Ethnic Socialization of African American Children: Implications for Parenting, Identity Development, and Academic Achievement

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This research explores ethnic socialization among middle-income African American parents and their children who attend predominantly white schools. Descriptive data regarding parents' and children's reports of ethnic socialization practices were obtained. Additionally, the relationship between ethnic socialization, ethnic identity, and academic achievement was assessed through correlational and predictive statistics. Correlation analyses indicated that children's reports of ethnic socialization were significantly related to the encounter stage of ethnic identity. Surprisingly, the child's report of ethnic socialization was predictive of lower classroom grades. Findings are discussed in terms of their implications for ethnic socialization and identity development among African American children.

INTRODUCTION

Comprising approximately 12% of the total American population (Dryfoos, 1990), African Americans in the United States occupy the lowest status position of any ethnic group (Fordham and Ogbu, 1986). Few would

argue with the assertion that African Americans are continually stereo-typed, discriminated against, and generally treated in a derogatory and in-humane fashion. Thus, parental ethnic socialization strategies that prepare African American children for the eventual racism and discrimination that they will very likely experience is significant. Important research questions to emerge are the following: (1) What types of messages do African Ameri-can parents attempt to convey to their children, specifically regarding their ethnicity? (2) In what ways do parents prepare African American children for the hostile environmental context in which the children live? (3) How does this preparation relate to the African American child's sense of ethnic identity? (4) Does ethnic socialization benefit the child in terms of the child's performance in behavioral domains? All of these questions are im-portant from both a theoretical and practical standpoint. Surprisingly, few researchers have systematically examined ethnic socialization strategies em-ployed by African American parents and even fewer have investigated the relationship of these socialization strategies to children's psychosocial de-velopment and behavior.

Family Socialization

Socialization has been defined as "the preparation of newcomers for life in their social, economic, physical, cultural and extraphysical surround-ings, i.e., their group in society" (Johnson, 1981, p. 25). Thus, the concept of socialization refers to the process of change or development that occurs in individuals due to their learning of social roles and engaging in social interaction (Richardson, 1981). A manner by which this process can be ex-amined is through studying the agents of socialization. The family is con-sidered the primary socializing agent of the group because it is the first institution with which an individual comes into contact, and often the last institution with which the individual has final ties (Johnson, 1981). Addi-tional influences on the behaviors and thoughts of children are that of peers, and cultural socialization occurring through television and other me-dia (Richardson, 1981). Further, for African American families, socializa-tion extends beyond the boundaries of the immediate nuclear family to include socializing agents in the child's extended family (Ruggles, 1994). Such socializing agents would be grandmother, grandfather, aunt, "play" relatives, and so on.

In comparison to other influences, family socialization has been said to have the most influential and lasting impact on the child's competencies as a functioning human being (Harrison et al., 1990). One aspect of family socialization, ethnic socialization, entails preparing the child for different

environmental niches by giving the child a positive sense of ethnic identity (Boykin, 1986; Johnson, 1981). The family, by inculcating a positive sense of ethnic identity (Hughes and Demo, 1989) serves as a buffer from the impact of the child's minority status (Jackson, McCullough, and Gurin, 1981; Epps, 1975).

Ethnic Socialization

Ethnic socialization refers to the responsibility that African American parents have in terms of rearing children who are psychologically and physiologically healthy in a society where having black skin and/or African features could lead to detrimental physical and psychological outcomes (Peters, 1981). Thus, African American parents must not only be concerned about the same general issues as other parents, but within their parenting practices, it is necessary for them to concentrate on raising children who are emotionally and physically healthy despite living in a society in which being black has negative connotations and consequences (Peters, 1981). This places the African American family in a central position, and in many ways makes their job of socialization a much more arduous task than that of majority-group parents. African American parents—many of whom must deal with the complexities of duallearner lifestyles, marginal incomes, and extreme social stress emanating from racial discrimination of the larger society—must still take on yet one other task, and that is acting as buffer and filter for their children as they interact with the larger prejudicial social structure.

Types of Ethnic Socialization

Ethnic socialization can be separated into three basic components: (1) *cultural experience*, (2) *minority experience*, and (3) *mainstream experience* (Thornton *et al.*, 1990). In terms of cultural experience, research shows that African American parents generally do not focus on the cultural experience of Africans or African Americans in their socialization strategies. When they do, it is usually in the form of sharing their personal experiences (Thornton *et al.*, 1990). When socializing regarding the minority experience, parents tend to focus on the struggles that their children will face because they are of minority status. Early findings have shown that, while parents may show some interest in instilling a positive racial identity in their children, they still focus primarily on nonracial identity factors such as helping their children to survive in a world of prejudice and racism via understanding the importance of good education, and fairness. Those who choose

to focus on mainstream values, such as education and socioeconomic stand-ing, do not emphasize the significance of ethnicity. For the parents who embrace mainstream values, "life issues" are more important; issues such as teaching their children to be trustworthy and honest.

Earlier Research

An overriding consensus from earlier research on ethnic socialization is that African American parents are aware that they are raising children who must be able to deal with the racial oppression, hostility, and overall degradation imposed on their children as a result of the larger prejudicial society (Richardson, 1981; Peters, 1985). The earlier empirical studies that have examined ethnic socialization in African American families reveal sev-eral consistent patterns. First, most of the studies report that African par-ents have a desire for their children to possess high self-esteem in order to handle the many slights and overt hostile behaviors from the larger cul-ture (Peters, 1981; Richardson, 1981). Second, earlier investigations gen-erally report that African American parents focus a great deal of their parenting practices on educational attainment, hard work, and moral values in rearing their children (Peters, 1985; Richardson, 1981). Third, and per-haps most importantly, earlier studies reveal that African American parents tend to focus on these more "standard" values to the exclusion of other ethnic-specific socialization strategies such as instructing their children on interactions between African Americans and White Americans (Spencer, 1983). Specific empirical studies that have lead to these broad generaliza-tions are reviewed below.

One of the first empirical examinations of ethnic socialization among African American parents was conducted by Marie Ferguson Peters (1985). Peters, in her Toddler Infant Experiences Study (TIES), examined African American parents' socialization of their preschoolers. The global findings from her empirical, descriptive study suggest that the African American mothers were gravely concerned about their children growing up in an en-vironment that was generally not safe for them because of their ethnicity. Additionally, the parents tended to emphasize the following in their so-cialization practices: (1) self-esteem, (2) positive feelings about their eth-nicity, (3) self-respect, (4) lack of fair and honest treatment from White Americans, and (5) education.

It is clear from the descriptive study conducted by Peters that the parents did not appear to implement any *explicit* strategies to combat the racism and prejudice that they would foresee in their children's lives. For instance, none of the parents stated that they engaged in activities to in-

crease racial esteem specifically. It is also noteworthy that in Peters's study, African American parents felt that the primary coping strategy for their children in the racist society in which they would grow and live was *a good education*. This, the author stated, was the most prevalent response that many of the parents gave immediately when asked about the *primary* coping strategies that they imparted to their children. The findings were perhaps a function of the children's ages (preschoolers) and not necessarily the mothers' general approach.

A study to look at similar issues among a school-aged sample of African American children was conducted by Richardson (1981). The participants in Richardson's sample consisted of mothers (both married and single) residing in the Los Angeles, California, area. The mothers had children who were between the ages of 4 and 17. In investigating the parenting strategies of these mothers, Richardson generally concluded that the mothers had developed attitudinal and behavioral styles to help them to cope with racism in the larger society. The mothers believed that racism was indeed a significant aspect in the lives of all African Americans and felt that it was important for their children to be aware of the racism that pervades American society.

In discussing what they felt their children should know in preparation for societal racism, the mothers responded that the information given to the child should be developmental; the child should only be given information that was appropriate for his or her age. The author interpreted the mothers' responses to mean that they did not want to "overburden" the child with too much ethnic information. The paragraph below expresses the concern that one parent in Richardson's study had relative to imparting age-graded ethnic-related messages to her child:

> You just can't sit a child down and say, 'Now listen: I'm going to tell you about what the white man is going to do to you.' You can't just do that, but when you as a parent see something happen, then you sit the child down and give them as much as they need to know at that particular time . . . . (Richardson, 1981, p. 179)

While Richardson's descriptive work gives evidence that African American parents are concerned about their children's well-being in a racist society, the parents in her study did not express specific strategies for preparing their child for the racist environment in which they would live. The parents appeared to feel that the children, when met with racism, should be given some information on the nature and existence of racism. The general conclusion from Richardson's research is that African American parents appear to be aware of the significance of ethnic socialization, but do not appear to engage in anticipatory socialization: the act of instructing

one about how to perform in a situation before one actually has to confront the situation.

The results from a study conducted by Thornton *et al.* (1990) reveal that structural characteristics influence the propensity of African American parents to engage in ethnic socialization. African American parents who were older, more educated, residing in the Northeast, and who were married were more likely to engage in ethnic socialization. Additionally, those who lived in neighborhoods that were predominantly black were *less* likely to socialize their children than those who lived in neighborhoods where half of the residents were white. Hence, the greater the number of white people in the neighborhood the more likely the parents were to engage in ethnic socialization (Thornton *et al.*, 1990).

In stating the specific socialization strategies that they impart to their children, the majority of the parents (22%) in Thornton *et al.*'s study stated that they emphasized *high achievement* and *hard work*. The next highest category of responses consisted of those parents who emphasized *racial pride* (17.2%). It is clear from Thornton *et al.*'s study that many African American parents stress achievement-oriented goals over ethnic identity goals, and that geographical and structural variables influence African American parents' socialization practices.

The influence of structural characteristics on the propensity of African American families to engage in ethnic socialization is demonstrated in the results of a recent study conducted by Witty (1992). Witty was interested in the influence that ethnic socialization had on the academic performance of African American males attending school in a southern urban area. She found that when parents were asked questions pertaining to ethnic socialization—such as "What issues related to race and school have you discussed with him?" [the child] and "To what extent have you discussed with him differences in treatment that may exist in and out of school for black boys and men?"—the results indicated that the parents, for the most part, had not addressed issues relative to these questions. The responses from the black boys were also indicative of this lack of emphasis on issues regarding ethnicity, as most of the children stated that race was not a factor in their school performance.

Furthermore, Witty's work demonstrated that, although parents generally did not concentrate on ethnic issues in their parenting, that one could classify the parents along distinctions based on what was emphasized in their parenting practices. Four emphases emerged: (1) humanism, (2) religiosity, (3) racial discrimination or inequality, and (4) neutrality (i.e., not discussing race issues at all). Hence, Witty's ethnographic work corroborates research that suggests that African American parents stress issues of humanism, equality, and religiosity at a greater rate than they

stress issues regarding ethnicity. Also, Witty's work was done with a sample of primarily single mothers living in low-income, predominantly African American areas in the South. All of the characteristics present in Witty's sample were identified by Thornton *et al.* as being associated with lower ethnic socialization.

Ethnic Socialization and Ethnic Identity

Ethnic socialization entails the intergenerational transmission (from parent or guardian to child) of certain messages and patterns that relate to personal and group identity, relationships between and within ethnic· groups, and the ethnic group's position in society. The family setting is generally regarded as a key element in the child's formation of a sense of self. Thus family socialization factors are thought to influence self and personality characteristics of the children. Although ethnic socialization is generally considered the setting that impacts children's self-identity, there is little research on the relationship between the content of ethnic socialization and ethnic identity.

One study to address this issue is that conducted by Demo and Hughes (1990). In their study, utilizing the National Survey of Black Americans data set, these researchers examined the relationship of racial identity to ethnic socialization. In distinguishing between the different types of socialization strategies employed by parents, the authors report that parents who took an assertive/integrative style to socializing their children had children who felt a greater attachment to their ethnic group. An assertive/integrative style is one in which the parent instructed the child on the general importance of their black heritage, the equality of all people, and the importance of getting along with white people. Thus, racial group identity as measured through the individual's feeling of closeness to other blacks was impacted by the parent's emphasis on preparing the child for a race-conscious milieu.

Ethnic Socialization and Achievement

The only investigation to date that has explored ethnic socialization and its relationship to achievement among African American children was conducted by Bowman and Howard (1985). Viewing familial socialization strategies that actively prepare children for a race-conscious society as more beneficial than passive orientations to socialization, these researchers were interested in determining whether proactive socialization messages, messages that emphasize an orientation toward blocked opportunities due to

racism, were related to resiliency in African American children. It was ex-
pected that this resiliency would manifest itself in the propensity of African
American children to take advantage of opportunities in an environment
that is largely nonresponsive (Bowman and Howard, 1985).

   In testing this assumption, the researchers sought to determine the
following: Does "race-related socialization [have] an effect on the academic
performance which is independent of the effect of personal efficacy?" Util-
izing a sample of 377 African American youth between the ages of 14 and
24, the researchers asked the adolescents and young adults to recall what
they were taught about being African American in this society. Findings
showed that those who were not taught anything about race had lower self-
efficacy scores when compared to those who were socialized in a proactive
manner. Additionally, it was found that children who were socialized to be
conscious of racial barriers received higher grades when compared to chil-
dren who were not socialized regarding race.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

   For African American children being reared in culturally dissonant
contexts such as predominantly white communities (Rosenberg, cited in
Elder, 1975), ethnic socialization could be a critical component in deter-
mining their behavior and psychological functioning because of its relation-
ship to identity processes that may mediate the relation between the context
and behavior. Most studies of ethnic socialization are retrospective, provide
few details about the content of ethnic socialization, and have not linked
ethnic socialization to outcome behavior.

   The purpose of this research is to do the following: (1) describe the
nature of global socialization (i.e., what African American parents state
are their important child-rearing strategies overall); (2) analyze the rela-
tionship between parents' and children's reports of ethnic socialization; (3)
examine the relationship between the child's report of ethnic socialization
and the child's academic achievement, controlling for the influence of other
psychological variables.

PROCEDURES

Subjects

   The subjects were middle-income, African American mothers ($N =$
58) and their 9- and 10-year-old children (38 females and 20 males). The
children attended predominantly white public schools in the suburbs of a

northeastern city. The children were in the third (16%), fourth (53%), and fifth (27%) grades. The mean number of African American children per classroom was 4. Most of the mothers of the children were employed (71%), married (61%), and high school graduates (90%). Family incomes ranged from $8,000 to over $30,000, with 63% reporting annual salaries of over $30,000.

Parents at elementary schools in six school districts were approached about participating in the study. Parents who agreed to participate were notified and a time was arranged for the parents to meet as a group. The parents and children completed all paper-and-pencil instruments in separate groups in the library at the school.

Parent Measures

Ethnic Socialization

The parents completed open-ended questionnaires to assess their specific ethnic socialization strategies. The questionnaire was adapted from questionnaires used by Branch (1980) and Spencer (1983). Four-hundred-and-thirty responses were generated from the combined parent and child socialization questionnaires. The coding consisted of grouping responses to questions into thematic independent categories so that one answer could fit into only one category. After generating categories based on several responses, two raters (one undergraduate student and the primary investigator) coded the responses into categories independently. Subsequently, the first ten forms were coded by individual raters. Intercoder reliability was .88. After establishing intercoder reliability, the undergraduate assistant coded all of the remaining forms.

During the data-reduction process, responses were dummy coded so that answers that were indicative of greater socialization regarding one's ethnicity were given a 1; those that were indicative of less ethnic socialization were given a 0. For instance, the first question in the parent's socialization questionnaire asked, "Do you teach your child about ethnic differences, if so, explain?" If the parent answered "no," the answer was coded 0. If, on the other hand, the parent said that they teach about cultural backgrounds, black heritage, or something else related to black/African heritage, the response was coded as 1. All responses were dummy coded in this same manner. Therefore, a greater number of points was representative of greater ethnic socialization.

All questions on the socialization form were not used in deriving the racial socialization score. There were seven questions drawn from the Racial

Socialization Questionnaire to tap the degree of racial socialization: (1) "Do you teach your child about racial differences? If so, explain." (2) "How do you think you would help your child cope with other children calling him or her racist names?" (3) "What do you tell your child about what he/she should do if called racist names?" (4) "In your home do you have pictures of black and white people, only white people or only black people?" (5) "Do you make it a point to purchase play items that are characteristic of black people?" (6) "Would you say that it is almost impossible to prepare your child for any racial episodes he or she is likely to encounter?" (7) "What are your most important goals in raising your children?" For questions numbered 5, 6, and 7, if parents stated that they do make it a point to purchase black play items, say that is not impossible to prepare children for racial episodes, and state that giving their child a positive sense of racial identity is important in their child-rearing goals, then they were given a 1. Otherwise, the parents' responses were coded as 0.

Affirmative responses to the question inquiring about general (i.e., nonethnic specific) child-rearing goals naturally fell into a format whereby parents typically gave three responses. Since the responses were stated in order (e.g., parent would list one goal first, a different goal second, and so on) they were taken to imply their first, second, and third goal choices. Therefore, their goals were examined in terms of the percentage of respondents who listed a particular goal as *first*, the percentage listing a response as *second*, and the percentage listing the goal as *third*. Data were coded as missing for those who did not give a second or third response.

Child Measures

Racial Identity

A revised version of the Racial Identity Scale (RIAS; Spencer, 1990) was administered. The RIAS is a 30-item Likert-type scale developed by Parhelm and Helms (1985) to measure attitudes associated with the various stages of racial identity as described by Cross (1991). The items on the scale are distributed equally for the stages of (1) *preencounter*, the African American has a worldview similar to that of the larger society; (2) *encounter*, person abandons his/her old worldview and takes on a new view with respect to African Americans; (3) *immersion*, person considers him/herself a member of a distinct ethnic group and glorifies his or her heritage; and (4) *internalization* and *internalization commitment*, the person places his/her ethnic group membership at the center of his/her thought and is comfortable with his/her "blackness." Internal consistency reliabilities for the RIAS

subscales were measured through coefficient alpha. The reliability scores for each scale are as follows: .67 preencounter; .72 encounter, .66 immersion, and .71 internalization. The interscale correlations range from −.17 to .67.

Children's stage scores were used in the correlation analyses. The intention was to examine how the child's position on the continuum of ethnic identity stages correlated with the child's score on ethnic socialization.

Child's Report of Ethnic Socialization

The self-report ethnic socialization measure administered to parents was rephrased so that it was appropriate for children ages 9 and 10. The children answered questions designed to assess their perception about what their parent(s) teach them with regard to their ethnic group membership. Specific questions were centered around the children's strategies for getting along with White American children. The child was also asked about any objects or pictures the parent may have displayed in the home.

As with mothers, all of the questions included on the Racial Socialization Questionnaire were not used to derive the score for the level of ethnic socialization. The following questions from the child questionnaire were used in the analysis procedures: (1) "Can you tell me what your parents teach you about racial differences?" (2) "What do your parents tell you to do if someone calls you a bad name because of your race?" (3) "Can you tell me some of the things you would do if someone called you a racist name?" (4) "In your home, does your mother have pictures of black and white people, only white people or only black people?" (5) "Do you have dolls or other things that you play with that are white?" (6) "Are most of the toys you play with white?"

Perceived Scholastic Competence

The self-perception profile, a scale designed by Harter (1982), measures self-adequacy and competence in children based on their perceptions of themselves. There are six separate subscales (scholastic competence, social acceptance, athletic competence, physical competence, behavioral conduct, and global self-worth). Only items from the scholastic competence and global self-worth subscales are used for this investigation. The scholastic competence scale examines the child's beliefs about his or her scholastic abilities. Reliabilities, measured by Cronbach's alpha of reliability, were .80 to .85 for the scholastic competence scale, and .78 to .84 for the global self-worth scale.

Academic Expectations

The child's academic expectations were measured by a report card measure developed by Entwisle and Hayduk (1978). The measure is designed to assess the child's own expectation about his scholastic performance. Children are asked to predict the grade that they will receive on their next report cared. Predictions are made in reading and math. Test–retest (one-week interval) reliability run on first graders has been reported to be fair ($r = .76$). Grades are converted to interval level data in a manner commensurable with those from report card grades, outlined below.

Locus of Control

Locus of control was measured by a self-administered rating scale designed by Crandall *et al.* (1965) to assess children's beliefs about whether internal or external forces are responsible for their academic achievement in various school-related activities. This scale taps into the child's beliefs about who is responsible for behavioral outcomes in both positive and negative situations. High scores indicate high personal responsibility for achievement situations. Separate scores for the child's assuming responsibility for negative outcomes as well as positive outcomes are obtained. Test–retest reliability correlations for those in the fourth and fifth grades over a two-month interval were .69 for total internality (I); .66 for positive internality (I+), and .74 for negative internality (I–). These correlations were significant at the .001 level.

The Child's Perception of the Ethnic Climate

A rating scale designed by the investigator was completed by the child to indicate the frequency with which specific negative and positive incidents are thought to occur in the child's school. The purpose of the school climate rating is to determine the child's perception of the degree of interethnic friction present at the school. Children rate the frequency according to whether the events *never occur* (1), *occur sometimes* (2), *almost always occur* (3), or *always occur* (4). The number of negative events are subtracted from the number of positive events. Because of further coding that took place for the purpose of computer analysis, the *lower* the score the more negative the environment. Likewise, the *higher* the score the more negative the child's perception of his or her school's racial climate.

Academic Performance

The child's report card was used as an indicator of academic performance. Grades are used only from the report cards issued *during* or *prior to* the quarter the study took place. Class performance grades were coded as follows: A+ = 9.0, A = 8.5, A– = 8.0, B+ = 7.0, B = 6.5, B– = 6.0, C+ = 5.0, C = 4.5, C– = 4.0, D+ = 3.0, D = 2.5, D– = 2.0, F = 1.0.

RESULTS

One of the general issues important to the discussion of ethnic socialization of African American children is what African American parents give priority to in the rearing of their children, who are of minority status in American society. Examining the descriptive responses pertaining to broad-based child-rearing goals, it is apparent that the African American parents placed the greatest emphasis on primarily four areas: (1) *education*, (2) *religion*, (3) *self-esteem*, and (4) *hard work* (see Fig. 1).

The other striking observation with respect to this configuration of parenting goals depicted in Fig. 1 is that there is practically no emphasis on black pride or ethnic identification. Since only 2% ($N = 58$) of the sample listed instilling ethnic identity as an important goal among their top choices, it is obvious that the parents do not place priority on this aspect of child rearing, overall. Stated another way, when African American parents are not probed about their parenting practices specifically geared toward race, they do not mention it as salient.

In inspecting the second list of responses (see Fig. 2) it is apparent that many parents did not give a second response. Among those who did, however, emphasis was placed on (1) *virtues* (i.e., being a "good human being"), (2) *religion*, and (3) *self-esteem*. Because self-esteem and religion are among the parents' first and second priorities, it appears that being religious and feeling good about "self" are child-rearing outcomes that are specially valued by these parents. In essence, what these two configurations, combined, indicate is that when mothers did not list either education, self-esteem, or religion as first, they listed them as second in terms of raising their children. It was found, however, that when parents were asked pointedly "Do you believe that ethnicity is important in raising your children?" an overwhelming 89% said yes. This finding indicates that African American parents do consider ethnicity to be an important factor in childrearing; however, enhancing or inculcating ethnic identity is not a priority.

Since parents maintained that ethnicity was significant in the lives of their children (although not stressed in their childrearing), they were fur-

ther probed on what they taught their children specifically regarding ethnicity. The descriptive analysis of parents' and children's reports of the what parents taught their children about their ethnicity indicates a great deal of intergenerational congruence. The answers to this part of the self-report questionnaire were categorized into the six thematically independent categories. Listed below are the categories and examples of each.

1. *Nothing.* Parent or child did not state anything.
2. *Ethnic pride.* "Explain there are many races" [parent]; "Teach my child about her African heritage" [parent]. "Mom told me the difference about blacks and whites" [child].
3. *Equality.* "People are people no matter what color" [parent]. "Doesn't matter if you're black or white" [child].
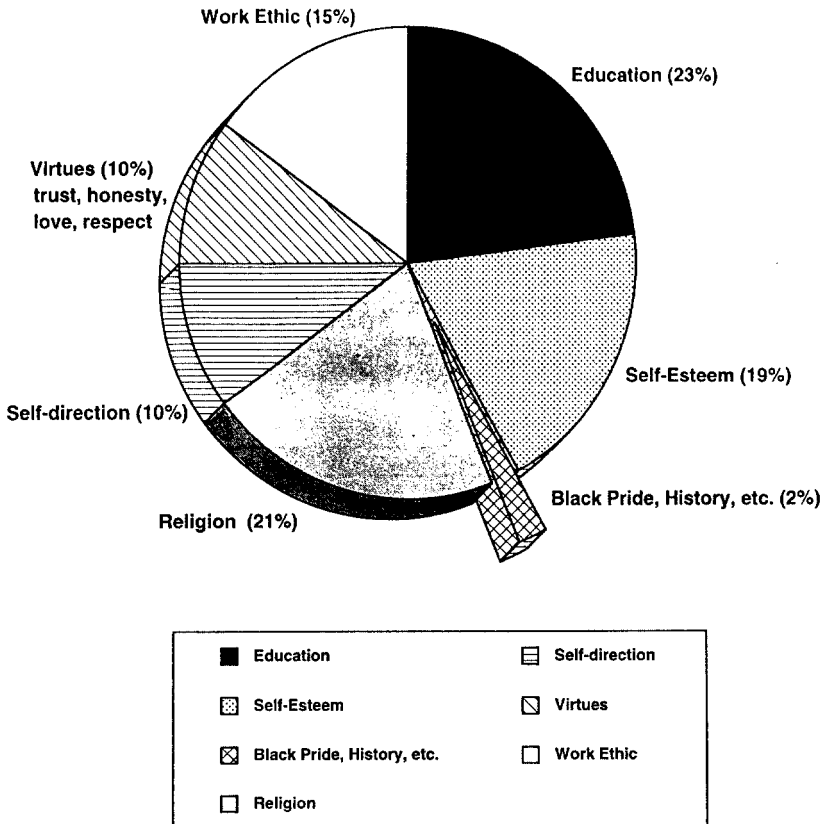

Fig. 1. The distribution of child-rearing goals parents stated in their first set of responses.

4. *Ethnic/Racial Barriers*. "Because we are black . . .we are held back in all areas of life" [child].
5. *Self-development*. "Stress 'glad to be me' " [parent]. "Whites and blacks are good in schools" [child].
6. *Physical attributes*. " . . . Don't forget he is black" [parent]; "Her personal hygiene is different from her white friends" [parent]. "Skin color" [child].

As indicated in Fig. 3, parents and children agreed on what the parents taught about the following: (1) racial pride, (2) equality, and (3) self-development. Children and parents agreed remarkably on the emphasis parents placed on equality. There was not much intergenerational convergence on three other categories: (1) nothing, (2) physical attributes, and
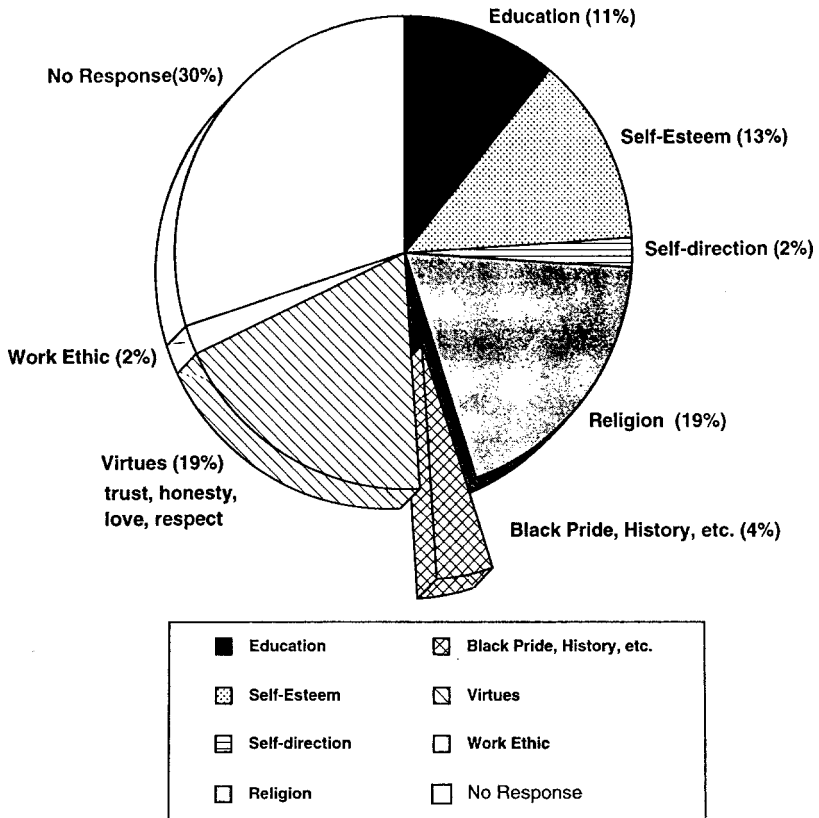

Fig. 2. The distribution of child-rearing goals parents stated in their second set of responses.
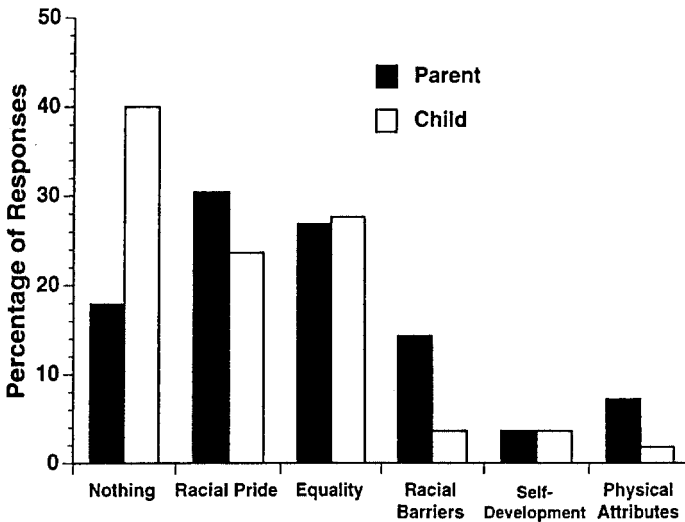
Fig. 3. Distribution of responses children and parents gave to the questions asking what parents teach about ethnic differences.

(3) racial barriers. Children appear to particularly tune into their parents' messages about treating all people equally regardless of ethnicity. Overall, these findings suggest that, when probed, parents give information about their socialization practices regarding ethnicity. Further, children appear to be tuned into the messages parents state they communicate, as their reports are very similar, in many respects, to their parents'. Additionally, messages of equality, racial pride, and self-development appear to be those of which children are particularly aware.

While there was no relationship found between children's report of ethnic socialization and their ethnic identity, correlation analyses do suggest that African American parents who state that they prepare their children for the significance of race in American society have children who are more likely to express racial identity views characteristic of Cross's *encounter stage* (see Table I). In the encounter stage, an individual begins to question his or her allegiance to the worldview subscribed to by the dominant culture. Cross (1991) states that this stage "isolates the point at which the person feels compelled to change" (p. 190). Thus, the children of parents who report higher ethnic socialization are more likely to be at a stage in ethnic identity where they question allegiance to majority standards and values.

A forward stepwise regression was run with all psychological variables and ethnic socialization entered into the model. Whereas *locus of control*

Table I. Correlations Between Parent and Child Reports of Ethnic Socialization and Child's Ethnic Identity[a]

	Child's ethnic identity				
Socialization	Overall	PRE	ENC	IMR	INT
Parent's report of ethnic socialization	−.23	−.01	.50[b]	−.03	.04
Child's report of ethnic socialization	−.04	.30	.09	.29	−.23

[a]PRE: preencounter; ENC: encounter; IMR: immersion; INT: internalization; Overall: overall stage score.
[b]$p \leq .01$.

Table II. Regression of Children's Reading Grades on Ethnic Socialization and Other Psychological Variables

Variable	Regression coefficients	F	R^2
Psychological			
Academic self-esteem	.35	7.87[b]	
Child's expectation of reading grades	.49	7.53[b]	
Global self-esteem	−.23	5.01[b]	
Child's perception of school ethnic climate	.67	5.08[b]	
Socialization			
Child's report of ethnic socialization	−.58	7.82[b]	
Model		5.45[a]	.54

[a]$p < .01$.
[b]$p < .05$.

did not enter the model as a significant predictor, all other variables entered and were significant. The model explained a little over half of the variance (54%) in the children's reading grades (see Table II). Further inspection of the regression models showed that children's report of ethnic socialization was a significant predictor of reading grades, $F(1, 28) = 5.45$, $p < .01$. Albeit ethnic socialization is a significant predictor of reading grades, it should be noted that it is *negatively* associated with academic outcomes in reading (see Table II)—meaning lower grades were associated with *greater* ethnic socialization (estimate of coefficient = −.58). The sample mean for grades in reading and math are presented in Table III.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study corroborate previous research on race-related socialization conducted almost 10 years ago (Peters, 1985; Spencer, 1983):

Table III. Means and Standard Deviations of Report Card Grades
for Math, Reading, and Total Academic Grade[a]

Subject	Report card grades		
	M	SD	Range
Math	5.97	1.98	1.0–9.0
Reading	6.38	1.44	4.0–8.5
Total academic grade	12.36	2.96	6.0–17.5

[a]A+ = 9.0, A = 8.5, A– = 8.0, B+ = 7.0, B = 6.5, B– = 6.0, C+ = 5.0, C = 4.5, C– = 4.0, D+ = 3.0, D = 2.5, D– = 2.0, F = 1.0.

African American parents emphasize "humanistic" values over more ethnic-specific parenting practices and values. To this end, children and parents showed remarkable agreement relative to parents' teaching about the equality of all people. Children were more likely, however, to state that their parents did not teach them anything, and parents were more likely to report that they taught about physical attributes and racial barriers. It could be the case that parents stressing physical differences and racial barriers were less likely to be "heard" than those who spoke of "equality." Furthermore, equality and the "let's all get along" theme is much more likely to be reinforced by the larger society. Additionally, parents who emphasize equality between ethnic groups are more likely to display behaviors that make this message particularly salient. Also, equality is perhaps a "safe" message to transmit as the children and parents do not have to deal with sensitive issues if they simply believe all people are treated equally regardless of their ethnicity.

Going a step further than previous research, results from this study suggest that for parents who do address race in their parenting practices, their children appear to be further along in identity development. Cross (1991) has stated that an African American child can be socialized in such a manner that he or she may acquire a black identity and not need to go through the process of Nigrescence in adulthood. This contention is supported through the findings of this study. These results suggest that ethnic socialization may "speed up" the process of identity formation such that children receiving socialization messages regarding ethnicity appear not to be in the preencounter stage but rather have achieved the "first" identity. This "first" identity is largely one in which the child has "encountered" the experience of being black through didactic teaching or vicarious experience (i.e., the experience of their parents; Cross, 1991).

Children who received more ethnic socialization from parents performed worse in school. This could be because the children who have the lowest grades have parents who may be sensitive to differential treatment

that their child is receiving because of his or her ethnicity and may be apt to discuss these issues with the children. Hence, ethnic socialization would be predictive of lower grades. It should be emphasized that the data are cross-sectional and one cannot determine whether socialization leads to lower grades or lower grades brought about more ethnic socialization. Another plausible explanation is that the encounter stage is characteristic of feelings of upheaval and hostility, and could, therefore, lead to lower performance.

CONCLUSION

This research corroborates findings from earlier and recent research suggesting that African American parents do not place priority on issues of ethnicity in the rearing of their children who are of minority status. However, as suggested in earlier research there is an indication that African American parents do deal with ethnicity in raising children in a society where being black has negative consequences. In other words, while African American parents do not indicate that they place a priority on dealing with issues of ethnicity in the rearing of their children, they do not dismiss the fact that their children are black in a society that shuns blackness. This realization, though, has not lead them to emphasize blackness when parenting their children.

Perhaps African American parents are faced with issues that are much more pressing than identity. Issues such as teen pregnancy, AIDS, violence, and poor quality educational institutions all may take precedence over ethnic socialization. Additionally, it may be the case, especially for poor African American parents, that "survival" might be of utmost importance as opposed to instructing their children on issues of ethnicity.

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