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Jacqueline A. Johnson
The Long-Term Effects of
Racial Socialization of
African American Sons through
Communication Patterns
from Their Mothers

Abstract

This study explored the long-term effects of racial socialization patterns from African American mothers to their sons to discover whether they are enhancing or impeding the well-being of the African American males. While several distinct socialization types emerge throughout the literature with egalitarian, and barrier socialization messages predominating, the measures have focused primarily on the effects of racial socialization on academic performance. This qualitative study attempted to illuminate a gap in the literature: the long-term effects of mother to son racial socialization messages as evidenced by the limited research examining the later life experiences of adult African American men. The results of this study support the literature with the discovery of consistent examples of early racial socialization patterns from African American mothers to sons continuing to be a protective factor well into the middle stages of adulthood. These findings allow for the development of a more culturally sensitive and competent treatment modality for victims of racism, accessible through all stages of adulthood.

THE LONG TERM EFFECTS OF RACIAL SOCIALIZATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN
SONS THROUGH COMMUNICATION PATTERNS FROM THEIR MOTHERS

A project based upon an independent investigation,
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis could not have been accomplished without the assistance of many people whose contributions are gratefully acknowledged.

I dearly thank Dr. Joanne Corbin, PhD, and Dr. Elaine Kersten for their strength, patience and guidance during this transformation from student to research professional. I have found my joy.

I thank my parents, Roy and Liane Johnson for leaving the shores of their countries in order to sacrifice and struggle to afford me an American Dream. I thank my children Chaz Alers-Johnson and Justin Johnson, and my friend Joseph Gillespie for gently and endlessly making my computer do what I needed it to do at all hours of the day and night.

I thank my brother Roy Johnson and my sister Michelle Johnson for supporting me through the recruitment process. Without their connections, the interviews would have been much harder.

I thank my cheerleading team, people whose love and confidence lifted me out of the two am darkness...Georgia Barwick, Kevin Quashie, Lynn Ciesielski and Nick Todaro, Senka Salatic, LCSW, John James Johnson, Pearl Johnson, Aimee Letson, LICSW, Sharon Pikul, and Julie McClure (CFO of Montrose Travel).

Finally, I thank the participants who allowed a complete stranger to ask them questions about wonderful and painful past histories. You are my heroes.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iii
CHAPTER	
I INTRODUCTION	1
II LITERATURE REVIEW	4
III METHODOLOGY	16
IV FINDINGS	22
V DISCUSSION	36
REFERENCES	43
APPENDICES	
Appendix A: HSR Approval Letter	48
Appendix B: Consent Form	49
Appendix C: Interview Guide	52

Chapter I

Introduction

Not all children live similar lives in The United States of America. The media is full of depictions of childhood complete with pastel colored visions of abundance, safety and messages of meritocratic achievement of the “American Dream.” The dominant culture spreads these messages through satellite facilitated media outlets in the immediate landscape and into living rooms around the globe. In the last few decades these images have even begun to show a more diverse version of the American man privileged enough to have a car and a college degree. The African American is still far behind not only his white counterpart, but all other ethnic minorities as well. Marian Wright Edelman, president and founder of the Children’s Defense Fund spoke at a National Press Club symposium (June 14, 2011) addressing the achievement gap of young Black boys and said,

Children are suffering from a toxic cocktail of poverty, illiteracy, racial discrimination and massive incarceration that sentences poor boys to dead-end and hopeless lives. It is a community disaster. A national disaster. Black boys are always at the bottom of the totem pole...

This study explores one small variable of what may be a contributing influence of why so many African American men either do not find ways to measure up or take part in the wealth and abundance or in the success of the growing number who do: the racial socialization patterns from African American mothers to their sons. This study explores patterns of communication from African American mothers to their sons about the possible race inspired hostility and

barriers they may face in their daily lives. African American parents have to make sure their children get the standard education, which would allow them to build lives and compete with their White counterparts, but they also have the added responsibility of making sure their children can compete despite their minority status. Parents have to enhance the normal studies with cultural socialization, minority socialization, and mainstream socialization to help their children adapt (Boykin & Toms, 1985).

Many studies exist which show evidence of differences in conditions the African American child lives under. Racism and racist practices in every facet of life have been exposed, analyzed and commented upon. Racism, defined as “beliefs, attitudes, institutional arrangements, and acts that tend to denigrate individuals or groups because of phenotypic characteristics or ethnic group affiliation” (Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999, p. 805), is a destructive force and a present day reality. Studies have been done to examine how racial socialization of the child by the parents has supported and impeded healthy identity formation, (Demo & Hughes, 1990; Scottham & Smalls 2009; Neblett et al., 2006). Internalized racism is one reoccurring consequence of failing to properly racially socialize (Sherover-Marcuse, 1986). Are the socialization messages helpful in the struggle for identity formation and personal success, or do they impede growth by inspiring fear, hyper vigilance and underachievement?

Studies, which explored racial socialization by gender, suggest that while girls are taught cultural socialization, boys are taught cultural socialization with added emphasis on coping skills and the promotion of mistrust in preparation for racial discrimination (Bowman & Howard 1985; Caughy et al., 2011; McHale et al., 2006; Thomas & Speight, 1999). This study takes a closer look at the mothers’ role in this socialization process to see how they are teaching their children

and their sons in particular, how to negotiate a world, which views their growth with hostility. Further, I wanted to know how the messages from mother to son serve the African American man in the middle stages of life.

I hypothesize that male members of the disenfranchised communities (in this case African American men) are in some ways prepared for discrimination and struggle as a result of the messages they received as children. The value of this study for clinical social work is great. When racial socialization patterns are understood and correlations between types of socialization and positive or negative outcomes are made, therapists can focus, with their clients, on reframing those messages in a more affirming way, and make lasting changes on a cognitive level, which may open up new possibilities for their African American male clients.

Chapter II

Literature Review

The racial socialization of African American children, and specifically boys whose growth is not always welcomed or supported by the larger society, is a necessity. I wanted to know about these messages. What are they? How are they delivered? How are they received? Are they moments of inspiration and pride, or are they moments of fear and doubt? A wealth of articles found supported the need for some form of racial socialization for African American children.

Several socialization styles emerged during my review of the literature, including an analysis of the differences in academic achievement of sons who were socialized with positive (egalitarian and pride) messages, and with negative (social barrier and fear) messages (Cooper & McLoyd, 2011; Demo & Hughes, 1990; Stevenson, 2004; Strom et al., 2002).

Most interesting to me, and the impetus of this qualitative study, was underrepresented in the research: the long-term effects of racial socialization of sons by their mothers on adult African American men. My examination of the literature reveals an insufficiency in the research connecting racial socialization of African American boys and adolescents and its long-term effects on adults.

The Need for Racial Socialization

Rotherman defines 'racial socialization' as the developmental process by which children acquire behaviors, perceptions, values and attitudes of an ethnic group and come to see

themselves and others as members of groups (1987). In my exploration of the differences in the life advice messages between African American mothers and their sons, I first needed to look at why African American mothers racially socialize their sons. Internalized racism, the acceptance of and perpetuation of racial oppression (Sherover-Marcuse, 1986) is a reason some African Americans do, and the reason some African Americans do not prepare their children to strive for success in a racist environment. Has internalized racism mutated the expectations of happiness and well being of the entire diaspora? “This internalized racism causes Black men to expect less of their lives, endure abuse from loved ones, engage in risky behavior, and risk incarceration to prove one’s existence (Stevenson, 2004).” African American mothers may racially socialize their children when they have received validating messages of their race and contributions to the American story. African American mothers may not racially socialize their children when they have only received the stereotypical and negative caricatures of Blackness that the majority narrative popular media exposes everyone to, and have not received balanced representation or education to combat these negative messages. In their article on racial socialization messages and mother/child interactions, (Frabutt, Walker, & MacKinnon-Lewis, 2002) confirm that African American mothers feel a need to prepare their sons for racial discrimination. Research shows that mothers tend to wait until their children are older, from 10 to 17, to begin bias racial socialization (Fatimilehin, 1999; Hughes, 2003; McHale et al., 2006) while cultural socialization and racial pride socialization has taken place in all ages.

Even spirituality, as a reason for racial socialization, is discussed at length in the literature. “The struggle of African American identity or identities in bodies, souls, and minds of male adolescents is a complex one that involves levels of personal and social vulnerability unprecedented in American human social interaction despite advances in civilization”

(Stevenson, 2004). Stevenson goes on to explain his concept of hyper vulnerability, and how this contributes to the undoing of the African American male child, “living in a constant state of vulnerability through the psychological and physical exposure of one’s cognitions, feelings and actions to annihilation and dehumanization by family, friends and society at large results in the internalization of negative images of Black maleness” (Stevenson, 2004). The church has a historic presence in the African American experience and is a natural addition to any multifaceted approach to racial socialization. Some research suggests that youth involved in the church are less depressed, less promiscuous and less likely to go against societal expectations because of the extended family supports (blood and non-blood kin) rooted in the church (Litchfield, Thomas, & Li, 1997).

Antisocial Personality Disorder is described by the American psychiatric association diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders as characterized by “...a pervasive pattern of disregard for, and violation of, the rights of others that begins in childhood or early adolescence and continues into adulthood.” In a recent class, a professor stated that it is the number one diagnosis for African American males and it has no cure. She said the jails are full of men with this diagnosis. This study will look at how middle-aged African American men utilized racial socialization messages from their mothers to mitigate these and other effects of racism.

Other researchers have attempted to articulate elements of the racial socialization construct. Examination revealed that African American mothers emphasized positive feelings about race and self-respect, while warning of discrimination from White Americans. On a positive note, Demo and Hughes (1990) described a socialization theme termed *integrative/assertive*, which involved egalitarian style socialization. Integrative/assertive utilizes positive messages about their own race without vilifying the dominant society. Hughes and Chen (1997) identified two

themes that underlie conceptualizations of racial socialization that were endorsed frequently by parents: African American historical awareness, culture and heritage, and preparing children for future encounters with racial discrimination. In an article addressing the identity formation of the mothers racially socializing the sons, Scottham and Smalls (2009) pointed to a wealth of evidentiary sources of the positive effects of racial socialization and survival. Scottham and Smalls cited Hughes, et al.,'s (2006) examination of previously unexplored female caregivers beliefs about race and intergroup relations influence the messages they transmit to their children. Though unable to determine a finite number or nature of the messages, themes of egalitarian, racial group pride, and racial barriers socialization emerged. Scottham and Smalls noted that Hughes, et al., also suggested that egalitarian messages were identified as the most conveyed messages by African American caregivers (2006). Along with verbal messages, Scottham and Smalls showed how Caughy suggested that modeling behaviors such as cooking traditional foods and providing an Afrocentric home environment reinforced positive identity attitudes (Caughy, Randolph & O'Campo, 2002; Parke, 2004). The themes of these studies support the commonality of racial socialization in the African American community to prepare their children to succeed where their success is not welcomed.

Most of the literature about the mother's socialization experiences separates the most common types of racial socialization into three categories; egalitarian messages, which emphasize that all racial groups are equal, are the most frequently emphasized messages, followed by racial group pride and racial barrier messages, which talk about discrimination.

Egalitarian Messages

Egalitarian messages emphasize cooperation between, and the equality of all races (Neblett et al., 2006) and have shown to increase academic achievement. A growing body of research

indicates that racial socialization can protect African American youth from the negative effects of prejudice and discrimination, nurture the development of positive in-group attitudes and buttress youths' self-concept, which has been associated with positive life outcomes such as academic achievement (Constantine & Blackmon, 2002; Demo & Hughes, 1990).

Egalitarian messages have also resulted in youth reporting more pride; security and self-confidence in their early teen years without the anti-Black pro-White ideology many African American youth have been found to display (Stevenson, 1995). Several studies have shown that learning to cope with racial discrimination can be a protective factor in the negotiation of the pressures facing the African American adolescent (Garcia-Coll, Crnic, Lamberty, Wasik, Jenkins, & Vazquez-Garcia, 1996). Minority children must understand their ethnicity, and teaching survival skills is common among African American parents. Some parents choose to focus on the child's humanity while instilling values, they practice "race neutral" parenting (Spencer, 1990; Taylor & Thornton, 1997), even though they know their children will not be prepared for a sometimes hostile environment, in favor of emphasizing personal achievement.

Racial Pride Messages

Racial pride messages were associated with higher levels of academic interest and determination to do well in school (Neblett et al., 2006). When children learn to be proud of their ethnicity early on, they are stronger and more prepared to achieve. This self-pride learning happens in many ways including living in a positive culturally representative environment and through interactions with positive community members.

Racial Barrier Socialization

Racial barrier socialization focuses on recognizing systemic inequities and the resulting coping strategies. The research suggests that knowledge and/or awareness of environmental

contributors to negative psychological, behavioral and physiological outcomes is imperative to combat their effects. Racial barrier socialization imparts comprehension of racism and its long-term effects in an effort to inoculate African Americans against negative physiological and psychological consequences. These messages can be both a protective factor and a risk factor depending on their usage. Unlike egalitarian messages, racial barrier messages, if not combined with egalitarian messages or delivered in a supportive ethnic environment can adversely affect children.

An article about mother/child relationship quality hypothesizes that racial barrier socialization alone may reduce adolescents' sense of control over their environment or their sense of safety and independence, which inhibits psychological well-being. It also linked racial barrier related messages with more negative academic engagement (Cooper & McLoyd 2011; Hughes, Witherspoon, Rivas-Drake, & West-Bey, 2009), as academic curiosity and diligence suffers when students struggle with racism and internalized racism. Racial barrier socialization, when combined with positive cultural messages about one's race can become a protective factor.

How Does Racial Socialization Affect Adult African American Males?

The stress of racism can have long lasting negative physical effects like hypertension and respiratory illnesses, and chronic stress and negative psychological consequences such as anxiety, depression and psychosis (Giscombe & Lobel, 2005; King, 2005; Williams, Neighbors, & Jackson, 2003; McKenzie, 2003). Systemic inequalities (racism which is built into everyday experiences) are often invisible, unlike poverty, dangerous neighborhoods and hostility. Yet some African American boys manage to cope and become healthy adults through resiliency, which remains largely understudied and of great importance (Brown, 2008; Brown & Tylka, 2011; Utsey et al., 2007). Certainly early racial socialization practices contribute to resiliency. I

am interested in discovering which methods are more protective, and which are less protective, from the perspective of adult African American males who have lived through stress, discrimination and traumatic experiences.

Advising Style: Authoritarian Versus Warm and Interactional

Theoretical and empirical studies show that under specific conditions authoritarian parenting is an effective method to socialize African American boys in high-risk urban environments. Authoritative parenting in the African American community was once characterized by responsiveness, monitoring, consistent discipline and restrictive parental control (Pazzella, Thornberry, & Smith, 2010). Authoritarian- related parenting has evolved to encompass a more democratic and less punitive version of the former, which can incorporate the child's input.

The strict punishment style often seen in the African American community has been said to yield more negative results than the warm communicating style. According to the literature examined, authoritarian parent interactional styles, which include physical punishment and deprivation of privileges, are related to negative social outcomes for children and that *warm* interactional styles are related to positive social outcomes (Putallaz, 1987). Parenting under economic hardship often creates maladaptive patterns such as inconsistent parenting, with overuse of restrictions and physical punishment, in an atmosphere lacking reason and willingness to hear the child out (McLoyd, 1990, 1998). In an examination of mothers' interactional style and the social competence of passing grade children, Putallaz (1987) found that children of mothers who were observed interacting more positively with their children were more socially accepted by peers. Pettit and Harrist (1993) observed positive and negative maternal interactional styles during a family meal. Positive peer outcomes for the children were related to higher

maternal sensitivity while negative peer outcomes were related to higher levels of maternal intrusion. While these race blind studies provide evidence that parenting style is associated with social competence, other studies suggest that the content of parent-child interaction is a further determinant of peer social competence.

Summary of the Research.

The results of the studies research examined reflect divergent points of view regarding egalitarian and barrier socialization styles, while at other times, clearly reflect convergent points of view across several authors. All of these studies seek to comment on racial socialization communication patterns between mothers and sons. I have gained understanding of the complexities of how, when and why African American mothers socialize their sons. Much of the research I read pointed to the differences in how African American mothers socialized their children by gender, with girls having more responsibilities and more expectations to succeed.

Of the 46 studies I examined and the 26 studies I cited in this proposal, all recommended the necessity of some form of racial socialization as a protective factor for the biological, psychological and sociological development of identity, health and well-being of African American children and young adults. The types of studies examined included eight qualitative studies with sample sizes ranging from 46 to 361 with 200 participants interviewed as the average. The age range in these studies was from four years old to grandparents. Children and young adults made up the majority of participants. There were several quantitative studies which utilized surveys and questionnaires to investigate a larger sample for longitudinal correlations of parenting styles, as well as calls for future research in critical, but understudied areas. The largest of these sampled 1,500 participants. There were three literature reviews that examined respectively the scholarship about transracial adoption and the impossibility of proper racial

socialization; how poverty diminishes the capacity for parenting and age and gender patterns in racial socialization content. One study examined the homes of 173 mother headed households, eighteen grandmother headed households and four father headed households to study the Afrocentricity of the art on the walls to the food on the tables in an effort to correlate cultural environment effect on racial socialization. Most of the studies discussed racial socialization as a win-win effort, with the exception of one which pointed out that racial barrier socialization, when not supplemented with racial pride messages and positive cultural environments, may be a risk factor by leaving children feeling insecure, depressed and disengaged from academic achievement. The most important studies discussed the biopsychosocial damage both children and adults suffer when not, or not properly racially socialized to process the hostility from the dominant culture.

Several studies discussed the limitations of their work. A repeated problem was the specificity of the sample where random samples would give a better account of the particular questions asked, for example, several studies pointed out the location of their sample, Midwestern universities, as not representative of the urban populations most affected by racism. A majority of the studies questioned the validity of self-reports. I found the scholarship lacking at the point where the supports from family and community ends and life as an African American adult male competing for resources and life achievement begins.

The three types of racial socialization messages that dominated the literature were utilized in different stages of childhood: Egalitarian and cultural pride messages are the most widely used with younger children ranging from approximately four to seven years of age, with racial barrier messages enhancing the pride messages from approximately eleven to seventeen. The literature also discussed variables such as socioeconomic status, parent levels of racial socialization and

religiosity as being mitigating factors in the resiliency needed to buffer the effects of racism. All of these studies focused on academic performance and college attendance as the measure. The common theme of the studies I reviewed focused on the student and did not encompass the experiences of the majority of the population.

The research thus far has enhanced my passion to learn about how mothers socialize African American boys, and how this socialization serves the middle-aged man. One major difference is already clear; boys who undergo egalitarian socialization fare better in school, while boys who only undergo “racial barrier” socialization do not do as well. Further study into the adult life of these boys is indicated in order to fully understand the effects of the different styles mothers use in an effort to prepare them to meet a world which views their growth with hostility. It has also inspired new questions I hope to find answers for in my work. Initially I wanted to ask rather open ended questions designed to allow the participant to remember and apply his own meaning to the messages he received from his mother, good or bad, but since reading about *The Afrocentric Home Environment Inventory*, (Caughy, Randolph, & O’Campo, 2002) I realize that socialization is much more than just words. When interviewing the participants, I think a context of his childhood environment may be equally important in helping define patterns to identify what works and what doesn’t. Another important area to explore would be their memories of the mental health status of the mothers. According to Giscombe & Lobel (2005) the impact of stress and racism adversely affects birth outcomes. This makes me wonder how these mothers find time to racially socialize their sons when survival is at the front of their minds, or if socialization is conceptualized at all. Though I believe the truest experiences of the long-term effects of racial socialization resides in the beliefs of the adult African American male, I don’t think concrete

conclusions can be drawn without consideration of the condition of the childhood home and the mental health condition of the mothers.

The importance of racial socialization cannot be overlooked if social justice is to be achieved in micro and macro arenas. If African American mothers are inadvertently overly cautious and frighten their sons through the misuse of racial barrier socialization, this could stifle creativity and necessary risk taking behavior while lowering future expectations. If they only focus on the child as an individual without connecting him to his larger historical legacy and his social location in the current racial climate, she could be leaving him unprepared for the realities of his race. Further, how she prepares him is just as critical as if she prepares him.

For social work practice, culturally relevant interventions are often called for. Knowledge of African American mother to son socialization experiences can reduce time needed for assessment, while making the professional more culturally competent and accessible to African American clients. For society as a whole, the knowledge of the long term effects of the differences in socialization techniques can start to change policy in the police departments, academia, and employment practices, and may begin a trend toward more equitable access to opportunities for marginalized populations.

The examination of the literature supports the hypothesis that African American mothers communicate racial socialization messages to their sons in an effort to prepare them to take their place in the racist climate of the United States. My research question remains the same: Does this racial socialization result in positive or negative consequences for the African American men they become? This study is designed to enhance our understanding of the influence that childhood messages have on adult psychological well-being and personal success. The results of

the study may eventually assist therapists and new mothers in improving socialization patterns and African American identity formation.

Chapter III

Methodology

Research Purpose and Question

The purpose of this study is to discover whether racial socialization messages between African American mothers and their sons are helpful to identity formation and personal growth, or whether African American mothers are producing anxiety in their sons to the extent of impeding personal growth. I also want to understand how socialization patterns affect the success and well-being of adult African American men. Therefore, my overarching research question is ... what long-term effects do racial socialization messages from African American mothers to their sons have on identity formation, motivation, achievement and both physiological and psychological well-being of the African American male in the middle stages of life? The Human Subjects Review Board of The Smith College School of Social Work approved this study.

Research Design

The study is a qualitative research study utilizing in depth interviews of twelve to fifteen African American men about if and how the techniques their mothers used to prepare them for racism and racially inspired aggression serves them now. The results of this study may have implications for a future longitudinal study of the lifelong effects of racial socialization from mother to son in various life stages. The reason for the interview format is the further development of the questions through exploration of a set of perspectives about childhood messages, according to the subjective accounts of receivers of the racial socialization. Qualitative design is flexible, and allowed for re-framing of the questions if

triggering occurred, this method allowed for additional questions when relevant to the research goals, and allowed feedback in a two-person dyad that a survey could not. According to Rubin and Babbie,

Qualitative research methods emphasize depth and understanding, attempt to subjectively tap the deeper meanings of human experiences and are intended to generate theoretically rich observations (Rubin & Babbie, 2007 p. 50).

These interviews seek a purely subjective account of the interviewee's racial socialization experiences. A qualitative study allowed the observation of the emotional responses of the participant, and allowed the focus of the questions to follow or steer away from the affect according to the needs of the participant and/or the research questions. Where a quantitative survey would isolate specific variables, a qualitative study allowed me to incorporate historical research with the observable context of adult African American coping and goal achievement. In the interview process, the interviewer can observe the emotional affect of the daily racial hassles and subsequent effects on mental and physiological health when the participant might be unaware of these effects himself, and the interviewer might omit the difficult material from the interview. Qualitative design allowed for active listening as a tool to obtain full and detailed responses, by allowing the interviewer to keep the focus on the questions at hand.

The Afrocentric Home Environment Inventory (Caughy, Randolph, & O'Campo, 2002) listed, as one of its limitations, the discrepancy between the scores on an observational measure, which was not strongly associated with the parents' report of their racial socialization practices. Parents were reporting more racial socialization activity than was actually taking place. This discrepancy weakens the strength of the findings. In the interview process, when a participant

contradicts something he said earlier I sought clarification to be sure that I gathered accurate information. I was also able to probe the reason for the inconsistency for a deeper understanding of the meaning making for the participant. This type of clarification typically happens in two person dyad interviews available through the qualitative research design.

Sample

The study sample was 10 men who self-identify as African American, between the ages of 30 and 51 years of age. Inclusionary criteria was that their mother raised them until the age of 18. Men who consider themselves bi racial or multi-racial were excluded because the racial socialization messages when one parent is from a dominant, or less ostracized race or ethnicity may be different.

The level of education achieved was not included in the selection criteria because of the overwhelming forces against an African American male successfully reaching college. In the place of higher education, many African American men find success through other avenues and I did not want to exclude these men from the sample based on a measure more suited for the dominant perspective.

I posted flyers describing the purpose of the study and the inclusionary criteria throughout Western Massachusetts. I also sent out emails and a notice to my colleagues on Facebook and to personal and professional contacts. When possible volunteers were identified, I called them on the telephone and I asked if they met the inclusionary criteria and if they would be interested in participating in the study. I scheduled interviews upon receiving each favorable response.

Issues of Diversity and Bias

It is important to state possible transference and countertransference issues in order to mitigate the issues of diversity and bias. Initially I was concerned that three specific issues of

diversity and bias might interfere with the information gathering process: the issues of my bi-racial status causing possible mistrust or false reporting, my attendance at The Smith College School of Social Work causing assumptions of my class status and my Afrocentric hairstyle, which may cause either positive or negative bias.

When thinking about possible issues of diversity I imagined problems from a personal perspective, colored by my past interactions with African American men. I thought if light skin is something valued or distained, a participant might answer questions with the goal of impressing or injuring. This may also make the participant feel I have not experienced discrimination as he has, and am therefore not as worthy to receive his cooperation as a darker skinned interviewer would be. This could pollute the information sought. Similarly, if a participant has suffered poverty and lack of opportunity, he may assume my attendance at such a prestigious institution means that I have never experienced poverty and therefore could never understand or do not deserve to share in his difficult experiences. Finally, I worried that if a participant suffers with internalized racism, he may consider my Dred Lock's a sign of failure to adjust to the dominant perspective, or a gesture of defiance against the dominant beauty ideals. This may cause him to doubt my ability to objectively disseminate his contributions. If he approves of my Afrocentricity, he may become too familiar and begin to answer questions in a way he thinks I want them answered.

As it turned out I perceived none of these imagined roadblocks to communication during the interviews and believe that each participant did, according to his ability, share an accurate description of his racial socialization experience with his mother, and the lasting influence these message have on his negotiations of his environment.

Issues of diversity in the larger society may have negatively influenced my ability to locate the initially sought 12 to 15 study participants. I was not prepared for the difficulty I experienced in locating enough men who met the inclusionary criteria. Despite internet recruiting efforts, as well as hanging 70 flyers throughout a medium sized urban environment and five colleges, recruitment was arduous and only partially successful. I will discuss this more in the limitations of the research section.

Data

The qualitative questions asked sought to expose the type, method of delivery and influence of the racial socialization messages these men received from their mothers in their formative years (Caughy, Nettles, & Lima, 2011 ; Hughes, Witherspoon, Rivas-Drake & West-Bey, 2009). The questions examined direct connections between the experiences of racism the men encountered and the coping mechanisms used through the filter of the messages received from the mothers. The questions also lead to discoveries of whether or not these men currently refer to these messages from their mothers to cope with racism. Finally, I asked participants who were fathers if the racial socialization messages from their mothers are suitable for them to hand down to their sons. (See the complete interview guide in the appendix).

I did not collect any quantitative data beyond the demographic information about the participants and their mothers. Demographic information included age, how they racially identify, their family structure growing up and whether or nor they were raised by their mothers until the age of 18.

Data Collection

I met the men in mutually convenient locations that were free of distraction and assured privacy of the interview process. The interviews were scheduled to last no longer than 30 to 45 minutes, but the average time actually interviewing was closer to 25 minutes. The participants were encouraged to ask any questions for further clarification of the reason for the study before recording began. The Informed Consent process was reviewed with each participant before the interview began. The participants were informed of the following; if they did not wish to answer any of the questions during the interview, they could say so and I would have moved on to the next question. They could withdraw from the interview at any time by simply indicating they no longer wishes to participate. No one else but me would be present unless the participant wanted someone else to be there. The information recorded was confidential, and no one would have access to the information documented during the interview. The entire interview would be digitally recorded, with the participant being identified only by a code. The list, which identifies the participant by code, would be kept in a separate secure file from the coded interviews.

In addition, participants were provided with an informed consent form before the date of the interview. The form discussed the purpose of the study; the procedures; confidentiality guarantees and procedures; outline of the interview including location and duration; possible risks and benefits of participation; participants' rights; information about rules I had to follow; information on who to contact if I violated the rules, and information on who to contact if a participant required therapeutic intervention as a result of the interview.

Chapter IV

Findings

This chapter presents a summary of the findings of 10 interviews with African American men in the middle stages of life. This qualitative study, which explored the long-term effects of racial socialization messages from African American mothers to their sons, showed that several distinct patterns of racial socialization messages aided in positive identity formation, and consistently influence the coping behavior of African American men who perceived and still perceive racism and racial aggression. Interview questions were designed to identify and understand the long-term effects of racial socialization messages from mother to son. Following, I will conduct a thematic analysis of the qualitative data. The key questions explored, 1) How mothers communicated about race, racism, and coping with racism, and 2) How that communication translated to coping skills related to racism and race in the later stages of life.

The data are organized as follows: Demographics of the participants; the racial socialization messages the participants remembered including what types of messages and how the messages were communicated; whether and when the participants experience racism and how they cope; whether or not the coping strategies came directly from or in some ways evolved from the original racial socialization messages from their mothers; and finally, whether or not their experiences of success are directly or indirectly related to Racial Socialization Messages.

Demographics of the Participants

I will first present demographic information about the sample in this study. In order to get a glimpse of the long-term effects of the socialization messages I wanted to interview men well out of college and in the middle stages of careers and family life. I interviewed 10 men between the ages of 30 and 45 who identified as African American and were raised by their mothers until the age of 18. An emergent theme was the interchangeability of mothers and grandmothers in the racial socialization process. Four participants described their grandmothers as having a prominent role in how they came to understand their racial location, reporting that they were raised either by their grandmother alone or with grandmother functioning as a parent on a daily basis. For the rest of this paper I will utilize the word mother and will ask you to embrace the possibility of this socialization coming from grandmothers with equal importance. I will indicate the socialization as coming from a grandmother when the difference is indicated to support a point. Much to my surprise, this age range was very difficult to recruit and I had to extend the age to 51, and only interviewed 10 men. I conducted face-to-face interviews with two maintenance men, a photographer, a medical records clerk, a night auditor, a college professor, and a pastor all from an urban town in Western Massachusetts. I interviewed a prison guard in California, a realtor in Kansas, and a car dealer in Mississippi on the telephone. All of the men reported graduating from high school and three had some college, one of which earned a PhD. All the participants were fully employed and only two were not satisfied with their current employment. Seven men reported being married, one was divorced and two described themselves as single.

Racial Socialization from Mothers

A key theme in these findings was the men's experience of racial socialization from their mothers. Nine of the 10 participants enthusiastically agreed that their mothers prepared them for

racism through both verbal and non-verbal messaging from an early age. Spread throughout the nine participants, there were 23 separate responses affirming that mothers spoke messages that could be categorized as racially socializing in nature. One participant reported that his mother spoke no messages that could be qualified as racially socializing in nature that he could remember. He said “she kind of skirted around it” but he did recognize this skirting behavior as modeling and this will be discussed in the non-verbal/modeling section.

How Messages were Communicated

Verbal messages.

The verbal messages consisted of replies whereby mothers told their sons to ignore racism and racial aggression in four responses, and told sons to confront racism in four responses. Seven responses attributed spoken messages from grandmothers as well as mothers, while one respondent reported that the only verbal racial socialization messages he received in childhood came from his grandmother. He said his mother did not handle issues of race with him from birth until his early 40’s, when she began to express concern for his safety after he moved to a predominately-white community for work. He said that during his youth she did not have enough authority in her household to discuss this with him:

And my mother worked. And got second jobs and always worked... I’d hear my father complaining about white people and racism and its impact on him, my mother was out working and that to me was um not it wasn’t a minimal thing right? It was this resilience and this sense of I can work and so um my mother wasn’t her mother, but my mother never explicitly talked about race. My grandmother did in that short time she was alive in my life. And in some ways between those two women I certainly learned a way of thinking about race where racism didn’t have to organize my entire life.

Three participants spoke of mothers ignoring racism altogether in favor of providing constant messages of “loving everyone” in a religious context. Two responses reported their mothers saying, “a black man had to work twice as hard as a white man to get half as far in life.” One participant said his mother did not talk about race, but did say to “remain graceful in every situation life hands you.”

Non-verbal.

The non-verbal category of racial socialization messages for this study includes modeling and environment. Eleven responses confirmed that mothers spoke no verbal messages that could be considered racially socializing in nature. Five of those responses were a result of not experiencing racism in their communities at all. Fifteen responses pointed to modeling behavior, which could be classified as racially socializing in that it demonstrated coping strategies to racial incidents and racism without specific discussions about race or racism. One participant discussed how his mother modeled humanity as an alternative strategy:

Well, she... never really...talked about racism. Um, because it wasn't in her heart to be uh, angry with any race. And so she didn't communicate that, and I think she knew that communicating racism would make things probably harder for us, especially boys you know, because she had more boys than girls. And if she had communicated racism then we would probably have carried that uh, in everything that we dealt with so that you know we might enter into a situation with a grudge long before we actually got an opportunity to be successful. And so you know my siblings... there's uh, nine of us today um, we don't operate in that in that aggression type of hostility when it comes to racism. We just kinda we are who we are and we just kinda walk through life you know, just... I believe, just loving all humanity.

Another participant talked about how his mother modeled desired behavior without discussing race:

I don't think I heard my mother talk about race and racism even though my mother encountered and dealt with race especially when we moved to the US. Um uh in her in her work, right? She worked as a um as a optometric assistant in this um really well to do neighborhood in this in this very initially in a large kind of upscale mall and then in um a doctor's office that was in a very well to do suburban neighborhood that was overwhelmingly white. Um, overwhelmingly upper middle class. And my mother would drive 45 miles a day to work and she encountered all kinds of ridiculousness, racist stuff or um people uh reading and misreading her assuming things about her. And I notice now cause as as an adult she's talked about some of this, but my mother never talked about that in our household.

These examples of mothers modeling coping behavior without discussing race can be considered non-verbal socialization.

Non-verbal racial socialization can also take place in how the childhood home environment represents cultural acceptance. When a home is decorated with culturally confirming items children benefit. These can be considered racial pride messages in how the admired individuals displayed in the home share physical traits of the child being racially socialized. In reviewing the literature in preparation for this study I found that modeling behaviors such as cooking traditional foods and providing an Afrocentric home environment reinforced positive identity attitudes (Caughy, Randolph, & O'Campo, 2002; Parke, 2004). During the questioning in this study there were seven positive responses to the question of whether or not growing up in an Afrocentric childhood home environment contributed to

successful coping strategies from six participants. Photos of Martin Luther King and Black Jesus hung in two homes while books about Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, Rosa Parks and Frederick Douglas informed the childhoods of two others. One stepfather brought photographs of Egyptian Pharos to the home of a pre-teen who conveyed emotions in his reaction to seeing Black Egyptians,

Um when she married um my little sister's father I remember he had um a couple of mirror posters of uh Egyptians that were black. And they had some type of sayings on them and everything. I was just like wow. You know. Where'd that come from? Haha.

Types of Racial Socialization Messages

Egalitarian and pride messages emphasize cooperation between, and the equality of all races (Neblett et al., 2006). These types of messages have been proven to be a protective factor for developing African American boys. There were 13 descriptions of racial socialization messages, which qualified as egalitarian across the 10 participants. One participant said that his mother always told him he could do anything that Caucasians could do.

For all people uh were made apparently to be equal. And so these were the things that she communicated to us and allowed us to understand it didn't really matter where we came from or what we were uh what our living conditions were. We were as good as the next person. And so uh my whole life was predicated upon her philosophy to uh allow me to overcome obstacles or situations where by if I was having difficulties in terms of uh let's just say background uh because of her uh analogies and I use them often, uh it didn't keep me from moving forward or advancing in life.

Two mothers cautioned their sons to respect everybody equally and never use anyone's race against them. One particularly striking example of egalitarian socialization came from a

Pastor who was raised with nine siblings by a single mother. He leaned forward and spoke admiringly and looked far off as he said:

Uh through that uh she began to communicate to her children how we ought to love one another and be concerned uh about all people and not have uh a racial issue when it comes to color. For all people uh, were made apparently to be equal. And so these were the things that she communicated to us and allowed us to understand it didn't really matter where we came from or what we were uh what our living conditions were. We were as good as the next person.

Another participant said,

You know. Um the thing is today my mother encourages that we get anything Caucasians do in life you know. (Muffled). There was no difference between us you know they was they was not no more intelligent than we were.

Many egalitarian messages linger as just fragments of words or gestures designed to shape young psyches into resilient tools for chronic resistance. Some mothers showed pride without words and their sons adopted their stance,

My mother never really had to explain it she just showed it she didn't let anybody classify her as black or as this or as that. She said no, I am (mother's name), this is what I do. So that's how me and my brothers we lived its not necessarily I have to say it to let you know I know what I can do and I see that even though I have that attitude I know for a fact that I am black and people do see that first and see, ok that is now not necessarily I don't see it as a strike against me, but they automatically put a strike against me.

Barrier socialization is the practice of warning children about possible racially biased systemic inequities in an effort to prepare them for racism and racial aggression. Surprisingly,

only two responses fell into this category. One participant said his mother always told him that people would “say stuff, do stuff to hurt you” because of his race and the other mother said the sentence about Black men having to work twice as hard as white men to get half as far as I already mentioned above.

The Experience of Racism

Nine of the 10 participants reported 21 experiences of racism at multiple stages in their lives. A 10th was raised “not to think in those terms” and thusly did not say race was an issue in his life, but felt that his race was not properly constructing families or protecting the children. The 21 experiences ranged from watching someone else experience racial aggression to personally experiencing a life-altering racist inspired incident. One participant expressed a belief that his mother prepared him for a racial environment she suffered through, which never manifested for him. He said, “I understand the tools she was trying to equip us with, but very, very few times did I ever really have to use them.” Two other participants did not experience racism until college. Of the participants that experienced racism when they were young, one reported struggling with the unfairness of racism:

It was hard when I was younger because the question was always why, why, why are you harassing me? Why, is it because I’m black? Why do you always have to harass me? Why do you have to look at me like that because I’m black? Why you crossing the street? Things like that, it was real hard.

Another man talked about how angry he was by the time he reached college. He was torn with being there to achieve his goals or to dispel stereotypes in an imposed position of representing the race,

Um, in college I...I had a totally different attitude. It was... more of the discovering yourself um, and realizing that you're black and kind of having that feeling that, well you know, I'm gonna be a drug dealer I guess. You know? So I'm in college and you know it's mostly white kids and they would say stuff like well we're gonna have a meeting and we're gonna discuss what we're gonna do and it's and what would be going through my mind is: I would shoot every one of you. Haha. Do you realize who I am?

One participant spoke of the hopelessness and guilt he experiences today when he thinks of his former classmates,

And so my own life as a as a black man who has navigated you know most, Jackie, most of the, um most of the black kids who I was friends with in high school in Miami, um boys who were to my mind as smart, smarter than I was, most of them are either not alive or, um are you know living in in vulnerable relationships in the world. Meaning um have either had problems with the law or um made other decisions about how they were going to navigate being in urban Miami. And I don't you know and there is a certain amount of guilt that one feels about having for lack of a better phrase gotten out.

Coping Strategies

Coping strategies and resiliency are two essential components to survive the negative physical and emotional effects of prolonged exposure to racism. This study sought to explore connections between racial socialization messages and the development of coping strategies and resiliency in middle aged African American men. Of the nine participants who acknowledged experiencing racism, all nine of them reported coping behaviors that encompassed some or all of the racial socialization messages they received from their mothers. One participant reported moving back to his hometown to be closer to his mother after what he perceived to be a difficult

racist incident. He was one of 100 candidates for his dream job with American Express. He was the only African American candidate and he made it down to the final 10. When he was not hired for the job I asked him how he coped, he said:

Well I went into a state of shock to be honest with you cause I had put everything around me I had went looking for apartments in Birmingham cause I thought I was sure I just felt that confident inside that I had that job. You know. That's how excited I was. But... shut down for about two days after I got that letter. Shut down means just didn't wanna be bothered, didn't wanna talk, um just kinda just kinda I was at a crossroads in my life to where did I go from here? You know. Because as an African American student I had put all my eggs in one basket. And guess what I just dropped the basket? You know. Cause every day when I was there by myself I was thinking you know what did I say wrong? What did I do wrong? Did I wear the wrong suit? You know all those things went through my mind. You know at that at that moment in my life. You know. Um so that was that was where I was an... I had a little job in high school. I was selling cars with a dealership here in Laurel and I went back and talked to the owner and he said "you know have you ever explored he said you were so good at car dealers for the career in the automobile industry?" I said well no that's not really what I want to do. He said well he said when I was still in school you'd say I don't really know what I wanna do. So he said you know you always got a door here to come open to you till you find what you wanna go next in life. So at that point in my life I felt like I needed a new environment. I need you know I wanted to get out the college zone you know cause everybody they was younger and I was ready to move on. So I decided back home and take a job here at home.

Another participant coped by making connections between racially motivated aggression in his life and media representations of race. He said people who engage in racial aggression suffer from what he calls “menace to society syndrome”¹ and miss the opportunity to know who he really is,

As I grew older I realized it’s just ignorance. They don’t know me. They’ve seen something on TV and they go oh well that’s them 100%. I used to call it the menace to society syndrome. I used to think everybody watched me as a society and that’s just what they thought. All black people did was gang bang, drink beer, and shoot each other. So I realized that with the media and everything and what they see with the music and all that they don’t know they just see what they want to see. I just say it’s ignorance because they don’t know me personally they don’t know what type of person I am. So I learned to say ok I’m not going to let that bother me as much because of their ignorance. I’m not going to let their ignorance bring me to a level where it affects me. Where I’m sweating about it thinking about it and now my mind is occupied with it when I could be occupied with something more positive than that. I was more aggressive when I was younger, now I just throw my hand at them like you’ll learn one day.

Three other participants utilized variations on ignoring racism and continuing to push towards their goals as suggested by their mothers. One participant was instructed to confront racism and educate people to their mistakes. Another said his mother’s success in her job at a college inspired him to ignore racism in his very competitive photography business. He

¹ Referring to Menace II Society a 1993 film and the directorial debut of twin brothers Allen and Albert Hughes. Menace II Society is set in South Central Los Angeles and follows the life of a hoodlum named Caine Lawson and his close friends. The film gained notoriety for its scenes of violence, profanity, and drug-related content.

described getting jobs by sounding white on the telephone and banking on clients being too embarrassed to protest once he arrives at the job. He says he “wins them over” The one participant who reported he does not experience racism explained it as follows,

No I don't deal in those terms. Although it does exist, aggression uh exists only because people have not matured. So it's in it's in the perception of the individual that's dealing with the aggression how they're going to cope with the aggression. You can either diffuse it or you can or you can feed into it. And so in all situations where there is aggression I just opt not to.

This is the participant whose mother used the egalitarian alternative socialization process of having her ten children see all people as equal and deserving of love. This man is a leader in the community and successfully owns and operates several businesses. One participant described a police officer who frightened the children in the housing project he grew up in,

There was this one cop in particular his name was Frost and he randomly would come in and harass everybody. It was just well known that he was racist. If you seen him coming you had to run, hide, until he left and then you could come back outside and play.

Fear was replaced by helplessness and anger in the descriptions of racism experienced in college,

I guess through college that would be the most things cause I felt like a couple of my teachers would pick on me. And you know as um as African American student you know I was very um uh impromptu speaking I was very good at. You follow me. They would take my literal work, my handwritten work and destroy it. You know? Um as for you know grammatical errors and that kind of thing and that kind of killed my spirit as a college student.

One participant described having fantasies of committing homicide when he was asked to

participate in group projects in a predominately Caucasian class. Another still experiences guilt that he was able to achieve a professional life when many of his boyhood friends were no longer living.

Experiences of Success as Related to Racial Socialization Messages

In response to the question of whether their mother's verbal and non-verbal racial socialization messages influenced their experience of success there were 18 positive responses and two negative responses. Eight participants agreed that the racial socialization messages they received from their mother continue to influence their success in both business and personal relationships. One participant says he did not receive any messages from his mother and one participant reports that he does not think in those terms. One participant credits his mother's egalitarian messages as the reason he made it through college,

College was way different. Ok. Um college um I had just (muffled) so um racism in professors. My mom's encouraging words, telling us we can do anything we wanted to do. That was no different. Um you know in college I had challenges of making you know um not passing some subjects and you know it was tough. It was really tough you know. I thought a lot of times of giving up on it. You know? Um I went there on academic scholarship a couple times I came close to losing my scholarship there. And um you know at that time my mom I was always calling my mom and she was always encouraging me. And you know despite what no matter how things looked you still can achieve. And no matter what people say or what people do you know that that main thing is that God has your best interest at heart.

Another participant credited his mother's example of quiet accomplishment and developing the ability to ignore aggression that helped him open his own business:

Um I think you know kind of that you know you have to work uh twice as hard um things like that. Um kind of put something in me. Um to where it was and you know that kind of thick skin um probably helped me a lot. You know. Um because she wasn't the type of person to uh like you know wanna get physical and fight people and you know and that kind of stuff. Um it was more um she would just be quiet and outdo you. You know.

Haha.

Many of the messages continue to be worded exactly as spoken to the men as children, So it was rules you didn't do. You didn't run from the cops for any reason. Uh you didn't hang in specific areas. And uh you just minded your business. And that was the guide we lived by. You know? Just mind your business. Be at the right place at the right time. And don't like entice the cops to mess with you.

The responses to the questions were beneficial in discovering if and how early racial socialization messages continue to act as a protective factor to the adult men in various stages of their lives.

Chapter V

Discussion

This propose of this qualitative study was to explore the long-term effects of racial socialization patterns from African American mothers to their sons to discover whether they are enhancing or impeding the well-being the African American male in the middle stages of life. My exploration of the existing research shows that it has been established that racial socialization messages act as a protective factor for African American children and youth up to college age when academic performance is the measure. There is a gap in the research as to whether or not these messages continue to ameliorate the negative effects of racism and racially inspired aggression in the middle stages of life. This study increases the dialogue through the accounts of 10 African American men in the middle stages of life who shared how the racial socialization efforts of their mothers influenced their understanding of race, racism and how to cope with it.

A significant portion of the findings obtained from the 10 participants was supported in the literature. Early racial socialization messages prove to be a protective factor well into the middle stages of life. Several types of socialization appear in the data and the men make clear connections between the early racial socialization messages and coping with racism in elementary school, high school and college. The open-ended questions in this qualitative study allowed us to expand the findings in the literature to include the details of the prolonged usefulness of these messages in the current coping strategies and feelings of well-being in the participants who have reached middle age.

The data collected supports the premise that early racial socialization efforts do continue

to support healthy identity formation; the development and implementation of coping strategies for processing racism and racial aggression and overall resiliency to chronic stress from racism and oppression well into the middle stages of life.

Key Findings

Racial socialization messages from mother to son helped 100% of the participants to negotiate the stresses of racism when it did occur in their lives. All participants reported that spoken, modeled or environmental messages had some level of influence on how they understood how they, through the lens of race, would be perceived by the dominant society surrounding them. These findings on racial socialization messages and mother/child interactions were supported by Frabutt, Walker, and MacKinnon-Lewis, (2002) who found that African American mothers feel a need to prepare their sons for racial discrimination. When supportive socialization does not take place the stress of racism can have long lasting negative physical effects like hypertension and respiratory illnesses, and chronic stress and negative psychological consequences such as anxiety, depression and psychosis (Giscombe & Lobel, 2005; King, 2005; McKenzie, 2003; Williams, Neighbors, & Jackson, 2003). Systemic inequalities (racism which is built into everyday experiences) are often invisible, unlike poverty, dangerous neighborhoods and hostility. Several participants spoke about the emotional impact of racism and then reversed the mood by describing how they eventually recovered by tapping in to the early racial socialization messages they remembered hearing from their mothers.

Ninety percent of the participants reported experiencing racism. Though racism was experienced in different intensities throughout the sample, 70% of the participants were able to recall perceived incidents of racial aggression from authority figures in their childhoods and later school years. Two participants said, “it is like it happened yesterday” indicating disturbing

associations with the past through brief moments of dissociation during the interview, as evidenced by a shaking of the head as they returned to the present and began to describe the incident. Their stories contained descriptions of fear for their safety or the safety of their mothers or other loved ones.

The experience of racism, when not mitigated by positive racial socialization, can lead to internalized racism with disastrous results. According to one study, internalized racism causes African Americans to join their oppressors in supporting their own inferiority, “This internalized racism causes Black men to expect less of their lives, endure abuse from loved ones, engage in risky behavior, and risk incarceration to prove one’s existence” (Stevenson, 2004).

One hundred percent of the participants reported utilizing some form of their mother’s racial socialization messages to develop coping mechanisms that they still use today. Whether they ignored racial aggression, used the anger to propel themselves into success or fight back, all of the participants linked their strategies to something their mothers said or did to ameliorate racial aggression during their childhoods.

Egalitarian messages were the most prominent type of messages given and were at least partially responsible for perceived successes in personal and business relationships. These messages provide a foundation of expectations of fair treatment and equal self worth or value with the dominant culture. Egalitarian messages were found consistently across the data from mothers telling their children to ignore race and love and respect everyone equally to mothers telling their children to confront racism because nobody was better than they were.

The examined research uncovered a substantial consensus about the positive outcomes of egalitarian socialization in African American academic and social achievement in youth and college aged men (Caughy, et al., Constantine & Blackmon, 2002; Demo & Hughes, 1990;

Garcia-Coll, Crnic, Lamberty, Wasik, Jenkins, & Vazquez-Garcia, 1996; Hughes & Chen, 1997; 2002; Parke, 2004; Randolph, & O'Campo, Neblett et al., 2006; Spencer, 1990; Taylor & Thornton, 1997) and is supported by the findings of this study. There is even evidence that barrier socialization can be converted to motivational energy in how the two men whose mothers told them that a Black man has to work twice as hard as a White man to get half as far took this as a challenge and coping strategy. The questions that arise are; why have members of academia and social work professionals ended the research at the college level? Why have the encouraging results of this study not been explored at length before this and utilized to assist in the dialogue about African American underrepresentation and underachievement?

Summary

The exploration of the existing scholarship on racial socialization as a protective factor for African American boys identity development, and the construction of coping strategies for the racially inspired aggression often experienced in early life is clearly substantiated in the data collected in this study. Ten men point to the verbal and non-verbal messages on race, racism and coping with racism from their mothers and grandmothers as protective factors in their identity development, relationships and success. They agreed that these messages were at least partially instrumental in their experiencing success in both career and personal relationships. All ten men have used these messages to ameliorate the effects of racism on their overall experience of satisfaction with work and family life. One man uses his mother's messages to circumvent the issue of race completely. Three men went as far as to say the racial socialization messages from their mothers (and grandmothers) were essential to their survival and self-conception,

“...But anyway all that is to say that um yeah it, it has continued to be philosophically, emotionally, um... a guide for my professional life, my personal life, um I am made by those two women. Um... yeah I am made by those two women.”

There is a gap in the scholarship on the continued effectiveness of racial socialization efforts from mother to son into the middle stages of life in the literature. All of the studies found examined the effects of racism on youth, children, adolescents, academic achievement and youth crime rates. This study represents an opportunity to build upon the previous research to gain a broader understanding of the effects of these messages.

The data collected illustrates the long-term effects of racial socialization messages from African American mothers to their sons through exploration of the relevance of and continued references to these messages in the middle stages of lives of the participants of this qualitative study.

Strengths and Limitations

The strengths of the study include: the richness of the data that resulted from the understudied question being posed to a besieged population eager for a voice; the qualitative format allowed for clarification of terminology and meanings.

The limitations of this study were that: the sample was small ($n=10$) and, therefore, limits the generalizability of the findings; the sample was comprised entirely of employed, healthy men who were confident enough to want to participate without financial gain. This excludes men suffering from many of the pathological effects of racism and their contribution is imperative to gain a balanced understanding of the long term effects of racial socialization messages; contributions to racial socialization by fathers and community members were not considered. This may limit and distort the results by participants accidentally attributing messages to

mothers, which may have come from male and community role models; the data were self-reported, which may lead to exaggerated or diminished examples and reports of emotional distress. A final limitation may be that the questions were developed by the researcher and may have been influenced by the researchers socio-cultural location.

Implications for Social Work

The findings of this study have several implications for clinical social work practice. Clinicians must understand the consequences of racism to provide culturally sensitive, competent treatment to the African American community. A deeper understanding of the effects of maternal racial socialization can guide clinicians when working with African American mothers and children, which can result in increased trust and empowerment. Relationship difficulties experienced by African American men may be informed by socialization, or lack thereof, from mothers. Given the underrepresentation of the long-term effects of maternal racial socialization in the research, an opportunity exists to continue to forge an understanding of the inherent strengths of African American mother to son models of support in adulthood and through old age.

Conclusion

I now understand that this research, which put me in close contact with fathers who are proud of their ethnic heritage, has allowed me to envision the African American man as a strong and admirable survivor of circumstance. Where I expected to find injured and angry underachievers I found confident and engaged middle-aged men busy getting on with life. Nine of the 10 participants currently hold their mothers in very high esteem. The one who was reluctant to give his mother credit for his advancement was able to point to her modeling behavior as influential in his current stance when experiencing racism.

Participants shared their insights on conditions that perpetuate racism. Participants shared their thoughts on what could be done by African Americans to improve conditions for African Americans overall. The findings of this study point to linear relationships between the scholarship examined and the hypothesis that racial socialization messages from mother to son in childhood continue to be a protective factor in the middle stages of life. This study hopes to begin an expansion of the research to include the effects of racial socialization messages throughout the lifespan of the African American man. It has certainly given me critical balance for future use in my profession when working with and understanding the value of racial socialization messages in the well-being of the African American middle-aged man.

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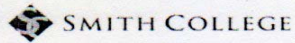
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APPENDIX A

HSR APPROVAL LETTER



School for Social Work
Smith College
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063
T (413) 585-7950 F (413) 585-7994

March 7, 2013

Jacqueline Johnson

Dear Jacqueline,

Thank you for making all the requested changes to your Human Subjects Review application. Your project is now approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee.

Please note the following requirements:

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

Maintaining Data: You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Good luck with your project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Marsha Kline Pruett' followed by a stylized flourish.

Marsha Kline Pruett, M.S., Ph.D., M.S.L.
Acting Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Joanne Corbin, Research Advisor

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form

Dear participant,

I am Jacqueline A. Johnson and I am a current master's in clinical social work candidate at the Smith College School for Social Work. I am inviting you to participate in a study. I am conducting research about the racial socialization messages African American mothers give to their sons. I am interested in exploring how these messages serve the African American male in the middle stages of life.

I will use this information for my master's thesis for professional presentation and publication on this topic. Your contribution to this study may eventually become part of ongoing research for publication.

You have been selected to participate in this research because you have identified as an African American male between the ages of thirty and forty-five, and have been raised by your mother until the age of eighteen, and you speak English fluently. Your experience of your mother's advice can contribute much to our understanding of advising patterns in African American families. The interview will last for approximately thirty to forty-five minutes. I will be recording the interview on a digital recorder. I will transcribe your answers by myself and no one else will hear your answers. If I decide to use a professional transcriber, he or she will sign a confidentiality pledge.

You will not have to answer any question or take part in the discussion/interview if you don't wish to do so. You do not have to give me any reason for not responding to any question, or for refusing to take part in the interview. I will provide you with a list of mental health

resources should you want to explore your feelings further. The results of this study will benefit you in how you may gain knowledge of the developmental forces that shaped you as you reflect on how your mother's socialization efforts affect your personal and professional relationships, and your decision making process. There will be no compensation for participating in this study, but you have my sincere appreciation.

Your responses to the questions will be kept confidential and available only to my thesis advisor and myself. By the time my advisor has access to your responses your recording will not have any identifying information on it, but will instead have a code assigned to it. The list of names with their codes will be kept separately from recordings. The recording will be kept locked in my office. Your signed informed consent form will be kept separately and securely from your recordings and code numbers. Any and all data will be held secure location for a period of at least three years, as required by Federal guidelines. Any data stored electronically will be password protected. If I need the materials beyond the three-year period, they will be kept in a secure location and will be destroyed when no longer needed. Any transcribers who come in contact with your data will sign a confidentiality pledge. In publications and presentations the data will be presented as a whole and if any brief illustrative quotes or vignettes are used, they will be carefully disguised.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You can choose to participate or not. You can end participation at any point. There will be no consequences for ending participation at will. If you decide to stop participating, all the information related to you will be immediately destroyed. You can withdraw from this study until April 15th, at which point the study will be written. If you have any concerns about your rights or about any aspect of this

study I encourage you to call the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee at **(413)-585-7974**.

YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE ABOVE INFORMATION AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION, AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.

Name of Participant _____ Date _____

Name of Researcher _____ Date _____

Jacqueline Johnson

The Smith College School for Social Work

Northampton, Ma. 01063

jaajohns@smith.edu

Office: (413) 493-2728

PLEASE KEEP A COPY OF THIS FORM FOR YOUR RECORDS

I gratefully appreciate your contribution to this research. Thank you.

Jacqueline Johnson

APPENDIX C

Interview Schedule

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted to allow for adjustments to question order, level of language, clarifications, and probes in response to descriptions.

Interview Schedule

Participant Code: _____

Opening Comments

Hello, I'm Jacqueline Johnson, and I am writing a masters thesis to satisfy the requirements of the Master's degree in clinical social work at the Smith College School for Social work. My thesis looks at racial socialization patterns from African American mothers to their sons. I am exploring how the messages mothers give their sons about race effect boys and men into adulthood. Thank you for agreeing to help me with this important topic.

Please tell me about yourself and why you decided to participate in this study?

Do you have any questions about what is going to happen in this interview, or to the information you give me?

Before I get to the interview questions I wanted to give you a brief explanation of racial socialization. It is the process of developing behaviors, perceptions, values and attitudes of an ethnic group, and coming to see yourself and others as members of ethnic groups. In this case, we are exploring how messages from your mother helped you come to know yourself to be African American, and what membership in this group means to you.

Demographic Data

How old are you?

Racially speaking, how do you identify?

Please briefly describe your family structure?

Did your mother raise you until the age of eighteen?

Interview Questions

Racial Socialization

Can you say a bit about how your mother talked to you about race, racism and coping with racism during your childhood?

Can you describe how those messages changed, as you got older; say during your adolescence and high school years; and during your adult life and after you left home?

Did your mother say anything about dealing with authority figures?

Coping

How would you say your coping skills with racism and race inspired aggression evolved through your significant life stages?

Do you see connections between your coping methods and your mothers' socialization messages/or lack thereof?

Were any of your mothers' racial socialization messages particularly helpful, and why?

Were any of your mothers' racial socialization messages problematic, and why?

Are there any racial socialization messages you would prefer your wife (or any important female) to give to your sons?

In what areas of your life have you experienced success?

In what areas of your life have you experienced lack of success?

Briefly explain anything you wish your mother had done differently.

Conclusion

Do you have any further thoughts or questions about racial socialization messages from African American mothers to sons?

We have talked about a lot of things that might be sensitive today. How are you feeling at the moment? I would like to remind you of the therapeutic resources available to you if you needed to talk further about anything we discussed here today.

Thank you so much for your participation.