# The Role of Racial Socialization in Relation to Parenting Practices and Youth Behavior: An Exploratory Analysis

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## SUMMARY

Racial socialization is receiving research attention because of growing evidence that it can be a protective developmental process in African American families. The present study was an exploration of the relationship of parental mental health, discipline effectiveness, monitoring and racial socialization strategies on child externalizing behaviors in a sample of 140 African American parent/caregivers. Findings indicated that certain types of racial socialization–particularly, spirituality and religious coping–in conjunction with discipline effectiveness was related to child behavior problems. Specifically, among parents who felt they used more effective discipline strategies, moderate to high rates of spiritual and religious coping were associated with a reduction of child behavior problems. These findings support the hypothesis that racial socialization is an important aspect of parenting in African American families that can be associated with the effective management of children's behavior. Implications for parenting interventions and future research are discussed.

### Keywords

Racial socialization; parents; African Americans; behavior problems

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A central goal of African American parents, like all parents, is to manage their children's behavior, but they are also faced with the unique task of preparing their children to develop a positive racial self-concept and, when faced with racism and discrimination, strategies to cope with their racial group membership (Boykin & Toms, 1985; Peters, 1985; Ward, 2000). Research and theory on parenting processes associated with children's behavior outcomes and

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those associated with racial socialization have developed separately, although recent research has moved towards examining how aspects of racial socialization are related to problem behaviors (e.g., Caughy, O'Campo, Randolph, & Nickerson, 2002; Stevenson, Herrero-Taylor, Cameron, & Davis, 2002). This area of research, at the crossroads of culturally specific and general parenting practices, should be of interest to applied researchers interested in developing culturally relevant interventions for parents of color and basic researchers interested in risk and protective factors that influence child outcomes in African American families, particularly those living in impoverished neighborhoods.

Racial socialization is the primary vehicle of cultural transmission for African American families, steeped in a tradition of resistance to oppression and embedded in "conversations and actions that communicate to [our] children how to survive with dignity and pride in a racist world." (Stevenson, Davis, & Abdul-Kabir, 2001 p. 46). In the present study, the interrelationship of racial socialization strategies, parental stress, parental mental health, discipline effectiveness, monitoring and child externalizing behaviors among low-income inner city African American families were examined.

Ethnographic research by Jarrett (1999) with African American parents living in conditions of neighborhood disadvantage suggests that they rely greatly on the effective and sometimes restrictive use of discipline strategies and parental monitoring to protect their children from harm. Indeed, numerous studies suggest that strategies such as the effective use of discipline and parental monitoring are strong influences on youth behavioral outcomes (Capaldi, 1992; Capaldi & Patterson, 1991; Conger, Patterson, & Ge, 1995; Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992). However, prior research also indicates that parenting under conditions of economic hardship can be characterized by harsh and inconsistent parenting, marked by the frequent use of restrictions and physical punishment, a high value placed on obedience, and the absence of reasoning when providing discipline Conger, et al., 1992; Halpern, 1990; Hanson, McLanahan, & Thomson, 1997; Kelley, Power, & Wimbush, 1992; McLoyd, 1990, 1998; Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992; Simons, Johnson, Beaman, Conger, & Whitbeck, 1996).

These parenting practices may be maladaptive responses to the stressors associated with poverty or a reaction to the intuitive knowledge of parents that family poverty and neighborhood risk are associated higher risk for participation in antisocial behavior among youth, which is supported by prior longitudinal and cross-sectional studies (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; McLoyd, 1990). Given that research suggests that African American children are more likely to experience persistent poverty (McLoyd, 1998), it is not surprising that negative outcomes disproportionately impact minority youth who are over represented among the poor in distressed areas (Steinberg, 2002; Wilson, 1987).

Although longitudinal, cross-sectional, and randomized control trials of interventions, overall, present a gloomy picture of parenting school-age children and adolescents in poor African American neighborhoods, there is surprisingly little research on factors that protect children from developing behavior problems. Three trends in research offer some directions for exploring critical parenting practices that may protect children in impoverished minority communities from the negative effects of poverty. First, in a line of research focused on the influence of neighborhood disadvantage on child development, there are relatively few studies with preadolescents that examine externalizing behaviors (Plybon & Kliewer, 2001), preadolescence being an important developmental stage to explore since problem behavior in these years is associated with serious delinquency later in adolescence. In one large scale cross-sectional study of 1,271 African American and White 2nd through 5th graders, African American boys were found to be more aggressive, than African American girls or White boys and girls. These findings support the neighborhood risk model with children residing in high-risk neighborhoods being more prone to social or behavioral problems; however, this study

did not address the processes through which neighborhood disadvantage influenced outcomes (Plybon & Kliewer, 2001), nor were any hypotheses developed with regards to explaining these racial group differences.

Second, there are no studies in the literature on parenting that explore the combined effects of culturally relevant parenting practices (i.e., racial socialization) and "universal" parenting practices (i.e. discipline effectiveness and monitoring) on the development of behavior problems in school-age children in low-income communities (for an exception see Coard, Wallace, Stevenson, & Brotman, 2004), a particularly glaring gap given the ample research on the greater prevalence of behavior problems in low-income neighborhoods of color. Lastly, psychological research is sparse with regards to the mechanisms that serve to protect and promote risk and resilience in children from low-income neighborhoods (for an exception, see Furstenberg et al., 1999). Recent work by Spencer et al. (1996) applying ecological systems theory to African American youth in low-income communities typifies the movement towards integrating an ecological approach in psychological research to understand parental buffering processes among low-income African American youth. We believe racial socialization is one such factor, unique to African American families, that serves to protect children from the harmful effects of racism and discrimination and simultaneously prevents the development of problem behaviors through generic positive parenting practices.

## Racial Socialization

Research and theory on racial socialization has increased substantially since the 1980s and advanced our understanding of the content and prevalence of messages that promote racial awareness for African American youth. Early scholars viewed racial socialization as a multi-dimensional construct and much research has been directed at defining the components or types of messages associated with racial socialization (Bowman & Howard, 1985; DeBerry, Scarr, & Weinberg, 1996; Demo & Hughes, 1990; Parham & Williams, 1993; Phinney & Chavira, 1995; Sanders Thompson, 1994; Spencer, 1983; Stevenson, Reed, & Bodison, 1996; Thornton, Chatters, Taylor, & Allen, 1990). In an early conceptualization of racial socialization, Boykin and Toms (1985), described the triple quandary that African American parents face in raising their children, balancing the tasks of promoting cultural pride, preparing children for life in mainstream society, and preparing children to deal with racism and discrimination.

Since that time a number of studies, including a few large-scale surveys and smaller cross-sectional studies, have examined the extent to which racial socialization is practiced among African American families and identified its multidimensional components that largely parallel Boykin and Toms' triple quandary. In the largest survey of racial socialization to date, Thornton et al. (1990) used open-ended responses to the question, "In raising your children, have you done or told them things to help them know what it means to be Black?" to examine racial socialization among 2,107 African American parents in the National Survey of Black Americans. Two-thirds of African American parents reported communicating or acting in a manner to racially socialize their children. Thirty percent imparted mainstream values, stressing the importance of achievement and hard work or good citizenship and moral values. Thirty-seven percent of respondents delivered messages associated with racial or ethnic pride, including being proud of one's color, Black heritage, racial self-acceptance and positive self-image. Lastly, 8.2% of respondents stressed racial barriers or blocked opportunities facing Blacks. Other studies have confirmed the widespread use of racial socialization practices among African American parents (Demo & Hughes, 1990; Sanders Thompson, 1999); however, some have commented that the degree to which it is practiced in African American families can differ depending on whether the measures used to assess racial socialization are open-ended or forced choice instruments (Hughes & Chen, 1990).

Aside from the themes consistent with the triple quandary, some scholars have attempted to elaborate or expand on the themes of the triple quandary. Stevenson's body of work with adolescent perceptions of racial socialization has advanced such dimensions as religiosity, kinship support and extended family caring in addition to themes of cultural pride reinforcement, and racism awareness training (Stevenson, 1995). The inclusion of a theme related to spirituality or religious involvement is based on scholarship underscoring the historic significance of religious church involvement and the importance of spirituality in the African American experience. In general, religiosity has a well-established effect on a number of psychological and behavioral outcomes (Brega & Coleman, 1999). Some research with adolescents suggests that religious adolescents are less depressed, less likely to engage in premarital intercourse, and somewhat less likely to engage in deviant or delinquent behavior (Benson, Donahue, & Erickson, 1989; Litchfield, Thomas, & Li, 1997). Likewise, messages related to the extended family are rooted in the belief that blood and non-blood (fictive) kin can influence child development and is also a significant part of African American family life.

In addition to the degree to which it is practiced by parents and the content of its components, of great interest to researchers is the impact of racial socialization on youth outcomes. The most often explored outcomes are related to youth's racial attitudes, identity, or self-esteem, (e.g., Boykin & Toms, 1985; Branch & Newcombe, 1986; Fischer & Shaw, 1999; Johnson, 2001; Peters, 1985; Spencer, 1983). These studies have tended to be small, descriptive or cross-sectional studies based on convenience samples; however, they consistently show a relationship between racial socialization or parental racial attitudes and youth's ethnic identity. In particular, messages related to the promotion of cultural pride are most often associated with positive identity development (Branch & Newcombe, 1986; Marshall, 1995; Spencer, 1983; Stevenson, 1995).

Aside from correlational studies of the association between racial socialization and ethnic identity, some studies have explored the relationship of racial socialization and other aspects of well-being, development or psychosocial functioning. Findings of these research studies are mixed, but there is growing and converging evidence that the effects of racial socialization on youth outcomes can be based on the types of messages sent (Hughes & Chen, 1998) with a few studies suggesting a link between specific dimensions of racial socialization and externalizing behavior problems. For example, in a recent study of 127 urban African American teenagers, Stevenson, et al. (2002) found that adolescent boys who reported lower levels of cultural pride reinforcement were more likely to report initiating fights. In two other studies, messages related to cultural socialization were also associated with greater peer self-esteem (Constantine & Blackmon, 2002) and more adaptive anger expression (Stevenson, Reed, Bodison, & Bishop, 1997). Negative associations have been found between racial socialization and behavior problems when racial socialization focuses on racial barriers. In a large-scale study with 1,328 sixth and seventh grade boys of African American, Haitian and Caribbean descent in Miami, Biafora, Warheit, Zimmerman, and Gil (1993) found that racial mistrust transmitted by family members was a significant predictor of both major and minor deviance. These relationships remained when other potentially important predictors of deviance, such as socioeconomic status, peer values, family cohesion, and religiosity were controlled. Stevenson et al. (1997) reported that racial socialization messages emphasizing racial barriers were associated with less adaptive anger expression among adolescents whereas adolescents in families that focused on strategies that promoted cultural pride and heritage showed higher levels of anger control.

Despite the associations between racial socialization practices and youth behavioral outcomes, there is little understanding of the underlying mechanisms by which racial socialization operates to promote or curtail problem behaviors, but recent studies suggest that the amount of time engaged in racial socialization and other "universal" parenting practices such as

monitoring, positive involvement and the effective use of discipline are related to child adjustment. For example, Frabutt, Walker, and MacKinnon-Lewis (2002) examined associations among racial socialization, dimensions of parenting, such as the quality of parent-child interactions as assessed by direct observation, and children's adjustment in a sample of 66 middle school youth and their mothers. Findings revealed "universal" parenting practices, such as monitoring, positive involvement and the effective use of discipline were related to their child's adjustment. Mothers were categorized into high, medium, and low racial socializers based on their answers to a questionnaire that assessed parent reported proactive responses to discrimination. Mothers in the medium group had higher scores on observational measures of positive parenting and higher scores on self reported measures of positive involvement and monitoring, than did their counterparts in the low or high racial socialization groups. Children of moderate racial socializers displayed the most positivity and the least negativity in interactions with their mothers.

In a study of racial socialization with preschool children, Caughy et al. (2002) found that home environments rich in African American cultural features (e.g., culturally appropriate toys, pictures, or clothing) were associated with greater factual knowledge and better problem solving skills as measured by the K-ABC (Kaufman & Applegate, 1988). After controlling for general level of parent involvement, only messages related to racial pride were significantly associated with parent reports of child behavior problems. Parents who stressed messages related to racial pride had children with fewer behavior problems. Though these studies are mixed in the methods used to assess racial socialization, they suggest a complex relationship between racial socialization and other parenting practices, the confluence of which may contribute to youth outcomes.

In summary, the available research on the relationship between racial socialization and youth behavioral outcomes is thin, but evidence suggests that some aspects of racial socialization such as cultural pride can have a positive effect, while strategies that promote mistrust or focus exclusively on racial barriers are associated with negative outcomes. It is likely that in order to truly understand the nature and importance of racial socialization in African American families, it must be understood in the context of more so-called "universal" parenting practices.

There are currently no theoretical models that delineate the relationship between "universal" and culturally specific parenting practices. However, we believe that theory and research related to racial socialization is compatible with well-established mainstream theories of parenting. Thus, the current study was informed by social interactional learning theory. The theory combines social learning and social interaction theory into a cohesive model that places parenting practices and the parent-child relationship at the center of understanding children's behavior and simultaneously accounts for the context in which the relationship develops, including sociocultural differences in attitudes and expectations that contribute to development and behavior (Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992; Dishion, Patterson, & Kavanaugh, 1992). According to the model, child adjustment is dependent on parenting practices, which may be either positive or coercive. Positive parenting practices include effective discipline, monitoring, problem solving, and positive involvement. In contrast, coercive parenting is a process whereby children's angry responses to parental demands escalate and become so aversive to the parent that the child's demands are met in order to avoid the aversive stimuli. These coercive processes are learned and become entrenched over time, and can lead to such negative parenting styles and practices as harsh, overly punitive, inconsistent or permissive parenting. Critical to social interactional learning theory—and where an understanding of racial socialization can be key—are contextual factors in the parent-child interactional environment that can either mediate or moderate parenting practices that impact child behaviors. Among the contextual variables that are outlined in the model are stress, parental mental health, social disadvantage, social support, child temperament, and parental adjustment. We would argue

that racial or ethnic background should be included in the list of contextual factors because ethnic minorities repeatedly encounter unique ecological demands and obstacles that can add stress and result in negative consequences for mental health.

Though there are competing conceptualizations and measures of racial socialization, our research uses Stevenson's (1994) which views racial socialization as a process that is channeled through various social contexts (e.g., family, peers, community and social contexts) and extends self-identity for African Americans. It includes proactive (e.g., cultural pride reinforcement) and protective or reactive (e.g., racism awareness training) dimensions, in addition to those that are conceptually grounded in the African American experience (e.g., extended family caring and spiritual and religious coping). Within a social interactional framework, Stevenson's dimensions can be thought of as a set of practices that moderate variations in child externalizing behavior by establishing opportunities for parent child interactions that promote healthy development. For example, parents' liberal use of messages that instill cultural pride, a common racial socialization theme, can serve to promote positive racial identity development and self-esteem that could translate into greater socio-emotional competence. Indeed, Stevenson et al. (2002) suggest that cultural pride reinforcement might protect adolescents from engaging in fighting behavior by teaching them more accurate ways to interpret their social environment. Extended family caring, expressed in beliefs and attitudes that blood and non-blood kin have child rearing responsibilities (Stevenson, 1995), can enhance parenting by preventing social isolation, which is associated with child abuse and neglect (Garbarino, 1977; Garbarino & Sherman, 1980; McLoyd, 1990, 1998). Extended family caring can also protect against parental depression, and possibly provide more models for positive parent child interactions. Racism awareness messages provide the context for helping parents and their children engage in joint problem solving around ways to cope with discrimination. These messages can also promote parental monitoring as when African American parents talk to youth about racial profiling and how to handle themselves when stopped by police. As mentioned above, an overemphasis on messages that focus on racial barriers and blocked opportunities could lead to an increase in racial mistrust and serve to alienate youth from mainstream society or promote antisocial behavior. Spiritual and religious coping messages, rooted in the belief that religion and faith can help overcome negative life experiences, can promote prosocial involvement and internal coping (Mamiya & Lincoln, 1990).

The current analysis tests the theory that parental racial socialization has a unique and beneficial effect on child behavior in African American families living in low-income neighborhoods over and above those parenting practices that typically predict children's behavior. We hypothesized that racial socialization would not have a direct effect on child outcomes, given that the available research suggests a complex relationship between racial socialization and child outcomes. We also did not expect racial socialization to substitute for other more commonly accepted efficacious parenting practices like parental monitoring and effectiveness. Consequently, we examined racial socialization as a potential moderator of the relationship between parenting characteristics like parental mental health, stress, monitoring, and discipline effectiveness and children's externalizing behaviors using the classic definition of a moderator variable as one that affects the relationship between an independent and dependent variable (Baron & Kenny, 1986; cited in Holmbeck, 1997).

## METHOD

### Sample

The current study was conducted in a large mid-western city from 1997 to 2001. The study sample was randomly selected from a larger longitudinal study of HIV prevention and adolescent mental health in a school-based sample of 140 African American parents and their school age and adolescent children. One hundred and forty African American parents or

caregivers participated in the current cross-sectional study. Ninety-two percent of adult caregivers were female. The typical caregiver was single (77%; $n = 77$), unemployed (58%; $n = 80$), and received public assistance (71%; $n = 99$) with the average annual family income reported between $5,000–$9,000. Eighty percent of caregivers (n = 110) had a high school/ GED level of education, with 20% ($n = 28$) of caregivers having an education level beyond high school (i.e., trade school, community college, graduate school). Children ranged from 9– 15 years ($M = 11.8$; $SD = 1.22$) of age. Sixty percent ($n = 70$) of youth were female. Informed consent materials were distributed and completed prior to data collection. Self-administered questionnaires were given to parent participants by group facilitators during the baseline data collection point of the larger longitudinal study. Parents were asked to answer the questionnaires relative to the identified target youth participating in the HIV prevention program.

## Measures

Parent mental health state was assessed through the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (Spielberger, Edwards, Lushere, Montouri, & Platzek, 1973). The instrument is a general measure of state anxiety levels, which are theoretically thought to predispose individuals to the harmful effects of stressors and therefore compromise their mental health. The instrument contains twenty items, each measured along a 4-point Likert scale (not at all to very much). Items ask adult caregivers to rate how they feel "right now" according to several emotions (e.g., "I feel calm." and "I feel 'high strung.'"). A higher score represents a lower frequency of anxiety traits and therefore a better state of parent mental health (range = 20–80; alpha = .87).

Parent hassles and uplifts are measured on the Hassles and Uplifts Scale (DeLongis, Folkman, & Lazarus, 1988). This 69-item instrument is designed to measure individual perceptions concerning daily situations (e.g., "not enough money," "feeling healthy") through three subscales: hassles (30 items), uplifts (39 items), and combined hassles and uplifts. Only hassles and uplifts are considered here. Items are measured along a 4-point Likert scale (none or did not occur or extremely severe/often). Higher scores represent either a higher amount of hassles (possible range = 30–120, alpha = .89) or uplifts (possible range = 39–156, alpha = . 95).

The degree of parental involvement and supervision and discipline effectiveness were measured on the Parenting Skills Questionnaire (Tolan & Gorman-Smith, 1991). This 30-item parent report contains four subscales: Discipline Effectiveness, Positive Parenting, Parent Involvement & Supervision, and Child Compliance. Only Parent Involvement and Supervision and Discipline Effectiveness are considered here. Three items were adapted from the original 17-item Parent Involvement and Supervision subscale to examine parent reports of parental involvement and supervision (e.g., "When you are not at home does your child know how to get in touch with you?"). Two items were adapted from the original 5-item discipline effectiveness subscale (i.e., "Is the discipline you use effective for your child?" and "If your child is punished, does the punishment work?") to measure parent reports of the degree of discipline effectiveness within families. All items are measured along a 5-point Likert scale (always to never) with higher scores representing a greater degree of parent involvement and supervision (possible range = 3–15; alpha = .75) and discipline effectiveness (possible range = 2–10; alpha = .80).

Parent reports of racial socialization were measured on the Scale of Racial Socialization for African American Adolescents (SORS-A; Stevenson, 1994). This instrument contains 45-items scored along a 4-point Likert scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree), and assesses the degree of adult caregiver acceptance of multiple racial socialization attitudes or race-related messages central to child rearing within the African American culture. Four subscales include: Spirituality and Religious Coping (e.g., "A belief in God can help a person deal with tough life struggles."), Extended Family Caring (e.g., "Relatives can help Black parents raise their

children."), Cultural Pride Reinforcement (e.g., "Schools should be required to teach all children about Black history."), and Racism Awareness Teaching (e.g., "A Black child or teenager will be harassed simply because she or he is Black."). All of the subscales demonstrated acceptable internal consistency reliabilities with Cronbach's alpha ranging from .59 for Racism Awareness Teaching to .71 for Spiritual and Religious Coping and Cultural Pride Reinforcement.

Child externalizing behavior was measured by the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL/4-18; Achenbach, 1991). This instrument (appropriate for children between 4 to 18 years of age) assesses a number of syndromes, including attention problems, somatic complaints, anxiety/depression, social problems, aggressive and delinquent behavior problems. Items are combined to create overall internalizing, externalizing, and total problems scores. Only the externalizing score, which includes two combined subcategories (i.e., child aggressive and rule-breaking behavior), is considered here. The 26 items used to compute externalizing scores (e.g., impulsive or acts without thinking) are rated along a 3-point Likert type parent rating scale (not true to very true). The possible range of this subscale is 26 to 78 (alpha = .91) with higher scores representing more negative externalizing behavior.

### Statistical Analysis

There were three steps involved in the analysis of these data. First, we examined the relationship among all the dependent and independent variables, including all components of racial socialization, maternal mental health, parental hassles and uplifts, monitoring, discipline effectiveness and child externalizing behavior. Second, each parenting variable was independently entered into a multivariate model using Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression analyses to examine any change in relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable, first in the absence, then in the presence of racial socialization. Lastly, interaction terms were included in a multivariate regression analyses in order to assess the combined effects of racial socialization and other parenting behaviors on child externalizing behaviors. Checks for multicollinearity among independent variables revealed no significant problems.

## RESULTS

Analysis of variance was used to examine differences on child externalizing behaviors relative to key sociodemographic characteristics. Child externalizing behavior did not differ by child gender, $t (82) = -1.85$, $p=.07$, child age, r (86) = $-.09$. $p = .41$, parent education level (greater than high school–yes/no), family income, r (94) = $-.03$. $p = .75$, $t (97) = -.75$, $p = .45$, single parent status (yes/no), $t (96) = .89$, $p = .37$, or if families received public assistance (yes/no), $t (97) = 1.27$, $p = .22$.

### Description of Study Variables

Characteristics of the parents and the parent reported child externalizing behaviors are shown in Table 1. Parents and children in the study were fairly well adjusted despite living under impoverished conditions. Parents described their own mental health as being fairly high with a high frequency of uplifts and a low amount of hassles. Although parents or caregivers reported low levels of child externalizing behaviors, overall, 38% reported that their children evidenced clinically significant levels of child externalizing behaviors. With regards to parental monitoring, 44% of parents reported the maximum value (15), while 26% of parents scored their level of monitoring from 12 to 14, and 2% from 2–11. Parents also reported using relatively high levels of racial socialization strategies. Mean ratings of spiritual/religious coping, extended family caring, cultural pride reinforcement, and racism awareness teaching

were contained within the upper third of possible scale values. Finally, parents reported a high degree of involvement and supervision within their families.

In order to rule out the effects of racial socialization on child outcomes, it is important to examine the possibility that racial socialization may be confounded by more general parenting practices, like discipline effectiveness, monitoring and involvement. Intercorrelations of racial socialization domains, parenting domains and child externalizing behaviors are displayed in Table 2. Two of the four subscales of racial socialization were related to behavioral and psychosocial parenting domains. As might be expected, there were low but significant associations between spiritual and religious coping and parental mental health, parent uplifts, and discipline effectiveness. Racism awareness teaching was associated with a variety of parenting domains. Parents who used racism awareness teaching as a strategy tended to report greater mental health and uplifts and less monitoring and discipline effectiveness. None of these correlations were greater than .50 and thus were modeled in the regression analyses as correlations below this threshold are not expected to contribute significantly to multicollinearity.

Intercorrelations on three of four subscales of the SORS-A were moderate to high with correlation coefficients among cultural pride reinforcement, extended family caring and spiritual and religious coping ranging from .42 to .62. Racism awareness teaching was uncorrelated with spiritual and religious coping and cultural pride reinforcement and negatively associated with extended family caring.

Child externalizing behaviors were associated with a number of parenting domains but not with any of the racial socialization subscales. As expected, parental reports of mental health were negatively associated with child externalizing behaviors and there was a low but significant negative association between parents' self-reported discipline effectiveness and child externalizing behavior.

### Multivariate Analysis

In the multivariate analysis, all of the psychosocial and behavioral parenting variables were entered into a stepwise regression model in order to examine the association with externalizing behaviors. Table 3 summarizes the findings of the regression analysis without racial socialization added to the model. Although parental mental health and discipline effectiveness were related with child externalizing behaviors in the bivariate analysis, neither these variables nor parental uplifts, hassles or monitoring had a main effect on child externalizing behavior.

Next, each domain of racial socialization was added in the second step of the multivariate analysis to examine whether controlling for these variables influenced the magnitude and significance of the relationship between parenting characteristics or behaviors and child externalizing behaviors. These results are displayed in Tables 4, 5, 6 and 7 for spiritual and religious coping, extended family caring, cultural pride reinforcement and racism awareness teaching, respectively. In each instance, when the racial socialization domain was entered into the regression model, there was no main effect of socialization on child externalizing behavior; however, other domains of parenting became significant influences on child externalizing behaviors. Specifically, parental mental health, parent hassles, and discipline effectiveness emerged as significant correlates of child externalizing behaviors. The total change in variance explained in the models increased significantly, ranging from .12 for the model with cultural pride reinforcement to .18 for spiritual and religious coping. All domains of racial socialization affected the relationship between discipline effectiveness and child externalizing behavior, such that discipline effectiveness was negatively associated with child externalizing behavior with standardized regression coefficients ranging from −.36 to −.39. In addition to discipline effectiveness, parental mental health was significantly associated with youth problem

behaviors in the models with extended family caring, $\beta = -.30$, p < .05, cultural pride reinforcement, $\beta = -.25$, p < .05, and racism awareness teaching, $\beta = -.35$, p < .05, entered into the models. Thus, when racial socialization is taken into consideration parents with higher levels of mental health also report fewer problem behaviors.

In the final multivariate analysis, interaction terms were created for each of the racial socialization domains and discipline effectiveness in relation to child externalizing behaviors. In this model, the interaction of spiritual and religious coping and discipline effectiveness was significantly associated with child externalizing behaviors, $F (20, 59) = 2.54$, p = .006. Parents who reported high levels of spiritual and religious coping and discipline effectiveness also reported fewer child behavior problems ($M = 30.0$, $SD = 2.7$) while parents who were low in spiritual and religious coping and discipline effectiveness reported more problematic behavior ($M = 38.00$, $SD$ 7.2). These results suggest that it is the combination of spiritual and religious coping socialization coupled with effective discipline that is most strongly associated child externalizing behaviors.

No significant effects were found for any of the remaining three racial socialization components and discipline effectiveness; however, interesting trends were notable. First, for all three of the remaining types of racial socialization, parents who reported low discipline effectiveness reported higher rates of problem behaviors. Second, for all four components, except extended family caring, parents who reported low discipline effectiveness and low religious and spiritual coping, cultural pride reinforcement and racism awareness training, reported the highest levels of problematic child behavior. Lastly, levels of externalizing behaviors were as low for parents who reported high discipline effectiveness and extended family caring ($M = 30.1$; $SD = 3.0$) as they were for parents who reported high discipline effectiveness and spiritual and religious coping, and highest among parents who reported high discipline effectiveness and low extended family caring ($M = 39.2$; $SD = 7.5$).

## DISCUSSION

Messages and practices that promote cultural pride and kinship bonds, prepare children for discrimination, and foster spiritual coping undoubtedly have a long legacy in African American parenting. These practices may be carried on most significantly in families that are under the greatest strains in society, low-income families of color. Research has explored the prevalence and domains of racial socialization, and attention is turning to the association of racial socialization to other parenting practices and youth psychosocial and behavioral outcomes.

The present study explored the relationship of racial socialization strategies to other parenting practices in a sample of low-income urban parents and caregivers. Results suggest that racial socialization practices are associated with more general parenting practices like discipline effectiveness and parental monitoring to reduce child externalizing behaviors. Parental mental health, uplifts, hassles, monitoring and discipline effectiveness had no main effects on child externalizing behaviors, but the interaction of racial socialization strategies, specifically spiritual and religious coping and discipline effectiveness suggest the possibility of mitigating the development of child behavior problems. This effect seems to be particularly important for parents who, for whatever reason, feel effective as parents. Among parents who us effective discipline strategies, the use of spiritual and religious coping messages contributed to fewer behavior problems. The findings were not similar with all components of racial socialization.

With regards to spiritual and religious coping, these results complement findings from previous research that highlights the importance and positive impact of religiosity among African Americans in comparison to White Americans (St. George & McNamara, 1984; Blaine & Crocker, 1995). Scholars believe that religiosity, and participation in the Black Church

specifically, contributes to positive psychosocial effects through processes associated with racial socialization and the development of racial identity by neutralizing the negative effects of racism and discrimination and providing opportunities for participation in activities with other members of the Black community (Brega & Coleman; 1999; Hughes & Demo, 1990; Mamiya & Lincoln, 1990; Stevenson, 1995). Research also suggests that adolescents appear to develop their patterns of participation in religious activities through their relationships with parents and subsequently engage in deviant behavior based on their anticipated religious participation (Litchfield et al., 1997).

These exploratory findings, although limited to only one aspect of racial socialization are significant for three reasons. First they support prior research findings that negative parenting practices, by mainstream standards, need to be understood in a particular cultural and contextual niche. For example, several researchers have found that the negative effect of authoritarian (harsh) parenting is less among ethnic minority families than their white counterparts (e.g., Chao, 1994; Lamborn, Dornbusch & Steinberg, 1996, cited in Steinberg, 2002). One theory for this discrepancy is that minority families tend to live in poorer neighborhoods with greater neighborhood risk and the control strategies of authoritarian parenting may not be as harmful in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Likewise, in the present study, the findings suggest that the negative effects of low parental monitoring are less harmful if coupled with proactive strategies to promote racial awareness through spiritually and religiously laden messages.

Second, this research suggests a synergistic relationship between universally and culturally specific parenting practices. Some African American parents appear to balance effective general parent management strategies with strategies to raise them to be aware of their African American experience. The specific mechanisms by which these universal and culturally specific parenting practices work in concert to reduce problem behaviors is not clear from this research. Coard et al. (2004) found that low-income African American parents racially socialize their children through four basic processes: oral communication, modeling, role playing, and exposure. It is highly likely that the key to understanding how universal and culturally specific forms of parenting act together to mitigate behavioral problems are embedded in these exchanges between parent and child. Caughy et al. (2002) suggests that among younger children, cultural pride reinforcement can provide culturally anchored forms of stimulation that promote cognitive development. This cognitive stimulation may lead to improved problem solving skills and can also serve as choice material for meaningful communication between parent and child.

Lastly, this study provides the possibility that there may be negative consequences of engaging too little in racial socialization. In the present study, findings suggest that under conditions where parental monitoring is low, parents who engage in low levels of racial socialization may be neglecting an important set of strategies that could contribute to protecting their children from developing serious behavior problems. In other research on racial socialization, Fischer and Shaw (1999) found that among adolescents who reported low levels of racial socialization, perception of more racist discrimination was associated with poorer overall mental health.

Also of note in this study is the fact that racial socialization was practiced by all parents in the sample and extensively by the majority. Previous research suggests that parents from neighborhoods with high concentrations of African Americans are less likely to racially socialize their children than parents from racially mixed areas (Thornton et al., 1990). However, that research did not control for socioeconomic status. Thus, it is possible that families from low-income neighborhoods, where threats to psychosocial functioning are greater, tend to use racial socialization strategies as a means to prepare their children for hardships they may face as racial minorities.

The results must be interpreted with some caution because of the limitations of the studies. As with many studies of racial socialization, these data rely exclusively on parents' self-reported data which is highly susceptible to reporting bias. Second, although the regression models detected a classic moderation effect, ultimately all tests of moderation are tests of interaction effects, which in the present study was limited to one significant finding. Further, regression models are insufficient to prove causality, and cross-sectional data does not provide the basis for determining causality. Third, the measure of racial socialization used in the present study, the SORS-A, was initially developed for use with adolescents. Fourth, there was a high likelihood of selection bias. The study sample was a group of parents involved in an intervention for HIV/AIDS and thus may not have been a true representative sample of the neighborhoods in which they live.

Notwithstanding these limitations, these exploratory findings have some implications for applied researchers interested in developing culturally relevant programs for African American parents. The growing body of evidence that racial socialization strategies are associated with a range of beneficial outcomes including positive and involved mother-child interactions (Frabutt, Walker, & McKinnon-Lewis, 2002) and better behavioral competence (Caughy et al., 2002) coupled with the fairly established research that racial socialization strategies are a routine, if not always central, part of African American parenting, suggests that parent training programs should incorporate the teaching of racial socialization strategies. Though the inclusion of such practices in parent training programs has not been evaluated empirically models of parent training programs that incorporate an understanding of ethnic and cultural roots along with strategies to increase parental discipline effectiveness exist (e.g., Steele, 2002). Future research combing interventions with behavioral observations of parent-child interactions could begin to shed light on the ways that parents transmit cultural messages with setting the groundwork for positive parenting and discipline strategies. Coard et al. (2004) predict that the benefits of such augmentations of parent training programs would include increased participation in such programs, improved parenting, and improved behavioral and emotional outcomes for children. Such predictions are the source for future empirical studies. Thus, this research has implications for intervention, including but not limited to incorporation of racial socialization strategies as part of parent management training programs.

Though research on racial socialization has grown in the last decade and a half, future research is needed to advance the knowledge base. We offer four suggestions. First, as suggested elsewhere, culturally relevant practices must be integrated at every stage of the clinical research from program conceptualization to dissemination (Dumas, Rollock, Prinz, Hops, & Blechman, 1999 as cited in Coard et al., 2004). Second, racial socialization research, in general, would be strengthened by prospective longitudinal programs of research. The current research is based primarily on small scale studies with convenience samples, which limits the possibility of determining causality or generalizing the results of findings. Lastly, racial socialization research would be strengthened by observational methods to address the limitations of research based on self-report data.

## Acknowledgments

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**TABLE 1**

Characteristics of parents on independent and dependent variables

| Variable | *M* | *SD* | Range |
|---|---|---|---|
| Child externalizing behavior | 36.3 | 8.41 | 26–75 |
| Parental mental health | 67.6 | 8.95 | 41–80 |
| Uplifts | 113.6 | 22.50 | 49–152 |
| Hassles | 54.4 | 15.16 | 31–105 |
| Parental involvement | 14.4 | 1.20 | 6–15 |
| Parental effectiveness | 8.7 | 1.24 | 4–10 |
| Racial socialization | | | |
| Cultural pride reinforcement | 23.0 | 2.70 | 7–28 |
| Extended family caring | 29.8 | 3.34 | 9–36 |
| Racism awareness teaching | 22.7 | 4.13 | 6–24 |
| Spiritual and religious coping | 22.7 | 3.17 | 7–28 |

**TABLE 2**

Intercorrelations between subscales

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Parent mental health | – | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Parent uplifts | .41** | – | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Parent hassles | -.28** | .05 | – | | | | | | | |
| 4. Parent monitoring | .14 | -.03 | -.12 | – | | | | | | |
| 5. Discipline effectiveness | .21 | -.03 | -.16 | .45** | – | | | | | |
| 6. Child externalizing behavior | -.42** | -.17 | .16 | -.01 | -.25* | – | | | | |
| 7. Spiritual/Religious coping | .24* | .25* | .06 | .02 | .24* | -.24 | – | | | |
| 8. Extended family caring | .03 | .17 | -.00 | -.06 | .01 | .07 | .49** | – | | |
| 9. Cultural Pride Reinforcement | .08 | .16 | .08 | -.06 | .12 | -.00 | .42** | .62** | – | |
| 10. Racial awareness teaching | .27* | .35** | .07 | -.27* | -.32* | -.03 | -.23 | -.31** | -.19 | – |

*
$p < .05$,

**
$p < .01$.

**TABLE 3**

OLS Regression of the independent variables on child externalizing behavior

| Variable | B | SE B | β |
|---|---|---|---|
| Parent mental health | −.22 | .12 | −.22 |
| Parent uplifts | −.04 | .04 | −.13 |
| Parent hassles | .09 | .06 | .17 |
| Parent monitoring | .90 | .75 | .15 |
| Discipline effectiveness | −1.41 | .79 | −.23 |

*Note.* For overall model, $R^2 = .18$, Adjusted $R^2 = .12$, df = 75, $F = 2.99$, $p < .05$.

**TABLE 4**

OLS Regression with spiritual/religious coping added

| Variable | *B* | *SE B* | *β* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Parent mental health | −.20 | .11 | −.25 |
| Parent uplifts | −.02 | .04 | −.05 |
| Parent hassles | .11 | .06 | .23 |
| Parent monitoring | 1.18 | .62 | .25 |
| Discipline effectiveness | −2.06 | .73 | −.39[**] |
| Spiritual/religious coping | −.19 | .22 | −.10 |

*Note.* For overall model, $R^2 = 36$, Adjusted $R^2 = .29$, df = 60, $F = 5.06$, $p < .001$.

[**]
$p < .01$.

**TABLE 5**

OLS Regression with extended family caring added

| Variable | B | SE B | β |
|---|---|---|---|
| Parent mental health | −.26 | .11 | −.30[*] |
| Parent uplifts | −.03 | .03 | −.10 |
| Parent hassles | .10 | .05 | .23 |
| Parent monitoring | 1.16 | .62 | .24 |
| Discipline effectiveness | −2.06 | .70 | −.39[**] |
| Extended family caring | .25 | .21 | .13 |

*Note.* For overall model, $R^2 = .32$, Adjusted $R^2 = .26$, df = 65, $F = 4.71$, $p < .001$.

[*]
$p < .05$,

[**]
$p < .01$.

**TABLE 6**

OLS Regression with cultural pride reinforcement added

| Variable | B | SE B | β |
|---|---|---|---|
| Parent mental health | −.20 | .10 | −.25[*] |
| Parent uplifts | −.02 | .03 | −.06 |
| Parent hassles | .12 | .05 | .26[*] |
| Parent monitoring | 1.14 | .60 | .24 |
| Discipline effectiveness | −1.92 | .68 | −.36[**] |
| Cultural pride reinforcement | .05 | .26 | .19 |

*Note.* For overall model, $R^2$ = .30, Adjusted $R^2$ = .23, df = 67, $F$ = 4.40, $p < .001$.

[*]
$p < .05$,

[**]
$p < .01$.

**TABLE 7**

OLS Regression with racism awareness teaching added

| Variable | B | SE B | β |
|---|---|---|---|
| Parent mental health | −.28 | .12 | −.35[*] |
| Parent uplifts | .07 | .04 | .03 |
| Parent hassles | .04 | .06 | .10 |
| Parent monitoring | 1.14 | .58 | .31 |
| Discipline effectiveness | 1.69 | .71 | −.41[*] |
| Racism awareness teaching | .11 | .20 | .09 |

*Note.* For overall model, $R^2$ =.33, Adjusted $R^2$ = .23, df=46, $F$=3.32, $p < .01$.

[*] $p < .05$.