of girls (Ball, Armistead, & Austin, 2003). Perhaps spirituality and religious socialization serve as a core component to developing a healthy sense of self for children and youth, an ultimate goal of racial socialization.

Factor 2, Alertness to Discrimination, includes nine items. Previous research on adult socialization suggests that parents who experienced race-related stress or racism were more likely to engage in racial socialization processes with their own children (Hughes & Johnson, 2001), so it seems a logical conclusion that preparing children for racism would be important for parents. This factor includes all the original items from the TERS Cultural Alertness to Discrimination factor and also includes items on the reality of racism from the original Cultural Appreciation of Legacy factor and an item on schools from Cultural Coping with Antagonism. Given the prevalence of experiences of racism in multiple settings that youth face, it may be imperative that parents explain the reality of racism, types of racism that may occur, along with coping strategies. Racial socialization processes serve as a protective factor against negative psychological effects of racism (Neblett et al., 2008) and self-esteem (Harris-Britt, Valrie, Kurtz-Costes, & Rowley, 2007).

Factor 3, Mainstream, has three items that focus on messages related to the benefits of being in majority settings, which were drawn from the original Cultural Endorsement of the Mainstream. These items promote White culture or the notion of equality in society. Mainstream messages are similar to egalitarian messages found in other studies (White-Johnson et al., 2010). Parents who convey these messages may want to reassure their children that they are equal to Whites in order to promote self-esteem and deemphasize race (White-Johnson et al., 2010). Factor 4, Cultural Pride and Coping, has three items that are positive affirmations of African Americans. These items include the importance of education to combat racism, self/racial pride, and not being ashamed of their skin color. Most racial socialization research reflects the importance of cultural pride (Hughes et al., 2006). Although the factor analysis did not confirm all of the subscales theorized by Stevenson et al. (2002), the current factor structure is theoretically consistent and parsimonious. The results of the factor analysis provide a streamlined, shortened version of the PERS that researchers can confidently use, given its interpretable factors.

The relationships between the new PERS factors and TERS subscales are interesting. First, a significant negative relationship was found between spirituality and religion in the parents and awareness of discrimination of youth. It may be that parents in the study attempted to foster self-worth based on a spiritual and religious foundation and minimized the reality of racism. Previous qualitative research suggests that mothers emphasize the importance of self-worth by reminding youth that they are a child of God (Thomas & King, 2007). The spirituality and religion factor was not related to cultural coping with racism, implying that parents' messages on religion may have more salience with children than other forms of coping or resources. A positive relationship was found between Factor 1, Religion and spirituality, and the TERS subscale Cultural Endorsement of the Mainstream. Again, Cultural Endorsement of the Mainstream includes messages reflecting majority cultural institutions, such as education and the benefits from being involved in them. Messages on youth importance and self-worth are important in these settings.

Surprisingly, the new PERS Factor 2, Alertness of Discrimination, was negatively related to teenage reports of cultural alertness of discrimination. This may be a result of measurement error, but this finding may suggest that the information that parents believe they are transmitting to their children is not actually being transmitted or received in the manner intended. According to White-Johnson et al. (2010), no research has explored the relationship of parent reports of socialization to child outcomes related to discrimination. They suggest that clusters of racial socialization messages (i.e., self-worth, racial pride, coping) are related to discrimination in youth. Both findings

suggest the need for more sophisticated research in racial socialization, with research examining clusters of messages on outcomes and the transmission and processing of messages by adolescents.

Overall, the findings of this investigation suggest that there is more work to be done with racial socialization in regard to its measurement among African American parents. Challenges related to operationalization of the construct speak to the reality that racial socialization is a highly contextual variable depending on relational, perceptual, and communication factors between parents and children. The challenge of many contextual factors associated with racial socialization is that children may not hear the implicit and/or explicit messages that parents intend (Hughes et al., 2006), or if they do receive the messages, they may be interpreted in a different manner than what they intend. Thus, the measurement of racial socialization messages sent by parents must be nuanced.

Limitations and Future Research

One limitation is the geographical differences in samples. Correlations between the PERS new factors and TERS may be due to regional concerns instead of measurement issues as the sample in Study 1 was from the Midwest and in Study 2 from the deep south. A second limitation comes from the nature of correlational research, which does not suggest directionality. Future research in racial socialization should continue to refine measures for parents and youth as correlational designs are needed to help psychologists better assess the process of racial socialization and how adolescents interpret and respond to intended parental messages. The ability to engage in these types of studies will help researchers and clinicians better understand socialization processes and not just the types of messages transmitted. Future correlational research should also explore differences in racial socialization processes across a variety of age groups for both parents and children.

Given the findings of this investigation, we propose three recommendations that apply broadly to use of racial socialization scales. First, future racial socialization scholars are encouraged to not assume measurement invariance of racial socialization items. Second, researchers should closely review the population for which a racial socialization scale was validated. A racial socialization scale used with adolescents may apply to children or parents, but the factor structure may be different as a function of the role of being a parent or the developmental level of the children the scale is administered to. Finally, if the original sample used to develop and validate a particular racial socialization scale is significantly different than a new intended sample, researchers should conduct an exploratory factor analysis to confirm measurement invariance. Overall, we suggest that the items found in racial

socialization scales are likely to continue to be useful because of consistency of cultural themes and experiences but may be highly sensitive to a variety of contextual factors (i.e., child developmental level, type of neighborhood, social class, social role, etc.) resulting in finding different factor structures.

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