
The Messages African American Mothers and Fathers Give Adolescents about Race Are Shaped by Their Own Experiences with Racial Discrimination and Their Observations and Fears of Racial Discrimination

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INTRODUCTION

African American parents commonly socialize their adolescent children about race, ethnicity, and interracial relations. These racial socialization messages include communications about potential racial barriers – known as preparation for bias – and messages about African American culture, history and heritage – known as cultural socialization.

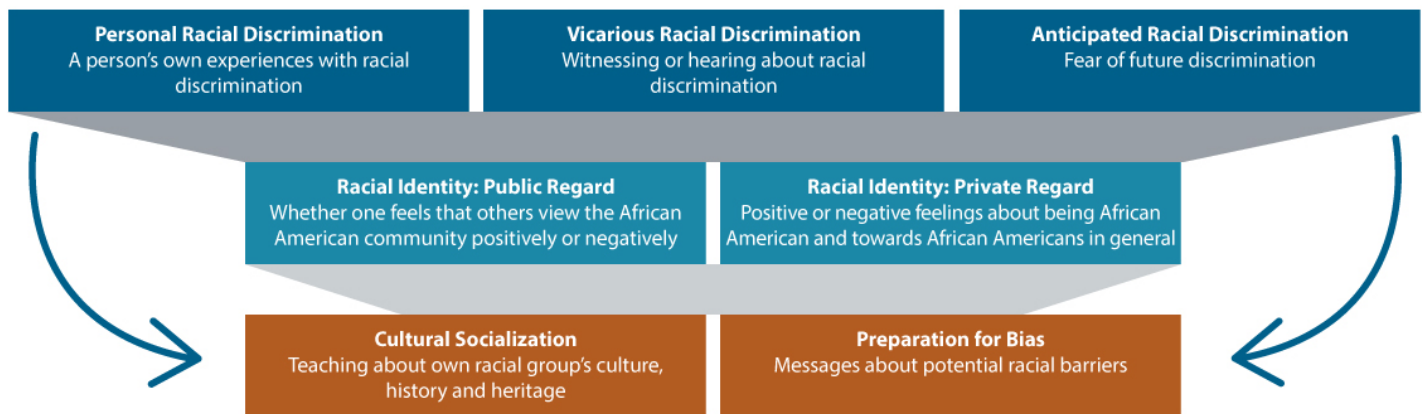
Cultural socialization has been linked to adolescents' academic achievement, fewer problem behaviors, and better psychological functioning. Though the evidence is somewhat weaker than for cultural socialization, preparation for bias has been linked to reduced problem behaviors, increased self-esteem, and increased wellbeing in the presence of racial discrimination.

African American individuals can experience racial discrimination directly or vicariously. In addition, they can fear future discrimination, also known as anticipated discrimination. These race-related stressors may, in turn, influence African American parents' racial socialization messages (*see figure*). For example, after parents are exposed to others' racial discrimination experiences (e.g., the death of Trayvon Martin), they may prepare their children to cope with racial stressors. Moreover, parents' worries about experiencing future racial discrimination may lead them to communicate about race with their children.

How parents view their race and think others view them (i.e., their racial identity), as well as whether they are a mother or father, can influence the relationship between race-related stressors and the racial socialization messages that they give their children (*see figure*). For example, previous research has found that parents who believe others view their race negatively (i.e., they report low public regard for African Americans) are more likely to communicate with their children about racial discrimination. Similarly, parents who hold positive views of their own race (i.e., they report high private regard for African Americans) share more positive messages about being Black with their children.

This research brief reports on a recent study that examined how parents' race-related stressors, racial identity, and gender shape the racial socialization messages they give their adolescents. The researchers analyzed online survey data from a national sample of 567 African American parents of adolescents.

Racial discrimination can directly impact racial socialization messages that parents give their adolescent children and are also influenced by parents' racial identity and gender



This figure shows the conceptual relationship between race-related stressors, racial identity and gender of parent (not shown) and the racial socialization messages that parents give their adolescent children. The arrows communicate that racial discrimination can directly influence mothers' and fathers' racial socialization messages and the boxes show that messages can also be influenced by parents' racial identity.

KEY FINDINGS

- ▶ **Levels of discrimination:** African American parents reported moderate levels of personal racial discrimination and vicarious racial discrimination experiences. They reported moderately high levels of anticipating future racial discrimination.
- ▶ Personal and vicarious racial discrimination experiences were related to the messages parents gave their adolescent children about African American culture, history, and heritage. However, anticipated racial discrimination was not associated with these **cultural socialization messages**.
 - ▶ Among mothers who held positive views about African American people (i.e., reported high private regard), higher reported experiences of vicarious racial discrimination were associated with more cultural socialization messages for their adolescents
- ▶ The following groups had higher **preparation for bias messages**; that is, they did more to prepare their adolescent children for bias:
 - ▶ Parents who believe that others view their race negatively (i.e., reported low public regard) who also experienced high vicarious racial discrimination;
 - ▶ Mothers who reported higher anticipated racial discrimination; and
 - ▶ Fathers who hold positive views about African American people who also had high levels of personal racial discrimination experiences.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Race-related stressors, particularly those associated with vicarious and anticipated racial discrimination, are common among African American parents and likely influence how they socialize their children about race. Reducing discrimination and helping African American parents cope with these race-related stressors would benefit parents and their children. Ways to achieve these goals

POLICY IMPLICATIONS, CONT.

include increasing resources available to schools, mental health providers, and institutions that serve African American families.

African American parents often relay messages about race to their adolescents that promote pride in their ethnic-racial group and that warn of possible racial barriers. The colorblind approaches (e.g., “I only see one race, the human race”) that are sometimes emphasized in schools are in conflict with these racial socialization messages that African American parents share with their children. Therefore, schools should strongly consider curricula that include racial socialization messages to both instill students’ pride in their racial-ethnic group and prepare them for bias.

Finally, African American parents’ racial messages to their children vary based on personal characteristics such as gender and racial attitudes, as well as based on their exposure to different race-related stressors. More funding for culturally-relevant training and interventions is needed to support African American families with attention to how exposure to and processing of racialized

REFERENCE

Holloway, K., & Varner, F. (2021). Parenting despite discrimination: Does racial identity matter? *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*. Online ahead of print.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Holloway, K., & Varner, F. (2021). The messages African American mothers and fathers give adolescents about race are shaped by their own experiences with racial discrimination as well as their observations and fears of racial discrimination. *PRC Research Brief 6*(10). DOI: 10.26153/tsw/15673.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was supported by the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (P2C HD042849), awarded to the Population Research Center at The University of Texas at Austin. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institutes of Health.