Racial Socialization and Identity across the Transition to Middle School among African

American Youth

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Abstract

Tanée M. Hudgens: Racial Socialization and Identity across the Transition to Middle
School among African American Youth
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Grade, gender, and reporter differences in parental racial socialization practices
and their relationship to race centrality were assessed in 197 African American child-
parent pairs when the children were in 5th and 7th grades. Parents reported on their racial
socialization practices with their children (racial pride and preparation for
discrimination), and children reported their perceptions of their parents' behaviors.
Contrary to study hypotheses, racial socialization practices did not increase after children
entered middle school. Furthermore, few gender differences emerged, and the predicted
bidirectional relationship between parental racial socialization and race centrality was not
supported. The interplay among gender, racial socialization, and contextual change in
shaping the identity development of African American youth is discussed.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Table

List of Figures

Figure

The transition from late childhood to adolescence is a period characterized by great physical, social, and cognitive change. Additionally, during this time there is increased identity exploration and awareness of membership in social groups such as those based on gender, ethnicity, and race (Marcia, 1980; Phinney, 1989). African American youth may have particular challenges during this time as they become increasingly aware of the racialized nature of society and the meaning associated with their membership in a racial minority group. Much research has focused on the role of parents in assisting African American youth with their experiences during this time in life; early work revealed that African American parents were concerned with the racial barriers and negative stereotypes their children may encounter (Hughes, Rodriguez, Smith, Johnson, Stevenson, & Spicer, 2006). In response to these concerns, parents attempt to prepare their children for bias, instill pride in their racial heritage, and promote high self-esteem (Peters & Massey, 1983; Tatum, 1987). The process through which these practices occur, which has been termed *racial socialization*, is conceptualized as ways through which "parents shape children's learning about their own race and about relations between ethnic groups" (Hughes & Johnson, 2001, p. 981).

Increasingly, researchers have posited the importance of racial socialization practices in contributing to the adaptive development of African American youth. Research indicates that sociodemographic (e.g., child age and gender) and contextual (e.g., region/neighborhood) factors may shape race-related parenting practices (Brown, Tanner-Smith, Lesane-Brown, & Ezell, 2007; Hughes, 2003; Thorton, Chatters, Taylor,

& Allen, 1990). Although the amount of literature in this field has increased substantially, shortcomings prevent a full understanding of important theoretical issues that are pertinent to the advancement of this field. Methodologically, there is a reliance on cross-sectional data and reports from one source. Also, findings are inconsistent regarding racial socialization practices in middle childhood and early adolescence. In the current study, I attempt to address some of these limitations by obtaining reports from a longitudinal sample of African American children and their parents. I examined grade, gender, and reporter differences in racial socialization practices and their relationship to race centrality as the youth transitioned to middle school.

Racial Socialization in African American Families

There has been a surge in research on racial socialization over the last two decades. Much of this work has focused on attempting to better understand the nature of the practices and messages parents perform and transmit about race. Most racial socialization studies have classified practices to specifically account for the subject or content (e.g., Hughes & Chen, 1997; 1999). Such classification has become common practice, and two categories of racial socialization practices have been examined most frequently and are of particular interest to the current study: cultural socialization and preparation for bias (Hughes, Rodriguez, et al., 2006). Cultural socialization, also termed *racial pride*, refers to those practices that promote pride in one's race, culture, or ethnicity. These messages also teach ethnic and racial history, heritage, and traditions (Boykin & Toms, 1985; Hughes & Chen, 1999). In contrast, *preparation for bias* practices raise awareness of racial discrimination and help youth develop effective coping skills when they encounter racism (Hughes & Chen, 1999).

Racial Pride. Racial pride socialization encompasses practices such as participation in cultural holidays and providing access to cultural music or books (Hughes & Chen, 1997). Researchers have noted that for minority parents in particular, messages of this type are transmitted early in life and are a significant part of child rearing practices (Caughy et al., 2002; Hughes, 2003; Phinney & Chavira, 1995). Eighty percent or more of African American parents report engaging in cultural socialization practices (Caughy et al., 2003; Hughes, 2003; Hughes & Johnson, 2001). Little is known, however, about how the frequency of racial pride messages change over time. Using a within-family design, McHale et al. (2006) noted that parents engaged in more cultural socialization and preparation for bias with older children ($M = 13.9$) as compared to their younger siblings ($M = 10.31$). These results, however, were drawn from cross-sectional data.

Studies have consistently found positive relationships between racial pride socialization and positive outcomes. Such results have been found in multiple domains, including academic outcomes and various aspects of psychological well-being (Caughy et al., 2002; Constantine & Blackmon, 2002; Murry, Berkel, Brody, Miller, & Chen, 2009; Neblett, Smalls, Ford, Nguyen, & Sellers, 2009; Smith, Atkins, & Connell, 2003). Research also indicates that racial pride may influence self-esteem and racial identity, which in turn may boost youth's resilience in discrimination experiences (Barnes, 1980; Neblett, White, Ford, Phillip, Nguyen, & Sellers, 2008; Neblett et al., 2009).

Preparation for Bias. To date, the majority of studies investigating racial socialization in African American samples include measures of preparation for bias (Hughes, Rodriguez, et al., 2006). In comparison to racial pride socialization, preparation for bias socialization is not as frequent (McLoyd, Cauce, Takeuchi, & Wilson, 2000).

When open-ended questions are used, parents infrequently report transmitting preparation for discrimination messages (Hughes, Rodriquez, et al., 2006). For example, Marshall (1995) reported that 3% of African American 9- and 10-year old children and 14% of their parents mentioned racial barriers when asked open ended questions about socialization practices. In contrast, however, some studies utilizing other procedures have found preparation for bias messages to be more common. In particular, Sanders Thompson (1994) found that 48%-58% of adults retrospectively recalled having conversations about racial barriers and discrimination during their youth. These inconsistent findings highlight the importance of methodology in this field. Moreover, because very few studies have incorporated multiple respondents (for exceptions, see Hughes, Bachman, et al., 2006 and Marshall, 1995), little is known regarding the correspondence between child and parent perceptions of racial socialization practices. The current study examines reports from both children and their parents.

Preparation for bias socialization practices are related to many child and youth outcomes, including ethnic identity (O'Connor, Brooks-Gunn, & Graber, 2000; Stevenson, 1995), academic outcomes (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Marshall, 1995), and psychosocial outcomes (Neblett et al, 2008; Stevenson et al., 2002). As previously noted, these practices are often viewed as protective and adaptive means for preparing racial minority children for racial discrimination (Harris-Britt, Valrie, Kurtz-Costes, & Rowley, 2007; Neblett, Phillip, Cogburn, & Sellers, 2006). Adolescents who have taken part in conversations about preparing for discrimination have more effective strategies for dealing with racism than youth who have not engaged in such conversations (Phinney & Chavira, 1995).

Although many studies show that preparation for bias socialization can lead to positive outcomes, some work indicates that an overemphasis on discrimination can lead to less favorable ones. Stevenson (1997) reported lower levels of anger control for adolescent boys who received more preparation for bias messages as compared to those who had received an emphasis on race pride. Harris-Britt et al. (2007) found that among adolescents who had received either low or high levels of preparation for bias, self-esteem was negatively related to perceived discrimination. In contrast, among youth who received moderate levels of preparation for bias, perceived discrimination was unrelated to self-esteem, suggesting that a moderate—but not high—amount of bias preparation was optimal in protecting youth from the deleterious effects of discrimination. In the proposed study, we assume that parents use preparation for bias messages in a protective manner, especially as their children age and are about to increase their contact with other races.

Gender and Racial Socialization Practices

A critical question for researchers in the racial socialization field is to what extent preparation for bias and race pride practices are shaped by individual and contextual factors. Gender is one factor that has been identified as a predictor of parental racial socialization practices. African American youth may have unique obstacles in a racialized society that often devalues the African American race. Experiences of racial discrimination lead to negative outcomes in both adolescents and adults (Cooper, McLoyd, Wood, & Hardaway, 2008). African American boys tend to be viewed by others as more threatening than African American girls (Stevenson, et al., 2002), and they also report more discrimination experiences than African American girls (Fisher & Shaw,

1999; Seaton, Caldwell, Sellers, & Jackson, 2008). In an attempt to protect their sons from such harmful experiences, parents may transmit messages to prepare them for racism. African American girls, on the other hand, may encounter more subtle forms of racism and sexism as they are faced with historical and present images and stereotypes of African American women (West, 1995). In an attempt to combat such views, parents may use practices that promote pride in being African American. Additionally, since passing on history and traditions is commonly viewed as a task for women in African American families, parents may transmit messages and engage in practices with their daughters that center around the importance of the African American culture and heritage (West, 1995).

Findings are inconsistent in the literature regarding the role of gender. In their study of adolescents and young adults ranging from 14 to 24, Bowman and Howard (1985) reported that girls were more likely than boys to report receiving an emphasis on racial pride socialization, whereas boys were more likely than girls to receive preparation for bias messages. Thomas and Speight (1999) reported similar findings utilizing parental reports of racial socialization practices. In contrast, other researchers have found no gender differences in parents' racial socialization of preschoolers, children in middle childhood, and adolescents (Caughy et al., 2002; Hughes & Chen, 1997; Phinney & Chavira, 1995; Stevenson, Reed, & Bodison, 1996). The present study adds to the existing literature by exploring the role of gender longitudinally.

Racial Identity in African Americans

The racial identity of African Americans has received considerable attention in psychological research. Several racial/ethnic identity models have been proposed; one of the most prominent is that by Sellers and his colleagues (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley,

6

& Chavous, 1998). In contrast to previously proposed unidimensional models, Sellers et al. (1998) proposed the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) which includes cognitive, affective, and ideological components. Of interest to the proposed study is centrality, which is defined as the extent to which being African American is core to the respondents' definitions of themselves.

Race centrality and racial socialization. A positive sense of racial identity may be difficult to develop for African Americans who live in a society that often discriminates against them. Racial identity has been found to be positively related to psychological well-being in African American adolescents (Seaton, Scottham, & Sellers, 2006). Racial socialization messages have been hypothesized to result in positive racial identification as such practices may instill pride. Stevenson (1995) found this link in adolescents, and Wills et al. (2007) discovered this relationship in 11-year-old children. Phinney and Chavira (1995), however, found no relationship between racial socialization and adolescent identity. A positive sense of racial identity has also been predicted to shape racial socialization practices; parents for whom race is important may be more likely than other parents to transmit race-related messages (Thomas & Speight, 1999). Similarly, it is also likely that children may elicit more racial socialization messages and practices from their parents if race is core to the child's self-concept (Hughes, Rodriguez, et al., 2006). The current study examines all of these possible relationships by hypothesizing a bidirectional relationship between racial socialization and identity.

The Transition to Middle School

Elementary schools differ in important ways from middle schools, both in terms of structure and in terms of the expectations of teachers and other school personnel. For

example, in addition to being larger and exposing children to more teachers, middle schools use more academic tracking than elementary schools (Eccles & Midgley, 1990; Simmons & Blyth, 1987). Middle school classrooms are also more competitive and are more likely to have public evaluation of work than are elementary schools (Feldlaufer, Midgley, & Eccles, 1988). These conditions may contribute to negative outcomes in students. In fact, the middle school transition is associated with declines in multiple education-related areas, including perceived competence, academic motivation, and achievement (Burchinal, Roberts, Zeisel, & Rowley, 2008; Eccles, Midgley, & Adler, 1984; Seidman et al., 1994).

The middle school transition coincides with the transition from late childhood to adolescence, a period characterized by increased exploration of identity. Children are aware of race and can categorize individuals into racial groups as early as 3, but it is not until about 9 or 10 years of age that minority children understand that race is unchanging and consistent across contexts and situations (Aboud, 1988; Bernal, Knight, Garza, O'Campo, & Cota, 1990). Along with this understanding comes increased awareness and endorsement of stereotypes about group differences, including those related to academic ability (Rowley, Kurtz-Costes, Mistry, & Feagans, 2007; Seidman, Allen, Aber, Mitchell, & Feinman, 1994). Therefore, minority youth must also deal with increasing awareness of race-related experiences during this time.

As children become more aware of race, they may seek information from their parents (Hughes & Johnson, 2001). Parents may adapt their socialization strategies to fit the developmental level of their children and specific contextual factors (Hughes & Chen, 1997). Research has shown low frequency of racial socialization of preschoolers

(Spencer, 1983; Peters & Massey, 1983) and more frequent socialization of older children (Bowman & Howard, 1995; Hughes & Chen, 1997, 1999). To my knowledge, however, no published works have examined longitudinally the possible changes in parental practices regarding race that accompany the transition to middle school in African American students. In the current study I explore this question and propose that parents are likely to increase their racial socialization efforts as children enter middle school, a setting in which they experience more interracial contact.

The Present Study

The current study had three goals. First, I examined changes in racial socialization across the transition to middle school and gender differences in racial socialization received by African American adolescents across this transition. Second, I examined the relationship between parent and child reports of racial socializing practices. Third, I investigated the relationship between parental racial socialization and child and parent race centrality. I extended previous work by following a sample of African American children and their parents longitudinally and by incorporating reports from more than one source.

My hypotheses were as follows:

1. Differences were anticipated in the frequencies with which racial pride messages and preparation for bias messages were transmitted. Consistent with previous research (e.g. Hughes, Rodriquez, et al., 2006; McLoyd, Cauce, Takeuchi, & Wilson, 2000), I hypothesized that both parents and youth would report more race pride than preparation for bias socialization.

2. Parents and children would report increases in parental racial socialization (both regarding racial pride and preparation for discrimination) across the transition to middle school.

3. The frequencies with which different types of racial socialization messages were transmitted would differ as a function of gender. I hypothesized that after the transition to middle school, boys would receive more preparation for bias than girls, who would report more race pride socialization than boys.

4. A bi-directional relationship between racial socialization and race centrality was expected. Greater frequency of racial socialization in Grade 5 was expected to be related to increases in child race centrality. Additionally, higher reports of parental and child race centrality in Grade 5 were expected to be related to increases across the two years in racial socialization.

Method

Participants

Participants were 197 (116 girls, 81 boys) African American child-parent pairs. These children were part of a larger sample of 464 students who were recruited from an urban school district in the southeastern United States to participate in a longitudinal study of academic striving. Students were originally recruited as fifth graders from seven predominantly Black (i.e. 72% or more children were African American) elementary schools. Children of other races and ethnicities participated at the first time point ($n = 83$) but were not interviewed at the second time point. The current report only includes students who indicated they were African American/Black.

The 197 children in the current sample participated in the project both as fifth graders and again when they were in seventh grade. One of their parents or primary caregivers also participated at both time points. Complete data on the measures of interest were available for 211 parent-child pairs from the larger sample of 381 African American participants; of these, 14 cases were dropped because the parent who participated in 5th grade was not the same parent who participated in the 7th grade. Thus, the final sample was composed of 197 child-parent pairs.

In fifth grade, the average age of the child participants was 10.9 years (*SD* = .70) and in seventh grade it was 13.0 years (*SD* = .69). Most participating parents were mothers (86.5%); however, fathers, grandparents, other relatives, and non-relative guardians also participated (Table 1). Henceforth in this report, these participants are referred to as "parents." The sample was largely lower-class, with a median yearly income between $20,000 and $29,000 and a median parental education level reflecting "some college" experience. Frequencies for parent education level, yearly income, and parent marital status can also be found in Table 1.

The 197 children who comprised the current sample did not differ from the children in the broader study sample (i.e., who were excluded because no parent data were available; because different parents responded across the two time points; or because children did not participate at Time 2) on Grade 5 reports of race centrality or racial socialization. Additionally, the two samples did not differ in parental reports of marital status, education, or yearly income.

Procedures

Letters requesting informed consent from parents and assent from children were distributed at school to all fifth graders in the selected schools. Once consent forms were signed and returned to the investigators, trained research assistants set up appointments, and children were administered questionnaires in small groups at school. Research assistants read the instructions and some items aloud and also answered questions for clarification when necessary. Upon completion of the surveys, children received a small gift as compensation.

Parents were then mailed questionnaires containing measures of demographic information and measures pertaining to their beliefs about and behaviors with the focal student. Included in the mailing with the questionnaire were return envelopes so that the questionnaires could be easily returned to the investigators. Upon receipt of the completed questionnaire, parents received a monetary incentive.

Two years later, students were in the seventh grade and attending middle schools that varied in racial composition, ranging from 37% to 98% African American. Contact was attempted with the original sample of 381 youth and their parents. Those students whose parents agreed to participate in this next part of the project completed questionnaires similar to those used two years earlier. Procedures similar to those used at the first time point were used to collect student data. Student incentives at this time point were McDonald's gift cards and movie passes to a local theater. Parents completed questionnaires and received incentives in the amount of $25.

Measures

Racial socialization. At each time point, parents and children completed an adapted version of two of the three subscales of the *Race Socialization* Scale (Hughes &

Chen, 1997) to indicate the extent to which parents engaged in certain race socializing behaviors. This adapted version included three additional items that were aimed at assessing behaviors that fostered racial pride (e.g. "Talked about the accomplishments of Black individuals"). Parents were asked to report on their own behaviors, and children responded to parallel items asking about their parents' behavior. Parents and youth rated on a 5-point Likert scale (*1* = never; *5* = more than 10 times) the frequency with which they or their parents, respectively, engaged in each behavior over the last year.

A factor analysis was conducted on the seventeen items using principal component analysis with Varimax (orthogonal) rotation. Factor analyses were done with both parent and child data. Results indicated small differences between the two reporters; parent results were used to construct factors. The analysis yielded two factors explaining a total of 56.2% of the variance for the entire set of variables. Factor 1 was labeled "preparation for bias" as those items focused on living within a racist society (e.g., "During the past year, how often have [you] your parents said that people might treat you badly due to race?"). Eight items loaded the highest on this factor, which accounted for 47.0% of the variance. The second factor explained an additional 9.2% of the variance, and nine items loaded the highest on it. This factor was labeled "racial pride" as it contained items that measured the extent to which parents encouraged children to be proud of their African American cultural heritage (e.g., "During the past year, how often have [you] your parents done things to celebrate Black history?"). Item scores were averaged for each subscale to create a composite score for race pride socialization and a composite score for preparation for bias. Alpha reliabilities for both scales at both time points exceeded 0.82 for child reports and 0.86 for parent reports.

Race Centrality. Parent and child race centrality were measured at both time points using 4 items from the centrality subscale of the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI) (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997). This subscale included items that measure the extent to which being African American is central to the respondents' definitions of themselves (e.g., "Being Black is an important part of my self-image"). Responses were on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *1* (strongly disagree) to *5* (strongly agree). Scores on the four items were averaged, and higher scores indicate higher race centrality. Alpha reliabilities for this scale were 0.59 and 0.73 for fifth and seventh grade child reports and 0.73 and 0.66 for fifth and seventh grade parent reports, respectively.

Demographic Information. Parents reported their relationship to the focal child, their educational attainment, yearly income, and marital status. Parents were told to select the label (mother, father, grandparent, other relative, guardian, or other) that best described their relationship to the focal child. If a parent selected "other," they were instructed to specify their relationship. Educational attainment was measured on a 10-point scale with responses ranging from "less than high school" to "doctoral or professional degree." Parents also reported their household income before taxes on an 11-point scale ranging from "under $10,000 yearly" to "over $100,000 yearly." Marital status was indicated by the selection of one of the following: 1) married and living together, 2) married but separated, 3) divorced, 4) widowed, and 5) single and never married.

Results

Table 2 shows means and standard deviations of parents' and children's reports of racial socialization and race centrality. Means are based on descriptive statistics and therefore may be different from the estimated marginal means reported in the next section.

Racial Socialization across the Transition to Middle School

To analyze grade, reporter and gender differences in race socialization across the transition to middle school, a repeated measures ANOVA was utilized. Gender (girls, boys) was the between-subjects variable, and type of racial socialization (preparation for bias, racial pride), Grade (5, 7) and Reporter (parent, child) were entered as within-subjects (repeated) variables, resulting in a 2(Gender) x 2(Race Socialization) x 2(Grade) x 2(Reporter) repeated measures ANOVA design. Parental education was controlled in this analysis.

Support for the first hypothesis was provided, as the main effect of Racial Socialization was significant, $F(1, 194) = 30.69$, $p < .001$. On average, for the entire sample of children and parents, Preparation for Bias (PB) scores were significantly lower than Racial Pride (RP) scores ($M_{PB} = 2.75$, $M_{RP} = 3.11$). Contrary to the second hypothesis, racial socialization did not increase with age: Neither the main effect of Grade nor the Racial Socialization x Grade interaction was significant, $F(1, 194) < 1.0$, p's $> .05$.

I also hypothesized that gender differences in type of racial socialization would emerge across the transition to middle school, with boys reporting more preparation for bias than girls, whose socialization would emphasize racial pride. Thus, I anticipated a

significant Gender x Grade x Racial Socialization interaction. This interaction was not significant, $F(1, 194) = < 1.0$, $p > .05$. The Racial Socialization x Gender interaction, however, was marginally significant, $F(1,194) = 2.73$, $p < .10$. Although preparation for bias did not differ by gender, girls marginally received more racial pride socialization at both time points than boys ($M_G = 3.17$; $M_B = 3.06$), providing partial support for our third hypothesis.

Relationship between Parent and Child Reports of Racial Socialization

Also consistent with Hypothesis 3, the Racial Socialization x Reporter x Gender interaction was significant, $F(1, 194) = 6.97$, $p < .01$. Both girls and their parents reported less emphasis on preparation for bias than on race pride (for girls, $M_{PB} = 2.80$, $M_{RP} = 3.18$; for parents of girls, $M_{PB} = 2.70$, $M_{RP} = 3.15$) (Figure 1). In contrast, these emphases differed between boys and their parents: Boys also reported greater emphasis on race pride than on preparation for bias ($M_{PB} = 2.66$, $M_{RP} = 3.09$), but parents of boys reported giving both types of messages with equal frequency ($M_{PB} = 2.83$, $M_{RP} = 3.02$).

Additionally, both girls and their parents reported receiving and giving, respectively, the same amount of preparation for bias messages (for girls, $M_{PB} = 2.80$, for parents of girls, $M_{PB} = 2.70$) (Figure 1). In contrast, these reports differed between boys and their parents: Boys reported receiving less preparation for bias than their parents reported giving (for boys, $M_{PB} = 2.66$; for parents of boys, $M_{PB} = 2.83$). Parents and youth did not differ in their reports of racial pride messages. All other interactions were nonsignificant. Bivariate correlations between parent and child reports of racial socialization were significant for preparation for bias, $r(195) = .23$ and $.23$, $p < .01$, and race pride, $r(195) = .26$ and $.27$, $p < .01$ in 5th and 7th grades, respectively.

Relationship between Racial Socialization and Race Centrality

Using Mplus 5.1, I constructed a path model to examine the hypothesis regarding the relationship between racial socialization and race centrality. I did not expect the two types of racial socialization to have different relationships to centrality and, therefore, a total racial socialization score encompassing both racial pride and preparation for bias messages was created for parent reports and another for child reports. Correlations among study variables can be found in Table 3. Parent reports of racial socialization were related to parent centrality at each time point, whereas child reports of racial socialization were related to their own race centrality in fifth grade but not in seventh. Fifth grade child racial socialization was examined as a predictor of child race centrality in Grade 7, controlling for previous child race centrality. Also, parent and child race centrality in Grade 5 were examined as predictors of parent and child reports of racial socialization, respectively, controlling for previously reported racial socialization.

Given that each of the goodness of fit indices operates on different assumptions, multiple indices of overall fit were assessed. Chi-square assesses the difference between expected and observed values, and therefore a nonsignificant *p* value is expected. For the current model, the chi-square was nonsignificant, $\chi^2 = 9.06/6$, *p* >.05. Values less than .05 indicate good fit for the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and values greater than .90 indicate "reasonably good fit of the researcher's model" overall for the comparative fit index (CFI) (Kline, 2005, p. 140). The RMSEA for this model was .05 and the CFI was .98.

Figure 3 presents the significant standardized path coefficients for the model. Fifth grade racial socialization was a significant predictor of seventh grade socialization

17

for children and parents, respectively (β =.26 (.07) and .55 (.06) p <.001), and fifth grade race centrality was a significant predictor of seventh grade race centrality (β =.39 (.07), p <.001) for children.

I expected that greater frequency of racial socialization in fifth grade would be related to increased race centrality in seventh grade and that higher race centrality scores in fifth grade would be related to increases in racial socialization practices in seventh grade. The model did not support the predicted bidirectional relationship between parental racial socialization and race centrality. For children, fifth grade racial socialization did not predict seventh grade race centrality, and fifth grade child reported race centrality did not predict seventh grade reports of racial socialization. Furthermore, fifth grade parent race centrality was not a significant predictor of seventh grade parent reported racial socialization.

To broadly summarize these results, racial pride was emphasized more than preparation for bias in these families. Contrary to the first hypothesis, neither preparation for bias nor race pride increased in middle school. Furthermore, there was only minor support for the existence of gender differences in the racial socialization messages transmitted to boys and girls. Boys did not receive more messages about preparing for bias, but girls did marginally receive more messages about race pride than boys. Reports of parents and children differed in that parents of boys reported transmitting race pride and preparation for bias messages with equal frequency, while their sons reported receiving more race pride messages than preparation for bias messages. Also, boys reported receiving less preparation for bias messages than their parents reported

transmitting to them. Path analysis did not support a bidirectional relationship between parental racial socialization and race centrality.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine grade, gender, and reporter differences in parental racial socialization practices and their relationship to race centrality in African American children and parents as children transitioned to middle school. The results of the current study contribute to the existing work in this area by examining parental practices regarding race longitudinally. In addition to assessing possible change in racial socialization across the transition to middle school, the longitudinal design of the current study allowed us to examine the bidirectional relationship between racial socialization practices and parent and child racial identity. Furthermore, information from both parents and children provided evidence from multiple sources regarding the questions of interest.

Racial Socialization across the Transition to Middle School

As hypothesized, racial pride socialization was emphasized more than preparation for bias socialization. These findings suggest that promoting racial pride is a salient part of childrearing for the families in our sample. This finding is consistent with previous work that suggests parents tend to transmit more messages that focus on positive aspects of being Black and fewer messages related to negative aspects such as experiencing discrimination and prejudice (Hughes & Johnson, 2001; Lesane-Brown, 2006; McLoyd, et al., 2000; Neblett et al., 2009; Peters, 2002). Harris-Britt et al.'s (2007) finding suggests the importance of transmitting moderate amounts of preparation for bias messages; either providing information to youth that may signal the nonexistence of bias or providing a constant reminder that discrimination will occur may be maladaptive.

Unfortunately, however, the reasons that some parents do not engage in preparation for bias practices as much as they do in race pride messages as well as family and contextual factors associated with individual differences in socialization practices are not fully understood. It is possible either that some factors prevent parents from engaging in such socialization (e.g., they understand the potential harm associated with their children being overly concerned about the possibility of discrimination) or that this type of socialization is not salient to parents (Coard, Wallace, Stevenson, & Brotman, 2004). Additional work is needed to better understand the factors that lead to or prevent the transmission of particular messages, to understand family and contextual factors associated with parents' racial socialization methods, and the consequences of parents' socialization style for youth.

I hypothesized that one factor which would play a role in the frequency of racial socialization messages was age. I anticipated that as children entered middle school, parents would talk to their children more about race. Given the increased autonomy, cognitive ability, and exposure to more students and teachers that come with the transition to adolescence and to middle school (Eccles & Midgley, 1990), I expected that parents would make adjustments in their racial socializing practices to fit children's developmental competencies and experiences. Consistent with studies including children of different ages (e.g., Hughes & Chen, 1997, McHale et al., 2006), I hypothesized shifts in parental practices either in response to the occurring changes or in anticipation of issues that would develop. Racial socialization practices, however, did not increase with age; they were the same at the two measurement points. The data for this study did not extend beyond seventh grade; perhaps the two-year age range examined in this study is

too narrow. Alternatively, it is possible that parents' racial socialization increased when children entered middle school in Grade 6, and then decreased as children adjusted to their new environments. Longitudinal studies that extend over a larger period of adolescence are needed to further address how racial socialization practices change developmentally. These issues will be addressed further in the limitations section below.

Due to the different experiences of ethnic minority girls and boys, I anticipated gender differences in the frequencies of types of messages transmitted. Because African American males are particularly at risk for overt discrimination, I expected that parents would provide boys with more preparation for bias and girls with more racial pride messages (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Thomas & Speight, 1999). The findings, however, did not completely support this hypothesis. The frequency of preparation for bias messages did not differ by gender. Although parents may believe that preparation for bias messages are more important for boys than for girls as youth enter adolescence, it seems that for the seventh graders in this sample, preparation for bias messages were viewed as equally needed for children of both genders. There was, however, some support for gender differences in racial pride messages, as girls marginally received more racial pride messages than boys. This finding suggests that parents in this sample may view these messages as especially important for adaptive development in girls. Taken together, the findings of the current study add to the mixed literature on gender differences in racial socialization practices and warrant the need for more study in this area.

Relationship between Child and Parent Reports

Inclusion of reports from both parents and children allowed me to examine how children perceived the behaviors and messages of their parents. As Marshall (1995) notes,

21

the messages parents intend to transmit to children may not reach their children; messages can be overlooked, ignored, misunderstood, or challenged. Furthermore, parents may not always be aware of what they are transmitting (Hughes, Bachman, et al., 2006). In the present study parent reports were not significantly different than child reports, suggesting that, in general, parents and children have similar perceptions of parental socialization behaviors. The weak correlations between parent reports of preparation for bias and race pride with child reports of preparation for bias and race pride, respectively, inform us of the relatively low correspondence between parent and child perceptions of racial socialization practices. Although the existing research in this area is limited, these findings are consistent with some studies that found child reports of racial socialization did not match parental reports (e.g., Hughes, Bachman, et al., 2006; Marshall, 1995).

Hughes, Bachman et al. (2006) found in a multi-racial sample that second- and fourth-grade children perceived more preparation for bias messages and fewer cultural socialization messages than their parents reported sending. In the current study, no reporter differences were found in the frequency of race pride messages, whereas boys reported less preparation for bias than their parents reported. More research is needed to better understand the correspondence between parent and child reports of racial socialization practices.

The Relationship between Racial Socialization and Race Centrality

I hypothesized a bidirectional relationship between racial socialization and race centrality. Previous research and theory indicate that parental racial socialization practices may influence child racial identity, and racial identity, in turn, may also

influence racial socialization practices (Hughes, Rodriquez, et al., 2006; Stevenson, 1995; Thomas & Speight, 1995). I did not, however, find support for these relationships. As previously noted, bivariate correlations revealed no relationship between fifth grade racial socialization and seventh grade race centrality or between fifth grade race centrality and seventh grade race socialization for children, and these relationships were nonsignificant in the path analysis. Similarly, fifth grade parent-reported socialization was only weakly correlated with Grade 7 parent race centrality.

To further clarify the findings of the current study, future studies should explore factors that may influence the relationship between racial socialization and identity. As Neblett and colleagues (2009) note, previous research on this topic has used a wide range of age groups, which may be partially responsible for the inconsistent results. Age might be an important factor such that racial socialization and identity might be related for older youth. It is also possible that racial socialization primarily influences other aspects of identity (e.g., Sellers' concept of racial ideology) rather than centrality. Moreover, the lack of a significant path from Grade 5 child race centrality to Grade 7 racial socialization might be because many parents are not aware of their child's racial identity.

Study Implications, Limitations, and Suggestions for Future Research

The current study makes an important contribution to the racial socialization literature but some limitations must also be acknowledged. Although common in the racial socialization literature, the reliance on a non-representative sample of African American youth and their parents from a particular region of the United States limits our ability to generalize the findings beyond the current study. Additionally, I focused on urban African American early adolescents. Although this limitation provided the

23

opportunity to test theoretically important questions, more representative samples would increase the external validity of the results.

Parents of higher socioeconomic status have been shown to use more racial socialization than lower SES parents (Hughes & Chen, 1997). The current sample was relatively low-income. It is also possible that this sample may be reporting higher race pride than those from other communities because the sample comes from a community with a long history of prominent African Americans in local politics and businesses. Additionally, the majority of children in the sample transitioned to middle schools that were predominately African American, perhaps decreasing the likelihood that parents would substantially increase their racial socialization. Future work should attempt to better understand such contextual factors that may influence the frequency and content of parental racial socialization.

Even though most studies of racial socialization rely on self-report methods, there are shortcomings associated with this method of assessment. Utilization of these methods assume that parents are aware of the messages they transmit to their children, are willing to report them correctly, and that children receive and understand the messages that parents intend to transmit (Hughes, Rodriquez, et al., 2006). This issue can be further complicated when respondents are asked to report retrospectively (Lesane-Brown, 2006). In the current study, respondents reported on behaviors and messages over the last year. Thus, self-report methods may be subject to recall bias and/or memory limitations. Caughy et al.'s (2003) finding that parents' self-reports of ethnic-racial socialization did not predict child cognitive outcomes whereas the observational measure did provides support for the methodological challenges associated with self-report. Future work should

incorporate both self-report and observational measures to better understand the types and frequencies of racial socialization messages.

In spite of these limitations, the findings of the current study suggest many directions for future research on parental racial socialization in African American families. For one, as previously noted, the possibility of age-related changes and gender and reporter differences in parental racial socialization practices should be further explored utilizing larger and more representative samples, measures that account for the complexity of racial socialization, and longitudinal designs that cover larger periods of time. Such work has the possibility of helping to explain the inconsistencies found in certain areas of the racial socialization literature.

It is also important for researchers to consider other factors that may influence the age-related changes in parental racial socialization. As previously noted, the sample for the current study was drawn from African American students who attended predominately African American elementary schools in the Southeastern United States. The middle schools attended by these students varied in their racial composition, and it is possible that school racial composition influences parental racial socialization messages. Borrowing from the literature examining the role of neighborhood context on racial socialization practices (e.g., Caughy, Nettles, O'Campo, & Lohrfink, 2005; Stevenson, McNeil, Herrero-Taylor, & Davis, 2005; Tatum, 1987; Thorton et al., 1990), it is plausible that levels of interracial contact within the school setting may impact the messages African American parents transmit to their children. Brown et al. (2007) found the percentage of minorities at the child's school to be a predictor of racial socialization for a sample of kindergarteners. Future work should attempt to account for the effects of

school racial composition. Such research would also be helpful in adding to our understanding of factors that promote or prevent the transmission of certain racial socialization messages or practices.

Additional work should continue to examine the relationship between child and parent reports of racial socialization. Our study, along with previous research (Hughes, Bachman, et al., 2006; Marshall, 1995), shows relatively weak correlations between children's and parents' reports of racial socialization. Even less is known about the nature of parent-child discrepancies. Researchers must work to understand where patterns of agreement and disagreement occur and the factors that may influence similar/dissimilar reports of racial socialization practices.

Table 1

Sample Characteristics: Parent's Relationship to Child, Parent Education Level, Family Income and Parent Marital Status

	% (n)
Relationship to Child	
Mother	86.5 (167)
Father	5.7 (11)
Grandparent	5.7 (11)
Other Relative	1.0 (2)
Guardian	0.5 (1)
Other	0.5 (1)
Parent Education Level	
Less than high school diploma/equivalent	14.7 (28)
High school diploma/GED	23.6 (45)
Some technical school/some college	38.2 (73)
Jr. college degree	6.8 (13)
4-year college degree	11.5 (22)
More than a 4-year college degree	5.2 (10)
Income (yearly)	
Under $10,000	18.0 (34)
$10,000 - $19,999	24.3 (46)
$20,000 - $29,999	18.0 (34)
$30,000 - $39,999	10.1 (19)
$40,000 - $49,999	6.3 (12)
$50,000 - $59,999	7.9 (15)
$60,000 - $69,999	5.8 (11)
$70,000 - $79,999	3.2 (6)
$80,000 - $89,999	2.6 (5)
$90,000 - $99,999	1.1 (2)
Over $100,000	2.6 (5)
Marital Status	
Married (living together)	28.1 (54)
Married (separated)	11.5 (22)
Divorced	15.6 (30)
Widowed	1.6 (3)
Single (never married)	43.2 (83)

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for Parent and Child Reports of Racial Socialization and

Race Centrality, by Reporter, Gender and Grade

| | Parent | | Child | |
| | 5th Grade | 7th Grade | 5th Grade | 7th Grade |
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Girls				
Preparation for Bias	2.73 (1.04)	2.65 (1.04)	2.75 (0.97)	2.83 (0.98)
Race Pride	3.27 (0.95)	3.03 (0.95)	3.15 (0.89)	3.20 (0.87)
Child Race Centrality			3.98 (0.85)	3.97 (0.84)
Boys				
Preparation for Bias	2.94 (1.07)	2.73 (0.98)	2.57 (0.91)	2.76 (0.86)
Race Pride	3.16 (0.91)	2.89 (0.93)	3.00 (1.02)	3.19 (0.78)
Child Race Centrality			4.07 (0.71)	3.89 (0.73)
Overall				
Preparation for Bias	2.82 (1.05)	2.60 (1.01)	2.68 (0.94)	2.80 (0.93)
Race Pride	3.23 (0.93)	2.97 (0.94)	3.09 (0.96)	3.20 (0.84)
Child Race Centrality			4.02 (0.80)	3.93 (0.80)
Parent Race Centrality	3.72 (0.81)	3.84 (0.73)		

Table 3

Bivariate Correlations among Racial Socialization and Race Centrality Variables

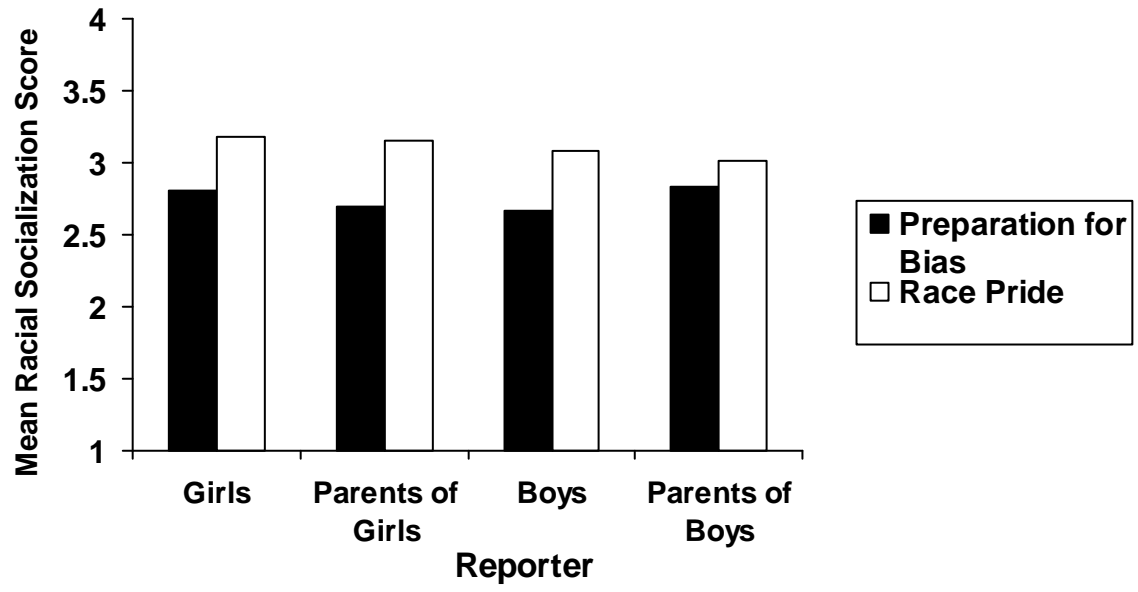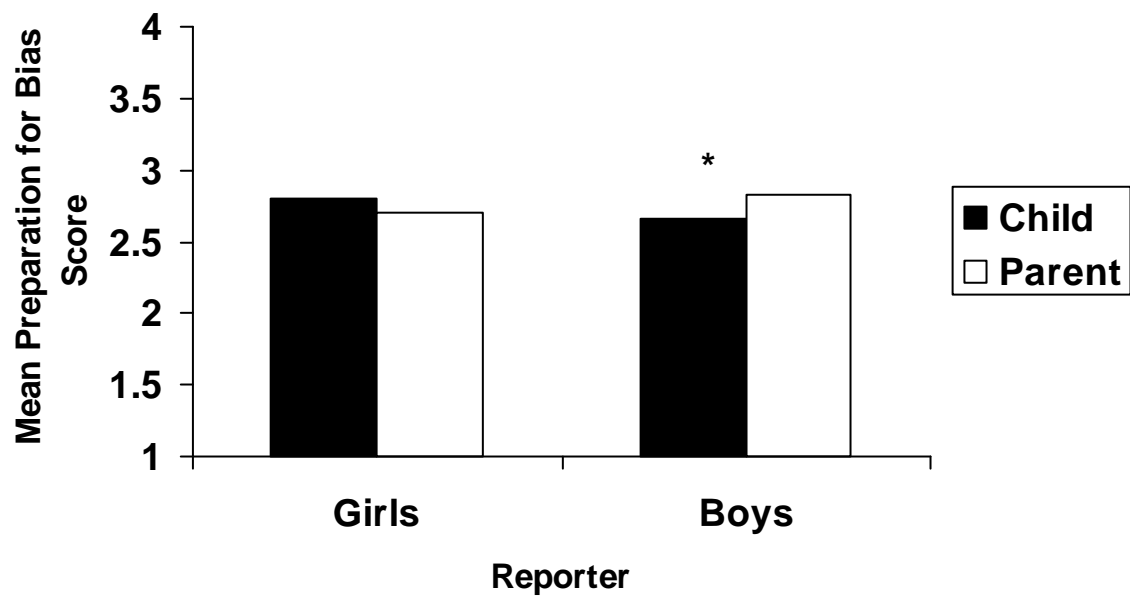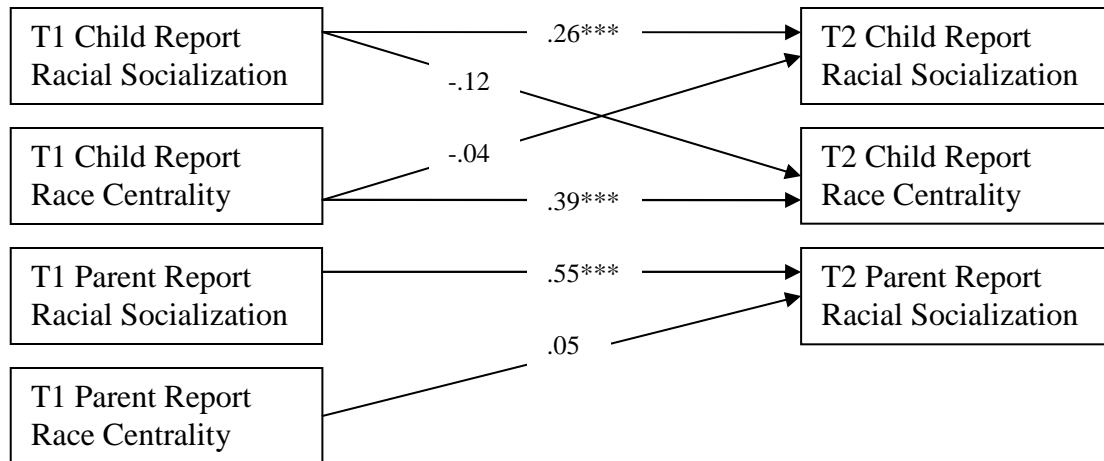| Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Parent preparation for bias (5th)	–											
2. Parent race pride (5th)	.66**	–										
3. Parent preparation for bias (7th)	.57**	.42**	–									
4. Parent race pride (7th)	.44**	.56**	.74**	–								
5. Child preparation for bias (5th)	.24**	.15*	.19**	.13	–							
6. Child race pride (5th)	.29**	.25**	.12	.15*	.68**	–						
7. Child preparation for bias (7th)	.19**	.15*	.23**	.19**	.31**	.11	–					
8. Child race pride (7th)	.17*	.19**	.19**	.27**	.24**	.26**	.73*	–				
9. Child race centrality (5th)	.10	.09	.01	.08	.27**	.30**	.00	.08	–			
10. Child race centrality (7th)	-.08	-.04	-.09	.01	.02	-.01	.10	.10	.36**	_		
11. Parent race centrality (5th)	.17*	.28**	.17*	.16*	.03	.05	-.61	.01	.09	.06	_	
12. Parent race centrality (7th)	.18*	.29**	.27**	.29**	.15*	.09	-.03	-.01	.07	.02	.50**	_

Note. *p<.05, **p<.01

29

Figure Captions

Figure 1. Mean Scores of Parent and Child Reports of Racial Socialization, by Reporter and Gender

Figure 2. Mean Scores of Parent and Child Reports of Preparation for Bias, by Reporter and Gender

Figure 3. Path Model for Relationship between Racial Socialization and Race Centrality

T1 Child Report Racial Socialization	.26***	T2 Child Report Racial Socialization
T1 Child Report Race Centrality	-.12 / -.04 / .39***	T2 Child Report Race Centrality
T1 Parent Report Racial Socialization	.55***	T2 Parent Report Racial Socialization
T1 Parent Report Race Centrality	.05	

χ^2= 9.06, *p* > .05; RMSEA=.05; CFI=.98
p <.05, **p<.01, ***p* <.001

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