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What is This?

Racial Socialization, Racial Identity, and Race-Related Stress of African American Parents

Anita Jones Thomas[1], Suzette L. Speight[2] and Karen M. Witherspoon[3]

Abstract
This study examines the relationship between racial identity, race-related stress, and racial socialization messages of over 400 African American parents. Results suggest that parents with higher levels of private regard or pride about being African American, and nationalist ideology are more likely to give racial socialization messages. Parents who have experienced race-related stress are also more likely to engage in racial socialization. Additionally, the results indicate parents with high private regard and who have experienced race-related stress serve as the best predictor of in racial socialization, suggesting the recognition of the importance of buffering children from acts of racism. Implications for counseling, parenting programs, and further research are provided.

One purpose of parental socialization is to transmit values, beliefs, and ideas around lifestyles based on cultural knowledge of the adult tasks and competencies needed for appropriate functioning in society (Harrison, Wilson, Pine, Chon, & Buriel, 1990). African American parents are also tasked with helping their children to develop positive self-concept and identity through socialization around issues of race and racism. Thus, racial socialization is one form of parenting that includes preparing children to develop a positive self-concept in an oppressive society. Parental socialization may be influenced by the racial identity of African American parents. For instance, parents who endorse more Afrocentric values may minimize messages on being a minority. Parental socialization may also be influenced by racism experiences that parents face. Although research has assessed how racial identity has influenced socialization practices, particularly racial socialization (Thomas & Speight, 1999), little research has examined how the effects of racism or race-related stress influence racial socialization practices. This study seeks to understand the relationship between racial socialization, racial identity, and race-related stress.

Racial Socialization

Racial socialization is defined as the process in which African American parents raise children to have positive self-concepts in an environment that is racist and sometimes hostile (Thomas & Speight, 1999) and includes exposure to cultural practices, promotion of racial pride, development of knowledge of African American culture, and preparation for bias and discrimination (Hughes, Smith, Stevenson, Rodriguez, Johnson,

& Spicer, 2006). Research has found that parents teach messages in a variety of categories, including the presence and reality of racism, preparing for and overcoming bias and racism, cultural heritage/legacy, racial pride, self-pride, racial equality and humanistic values, mainstream Eurocentric values, spirituality, and coping (Hughes et al., 2006). 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). Racial socialization process seems to be developmental and perhaps gender specific (Hughes & Chen, 1997; Hughes & Johnson, 2001). Racial socialization processes have been linked to a variety of important outcomes in children and adolescents. Specifically, research suggests that parental racial socialization practices and messages are related to racial identity attitudes, self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and anger management, along with school efficacy and achievement (Constantine & Blackmon, 2000; Marshall, 1995). Thus, racial socialization is an important parental practice providing key protective factors for children.

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Racial Identity

Racial identity is the part of an individual's self-concept or sense of self that is related to group membership status and perceptions of that membership. Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, and Chavous (1998) developed a multidimensional model of racial identity that provides a framework for understanding both the significance of race in the self-concept of African Americans and the qualitative meaning that is attributed to being a member of that racial category. The model assumes that identities are both situationally influenced and stable properties of the individual, that individuals have multiple identities within a hierarchical structure, and that the individual's perception is the most valid indicator of identity. There are four dimensions to racial identity in the model. Centrality refers to the extent to which a person defines himself or herself with regard to race and is relatively stable across situations. Salience is more reactive and refers to how relevant race is at a particular moment. Regard has an evaluative component about racial group membership and includes private regard (i.e., individual evaluation of self and other African Americans) and public regard (i.e., perceptions of others' views of African Americans). Finally, there are four prevalent ideologies in the model. The nationalist perspective emphasizes the uniqueness of being African American, and the belief in the importance of African Americans controlling the destiny of African Americans without the input of other groups. The oppressed minority ideology recognizes the oppression experienced by all minority groups. The assimilation ideology emphasizes similarities between African Americans and other American (dominant) groups, whereas the humanist emphasizes the similarities of all humans (Sellers et al., 1998).

Racial identity is related to positive self-esteem (Sellers, Copeland-Linder, Martin, & Lewis, 2006) and is associated with higher psychological well-being and lower psychological symptoms. Sellers and colleagues (2006) found that private regard was related to depression with more positive feelings about being African American related to lower depression. Private regard was also found to be related to lower levels of perceived stress and higher psychological well-being. Centrality has been linked to perceived discrimination (Sellers, Caldwell, Schmeelk-Cone, & Zimmerman, 2003; Sellers & Shelton, 2003).

Racism and Race-Related Stress

Racism has been defined as beliefs, attitudes, institutional arrangements, and acts that denigrate individuals and groups based on phenotypic features and sociopolitical factors (Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999). It includes personal acts, being discriminated against by others to collective acts such as facing discriminatory institutional policies (Landrine & Klonoff, 1996). Racism also exists in the cultural−symbolic realm, through the mass media and social science, and on the sociopolitical level through the legislative process (Harrell, 2000).

Research suggests that many African American adults experience some type of racist oppression, and that this oppression can lead to negative consequences that differ according to the level of threat involved, perceptions of the intent of behavior, and the presence of internalized oppression. Research has linked experiences with racism to physical and psychiatric symptoms including high blood pressure, somatic symptoms, anger, paranoia, anxiety, frustration, resentment, helplessness/hopelessness, low self-esteem, and subjective distress (Clark et al., 1999; Harrell, 2000; Jackson, Brown, Williams, Torres, Sellers, & Brown, 1996; Klonoff, Landrine, & Ullman, 1999; Krieger, 1990; Landrine & Klonoff, 1996; Thompson, 1996, 2002). The extent to which one identifies with being African American is associated with perceived racial discrimination (Sellers & Shelton, 2003). Studies support the idea of a connection between racial identity and race-related stress (Johnson & Arbona, 2006), suggesting that the more a person values being African American, the more perceived racism seems to be present in one's life experience (Utsey, Chae, Brown, & Kelly, 2002). African Americans who experience racism are more likely to engage in ethnic behaviors and to limit association with other ethnic groups (Sherry, Wood, Jackson, & Kaslow, 2006). It is not known whether parents' experiences of racism are related to engagement in racial socialization, and research is needed to explore this relationship.

Purpose of the Study

This study examines the relationship between racial socialization, racial identity processes or attitudes, and race-related stress. Studies have examined the relationship between racial identity and socialization. Thomas and Speight (1999) found a relationship between parents with higher levels of racial identity development and racial socialization messages. A few studies have examined the relationship between racial discrimination and racial socialization. Two studies found that parents, who experience racial (i.e., institutional) discrimination and race-related job stressors, were more likely to engage in racial socialization practices, specifically conveying messages on the promotion of mistrust and preparation for bias (Hughes & Chen, 1997; Hughes & Johnson, 2001). Both racial socialization and racial identity would seem to be influenced by race-related stress. Research has shown that racial identity is influenced by internalized racialism (Cokley, 2002).

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between racial socialization, racial identity, and race-related stress. The specific research questions are (a) what is the relationship between race-related stress and racial socialization? (b) what is the relationship between racial identity and racial socialization? and (c) what is the relationship between racial identity, race-related stress, and racial socialization? It is hypothesized that race-related stress will be positively and directly related to racial socialization. Racial identity, specifically, high levels of private regard, the internal perspectives on racial status, and centrality will be positively related to racial socialization. Finally, it is hypothesized that race-related stress and racial identity combined will best predict racial socialization.

Methodology

Participants

There were 474 participants in this study, which is a subsample of a larger NIMH–funded project examining oppression and racism, coping, and health outcomes. There were 316 women and 152 men who reported their gender. Ages ranged from $18-74$ (mean age $= 39.11$, $SD = 11.95$). The majority of the 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% 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 Experiences of Racial Socialization ([PERS]; Stevenson, 1995). The PERS 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*). There are 5 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). In this study, however, only the total score, adaptive racial socialization experience (ARSE) was used. The α reliability coefficient for the ARSE in this study was .86.

Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity ([MIBI]; Sellers et al., 1998). The MIBI was included in the study to assess racial identity of parents. The MIBI is a theoretically derived instrument constructed by Sellers et al. (1997), consisting of 71 items for 3 scales (i.e., Centrality, Regard, and Ideology). Items are scored on a 7-point scale with 1 $=$ *very strongly disagree* to 7 $=$ *very strongly agree*, with higher scores indicating a stronger identification of the measured identity subscale. The Centrality scale consists of 10 items measuring the extent to which being Black is core to the respondents overall identity. The Regard scale has 2 subscales. The Private Regard subscale contains 7 items and measures the extent to which the respondents hold positive or negative attitudes toward other Black Americans. Public Regard measures the extent to which one feels that other ethnicities hold positive or negative views of Black Americans. The final scale, Ideology, measures the 4 ideologies: nationalist, oppressed minority, assimilation and humanist.

Reliability and construct validity for the MIBI was investigated in a study of 474 African American college students from two mid-Atlantic universities and Cronbach's α for Centrality was found to be .77, and for Regard was .60 (Sellers et al., 1997). African American students with African American best friends yielded higher scores on all 4 subscales, suggesting predictive validity. MIBI scores have also been found to moderate experiences of discrimination and depressive symptoms (Banks & Kohn-Wood, 2007). MIBI α coefficients for this study were

.49 Centrality, .86 Private regard, .69 Public regard, .79 Assimilationist, .80 Humanist, .82 Minority, and .77 Nationalist.

Inventory of Race-Related Stress (IRRS). The IRRS-Brief Version (Utsey, Ponterotto, Reynolds, & Cancelli, 2000) is a measure of the stress experienced by African Americans as a result of their chronic exposure to racism. The IRRS is 22 items in length and uses a 5-point Likert-type scale which requires respondents to reply along a continuum of 0 $=$ *this has never happened to me* to 5 $=$ *event happened to me and I was extremely upset*. The IRRS consists of 1 global assessment of racism-related stress and 3 subscales: Cultural Racism, Institutional Racism, and Individual Racism. Cultural Racism assesses for the experience of an individual's culture has been defamed. Institutional Racism assesses for experiences of racism related to institutional practices and policies. Individual Racism assesses for experiences of interpersonal racism. The IRRS initial validation sample consisted of African American and White male and female college students and community members. Reliability estimates for the IRRS ranged from .79 to .87. In the present study, the α coefficients were found to be .87 (Cultural), .74 (Institutional), .81 (Individual), and .90 (Total racism).

Procedure

Participants were recruited through the health fair section of a large exposition geared toward African American women in a Midwestern city in the spring of 2004. The investigators rented booth space that allowed participants to complete the surveys on site. Participants were told about the objectives of the study 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. Participants were compensated \$15 for their participation in the study.

Results

This study addresses the relationship between race-related stress, racial identity, and racial socialization of African American parents. Table 1 summarizes the means, standard deviations, and reliability coefficients for the PERS, IRRS, and the MIBI. Table 2 lists correlations between variables. An a priori power analysis (Cohen, 1988) was conducted to determine an appropriate sample size. A minimum of 170 participants were needed based on a study with 15 variables, a medium effect size of .12, and a power of .80. The first research question explores the relationship between racial identity and racial socialization. Linear regression indicates that racial identity status accounts for 9% of the variance in racial socialization scores, $F(7, 341) = 4.84$, $p < .01$. Specifically, private regard ($\beta = .15$, $p < .05$) and the nationalist ideology ($\beta = .12$, $p < .05$) predicted racial socialization scores (see Table 3). The second research question examines the relationship between experiences of race-related stress and racial socialization. Linear regression indicates that race-related stress accounted for 21% of the

Table 1. Mean Scores and Score Ranges for Measures

Scale	Mean	SD	Score Ranges
Cultural coping with antagonism	2.39	0.42	1.0−3.0
Cultural pride reinforcement	2.49	0.38	1.11−3.0
Cultural appreciation of legacy	2.42	0.52	1.0−3.0
Cultural alertness to discrimination	2.33	0.50	1.0−3.0
Cultural endorsement of the mainstream	1.73	0.45	1.0−3.0
Adaptive racial socialization experience	2.3	0.34	1.03−3.0
Centrality	4.76	0.84	1.75−7.0
Private regard	5.88	1.17	1.0−7.0
Public regard	3.67	0.92	1.0−6.67
Assimilationist	4.74	0.95	1.22−7.0
Humanist	4.90	0.98	1.67−7.0
Nationalist	4.42	0.91	1.44−7.0
Oppressed minority	4.52	0.98	1.63−7.0
Global assessment of racism (total)	55.11	14.92	4.0−90.0
Cultural racism	27.44	7.45	3.0−40.0
Institutional racism	15.57	5.6	1.0−30.0
Individual racism	18.47	5.63	1.0−30.0

variance in racial socialization scores, $F(1, 346) = 91.36, p < .01$ (see Table 3). The third research question asks the nature of the relationship between racial identity status, race-related stress, and racial socialization. A hierarchical multiple regression analysis suggests racial identity status and race-related stress for 24% of the variance in racial socialization scores, $F(8, 341) = 14.51, p < .01$. Specifically, racial socialization is best predicted by a combination of private regard ($\beta = 2.66, p < .01$) and race-related stress ($\beta = 8.65, p < .01$; see Table 4).

Discussion

This research project seeks to understand the variables that influence racial socialization processes of African American parents, specifically racial identity status and race-related stress. Although previous research has examined each of these variables separately, research has not yet examined the constructs together. The first research question examined the relationship between racial identity status and racial socialization. Results suggested that parents with higher levels of private regard and nationalist ideology were more likely to give racial socialization messages. Individuals with higher levels of private regard often feel more positively about their racial group membership. Parents who feel more positively about their racial identity are more likely to discuss race, racism, and give racial socialization messages with their children (Thomas & Speight, 1999). Interestingly, centrality was not found to be significantly related to racial socialization in the regression analysis. Centrality is the degree to which a person defines herself or himself according to race. Mean scores suggest that in this sample, race has a moderate degree of importance.

Parents with nationalist ideology were more likely to engage in racial socialization than parents with assimilationist, humanist, and minority ideologies. The nationalist ideology promotes the importance of Black or Afrocentric culture. It is not surprising, therefore, that parents with this perspective want to teach their children to feel positively about being African American. The humanist, assimilationist, and minority ideologies were not significant predictors of racial socialization. Boykin and Toms (1985) theorized that African American parents may prepare children regarding their minority status in this country, focus on Eurocentric values and racial equality, a more humanistic approach. However, results from the regression analysis and mean scores of the subscales suggested that the parents in this study did not emphasize these types of messages but instead preferred messages promoting positive aspects of African American culture.

The second research question was whether race-related stress was related to racial socialization. Not surprisingly, parents who experienced race-related stress were more likely to engage in racial socialization, similar to other findings (Hughes & Chen, 1997; Hughes & Johnson, 2001). Parents who experience racism may feel more compelled to talk to their children about the racism that they might experience, too.

Finally, the study examined the relationship between racial identity, race-related stress, and racial socialization messages to find the best predictor or combination of predictors for racial socialization. Given that race-related stress and racial identity status are often associated, it was hypothesized that the two constructs together would be more predictive of racial socialization. The best predictor model included private regard and race-related stress, suggesting that parents who feel positively about being African American and have race-related stress are more likely to communicate racial socialization messages. These parents most likely have some degree of resilience based on their positive racial identity that buffers the potentially negative effects of racism. Their own experiences perhaps lead them to believe that racial socialization may shield their children from the devastating effects of racism.

Implications

The results from this study suggest that race-related stress and experiences of racism are associated with racial socialization messages of African American parents. Parents need to find a balance between teaching children about race-related issues in a way that promotes positive self-concept without overwhelming them or creating hypersensitivity to race. Because of the outcomes related to racial socialization practices for children and adolescents, including self-esteem, lower depression and anxiety, enhanced anger management, and higher school efficacy and achievement (Constantine & Blackmon, 2000; Davis & Stevenson, 2006; Hughes et al., 2006; Marshall, 1995; McHale et al., 2006), it is critical that clinicians help families to explore and develop racial socialization practices. Therapists can help parents to critically examine their own experiences of racism, assess the stress level, and develop positive and proactive forms of practicing racial socialization. Private regard and nationalist ideology were significantly related to racial socialization. Therapists may want to work with

Table 2. Correlations Between Variables

	Cen	Pri	Pub	Assim	Hum	Nat	Oppr	Race	Cult	Inst	Ind
ARSE	.10	.13*	−.03	.16*	.17*	.14*	.09	.46*	.46*	.28*	.44*
Cen		.63*	.21	.38*	.34*	.19*	.24*	.06	.24*	−.01	.18*
Pri			.25*	.44*	.38*	.28*	.32	.10*	.20*	−.07	.09
Pub				.32*	.22*	.10*	.22*	−.02	−.23*	.03	−.19*
Assim					.65*	.01	.35*	.08	.10*	.03	.05
Hum						−.09	.48*	.06	.12*	−.02	.03
Nat							.24*	.16*	.19*	.07	.15*
Oppr								.09	.11*	.04	.06
Race									.90*	.81*	.90*
Cult										.54*	.77*
Inst											.64*

Note. ARSE = adaptive racial socialization experience; CEN = centrality; Pri = private regard; Pub = public regard; Assim = assimilationist; Hum = humanist; Nat = nationalist; Oppr = oppressed minority; race tot = global assessment of racism (total); Cult = cultural racism; Inst = institutional racism; Ind = individual racism.
* $p < .01$.

Table 3. Multiple Regression for Racial Identity, Race-Related Stress, and Racial Socialization

	B	SE	β	t_
Racial identity				
Centrality	−.01	.03	−.01	−0.07
Private regard	.04	.02	.15	2.27
Public regard	−.03	.02	−.11	−1.91
Assimilationist	.02	.03	.06	0.90
Humanist	.02	.03	.13	1.56
Minority	.04	.02	−.07	−1.03
Nationalist	.04	.02	.12	2.05*
Race-related stress				
Cultural	.01	.00	.31	4.25*
Institutional	−.04	.00	−.01	−0.12
Individual	.01	.01	.21	2.64*

* $p < .01$.

Table 4. Hierarchical Regression for Racial Identity, Race-Related Stress, and Racial Socialization

	B	SE	β	t_
Centrality	−.02	.02	−.05	−0.94
Private regard	.04	.02	.16	2.66*
Public regard	−.02	.02	−.06	−1.19
Assimilationist	.03	.02	.00	0.02
Humanist	.04	.02	.14	1.96
Minority	.02	.02	−.07	−1.15
Nationalist	.02	.02	.07	1.28
Total race-related	.01	.00	.42	8.65*

* $p < .01$.

parents to develop racial pride or embrace Afrocentric cultural values. Greene (1992) suggested that clinicians help families with racial socialization by helping them to research through literature, family stories, and develop specific coping strategies for coping with racism.

Limitations and Future Research

There are several limitations to the study. First, the scale assessing racial socialization of parents only included specific categories of messages or explicit forms of racial socialization. Implicit forms of racial socialization, such as participation in cultural activities or events, artwork and literature in the home, or social relationships, may be more related to racial identity status. The study does not focus on the process of racial socialization including how and when parents choose to engage in both explicit and implicit forms of racial socialization. There may also be some range restriction in the scores, particularly in racial identity scores. Most of the scores, with the exception of private regard, were in the moderate range (around 4 on a

7-point scale). Significant relationships may have been underestimated in the study. In addition, the reliability coefficient for centrality in the study was lower than has been previously found. Centrality may not have entered into regression equations due to the lower reliability.

Future research should continue to explore the relationship between these variables, particularly how experiences of racism influence racial socialization. More research needs to be conducted on implicit forms of racial socialization and on the process. Future research could further develop and test a broader model of racial socialization, which would include parental racial identity and experience of racism.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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