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## Correlates in Children's Experiences of Parents' Racial Socialization Behaviors

*This study examined racial socialization processes among 94 African American parents of third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade children as they were predicted by children's ethnic identity exploration and unfair treatment as well as by parents' ethnic identity and discrimination experiences. Findings indicated that children's ethnic identity exploration and parents' perceptions that their children had been treated unfairly by an adult because of their race were both significantly associated with the frequency of messages to children regarding discrimination (Preparation for Bias). Parents' perceptions of children's unfair treatment from an adult and children's perceptions that they had been treated unfairly by peers were significantly associated with parents' cautions and warnings to children about intergroup relations (Promotion of Mistrust). Moreover, the influence of parents' perceptions on Promotion of Mistrust were especially pronounced when children also reported unfair treatment from adults. Children's identity exploration and unfair treatment were not associated with parents' emphasis on ethnic pride, heritage, and diversity (Cultural Socialization/Pluralism).*

*Thus, findings suggest that parental factors are most central in the racial socialization messages that children receive. However, children's perceptions of discrimination and information seeking regarding their own history appear to have some influence on parental messages about race.*

Over the past several years, researchers have become increasingly interested in how parents shape children's learning about their own race and about relations between ethnic groups. Commonly referred to as *racial socialization*, parents' race-related communications to children have been viewed as important determinants of children's race-related attitudes and beliefs and of their sense of efficacy in negotiating race-related barriers and experiences (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Spencer, 1983). In the modest efforts of pioneers establishing this literature base, emphasis has largely been placed on understanding relationships between racial socialization and child outcomes. This work has been extended by research assessing parent characteristics and attitudes that shape racial socialization. However, researchers know little about what may be a more transactional process—how parents' racial socialization is influenced by children's experiences. The present study is intended to contribute to this more neglected area of inquiry. To situate the present study, we first provide a brief overview of existing literature on the topic.

Research on racial socialization is largely embedded in scholars' efforts to describe the strate-

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gies ethnic minority parents use to rear competent and effective children in societies in which racial stratification is pervasive. Although conceptualizations of the process vary, most focus on the ways in which ethnic minority parents promote racial pride in their children, orient them to race-related barriers, and prepare them to succeed in mainstream endeavors (Hughes & Chen, 1999; Johnson, 2001). For example, Peters's (1985) widely cited definition emphasized the complex interplay between African American parents' recognition of their disadvantaged position in the United States and their normative goals for their children. Thornton, Chatters, Taylor, and Allen (1990) and others (Sanders Thompson, 1994; Stevenson, 1995) emphasized verbal, nonverbal, deliberate, and unintended parental messages to children that transmit information regarding cultural pride, awareness of racism, and cultural practices.

Although the literature on racial socialization is small, several important themes have emerged. For one, studies suggest that most ethnic minority parents engage in racial socialization with their children. For instance, Sanders Thompson (1994), in a study of African American adults, found that the majority of respondents recalled race-related discussions with their parents (79%) or with other adults (85%), especially discussions about racial barriers and self-development. Biafora et al. (1993) found that 73% of a sample of Black adolescents reported family discussions about racism and prejudice. In Phinney and Chavira's (1995) study of an ethnically diverse sample, the majority of Mexican American, African American, and Japanese American parents described efforts to instill cultural pride in their children as well as conversations with them about discrimination. Thus, there is substantial evidence that racial socialization is an important component of childrearing among many ethnic minority families.

Related to this, studies have also documented that parents' racial socialization influences youth's identity development and well-being. For instance, studies have found that children whose parents emphasize their ethnic or racial group's culture, history, and heritage report higher self-esteem, more knowledge about their ethnic group, and more favorable in-group attitudes (e.g., Marshall, 1995; Stevenson, 1995). Parents' efforts to prepare children for racial barriers have also been associated with favorable youth outcomes, including higher grades and feelings of efficacy (Bowman & Howard, 1985) and lower depression (Stevenson, Reed, Bodison, & Bishop, 1997).

However, studies have shown that parents' overemphasis on racial barriers may undermine youths' efficacy and prompt them to withdraw from activities that are essential for access to opportunity and reward structures in the dominant society (Biafora et al., 1993; Marshall). Thus, the consequences of racial socialization for children depend upon the nature of the messages that parents transmit.

Finally, studies have documented differences in racial socialization according to parents' sociodemographic background and their attitudes, beliefs, and experiences (Hughes & Chen, 1997; Thornton, 1997; Thornton et al., 1990). In an analysis of data from the National Survey of Black Americans, Thornton and colleagues found that older respondents, women, married respondents, and persons living in the Northeast were more likely to report racial socialization than were younger respondents, men, never-married respondents, and persons living in the South. Thornton found that parents' racial attitudes predicted the types of racial socialization strategies they used. Hughes and Chen (1997) found that parents were likely to transmit to children the sorts of racial socialization messages they had received during their own upbringing. Further, parents' perceptions of racial bias in the workplace predicted the frequency of discussions with children about discrimination as well as the frequency of messages regarding racial mistrust. Thus, there is increasing evidence that racial socialization practices are influenced both by indigenous family practices and by the nature of parents' daily experiences.

Although existing literature has provided critical information regarding the nature, antecedents, and consequences of racial socialization, an important limitation is that little is known about the role of children's experiences in shaping parental practices in this regard. Researchers have not yet explored the extent to which racial socialization is synchronized to happenings in children's personal and social worlds. Undoubtedly, parents bring to the process ideas about race and race relations as well as expectations regarding the competencies children need to negotiate negative race-related experiences. However, children are unlikely to be passive recipients of racial socialization messages. As curious, observant, and developing social beings, children are likely to pose questions, comments, and critiques that foster and shape parents' racial socialization behaviors. Thus, more transactional models of racial socialization, in which

children's behavior and experiences play a role in initiating parental behavior, are needed.

In this regard, one phenomenon that is likely to influence parents' racial socialization is children's ethnic identity processes. As children develop, and especially as they enter adolescence, ethnicity begins to emerge as an increasingly complex and salient aspect of their self-definition (Phinney, 1990). Stage models of ethnic identity development suggest that periods of exploration, in which individuals seek information about their group membership and its meaning, precede an internalized sense of positive group regard and "belonging-ness" (Cross, 1991; Phinney, 1990). Thus, children's efforts to explore the meaning of their racial group membership may prompt parents' communications to them about race, independent of parents' own attitudes and experiences. Although qualitative studies have described how children initiate parents' racial socialization through their queries and questions (Hughes & Chen, 1999), additional empirical inquiries are needed to document further the nature of these transactional processes.

Related to this, a second class of phenomena that may prompt parents' racial socialization is children's experiences with discrimination. As children increase in autonomous functioning and enter the wider world of peers and independent activities, they are likely to encounter racially based experiences with prejudice and discrimination (Phinney & Chavira, 1995). Although only a few studies have examined children's or adolescents' experiences with discrimination, they suggest that such experiences are common, especially among youths of color (Biafora et al., 1993). To the extent that discriminatory experiences are recounted to or perceived by parents, they may prompt parents to share attitudes, values, and information regarding race and intergroup relations. Again, however, empirical studies are needed that examine relationships between youths' discrimination experiences and parents' racial socialization behaviors. Thus, in light of increasing interest in racial socialization, alongside evidence that it has important consequences for children's identity and well-being, it seems important for social scientists to build a knowledge base regarding children's contributions to shaping racial socialization.

#### THE PRESENT STUDY

The primary objective of the present study was to examine the antecedents in children's experiences

of multiple types of racial socialization, including (a) teaching about one's own group's culture, history, and heritage (termed *Cultural Socialization*); (b) emphasizing diversity and awareness of other groups (termed *Pluralism*); (c) preparing children for racial bias (termed *Preparation for Bias*); and (d) issuing cautions or warnings about interactions with other groups (termed *Promotion of Mistrust*). Using data from 94 African American parent-child dyads, we examined children's reports about their identity exploration processes in relation to parent-reported racial socialization as well as the separate and interactive effects of parents' and children's reports about children's unfair treatment. Thus, although our sample was small and nonrepresentative, an advantage of our approach was that we used data from children and their parents to initially explore the transactional processes we propose.

Several a priori hypotheses were put forth regarding aspects of children's experiences as they relate to specific types of racial socialization. First, we expected that children's identity exploration would be especially important relative to children's unfair treatment in predicting Cultural Socialization. Previous studies have indicated that Cultural Socialization is a proactive feature of parenting that is independent of parents' own experiences of discrimination (Hughes, 2000). Studies have also indicated that parents are reluctant to discuss prejudice and discrimination with their children, despite their beliefs that such discussions are necessary (Peters, 1985). Thus, we expected that parents might respond to children's identity exploration queries with positive identity messages rather than with messages about racial bias.

A second hypothesis was that children's unfair treatment would be especially important in predicting Preparation for Bias and Promotion of Mistrust. Prior findings that parents' own discrimination experiences predict Preparation for Bias suggest that this sort of socialization is reactive to ongoing reminders of African Americans' disadvantaged status. Moreover, children's discrimination experiences provide unique opportunities for parents to inform them about racial realities that might otherwise be difficult to introduce. Although in most studies, few parents report Promotion of Mistrust (Hughes & Chen, 1997; Thornton et al., 1990), we hypothesized that children's unfair treatment would also be associated with this sort of racial socialization.

In examining children's experiences as potential determinants of racial socialization, we con-

trolled for parent and child demographic characteristics as well as for parents' own ethnic identity and discrimination experiences. As we have described, these sorts of factors have been identified as important determinants of racial socialization in prior research. Moreover, in order to represent the transactional nature of racial socialization, parents' and children's characteristics, attitudes, and experiences need to be considered simultaneously.

#### METHOD

The data for the present study come from a larger study, the Early Adolescent Development Study (EADS), a short-term longitudinal study of school experiences and intergroup relations among elementary and middle school youth in an ethnically diverse middle-class suburban school district. Four waves of data were collected from youth—in the spring and fall of two academic years—by means of classroom-administered surveys. In the spring of each year, a subsample of parents of participating youth completed mailed questionnaires. The present study is based on data from 94 African American parent-child dyads who participated in the spring 1997 child and parent survey administration.

#### *Procedures*

*Child surveys.* In the fall of 1996, the central office of the school district provided names and addresses of all children in fourth and fifth grade within the district and of third-grade children in three schools ( $N = 1,266$ ). In an initial mailing, we sent introductory materials and consent forms with postage-paid return envelopes to parents of targeted children. We supplemented mailings with visits to classrooms to gain teachers' assistance in collecting consent forms and to distribute reminder letters that were sent home in children's book bags. Consent was obtained for 81% of students, including 85% of White children ( $n = 531$ ), 70% of African American children ( $n = 355$ ), and 63% of students classified as National Origin (Asian or Hispanic,  $n = 53$ ).

In the spring and fall of the 1996-1997 and 1997-1998 academic years, we collected data from youth by way of structured self-administered surveys that were administered in their classrooms during regular school hours. Surveys covered a range of issues related to their school experiences, social relationships, ethnic identity, and other psychosocial factors. At each administration, three

members of the research team visited each classroom. One member read survey items aloud while the other two monitored students' understanding and answered their questions. The survey administrator also read child assent procedures, explained procedures for confidentiality, and collected completed survey protocols from students.

*Parent surveys.* In the spring of 1997, questionnaires, consent forms, and other materials were mailed to all parents of children with parental consent for participation ( $N = 939$ ). Questionnaires assessed issues such as involvement in school, perceptions of children's school experiences, and parenting practices, including racial socialization. Either parent was permitted to complete the survey. A follow-up letter was mailed to nonresponding parents 3 weeks after the initial mailing, and a second copy of the survey was mailed at 5 weeks. To minimize respondent burden, parents with two or more children participating in the study ( $n = 86$ ) were asked to complete a survey for a randomly selected child. The overall parent response rate was 54%, with 69% of White parents, 32% of African American parents, and 51% of Asian and Hispanic parents returning the survey. For the purposes of the present analyses, it is important to note that African American youth whose parents returned surveys did not differ significantly from those with nonparticipating parents on a wide range of indicators including psychosocial and behavioral outcomes, social relationships, and ethnic identity processes. Of 18 indicators we examined in this regard, only children's academic engagement varied significantly according to parents' participation in the parent survey, with children of participating parents reporting higher academic engagement than their counterparts.

#### *Sample*

Although the sample of youth who participated in the EADS was large and ethnically diverse, we focused in the present study on a subsample of 94 parent-child dyads in which children were classified as African American according to school district records and in which the parent returned a mailed survey. We focused on within-group analysis of African American youth for several reasons. For one, within-group analyses seemed best suited to the research questions guiding the present study. Issues related to children's ethnic identity exploration and discrimination are likely to be

more central to the experiences of African American youth than to their White counterparts, and racial socialization is a more central feature of childrearing in African American families than in families of other ethnic groups (Hughes & Chen, 1999). Second, studies of normative family processes within African American families are far less prominent in the research literature than are comparative, between-group studies. Thus, within-group studies, particularly among middle-class African American families, are sorely needed. Third, because of the relatively small sample of African American parents, we did not have power to examine statistical interaction terms involving race. Thus, limiting our analyses to African American youth and their parents seemed appropriate.

Within the 94 parent-child dyads who were the focus of the analysis, the majority of parents were college-educated middle- to upper-middle-income African American mothers, although there was diversity within the sample as well. Twenty-one percent of parents were fathers, and 9% of them were European American, according to their own reports, indicating that about 9% of African American youth were biracial. Educational attainment ranged from ninth grade to completion of a professional degree, although 67% of parents had at least a 4-year college degree. Similarly, annual household income ranged from under \$10,000 to more than \$200,000, with a median of \$78,000. Eighty-nine percent of parents reported that they were currently married. Ages ranged from 26 to 56 years ( $M = 41.7$ ,  $SD = 5.5$ ). Fifty-four percent of youth were male children; 21% were in third grade, 43% were in fourth grade, and 37% were in fifth grade. Although all youth were in integrated schools, the extent of diversity varied: 37% of children attended schools that were less than 50% White, 55% attended schools that were 50%–60% White, and 8% attended schools that were more than 60% White.

### Measures

*Parents' Racial Socialization* practices were reported by parents using 15 items concerning the frequency of a range of parental behaviors and communications to children that concerned race and intergroup relations. Items focused on behaviors, rather than on attitudes and values, because of the likelihood that parents' reports about their behaviors better reflect their actual practices. For each item, parents estimated the number of times they had engaged in the specified behavior during

the past 12 months (e.g., 0 = none; 5 = more than seven times).

The 15 items were intended to assess four underlying dimensions of racial socialization, including: (a) teaching about one's own group's culture, history, and heritage (termed *Cultural Socialization*); (b) teaching about prejudice and discrimination (termed *Preparation for Bias*); (c) communication of cautions or warnings about other groups (termed *Promotion of Mistrust*); and (d) emphasis on diversity and awareness of other groups (termed *Pluralism*). Construct validity was evaluated using principal components analysis with varimax rotation. The factor structure for the set of items is shown in Table 1, as are the endorsement frequencies for items assessing each dimension of racial socialization. A three-factor solution was chosen based on the scree criteria, parsimony, and interpretability. Factor 1, explaining 41% of variance, consisted of items concerning knowledge of the history and traditions of one's own and other ethnic groups. Thus, in contrast to a priori expectations, Cultural Socialization/Pluralism were indistinguishable empirically. Factor 2, accounting for 13% of variance, consisted of items concerning discussions with children about discrimination against their ethnic or racial group and the possibility that they might encounter it. Factor 3, which explained 9% of variance, consisted of two items tapping cautions or warnings to children regarding intergroup relations. Three unit-weighted measures were constructed to represent Cultural Socialization/Pluralism (four items,  $\alpha = .86$ ), Preparation for Bias (four items,  $\alpha = .81$ ), and Promotion of Mistrust (two items,  $r = .73$ ). Items listed in Table 1 with loadings above .45 on two or more factors or below .45 on all three factors were omitted from the subscales.

*Parents' discrimination experiences.* Items concerning parents' discrimination experiences were adapted from the Detroit Area Study's measures of acute and everyday racism (Williams, Spencer, & Jackson, 1999). Two sets of items were included. For the first set, assessing lifetime experiences with discrimination, parents indicated the number of times they had ever experienced a series of negative events (e.g., being unjustly questioned or hassled by the police, being discouraged from seeking higher education). A summary score was estimated that consisted of the number of events across the seven events listed that parents had ever experienced (possible range = 0–7). The breadth,

TABLE 1. ENDORSEMENT FREQUENCY FOR ITEMS MEASURING DIMENSIONS OF RACIAL SOCIALIZATION

Items	% of Parents Reporting Item in the Past Year			
	Factor 1 <sup>a</sup>	Factor 2 <sup>a</sup>	Factor 3 <sup>a</sup>	At Least Once
<b>Cultural Socialization/Pluralism</b>				
Talked to child about important people or events in history of different ethnic groups, other than own	.84			91.6
Encouraged child to read books, other ethnic groups	.76			83.2
Talked to child about important people or events in your group's history	.73			93.7
Talked to child about discrimination against an ethnic group not your own	.72	.46		90.5
Explained something on TV that showed discrimination against own group	.70	.48		89.4
Talked to child about discrimination against own ethnic group	.67	.51		88.4
Encouraged child to read books, own ethnic groups	.65			80.5
Done or said things to show that all are equal regardless of race				94.7
<b>Preparation for Bias</b>				
Talk to child about others trying to limit him or her because of race		.77		70.5
Told child must be better to get same rewards because of race		.75		51.6
Told child own ethnicity is an important part of self	.49	.64		91.6
Talked to someone else about discrimination when your child could hear you		.62		73.7
Talked to child about unfair treatment due to race		.55		82.1
<b>Promotion of Mistrust</b>				
Done or said things to child to keep child from trusting kids of other races			.93	18.9
Done or said thing to encourage child to keep distance from people of other races			.91	5.3
				21.0
				19.0
				44.2
				13.7
				18.9
				2.1
				2.1

Note: Loadings below .45 are not shown. Items loading .45 or above on more than one factor, or below .45 on all factors, were not included in the computation of measures of racial socialization but are shown here for descriptive purposes. Items omitted from summary measures are shown in italics.

<sup>a</sup> Eigenvalues were 6.16, 1.93, and 1.31 for Factors 1, 2, and 3, respectively. Percentages of variance were 41.22, 12.89, and 8.70 for Factors 1, 2, and 3, respectively.

rather than the quantity, of events was used because parents with greater breadth of discrimination experiences may be more likely to anticipate children's exposure to discrimination in a broader range of settings. In a follow-up question, parents ranked the three main reasons for the events they experienced from a list of nine possible reasons (e.g., age, gender, race, religion, height, or weight). Parents who did not attribute discrimination to their racial group membership were coded as 0 ( $M = 2.8$ ,  $SD = 2.1$ ).

The second indicator of parents' discrimination experiences consisted of nine items regarding exposure to interpersonal prejudice on a day-to-day basis (e.g., "How often are you treated with less respect than others?" "How often do people act as if they think you are not smart?"). Respondents indicated the frequency of such treatment on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = *never*; 4 = *often*). Following the set of items, parents ranked the three most common reasons for their unfair treatment from a list of nine possible reasons. The summary score for day-to-day interpersonal prejudice consisted of the mean of respondents' answers across the set of nine items. Parents who did not attribute these sorts of experiences to their racial group membership were coded as 1 (*never*) ( $M = 2.5$ ,  $SD = .65$ ). Because of the correlation between the measures of discrimination events and daily experiences ( $r = .54$ ), and because of the absence of theoretically derived hypotheses regarding differential relationships to racial socialization, measures were combined into a single measure using the mean of standardized scores ( $\alpha = .90$ ).

*Parents' ethnic identity.* The measure of ethnic identity consisted of the mean of three items that are often used in large-scale surveys to assess respondents' ethnic attitudes: (a) "How closely do you identify with other people who are of the same ethnic or racial group as yourself?" (1 = *not at all closely*; 4 = *very closely*); (b) "How much do you prefer to be with other people who are of the same ethnic or racial background as you are?" (1 = *not at all*; 4 = *a lot*); and (c) "About how many of your closest friends belong to the same ethnic or racial group as you?" (1 = *none or few*; 4 = *all or almost all*). Internal consistency-reliability was adequate ( $\alpha = .60$ ).

*Children's identity exploration.* The measure of children's identity exploration was adapted from the Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure (Phinney, 1992), based on prior work by French and

colleagues (French, Seidman, Allen, & Aber, 2000). Nine items were selected to represent two dimensions of ethnic identity: group esteem and exploration. Construct validity was evaluated using principle components analysis, which confirmed the two-factor structure and explained 48% of variance. Only the four items that assessed identity exploration (e.g., "I have spent time trying to find out more about people of my race, such as history, traditions, and customs") were used in this study. Students responded to items using a 4-point scale (1 = *not true at all*; 4 = *very true*). Internal consistency-reliability was adequate ( $\alpha = .63$ ).

*Parents' reports of children's unfair treatment.* In the parent survey, parents answered the following three questions about children's experiences: (a) "As far as you know, has there ever been a time when your child was treated poorly or unfairly by a teacher, coach, or other familiar adult?" (b) "As far as you know, has there ever been a time when your child was treated poorly or unfairly by other adults such as police officers or store owners?" and (c) "As far as you know, has your child been called names or teased by other kids?" Following each question, parents indicated the number of times each form of unfair treatment had occurred within the past year. Parents also ranked the three most common reasons for their child's unfair treatment from a list of nine reasons (e.g., age, gender, height, or weight). Because parents were more likely to report children's unfair treatment from peers as compared to adults (known or unknown), we derived separate indicators to represent unfair treatment from these two sources. To reduce the influence of extreme responses, parents' estimates regarding the number of times children had experienced each type of unfair treatment were recoded into five categories ranging from 0 (*never*) to 4 (*four or more times*). Parents who did not indicate race as a reason for their children's unfair treatment were coded as 0.

*Children's reports regarding children's unfair treatment.* In the context of classroom surveys, children directly reported their experiences with unfair treatment using questions parallel to those included in the parent survey (e.g., "In the past 4 months, since winter break, have you been treated poorly or unfairly by an adult who knows you (not including your parents or relatives) like an advisor, teacher, coach, or principal?"). Following each of these questions, children estimated the

number of times they had been treated unfairly and selected the reasons for their unfair treatment from a list of six possible reasons, including gender, age or grade, weight, race or skin color, height, or something else. Because children, like their parents, were more likely to report unfair treatment from peers as compared to adults (known or unknown), we derived separate measures of unfair treatment from these two sources. Children's estimates regarding the number of times they had been treated unfairly were recoded into five categories (0 = *never*; 4 = *four or more times*). Because only a few children who reported unfair treatment attributed it to race (from peers,  $n = 12$ ; from adults,  $n = 19$ ), and because parents may interpret children's unfair treatment as race-related even if children do not, we did not recode unfair treatment that children did not attribute to race as 0, as we did with parents' reports.

*Sociodemographic variables.* The following sociodemographic variables were controlled in all multivariate analyses: parent's and child's gender, child's grade in school (0 = third or fourth grade/elementary; 1 = fifth grade/middle school), parents' educational attainment (1 = less than 4 years of college; 2 = college degree; 3 = professional degree), parents' self-reported race-ethnicity (0 = African American; 1 = White), and school racial composition (percentage non-White).

## RESULTS

### *Racial Socialization, Ethnic Identity, and Discrimination: Descriptive Results*

We begin by providing descriptive findings regarding parents' racial socialization and parents' and children's race-related experiences. Means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations for major study variables are presented in Table 2. Because we examine predictors of racial socialization within a multivariate framework, we highlight findings regarding the frequency of racial socialization and intercorrelations between parents' background characteristics and parents' and children's ethnic identity and discrimination experiences.

As the table shows, most parents in the present sample reported racial socialization, although the frequency of such socialization varied across different dimensions. Paired sample  $t$  tests indicated that Cultural Socialization/Pluralism occurred more often than did Preparation for Bias,  $t(94) =$

6.38,  $p < .001$ , or Promotion of Mistrust,  $t(94) = 13.28$ ,  $p < .001$ . Preparation for Bias also occurred more often than did Promotion of Mistrust,  $t(94) = -6.84$ ,  $p < .001$ . The zero-order correlations in Table 2 also show that dimensions of racial socialization were intercorrelated. Parents who reported more frequent Preparation for Bias also reported more frequent Cultural Socialization/Pluralism and more Promotion of Mistrust. However, Cultural Socialization/Pluralism was not associated with Promotion of Mistrust.

Table 2 also shows that parents in the present sample identified strongly with their racial group and reported moderate racial discrimination, and that these two indicators were positively correlated. African American parents reported stronger ethnic identity and more discrimination experiences than did White parents of biracial youth. More highly educated parents also reported stronger ethnic identity than did their less well-educated counterparts. Parents of boys reported more discrimination experiences (for themselves) than did parents of girls.

Target children were also dealing with racial issues to some extent, according to their own and their parents' reports. Children reported moderate levels of identity exploration, with mean values that were above the midpoint of the scale. They also experienced moderate unfair treatment, although such treatment was more likely to come from peers than from adults, and according to children's as compared to parents' reports (this was the case even when we did not recode parents who did not attribute unfair treatment to race as 0). Parents of boys reported more frequent unfair treatment from peers and adults than did parents of girls, although boys themselves did not report more unfair treatment from either source than did girls. Parents' reports regarding children's unfair treatment from peers and adults were significantly and positively correlated, as were children's own reports. Parents' reports about their children's unfair treatment were also significantly and positively associated with their reports about their own discrimination experiences. However, parents' reports regarding children's unfair treatment were not significantly associated with children's reports.

### *Predictors of Racial Socialization*

To test multivariate hypotheses, we conducted a series of ordinary least squares regression equations, with each dimension of racial socialization used as criterion in turn. Demographic variables

TABLE 2. MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS, AND ZERO-ORDER CORRELATIONS FOR MAJOR STUDY VARIABLES

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Cultural Socialization/ Pluralism	2.74	1.24															
2. Preparation for Bias	1.95	1.30	.54**														
3. Promotion of Mistrust	0.20	0.46	.14	.34**													
4. Parents' ethnicity (% White)	9.00	—	-.27**	-.36**	-.14												
5. Parents' education	2.02	0.83	.05	-.15	-.17	-.05											
6. Parents' gender (% male)	21.00	—	-.12	-.27**	-.05	.01	.14										
7. Child's grade (% fifth)	37.00	—	-.03	-.05	.07	.08	.21	.06									
8. Child's gender (% male)	54.00	—	-.21**	.03	.10	-.18*	-.10	.08	.13								
9. School, % non-White	51.16	9.10	-.03	-.06	.19*	-.23**	.08	.19*	-.01	.06							
10. Parents' ethnic identity	3.22	0.62	.22**	.24**	.15	-.39**	.25**	.01	.08	.02	.03						
11. Parents' discrimination experiences	0.00	0.87	.38**	.29**	.16	-.37**	.14	.05	.28**	.00	.09	.26					
12. Children's identity ex- ploration	2.20	2.00	.05	.27**	.07	.03	-.07	-.17	-.02	.06	-.10	-.13	-.03				
13. Children's unfair treat- ment by adults (par- ent report)	0.67	1.25	.16	.33**	.27**	-.02	.01	-.04	.29**	.08	-.09	.01	.31**	.10			
14. Children's unfair treat- ment by peers (parent report)	1.03	1.52	.04	.17*	.09	.02	-.01	.04	.23**	-.05	.09	.01	.38**	.14	.41		
15. Children's unfair treat- ment by adults (child report)	1.59	1.78	.02	.16	-.20**	-.19*	-.19*	-.12	.03	.22**	-.15	-.03	.17*	.14	-.03	.08	
16. Children's unfair treat- ment by peers (child report)	2.21	1.80	.01	.09	.27**	-.24**	-.12	.01	.02	.13	.22**	.13	.16	.06	-.03	.15	.32**

\*  $p < .10$ . \*\*  $p < .05$ .

(e.g., parents' gender, children's gender, parents' education, parents' racial background, children's grade in school, and school racial composition) were entered into the equations at Step 1 alongside parents' ethnic identity and discrimination experiences. Children's identity exploration and unfair treatment (according to parents' and children's reports) were entered as a set at Step 2. At Step 3 we entered 2 two-way interaction terms (e.g., Parent  $\times$  Child report of unfair treatment from adults) to examine the extent to which relationships between parents' reports of children's unfair treatment from adults or peers and their racial socialization depended upon children's reports of unfair treatment from the same source. Interaction terms, and the main effects involved in them, were centered around the sample mean to reduce multicollinearity with main effects. Results of the regression equations are presented in Table 3. The columns labeled  $R^2$  represent the increment in explained variance at each step upon entry of the set. The unstandardized regression coefficients ( $b$ ) and their standard errors ( $SE_b$ ) are from the final equation with all variables entered. Thus, they represent the unique contribution of each variable to the model with other variables held constant.

We begin by discussing results for Cultural Socialization/Pluralism. At Step 1, entry of the set of demographic control variables and parent characteristics (ethnic identity, discrimination experiences) accounted for 26% of the variance in scores. Parents of fifth-grade students reported less frequent Cultural Socialization/Pluralism than did the reference group of parents of third- and fourth-grade students. Parents' discrimination experiences were also important in this regard. Parents who reported that they encountered more discrimination experiences reported more frequent Cultural Socialization/Pluralism. However, neither the set of variables representing children's identity exploration and unfair treatment (according to children's and parents' reports) nor the two multiplicative interaction terms were associated with Cultural Socialization/Pluralism.

Turning to results for Preparation for Bias, Table 3 shows that the set of demographic variables and parent characteristics accounted for 28% of variance in scores. In the final equation, parents' ethnicity and gender were significant. African American parents and women reported more frequent Preparation for Bias than did their counterparts. Notably, the coefficient representing parents' discrimination experiences was significant

upon entry,  $F(1, 84) = 2.18, p < .05$ , although not in the final equation. Entry of children's identity exploration and unfair treatment accounted for an incremental 13% of variance. Children's identity exploration was associated with more frequent Preparation for Bias, as was parent-reported unfair treatment from adults. Neither of the multiplicative interaction terms entered at Step 3 were significant.

Finally, results for Promotion of Mistrust indicated that the set of demographic variables and parent characteristics was not significant in predicting this sort of racial socialization. At Step 2, however, entry of the set of variables representing children's identity exploration and unfair treatment accounted for an incremental 14% in explained variance. Parents' reports of children's unfair treatment from adults, and children's reports of unfair treatment from peers, were associated with more frequent Promotion of Mistrust. Moreover, children's self-reported unfair treatment from adults was significant at the trend level. Entry of two-way interaction terms also resulted in a significant 10% increment in explained variance. Only the term representing the combined effects of parents' and children's reports about unfair treatment from adults was significant. We estimated slopes for parents whose children reported low and high unfair treatment from adults, using values for children at one standard deviation above and below the sample mean. Slopes indicated that parent-reported unfair treatment from adults was more highly associated with Promotion of Mistrust when children also reported unfair treatment from adults.

## DISCUSSION

The present study was an exploratory effort to examine African American parents' racial socialization practices in relation to happenings in children's lives. Although scholars have increasingly recognized that racial socialization is an important feature of childrearing, and that parenting is a bidirectional process shaped by both parents and children (Belsky, 1984), scholars studying racial socialization have yet to examine the role of events in children's lives in shaping parents' messages to them about race. In this study, using reports from African American parents and children who were participating in a larger study of intergroup relations, we examined the extent to which children's identity exploration and unfair treatment predicted parents' racial socialization. In this

TABLE 3. ORDINARY LEAST SQUARES REGRESSION OF RACIAL SOCIALIZATION ON DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES, PARENTAL CHARACTERISTICS, AND CHILDREN'S IDENTITY EXPLORATION AND UNFAIR TREATMENT

	Cultural Socialization			Preparation for Bias			Promotion of Mistrust		
	$\Delta R^2$	<i>b</i>	<i>SE<sub>b</sub></i>	$\Delta R^2$	<i>b</i>	<i>SE<sub>b</sub></i>	$\Delta R^2$	<i>b</i>	<i>SE<sub>b</sub></i>
Demographic and parent characteristics	.24**			.28**			.13		
Parents' ethnicity	$F(8, 854) = 3.43$	-.61	.51	$F(8, 854) = 4.22$	-1.08**	.48	$F(8, 854) = 1.65$	-.11	.08
Parents' gender		-.24	.31		-.58**	.29		-.01	.11
Parents' education		-.03	.16		-.24	.15		-.09	.06
Child's gender		-.22	.27		-.31	.26		-.01	.09
Child's grade = fifth		-.55**	.27		-.12	.26		-.03	.09
School, % non-White		-.01	.01		.01	.01		-.01	.00
Parents' ethnic identity		.21	.22		.38*	.22		.12	.17
Parents' discrimination		.51**	.18		.20	.17		.04	.06
Child identity and unfair treatment	.03			.13**			.14*		
Ethnic identity exploration	$F(5, 80) = 0.56$	.12	.19	$F(5, 80) = 3.42$			$F(5, 80) = 3.26$	-.11	.07
Unfair treatment from adults (parent report)		.08	.11		.46**	.19		.13**	.04
Unfair treatment from peers (parent report)		-.09	.09		.01	.09		-.05	.03
Unfair treatment from adults (child report)		-.03	.08		.01	.08		.05**	.02
Unfair treatment from peers (child report)		-.02	.08		.01	.07		.05**	.02
Unfair treatment from adults (Parent × Child report)	.01			.00			.10**		
Unfair treatment from peers (Parent × Child report)	$F(2, 78) = 0.33$	-.03	.06	$F(2, 78) = 0.09$	.02	.05	$F(2, 78) = 5.66$	.07**	.02
		-.03	.05		-.01	.05		.01	.01

\*  $p < .10$ . \*\*  $p < .05$ .

context, we also examined the frequency and parental correlates of such socialization. Because findings regarding general patterns of racial socialization (frequency and parental correlates) are fairly consistent with those discussed elsewhere (Hughes, 2000; Hughes & Chen, 1997, 1999), we focus our discussion on relationships between children's experiences and parents' racial socialization. However, in considering the limitations of the present study, we also discuss findings that were discrepant with prior research.

### *Cultural Socialization/Pluralism*

Consistent with other studies (Phinney & Chavira, 1995; Thornton et al., 1990), most parents in this study reported messages to children concerning their own and other ethnic groups, termed *Cultural Socialization/Pluralism*. Indeed, such messages were the most common type of racial socialization that parents reported. Notably, although we initially conceptualized messages about one's own history (Cultural Socialization) and about diversity (Pluralism) as distinct dimensions of racial socialization, our a priori expectations were not supported empirically. Perhaps discussions and books about people and events in African American history inherently involve discussions about other groups, such that these two aspects of socialization co-occur by definition, at least within ethnic minority groups. It is also possible that a broader array of items is needed to distinguish enculturative aspects of racial socialization from pluralistic agendas.

Although Cultural Socialization/Pluralism occurred more frequently than did other types of racial socialization, we found little evidence that it varied according to children's identity exploration or experiences with unfair treatment. This finding was surprising in light of our expectation that children's identity exploration would be especially likely to prompt discussions about history, ethnic pride, and heritage. As we shall discuss momentarily, it may be that children's identity exploration is more likely to involve queries about racial discrimination than queries that would prompt Cultural Socialization/Pluralism. In light of prior findings that Cultural Socialization/Pluralism is a proactive dimension of racial socialization (Stevenson, 1995), it may occur regardless of children's experiences.

### *Preparation for Bias*

Discussions with children about the possibility that they might experience discrimination occurred in most families, although they occurred less frequently than did messages pertaining to Cultural Socialization/Pluralism. Other studies have reported similar results. For instance, Phinney and Chavira (1995) and Hughes and Chen (1997) also found that parents were more likely to report messages about ethnic pride than discussions about discrimination. As suggested elsewhere (Hughes & Chen, 1999), we do not interpret the low frequency of Preparation for Bias as evidence that parents view such discussions as unimportant. Rather, we would suggest that such discussions are inherently more difficult to introduce to children than are cultural discussions, such that parents are reluctant to initiate them without cause. As in other studies, parental background characteristics (gender, ethnicity) and discrimination experiences were important determinants of the frequency of Preparation for Bias.

Consistent with the primary aims of the study, we hypothesized that children's experiences with unfair treatment would be especially important in predicting Preparation for Bias. Findings indicated that children's ethnic identity exploration and parents' reports about children's unfair treatment from adults were both significant in predicting Preparation for Bias. In terms of the former, it may be that children's identity exploration inherently involves queries about racial discrimination, whether experienced directly or vicariously through television programs or the experiences of others. Thus, parents may respond to these sorts of queries with discussions about children's potential exposure to discrimination. However, alternative explanations are also possible. For instance, children's reports that they seek information about the meaning of their race may be reactions to, rather than antecedents of, parents' messages about discrimination. Studies using longitudinal or experimental methods are needed to explore these possibilities.

The finding that parents' reports of children's unfair treatment from adults were associated with Preparation for Bias is also important to consider, especially in light of an absence of similar relationships for children's own reports. Notably, parents' and children's reports about children's unfair treatment were not significantly correlated (even if we released the requirement of racial attributions for parents or imposed it for children), sug-

gesting that parents and children maintain separate accounts of events in children's lives. Under these conditions, one might expect parents' perceptions to be more closely associated with their racial socialization practices than are children's. However, alternative explanations are also possible. For instance, a third variable, such as the emphasis parents place on race, may influence parents' reports about children's experiences as well as their racial socialization practices. Thus, to support the sorts of transactional perspectives that we propose, it will be important for studies to document relationships between children's objective experiences and parental practices in this regard.

Related to this, it is also notable that parents' perceptions of children's unfair treatment by adults, but not by peers, were significant in predicting Preparation for Bias, although unfair treatment from peers was more likely to occur. Because adults have more power and authority in children's lives than do peers, and because unfair treatment from adults may be more consequential for children's experiences, parents may believe it to be especially important to provide children with an appropriate framework for interpreting instances of unfair treatment that parents attribute to race. In this regard, the finding is consistent with conceptualizations of racial socialization as a protective aspect of parenting in ethnic minority families (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Stevenson, 1995).

#### *Promotion of Mistrust*

Cautions or warnings about other groups were reported by only a small minority of parents in this study: Only 21% of them reported any such messages within the past year. The scarcity of Promotion of Mistrust has been reported in other studies as well. For instance, in the National Survey of Black Americans, only 2.7% of parents instructed their children to maintain their social distance from Whites (Thornton et al., 1990). Accordingly, Promotion of Mistrust did not vary according to parents' background, parents' ethnic identity, or parents' discrimination experiences. Despite the fact that a small minority of parents reported Promotion of Mistrust, we hypothesized and found that children's experiences with unfair treatment would be especially important in predicting this type of racial socialization. Findings indicated that parents' reports of children's unfair treatment from adults, and children's reports of their own unfair treatment from peers, were both significant in predicting Promotion of Mistrust.

Further, parent-reported unfair treatment from adults was especially likely to predict Promotion of Mistrust when children also reported unfair treatment from adults. In interpreting these findings, it is important to consider the mechanisms that may underlie choices to issue cautions or warnings about intergroup relations within this small group of parents. One possibility is that these parents are at the extreme end of the continuum regarding perceptions of children's unfair treatment from adults. Thus, whereas parental perceptions of *some* unfair treatment may prompt Preparation for Bias, perceptions of *a lot* of unfair treatment may prompt Promotion of Mistrust. The finding that this relationship was especially pronounced when children also reported higher unfair treatment from adults is consistent with this explanation. Perhaps children's unfair treatment is more frequent and more severe in instances in which both parents and children report it.

The finding that child-reported unfair treatment by a peer was significant in predicting parents' Promotion of Mistrust, whereas parent-reported unfair treatment by a peer was not, is more difficult to interpret. That is, it is unlikely that children's experiences prompt parents' behaviors if parents' are not aware of such experiences. In post hoc analyses, we examined whether or not parents' estimates about children's unfair treatment from peers were a significant predictor if we released the requirement that parents attribute children's treatment to race. Even then, parent-reported unfair treatment from peers was not significantly associated with Promotion of Mistrust. We also ensured that findings were not a function of multivariate outliers by examining this relationship graphically. One plausible explanation, then, is that parents' cautions to children about intergroup relations promote children's problems with peers. Unfortunately, the cross-sectional nature of our analyses do not permit us to disentangle these relationships.

#### *Study Limitations*

The present study suggests the importance of pursuing the notion that racial socialization is a transactional process rather than one that derives solely from parents' agendas. However, because of the exploratory nature of the study, it is important to interpret the findings in the context of its limitations. For one, the sample was small and nonrepresentative. Only one third of the African American parents we targeted for participation actually

returned a mail survey. Thus, participating parents are likely to differ from nonresponding parents in ways that might influence the findings of the study. For instance, the fact that children of responding parents were more engaged in school than were children of nonresponding parents suggests that well-functioning African American parents and children were overrepresented in the sample.

Further, African Americans in the community from which the sample was drawn are more affluent than the general population of African Americans, and thus the sample was well educated and affluent. Accordingly, the patterns of relationships observed may be unique to the present sample. Indeed, several findings that were discrepant with those of prior studies may be attributable to this issue. For example, whereas prior studies have found that more highly educated parents report more Cultural Socialization than do their less well-educated counterparts, education was not significantly associated with Cultural Socialization/Pluralism in the present sample. Most likely, the absence of a significant relationship is due to the limited range in education that was represented. In addition, whereas two prior studies found that parents' discrimination experiences were not associated with Cultural Socialization (Hughes, 2000; Hughes & Chen, 1997), parents' own discrimination experiences were significant in predicting Cultural Socialization/Pluralism in the present study. Perhaps African American parents who have achieved success in mainstream endeavors but still believe they experience race-related discrimination are especially likely to believe that emphasizing cultural pride and appreciation of all groups will enable their children to achieve similar success (Johnson, 2001). In future studies, it will be important for researchers to investigate more explicitly differences in patterns of relationships across socioeconomic groups.

In addition to limitations of the sample, the data were correlational and were based on respondents' self-reports of racial socialization and race-related experiences. Correlational data do not permit one to establish causality, and it is possible that unmeasured variables account for phenomena we are presently attributing to parents' and children's experiences. Further, parents' self-reports of racial socialization do not capture inadvertent and unintended elements of the racial socialization process, which parents may be unable or unwilling to report.

Nevertheless, this study has identified a group

of ecological correlates originating with parents and children that determine how parents choose messages that prepare children to cope with a racially stratified society. Children's ethnic identity exploration appears to provide an important impetus for parents to socialize them regarding racial barriers and discrimination. Parents' beliefs about children's race-related unfair treatment also influences this sort of socialization. Future studies need to represent the phenomenon of interest in the present study in a more dynamic fashion.

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