

# Black Parents' Experiences of Race-Related Experiences in Their Workplaces Impact How They Teach Their Adolescents About Race and Race Relations

Lorraine E. Scott and Fatima Varner

Racial discrimination – the unjust or prejudicial treatment of a person or a group of people based on racial group membership – is a harmful stressor on Black American families. This racial discrimination occurs across many contexts, including workplaces, schools, and neighborhoods. Black parents try to lessen the negative effects of racial discrimination by communicating *racial socialization messages* through which they tell their children about their race, racial group membership, and interracial interactions.

These racial socialization messages often take two primary forms: *cultural socialization* and *preparation for bias*. With cultural socialization messages, parents communicate to their children the importance of Black culture to instill a sense of pride and knowledge about their racial group. With preparation for bias messages, parents help their children understand the role that race and racial injustice plays in American society. Black parents often use preparation for bias messages to discuss racial barriers that their children may face and to teach coping strategies.

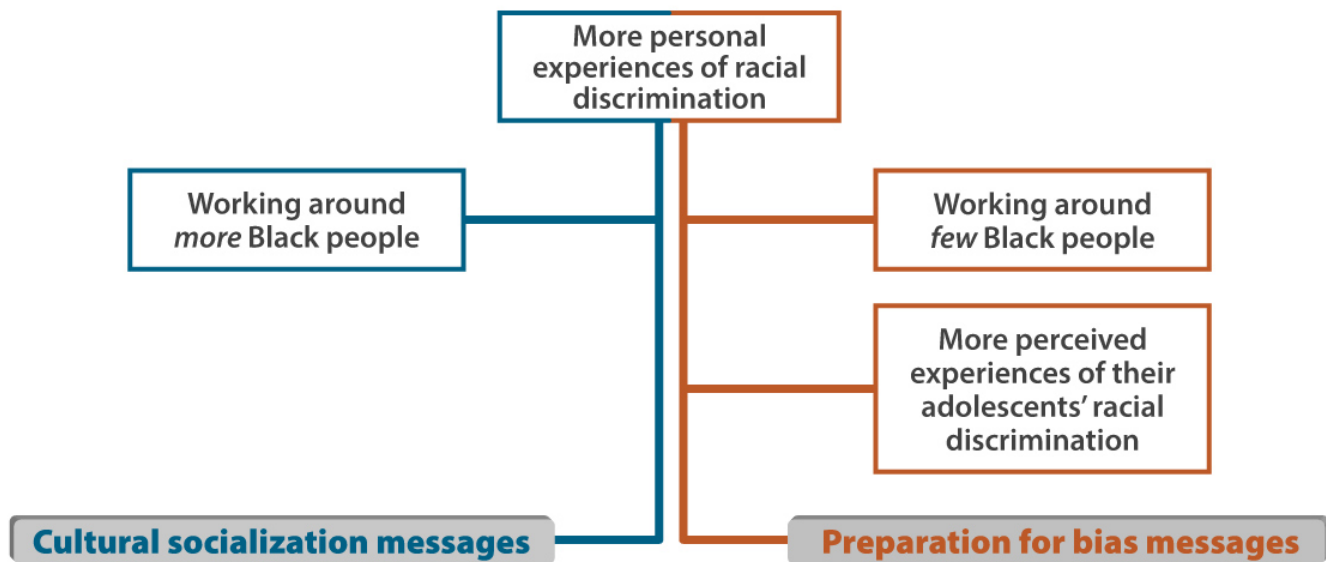
Previous research has shown that parents differ in which racial socialization messages they communicate more often to their children. These differences are likely due to, among other things, differences in the racialized contexts in which parents' function, as well as their experiences of racial discrimination and where those experiences of discrimination occur.

This brief reports on a recent study [1] in which the authors explored how the racial composition of Black families' contexts interact with experiences of racial discrimination to shape parents' racial socialization messages to their adolescents. They also tested the influence of parent-adolescent gender combinations (e.g., mothers of daughters, fathers of sons) on parents' racial socialization messages.

## KEY FINDINGS

- ▶ **Cultural socialization messages.** Factors associated with Black parents communicating more messages to their adolescent children about Black heritage, tradition, and racial group membership (*see figure*):
  - ▶ Working around *more* Black people;
  - ▶ More personal experiences of racial discrimination.
- ▶ **Preparation for bias messages.** Factors associated with Black parents communicating more messages to help their adolescents understand the role that race and racial injustice play in American society (*see figure*):
  - ▶ Working around *few* Black people;
  - ▶ More personal experiences of racial discrimination;
  - ▶ More perceived experiences of their adolescents' racial discrimination.
- ▶ Factors *not* associated with cultural socialization or preparation for bias messages:
  - ▶ Parent-adolescent gender combinations (e.g., mothers of daughters, fathers of daughters, etc.);
  - ▶ Proportion of Black people in the adolescents' school;
  - ▶ Proportion of Black people in the neighborhood.

## Black parents' race-related experiences in their workplaces impact how they teach their adolescents about race and race relations



This figure shows the factors, in blue boxes, associated with Black parents telling their adolescents about their culture and racial group membership (cultural socialization messages) and the factors, in orange boxes, associated with parents telling their adolescents about interracial relations and racial injustice (preparation for bias messages). Note too, that for the preparation for bias messages finding, the authors found a significant interaction between working around few Black people and personal experiences of racial discrimination. That is, parents with few Black co-workers communicated more preparation for bias messages when they had more personal experiences of racial discrimination.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Anti-Black racism has far-reaching and multi-generational implications, as this research demonstrates. Indeed, Black parents' experiences of racial discrimination and how they experience and perceive race in their workplaces carry over into how they teach their children about race and race relations. To lessen experiences of racial discrimination for Black workers and other workers from marginalized communities, workplaces need to intentionally become more culturally, racially, and ethnically diverse and inclusive. To achieve these goals, policies related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) need to be strengthened, rather than rolled back.

## DATA AND METHODS

The authors used data from a national sample of Black parents that was collected by Survey Sampling International (SSI), an online panel survey provider. The survey included items on race-related stressors, parenting, racial beliefs, and demographic and contextual factors. Participants had to be over 18 years old, identify as Black or African American, and be the parent of a child between the ages of 11 and 18. The sample included 565 Black American parents of adolescents, with 56% who were mothers and 44% who were fathers. The authors defined racial composition of workplaces, schools, and neighborhoods as the proportion of Black people that parents reported for each of these contexts. They conducted regression analyses in a structural equation modeling framework (path analyses).

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## REFERENCE

[1] Scott, L.E. & Varner, F. (2023). Who, what, and where? How racial composition and gender influence the association between racial discrimination and racial socialization messages. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 29(4):447-458. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cdp0000611>

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