Racial Discrimination: A Continuum of Violence Exposure for Children of Color

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Abstract This article reviews and examines findings on the impact of racial discrimination on the development and functioning of children of color in the US. Based on current definitions of violence and child maltreatment, exposure to racial discrimination should be considered as a form of violence that can significantly impact child outcomes and limit the ability of parents and communities to provide support that promotes resiliency and optimal child development. In this article, a conceptual model of the effects of racial discrimination in children of color is presented. The model posits that exposure to racial discrimination may be a chronic source of trauma in the lives of many children of color that negatively influences mental and physical outcomes as well as parent and community support and functioning. Concurrent exposure to other forms of violence, including domestic, interpersonal and/or community violence, may exacerbate these effects. The impact of a potential continuum of violence exposure for children of color in the US and the need for future research and theoretical models on children's exposure to violence that attend to the impact of racial discrimination on child outcomes are discussed.

Keywords Violence · Children · Parents · Racial discrimination

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Introduction

There is growing recognition of the multiple forms of violence (e.g., domestic, interpersonal, community, political) to which children may be exposed and the need to expand our definitions of violence and potentially reframe future violence studies to acknowledge and examine the full range of these exposures (Barber 2001; Daiute and Fine 2003; De Los Rios 2004; Finkelhor et al. 2007; Garbarino 2001; Mrug et al. 2008; Pine et al. 2005). Increasing attention has also been paid to identifying the links between different forms of violence; the aspects of violence exposure that are most damaging to children; and similarities in children's responses to different forms of violence (Finkelhor et al. 2007; Garbarino 2001; Holden 2003; Krug et al. 2002; Osofsky 1999; Pine et al. 2005). This literature, in conjunction with findings on the deleterious impact of exposure to racial discrimination on outcomes for children of color, suggests that exposure to racial discrimination may be a little recognized form of violence that should also be acknowledged and examined by investigators in the field of children's violence exposure. The lack of attention to the potential impact of exposure to racial discrimination may significantly limit our understanding of child outcomes in communities where youth may be exposed to multiple forms of violence.

The article acknowledges the potential "upstream" effects of racial discrimination (e.g., impact of racial discrimination on quality of life and material conditions such as income, housing, education, etc.) and provides a more detailed analysis of the "downstream" effects of racial discrimination (e.g., impact on psychological and biological functioning) on child functioning and development. A primary goal is to examine the degree to which current definitions and theoretical models of violence exposure and

child maltreatment should include exposure to racial discrimination for children of color (i.e., those who self-identify as African American, Latino, and Asian/Pacific Islander) (Aponte and Crouch 1995; Quintana et al. 2006).

To address these issues, the first section of the article provides an overview and comparison of current definitions of violence exposure and racial discrimination. A short overview of the effects of children's responses to violence is provided as a basis for examining and comparing children's responses to racial discrimination and other recognized forms of violence. Second, the pervasive nature of racial discrimination for children of color is examined and theoretical models that provide support for racial discrimination as a form of violence for children of color are presented. Third, children's responses to racial discrimination, the developmental stages of racial awareness in children of color, and the degree to which developmental changes in awareness of race may increase psychological distress in children of color are discussed. Similarities in children's responses to racial discrimination and to other forms of violence are also explored in this section. Fourth, the impact of racial discrimination on sources of resiliency for children, including parent and community support, are identified and the degree to which racial discrimination may limit the ability of parents and communities to support children is discussed. Finally, a conceptual model of children's exposure to racial discrimination is presented and recommendations for future research that incorporates racial discrimination as a form of violence exposure for children of color are discussed.

Definitions of Violence, Child Maltreatment, and Racial Discrimination

Current Definitions of Violence and Effects on Children

Violence is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation" (Krug et al. 2002, p. 1084). This definition emphasizes violence as an unjust or unwarranted exertion of force that is *inextricably linked to issues of power* (De Los Rios 2004). Historically, physical and/or psychological attacks against an individual or group have been used to establish power (De Los Rios 2004). Violence can take place in the *private* (e.g., interpersonal violence) or *public* (e.g., war and political violence) *domains* (De Los Rios 2004; Garbarino 2001; Pine et al. 2005). These different levels of violence may operate concurrently and result in a continuum of violence for

youth and their families across settings that include poor urban communities in the US, war zones worldwide, and impoverished countries (De Los Rios 2004; Finkelhor et al. 2007; Garbarino 2001; Mrug et al. 2008; Osofsky 1999; Pine et al. 2005).

Research on children's exposure to violence has developed rapidly based on accumulating data that exposure to violence negatively affects children's outcomes (Freeman et al. 1993; Garbarino 2001; Graham-Bermann et al. 2006; Grant et al. 2005; Hughes 1988; Mazza and Reynolds 1999; Osofsky 1999, 2003; Sanders-Phillips 1997; Vermeiren et al. 2002; Wolfe et al. 2003). Pine et al. (2005) have identified key characteristics of trauma in children, who have been exposed to violence. These include: (1) there is generally a dose-gradient response to the threat that can be measured in the victim or member of a victimized group; (2) the developmental timing of the event influences child and family reactions, protections, and developmental sequelae; (3) the experiences and consequences for children are mediated and moderated by family, peer, and other social systems and related to the quality of relationships with these systems; and (4) individual differences in vulnerabilities and capabilities influence child responses and recovery patterns. Similarly, Holden (2003) has argued that exposure to violence is a form of child maltreatment that is characterized by common responses in children. Holden's (2003) typology suggests that children exposed to violence are: (1) traumatized and fear for their own safety, (2) likely to perceive that violence is normative and an appropriate way of dealing with others and conflict (Graham-Bermann and Brescoll 2000), (3) degraded, belittled, criticized, and ridiculed, (4) denied the opportunity of expressing appropriate emotional responses, (5) isolated; and (6) denied attention to their medical, educational, and mental health needs. These characteristics of violence exposure (Pine et al. 2005) and child maltreatment (Holden 2003) are thought to be responsible for poor child outcomes.

Osofsky (1999) has also argued that exposure to violence is damaging to children because it interferes with the ability of parents to provide secure and supportive environments that protect youth from the effects of violence. High levels of violence may also limit the degree to which communities can serve as safe havens for children (Osofsky 1999). Garbarino (1995, 2001) concludes that exposure to violence can destroy a child's emerging capacity to form and maintain "social maps" (i.e., cognitive representations of the world as a safe and fair place) that guide and help to identify pathways to the future. The impact of exposure to violence may be particularly devastating for youth who are living in the context of other risks such as poverty and social marginalization (Garbarino 2001).

Given these definitions of violence and findings on the impact of violence on children, we next examine the degree

to which experiences of racial discrimination in children of color are consistent with these definitions of violence, and describe similarities in children's responses to racial discrimination and to other recognized forms of violence.

Definition and Structure of Racial Discrimination in the US

In societies where specific groups have unequal social status based on ethnicity, gender, or other characteristics, racial discrimination is a form of social inequality that includes experiences resulting from legal and non-legal systems of discrimination (Al Haddad 2000; Amaro et al. 1987; Comer 1995; De Los Rios 2004; Essed 1991; Franklin and Boyd-Franklin 2000; Sampson et al. 2005; Utsey et al. 2000; Williams 1999; Zierler and Krieger 1997). Historically, systems of racial discrimination in the US were maintained through the use of violence and utilized legal means and social norms to create dominant and secondary social groups that differ in levels of power (political, economic, social, and personal) and access to material goods and services in the society (e.g., education, housing, medical care, etc.) (Clark et al. 1999; Harrell 2000; Kendall and Hatton 2002). In the US, children and families of color, particularly African Americans, have generally been classified as members of secondary social groups (Sampson et al. 2005).

Like other forms of violence, racial discrimination can occur on multiple levels including: the *personal* level (e.g., individual exposure to prejudice and racial discrimination) and *institutional* level (e.g., discrimination in housing, education, health care) (Al Haddad 2000; Jones 2000). Although exposure to personal racial discrimination is common in the lives of most children of color in the US (Rumbaut 1994; Spencer and Markstrom-Adams 1990) racial discrimination at the institutional level is the primary cause of group differences in material conditions (e.g., poverty, education, employment, and access to medical care) and power (e.g., access to information, control of media, and political and economic influence) (Crawford et al. 2008; Jones 2000; Kendall and Hatton 2002). Institutional racism is structural since it has been codified in the society's policies, customs, and laws (Jones 2000).

Social experiences like racial discrimination may have "upstream" and "downstream" effects on mental and physical health outcomes that influence health disparities between groups (Schnittker and McLeod 2005). "Upstream" effects include the impact of social factors and experiences on variables and processes operating at the level of the social structure (e.g., social inequalities, restrictions on housing, and education) that may affect mental and physical health outcomes. "Downstream" effects include the impact of social experiences on

psychosocial factors such as levels of stress, psychological distress, and coping that also affect mental and physical health outcomes. "Upstream" and "downstream" effects are linked and the impact of each must be evaluated to fully understand outcomes in any group.

Based on these distinctions, the "upstream" effects of racial discrimination, which include policies that have resulted in increased poverty, poor education and housing, and limited healthcare for members of secondary social groups, have resulted in disparities in quality of life for children, families, and communities of color in the US that are well-documented (Gee 2002; Jones 2000; McLoyd 1990; Schnittker and McLeod 2005; Schulz et al. 2000). While less widely studied, the "downstream" effects of racial discrimination, including personal experiences of exclusion, harassment, physical and psychological threats, and stigmatization, have also significantly influenced mental health and development for children of color in this country as well as psychological functioning for parents of color and residents of communities of color (Nyborg and Curry 2003; Quintana et al. 2006; Wong et al. 2003).

In summary, the history of racial discrimination in the US as a social system that was based on violence and structured to maintain power differentials between groups, is consistent with current definitions of violence—particularly violence that occurs in the public domain to maintain social power (Al Haddad 2000; De Los Rios 2004). There is also evidence that, similar to other forms of violence, exposure to personal and institutional racism may negatively impact developmental outcomes in children of color. In the next section, theoretical models that support the premise that racial discrimination is a form of violence for children of color are presented and the pathways by which exposure to racial discrimination may influence child outcomes are described. Empirical findings on children's responses to racial discrimination are also reviewed and compared to children's responses to other forms of violence.

Racial Discrimination in Children of Color: Theoretical Foundations

Four major theoretical models guide this discussion of racial discrimination as a form of violence for youth of color. Collectively, these models support this conclusion by indicating that exposure to racial discrimination: (1) is a social experience, occurring at multiple levels of a child's environment, that causes trauma by fostering isolation, alienation, marginalization, psychological harm, and perceptions of danger; (2) limits the ability of parents and communities to protect children and promote resiliency; and (3) creates a level of psychological distress that, in

combination with other factors, may exceed the ability of children to cope and respond effectively.

Ecological Theory

Bronfenbrenner (1979) was one of the first theorists to emphasize the importance of understanding child development in the context of the multiple layers of the environment that influence it. Two of these layers are most important to our understanding of children's exposure to racial discrimination. The *microsystem layer* (i.e., the family and neighborhood in which a child lives) is the sphere of influence closest to the child and contains the structures with which the child has direct contact (Berk 2000). The *macrosystem* layer includes influences from the larger society such as laws, customs, media, schools, law enforcement, and social policies that also impact children and families (Berk 2000). Bronfenbrenner's theory is central to ecological theory—which acknowledges that contextual influences influencing physical and mental health occur at multiple levels of the environment (Hawkins et al. 1992; Jessor 1991; Noack 1988; Ringwalt et al. 1999; Sanders-Phillips 1996a, b; Schulz et al. 2002). A primary determinant of mental health is the nature of a child's interaction with an environment that may be a source of danger, or safety and support (Stokols 1992; Sussman et al. 1995).

Since racial discrimination can be pervasive and operate at the microsystem and macrosystem levels of a child's life, several investigators have argued have that an ecological approach to understanding child development for children of color is critical due, in part, to the potential impact of racial discrimination on the child, family, and community in which a child lives (Quintana et al. 2006; Spencer and Markstrom-Adams 1990). For example, the stereotypes and social policies that significantly influence quality of life and perceptions of groups of color in a society most often emanate from the macrosystem level, as do the policies and decisions (e.g., ability to secure loans) that significantly influence where families live (e.g., neighborhood and type of housing); where children go to school (e.g., public versus private education); and the resources that are available to communities (Spencer and Markstrom-Adams 1990, Utsey et al. 2001; Williams 1999). Personal experiences of racial discrimination, including harassment, insults, isolation, and physical or psychological attacks on safety, can emanate from the macrosystem (e.g., police) or microsystem (e.g., peers) levels and each may influence microsystem variables such parent behaviors and community cohesion, functioning, and support (Simons et al. 2002). As a result of exposure at these multiple levels, children of color are often presented with a negative image of their reference group and

experience the chronic trauma and problems associated with membership in a group that is devalued and viewed as different from others in the society (Spencer and Markstrom-Adams 1990). Racial discrimination may also deplete the material and psychological resources of parents and communities that are needed to support and nurture children of color.

Social Stratification Theory

Social stratification refers to the long-term processes that result in the hierarchy of groups in a society (Cooper 2001; Gregoria et al. 1997; Lavis et al. 2003). While social class is largely defined by economic status and education (Muntaner et al. 2000), social stratification is characterized and determined by current and past social policies and historical, political, and cultural conditions (Cooper 2001; Gregoria et al. 1997; Lavis et al. 2003). A group's place in the social hierarchy influences the likelihood of exposure to risk factors that directly affect health (Aneshensel 1992; Gregoria et al. 1997; Grusky 2001; Lavis et al. 2003; Schulz et al. 2002; Zierler and Krieger 1997). For example, groups of color in the US (e.g., African Americans, Latinos, Asians, etc.) are more likely to be exposed to racial discrimination as compared to other groups and, due to their unique history in the US, African Americans report the highest levels of racial discrimination (Banks et al. 2006; Utsey 2000; Utsey et al. 2000; Williams 1999).

Theory of Racial Inequality and Social Integration

The theory of racial inequality and social integration specifically elucidates the psychological pathways and mechanisms by which experiences of racial discrimination may foster psychological distress and create trauma in the lives of children of color (Burr et al. 1999; Durkheim 1951; Messner and Golden 1992; Peterson and Krivo 1993). Anomie, which is characterized by feelings of low self-efficacy and hopelessness, develops when children living in social and economic adversity experience inequalities in quality of life and perceive contradictions between opportunities in the larger society and the conditions and lack of opportunity in their own lives (Blau and Blau 1982; Burr et al. 1999). Racial discrimination reinforces these perceptions by further marginalizing youth and provoking feelings of anger and unfairness that operate as barriers to social integration and the achievement of life goals (Aneshensel 1992; Simons et al. 2006; Zierler and Krieger 1997).

Accumulation of Risk Model

The accumulation of risk model, which was developed by researchers in the field of violence exposure, posits that

children at greatest risk for poor developmental outcomes are those exposed to multiple forms of violence concurrently (Finkelhor et al. 2007; Garbarino 2001). Youth may be capable of coping with low levels of risk but once the accumulation moves beyond a low level there must be a major concentration of opportunity to prevent serious harm (Garbarino 2001; Perry et al. 1995; Sameroff et al. 1987). Thus, youth who are exposed to racial discrimination and to other types of violence (e.g., interpersonal, community violence) may be at especially high risk for poor outcomes.

Psychological and Developmental Effects of Exposure to Racial Discrimination on Children of Color

While research on the impact of racial discrimination in adults has increased over the last decade, there is substantially less information on racial discrimination and child development in youth of color (Nyborg and Curry 2003). Since most of the studies of racial discrimination have been conducted in African American populations, the following findings, except where noted, are primarily focused on African American youth. In addition, most of these studies have not distinguished between racial discrimination at the personal versus institutional levels. The few studies of institutional racial discrimination that have been conducted with children involve assessments of racial discrimination in school and with adults in the larger.

Levels of Exposure to Racial Discrimination for Children of Color

African American youth are the most likely to report exposure to racial discrimination and African American male youth report the highest rates of stress related to discrimination (Banks et al. 2006; Contrada et al. 2001; Greene et al. 2006; Rolon-Dow 2005; Sellers et al. 2003; Simons et al. 2002; Turner and Avison 2003; Williams 1999). For African American youth, experiences of personal discrimination most often include racial slurs and name-calling; threats of physical harm from peers; and exclusion from peer activities (Simons et al. 2006). They are also much more likely than other children of color to report racial discrimination at school and with police or adults such as shopkeepers who may accuse them of stealing or other negative behaviors (Fine et al. 2003; Fisher et al. 2000; Simons et al. 2006; Wong et al. 2003).

Simons et al. (2006) found that more than 67% of African American males reported some form of racial discrimination in the last year including insults and racial slurs (46%); being suspected of doing something wrong when they had not (43%); being excluded from peer activities (33%); and threats of physical harm (18%). The

majority (51%) also reported that their friends and family had been victims of discrimination; close fiends had been treated unfairly because they were African American (54%); and family members had been treated unfairly because they were African American (48%). This finding suggests that African American children are also exposed to discrimination through the experiences of others in their family, peer group, and communities (Simons et al. 2002).

As African American boys grow into adolescence and young adulthood, they experience increasing incidents of racial discrimination (Bynum et al. 2008). In comparison to their Asian and Latino American peers, male and female African American youth experience steeper increases in discrimination as they grow older and African American girls are more likely than other groups of girls to report exposure to racial discrimination in the form of slurs, threats to safety, and psychological attacks (Greene et al. 2006; Martinez and Lillie-Blanton 1996; Moland 1996; Northridge et al. 2003).

Incidents of racial discrimination have also been reported for other children of color (e.g., Latino, Asian, etc.). For example, a survey of more than 5000 immigrant children from the major racial/ethnic and refugee groups in the US (Mexican, Filipino, Vietnamese, Laotians, Cambodians, Cubans, Afro-Caribbeans, Nicaraguans, Columbians) found high levels of racial discrimination, with the highest levels among youth who identified themselves as "Black" (Rumbaut 1994). Based on studies of adults of color, discrimination continues throughout the life cycle (Johnson and Jennison 1994; Spencer and Markstrom-Adams 1990; Zimmerman et al. 1999).

Development of Racial Awareness

Developmental differences in children's responses to domestic and community violence are well-documented and these developmental differences affect responses to violence (Osofsky 1999; Pine et al. 2005). Similarly, developmental differences have also been noted in children's responses to racial discrimination and there is a developmental progression in racial awareness; the ability to cope with exposure to racial discrimination; and socio/emotional responses to racial discrimination (Averhardt and Bigler 1997; Bynum et al. 2008; McLoyd 1990; Simons et al. 2002; Spencer 1990). There is also accumulating data on the degree to which responses to racial discrimination are dependent on cognitive development in children (Spencer and Markstrom-Adams 1990).

Awareness of racial differences and the negative stereotypes that are associated with particular groups begins quite early. One of the first studies conducted by Clark and Clark in 1939 documented a consciousness of self and racial identification in preschool African American

children. Subsequent studies have confirmed that children aged 3–4 are more likely than older children to identify with the dominant culture and the negative stereotypes associated with their own group (Averhardt and Bigler 1997; Branch and Newcombe 1986; Daniel and Daniel 1998).

As children develop cognitive skills that allow for a more expansive and global world-view, their awareness and attitudes about race change (Branch and Newcombe 1986). Younger children are limited in their cognitive ability to fully understand issues like race (Piaget 1960) and are often buffered from the deleterious effects of racial discrimination by their families and communities (Caldwell et al. 2002; Daniel and Daniel 1998; Simons et al. 2002; Spencer and Markstrom-Adams 1990). Therefore, young children of color are especially vulnerable to messages regarding race from macrosystem sources such as the media/television as well as microsystem variables such as parent attitudes and personal experiences with racial discrimination (Averhardt and Bigler 1997; Simons et al. 2002). As children develop greater inference-making skills, they acquire more information about the world, including knowledge of attitudes and stereotypes about groups in the society. This growing recognition may result in negative perceptions of their own ethnic group (Harter 1997; Simons et al. 2002). Exposure to racial discrimination at this developmental stage may also result in self-consciousness, decreases in self-esteem and self-efficacy, and depressive symptoms (Harter 1990; Simons et al. 2002).

At the ages of 10–12, children become more morally conscious and concerned with issues of merit, equity, advantage, and disadvantage (Turiel 1997). Therefore, exposure to discrimination at this age may cause children to feel helpless, demoralized, and discouraged (Simons et al. 2002). However, the development of abstract thinking may increase the ability of children to identify with members of their own group since they can see themselves from their own perspective instead or in spite of the perspective of others (Harter 1997; Simons et al. 2002).

As adolescents, children of color begin to function more outside of the family and, consequently, become increasingly aware of conditions that are related to social position and minority status and are influenced, directly and indirectly, by observations of discrimination in family and friends (Simons et al. 2002). During adolescence and young adulthood, their personal recognition of themselves as members of devalued social groups and the potential impact of this status on their future lives increases dramatically and levels of psychological distress including hopelessness, depression, and anomie characterized by feelings of isolation and marginalization may be particularly elevated (Bynum et al. 2008; Grant et al. 2005; Simons et al. 2006; Stevenson et al. 1997; Wong et al. 2003).

Racial Discrimination and Psychological Functioning in Children of Color

The successful negotiation of racial discrimination is a major developmental task for children of color in the US (Stevenson et al. 1997). They are faced with the challenge of building a healthy self-concept, decreasing psychological distress, and identifying successful coping strategies despite experiences of racial discrimination that may undermine the likelihood of achieving these goals (Averhardt and Bigler 1997; Bynum et al. 2008; McLoyd 1990; Simons et al. 2002; Spencer 1990). This reality poses unique psychological challenges that require youth of color to cope with racial discrimination at multiple levels and anticipate potentially negative situations while simultaneously minimizing the psychological impact of these experiences (Landrine and Klonoff 1996; Myers et al. 2003; Stevenson et al. 1997). Like children who are exposed to other forms of violence (Pine et al. 2005), a constant level of hyper-vigilance and behavioral adjustments can develop to reduce the chance of a racially aversive interaction (Myers et al. 2003). In general, existing evidence strongly suggests that a significant proportion of the variance in psychological distress for African American youth is explained by exposure to racial discrimination (Turner and Avison 2003).

The following sections describe the extant literature on responses to racial discrimination in children of color.

Depression

Higher rates of depression have been consistently associated with exposure to racial discrimination in African American youth and the effects may appear quite early in life (Banks et al. 2006; Bynum et al. 2008; Simons et al. 2002; Stevenson et al. 1997; Spencer and Markstrom-Adams 1990). Caughy et al. (2004) assessed symptoms of depression and anxiety in preschool African American children as measured by parent reports using the Child Behavior Checklist. Personal experiences of racial discrimination were also assessed in the parents. Interestingly, parents who denied racial discrimination reported higher levels of externalizing behaviors in their children. Internalizing problems, including symptoms of depression and anxiety, were also higher in the children of these parents. In contrast, child behavior problems were less common in children whose parents reported taking active behavioral responses to racial discrimination in their own lives. This study is important for several reasons. First, it documents relationships between a parent's experiences of racial discrimination and child outcomes. These relationships will be explored in greater detail in later sections of this article. Second, the findings suggest that how a parent copes with

racial discrimination in their own lives may affect child outcomes. Denying the impact of racial discrimination has consistently been related to poor mental health outcomes (Krieger 1990, 1999; Krieger and Sidney 1996) and the findings of Caughy et al. (2004) suggest that this denial may result in parental behaviors and/or functioning that negatively influence child outcomes.

Simons et al. (2002) examined the effects of racial discrimination on depression in African American youth aged 10–12. Findings indicated that 1.3% of the sample met the criteria for major depression—which is comparable to the prevalence rate for other groups of children. Therefore, the investigators examined relationships between the number of depressive symptoms and experiences of racial discrimination. Findings indicated that racial discrimination was a significant predictor of the number of depressive symptoms in this sample and in another sample of African American high school students assessed by Prelow et al. (2004). Wong et al. (2003) also examined the impact of racial discrimination on socio/emotional development in African American youth. The data indicated significant relationships between experiences of racial discrimination and several measures of psychological functioning including depression, anger, and self-esteem. Based on these findings, the investigators concluded that experiences of racial discrimination have substantial bearing on the psychological development of African American adolescents. Consistent with the Theory of Racial Inequality of Social Integration, Wong et al. (2003) found that racial discrimination by teachers and peers was likely to be viewed by African American youth as a potential threat to well-being—especially to their academic achievement, mental health and self-esteem (Wong et al. 2003). The investigators argue that experiences of racial discrimination should be viewed as potential developmental risk factors that alienate youth from the social situations (e.g., positive interactions with peers) and institutions (e.g., schools) that should function as sources of support and resiliency.

Self-Esteem

Exposure to racial discrimination is also associated with lower levels of self-esteem and self-concept in youth of color. In a study of African American children aged 10–15, Nyborg and Curry (2003) found that racial discrimination was associated with lower self-concept. Fisher et al. (2000) assessed relationships between experiences of racial discrimination and self-esteem in African American, Hispanic, East Asian, and South Asian adolescents. African American and Hispanic youth were more likely than their Asian peers to report racial discrimination in stores,

restaurants and other social venues as well as in school based on interactions with teachers and other school personnel. In contrast, East and South Asian youth reported somewhat higher levels of exposure to personal racial discrimination as evidenced by being excluded from activities and/or called racial slurs. Racial discrimination from peers and in school was associated with lower scores for self-esteem. This study is important since it included youth from several ethnic groups; the data support previous findings that racial discrimination is pervasive in the lives of youth of color; and confirms that African American youth have significant problems with racial discrimination in schools and other social institutions (Spencer and Markstrom-Adams 1990; Wong et al. 2003).

Self-Efficacy and Hopelessness

One of the most profound psychological effects of exposure to racial discrimination is on general self-efficacy—which is a child's cognitive orientation and belief in his/her ability to affect future outcomes (Aneshensel 1992). Self-efficacy is a critical component of mental health and the emergence and achievement of self-efficacy as a cognitive orientation during childhood is significantly influenced by social stratification (i.e., membership in a dominant or secondary group) (Aneshensel 1992; McLoyd 1990, 2004; Pulerwitz et al. 2002). Mirowsky and Ross (1990a, b) describe self-efficacy as a socially transmitted conception of reality that arises from experiences in life that are not uniformly distributed within or across societies. When a sense of control is not derived from one's social position and experiences, psychological distress increases (Mirowsky and Ross 1990a, b). Therefore, children who have experiences of racial discrimination may be less likely to perceive that they have control over their future outcomes. This may result in difficulties in forming the "social maps" (i.e., cognitive representations of the world as a safe and fair place) that provide a foundation for future development (Garbarino 1995, 2001).

Feelings of hopelessness and alienation are closely related to lower levels of self-efficacy (Burr et al. 1999; Krieger 2003; Nazroo 2003; Ogbu 1994; Williams 1999) and, consistent with the Theory of Racial Inequality and Social Integration, children exposed to racial discrimination show higher levels of hopelessness and alienation from the larger society (Lamberty et al. 2000; Sanders-Phillips 1997). Nyborg and Curry (2003) examined hopelessness in African American children whose average age was 12.6 years. Experiences of racial discrimination were significant predictors of hopelessness as well as self- and parent-reported externalizing symptoms including aggression. Prelow et al. (2004) also found relationships between

experiences of discrimination and delinquent behaviors in African American youth and speculated that decreased self-efficacy may be related to greater aggression in youth because racial discrimination is perceived as a significant threat to their control over life outcomes. As a result, youth may experience hopelessness or depression and respond with anger and externalizing behaviors such as aggression. These conclusions are supported by findings documenting relationships between experiences of racial discrimination, hopelessness, and externalizing behaviors such as conduct disorder, aggression, and drug use for African Americans (Nyborg and Curry 2003; Gibbons et al. 2007; Simons et al. 2006) and American Indian children (Whitbeck et al. 2001). The higher levels of aggression may also be related to lower levels of moral reasoning and development, empathy, and perceptions of justice that have been reported for children who experience racial discrimination (Fields 1987; Kuther and Wallace 2003; Margolin and Gordis 2000; Moane 2003; Valois et al. 2002; Watts et al. 1999; Zimmerman et al. 2007).

Anger and Anxiety

Greater levels of anger in children of color who have been exposed to racial discrimination may also explain the higher levels of externalizing behaviors. Anger is a primary predictor of impulsive and aggressive behaviors in children—particularly African American males (Colder and Stice 1998; Simons et al. 2002). Nyborg and Curry (2003) and Simons et al. (2002) found that exposure to racial discrimination in African American youth was associated with higher levels of anger. Stevenson et al. (1997) also found that African American adolescents who were faced with racial discrimination were likely to respond with anger. In general, African American males who experience racial discrimination are more likely than girls to show levels of anger and aggression and these associations increase as they grow older (Grant et al. 2005; Simons et al. 2006; Wong et al. 2003).

Exposure to racial discrimination is also a risk factor for violence against women and girls by African American males and may increase the likelihood that an African American youth will become either a victim or perpetrator of community violence (Hampton et al. 2003; Simons et al. 2006). Findings from Hammond and Yung (1993) suggest that African American youth who are perpetrators and/or victims of community violence may also feel that they are victimized by racial discrimination and, consequently, believe that violence is necessary for their survival. Thus, exposure to racial discrimination may be a variable that increases the possibility of becoming either a victim or perpetrator of other types of violence in African American communities.

Alterations in Physiological Functioning in Children Exposed to Racial Discrimination

Recent research in the field of children's exposure to violence has focussed on the impact of exposure to violence on physiological responses in children. Studies have reported altered physiological reactions, particularly in response to stressful stimuli in children, who have been abused (Stirling & Amaya-Jackson 2008) and health problems including heart disease, obesity and decreased immune function (Altemus et al. 2003; Felitti et al. 1998; Kendall-Tackett 2002). Similarly, there has been increasing interest in the impact of racial discrimination on physiological responses in children. Although most of the research on racial discrimination and physiological function has been conducted with adults of color, a few studies have investigated responses in children. For example, the interaction between experiences of racial discrimination and related coping responses predicted systolic blood pressure in African American children who were an average of 11 years of age (Clark and Gochett 2006). A belief in negative racial stereotypes in African American children aged 14–16 was associated with markers for diabetes including waist circumference (in girls only), body fat distribution and insulin resistance independently of age, income, birth weight, physical activity, and family history of diabetes (Chambers et al. 2004). Studies in adults confirm these findings and suggest that experiences of racial discrimination are associated with increased stress responses (e.g., cardiovascular reactivity, elevated blood pressure), decreased immune function, risks for cardiovascular disease and altered neuroendocrine responses (e.g., activation of the pituitary–adrenocortical and hypothalamic–sympathetic–adrenal medullary systems) that are associated with a wide range of physiological changes including the release of antidiuretic hormones, growth hormones, epinephrine, and cortisol (Clark et al. 1999; Harrell et al. 2003; Mays et al. 2007).

Chronic Versus Acute Effects of Racial Discrimination

Existing evidence on children's exposure to violence suggests that an important factor in predicting a child's response is whether the violence is chronic or acute and, in general, violence that is chronic will have a more debilitating effect on children (Holden 2003; Pine et al. 2005; Osofsky 1999). Similarly, experiences of racial discrimination may be significant determinants of psychological distress because they are more likely to be chronic rather than acute events (Aneshensel 1992; Schulz et al. 2000; Wong et al. 2003). Racial discrimination often occurs throughout childhood and adulthood (Grant et al. 2003; Spencer and Markstrom-Adams 1990). Chronicity of a

negative event is a particularly important predictor of psychological distress in groups at the lower end of the social hierarchy (Aneshensel and Sucoff 1996) because it is related to perceptions of inequality and/or perceived barriers to success in life (Aneshensel 1992). The findings of Wong et al. (2003) regarding the high levels of racial discrimination in the daily lives of youth of color and their perception of these experiences as significant threats to their future and well being support this conclusion. In addition, Schulz et al. (2000) directly examined the impact of chronic versus acute exposure to racial discrimination on individuals aged 18 and older. Those who reported more frequent encounters with everyday discrimination had higher levels of psychological distress including feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness, and anxiety. These findings suggest a dose-gradient response to racial discrimination that is consistent with previous findings regarding the criteria for assessing violence exposure in children (Pine et al. 2005).

Summary of Findings on Responses to Racial Discrimination in Children of Color

The above findings suggest that there are similarities in children's responses to racial discrimination and other forms of violence. The symptoms of depression, anger, anxiety and decreased self-efficacy that are associated with exposure to racial discrimination have also been reported for children exposed to domestic, interpersonal, and community violence (Kendall-Tackett 2002; Osofsky 1999). The findings on children's responses to racial discrimination are also consistent with the findings of Pine et al. 2005 indicating that children's responses to violence are generally dose dependent; influenced by developmental timing; and moderated by social systems such as schools. The impact of racial discrimination on children's perceptions and pathways to future achievement and wellbeing support the conclusions that the social maps of these youth may be altered (Garbarino 2001). Finally, the findings on experiences of racial discrimination and aggression support Holden's (2003) typology of child maltreatment which suggests that children who have been exposed to violence are likely to view violence as normative and use it to solve conflicts.

It has been suggested that the effects of racial discrimination on psychological distress and other outcomes in children of color may be primarily mediated by stress (Sellers et al. 2003). While data support this conclusion, perceived stress related to racial discrimination only partially explains relationships between racial discrimination and psychological distress. Sellers et al. (2003) found that perceived stress was a mediating factor; however, experiences of racial discrimination were significantly related to

measures of depression and anxiety independently of perceived stress. Based on this literature review, it is clear that experiences of racial discrimination increase stress in the lives of children of color and data presented in the next section of this article strongly suggest that racial discrimination fosters stress in the lives of parents and residents of communities of color. However, like other forms of violence and trauma, the relationships between exposure to racial discrimination and outcomes in children of color are complex. At this point in the existing literature, it appears that impact of racial discrimination is influenced by perceptions of stress but relationships cannot be entirely explained by a stress and coping model. There may be both direct and indirect psychological and biological pathways between experiences of racial discrimination and outcomes in children of color. For example, the above findings suggest that experiences of racial discrimination may be associated with both depression and decreased immune function. However, there is considerable controversy about whether depression precedes or is the result of decreased immune function (Zorrilla et al. 2001). Thus, exposure to racial discrimination may provoke physiological changes that, in turn, foster psychological distress. These possibilities should be explored in future studies.

As indicated, Osofsky (1999) has also suggested that exposure to violence is damaging to children because it interferes with the ability of parents to provide secure and supportive environments that protect children from the effects of violence and may limit the degree to which communities can serve as safe havens for children. In the next section, we examine empirical findings on the effects of exposure to racial discrimination on parenting behavior in communities of color with a particular focus on racial socialization and the effects on community functioning and support for children.

Impact of Racial Discrimination on Parenting Behaviors and Community Support

Racial Discrimination and Parent Functioning

Significant relationships have been documented between experiences of racial distress and psychological distress in adults of color—especially African Americans. In comparison to other groups, adults of color report higher levels of exposure to personal insults (name calling) as well as structural barriers like refusal of loans and are more likely to encounter hostile and exclusionary social environments (Buka et al. 2001; Williams 1999). In one study, more than 75% of African American women reported incidents of discrimination (Mustillo et al. 2004) and 71% of African Americans reported racial discrimination across two or

more domains (e.g., work, school, public setting, etc.) of their lives (Collins 1995). Landrine and Klonoff (1996) found that 98% of African Americans reported some form of racial discrimination in the past year.

Psychological Distress in Parents

Symptoms of psychological distress in response to racial discrimination have also been reported for adults of color. Responses include higher levels of depression and anxiety (Banks et al. 2006; Greene et al. 2006); lower self-efficacy and higher levels of anger and alienation (Alvarez and Kimura 2001; Amaro et al. 1987; Bulhan 1985; Cain and Kingston 2003; Franklin and Boyd-Franklin 2000; Harrell et al. 2003; Human Rights Documentation Center 2001; Krieger 2003; Meyer 2003; Nazroo 2003; Sanders-Phillips 1999; Smith 1985; Turner and Kramer 1995; Utsey et al. 2000; Williams 1999; Williams et al. 2003; Williams and Williams-Morris 2000). Women of color who are exposed to racial discrimination and interpersonal violence are at very high risk for psychological distress (Miller and Kaiser 2001).

Parenting Behaviors

The young adult years, when individuals are most likely to become parents, is a developmental period when psychological distress related to racial discrimination may peak because young adults have developed levels of abstract thinking that allow them to fully *consider* and *fear* the potential threat of racial discrimination to the achievement of their life goals (Garbarino 2001; McLoyd 2004) and to their ability to protect their children from harm and the pain of racial discrimination (Jenkins 2002). Thus, exposure to racial discrimination over their lifetime may predict psychological distress in young adults of color because of the *saliency* of these experiences to quality of life, achievement of future goals, and the ability to successfully raise children (Amaro and Raj 2000; Amaro et al. 1987; Dey and Lucas 2006; Gilbert 1991; Jenkins 2002; Schuckit 2000; Williams 1999).

These findings, in conjunction with data on the impact of racial discrimination on psychological functioning, are important because the responses of parents to their own experiences of discrimination are likely to influence subsequent parenting behavior and the messages they transmit to their children regarding the successful negotiation of racial discrimination.

Parent Nurturing and Support for Children

There have been very few studies of the impact of exposure to racial discrimination on parenting behaviors in families

of color (Caldwell et al. 2002; Spencer and Markstrom-Adams 1990; Stevenson et al. 1997). However, Caldwell et al. (2002) found that maternal support, which included emotional, problem solving, and moral support to children, is considerably impacted by perceptions of stress that include experiences of racial discrimination in daily life. Landrine and Klonoff (1996) reported that both lifetime and past year discriminatory events were related to lower levels of interpersonal sensitivity in adults of color. Thus, parents who experience higher levels of racial discrimination may be less sensitive to the needs of their children. This conclusion is consistent with reports by Caldwell et al. (2002) that exposure to racial discrimination may interfere with the ability of parents to provide a warm and caring environment that includes displays of affection from the primary caregiver and excludes harsh disciplinary practices. Providing warmth and non-harsh discipline for children encourages competency (self-esteem, self-efficacy, and mastery) and a sense of well-being for children across racial and ethnic groups (Simons et al. 2006). In contrast, Simons et al. (2006) found that exposure to racial discrimination in parents may increase irritable, explosive parenting, and harsh discipline.

Perhaps the most direct evidence of the impact of experiences of racial discrimination on parenting behaviors comes from a study that specifically examined parental experiences of racial discrimination and uninvolved parenting (Simons et al. 2002). Uninvolved parenting was defined as behavior that was not supportive, did not set standards or monitor behavior in the child; involved inconsistent discipline; and failed to use inductive reasoning to explain rules to children. Higher levels of racial discrimination were associated with higher levels of uninvolved parenting. Simons et al. (2006) concluded that the everyday pressure of racial discrimination may reduce the probability that warm and nurturing parenting can occur.

Interestingly, Simons et al. (2006) also found significant correlations between parents' reports of experiences of racial discrimination and levels of community violence. That is, higher levels of community-wide experiences of racial discrimination were associated with higher levels of community violence. This finding suggests that experiences of racial discrimination and the likelihood of community violence may be related to a common set of variables.

Racial Socialization

A parent's personal experiences of racial discrimination may also impact his/her ability to foster racial socialization—which is the process by which messages and behaviors regarding racial/ethnic issues are communicated to children in an effort to prepare them to cope with the

adverse effects of discrimination in racially stressful environments (Caldwell et al. 2002; Sanders-Thompson 1994). The family is the most influential agent for racial socialization since it is the first institution to which children are exposed (Caldwell et al. 2002; McLoyd et al. 2002). A critical and unique function of parents of color, across racial/ethnic groups, is to buffer the effects of discrimination and promote a sense of cultural pride and well-being in their children (Branch and Newcombe 1986; Hughes and Chen 1997; Hughes et al. 2006; Stevenson et al. 1996). Consistent with an ecological approach, Fillmore and Britsch (1988) concluded that the socialization efforts of parents and other adults in communities of color require greater effort to ensure a maximum individual-environment fit for children since the environment often includes racial discrimination. This conclusion is reinforced by findings that nearly 90% of African American parents consider racial socialization to be an important goal in raising their children and parents of color across racial/ethnic groups consistently cite ethnic socialization as a critical aspect of their parenting role (Hughes et al. 2006; Marshall 1995).

Hughes and Chen (1997) found that the three most frequent messages communicated by parents to their children were: (1) cultural socialization; (2) preparation for bias, and (3) promotion of mistrust. They also found that the content of the message varied by the age of the child with parents of younger children providing less information than parents of older children. However, based on their own personal experiences of racial discrimination and successful negotiation of racial discrimination, there is significant variability in parent's abilities, likelihood and success in socializing their children to effectively cope with racial discrimination (Ceballo and McLoyd 2002; Spencer and Markstrom-Adams 1990; Stevenson et al. 1997). These conclusions are best illustrated by the findings of Caughy et al. (2004) who reported that parents who actively responded to experiences of racial discrimination reported lower levels of anxiety and depression in their preschool children. These findings emphasize the potential importance of parent's responses to racial discrimination to children's levels of psychological distress. There is also evidence that youth who receive positive messages regarding racial socialization from parents are able to cope more effectively with racial discrimination and have lower levels of psychological distress (Hughes et al. 2006; Stevenson et al. 1997).

Impact of Racial Discrimination on Community Functioning and Support

To date, only one study has directly examined the sequential relationships between experiences of racial discrimination in community residents and child development and the findings provide important insights regarding racial discrimination at the microsystem and macrosystem levels. In an empirical study, Simons et al. (2002) examined relationships between experiences of discrimination in community residents, and symptoms of depression in African American children. Higher levels of experiences of racial discrimination in community residents were associated with higher levels of depression in children who lived in that community. The investigators suggest that the ability of community residents to effectively respond to racial discrimination, and children's observation of these successful or negative outcomes, may significantly impact psychological functioning in youth. Thus, the responses of community residents to racial discrimination may be an important intervening variable that significantly influences children's responses to racial discrimination.

It is important to note that the relationships in the Simons et al. (2002) study were moderated by levels of *community violence*. Levels of community violence dramatically increased a child's risk for depressive symptoms only in communities where community residents were *less* able to negotiate racial discrimination and develop positive identification with their ethnic group. There was *no* association between exposure to community violence and symptoms of depression in children living in communities where residents successfully coped with discrimination and identified positively with their ethnic group.

Summary of Findings on Racial Discrimination, Parent Behaviors, and Community Support

The above findings confirm that parent behaviors may be influenced by experiences of racial discrimination and the degree to which parents successfully negotiated racial discrimination may limit their ability to provide warm and nurturing support for their children and to successfully socialize them to cope with racial discrimination. The findings of Simons et al. (2002) on racial discrimination and community functioning are consistent with Osofsky's (1999) conclusion that violence may also impact the degree to which communities can serve as points of resiliency and protection for children. The findings also suggest that children's observation of the responses and success of community residents in coping with racial discrimination may influence their responses to other forms of violence—particularly community violence. These findings are consistent with ecological theory and the Theory of Racial Inequality and Social Integration which suggest that psychological distress in children of color is related to levels of social support, social cohesion, and social integration in communities of color (Durkheim 1951). As early as 1951, Durkheim argued that social ties to others, which are severely compromised under conditions of racial discrimination,

limit social integration and increase community levels of hopelessness and despair. As a result, low social cohesion related to racial discrimination may be a primary determinant of psychological distress in community residents and contribute to levels of interpersonal and community violence (Peterson and Krivo 1993; Sampson et al. 2005). These findings support the conclusions of Pine et al. (2005) that children's responses to violence will depend, in part, on the nature and quality of their relationships with significant adults and social institutions and Garbarino's (2001) contention that exposure to multiple forms of violence may exceed the capacity of children to cope. Collectively, these results expand our understanding of the impact of racial discrimination on children, families and communities, and reinforce and underscore the importance of evaluating children's exposure to other forms of violence in the context of their experiences of racial discrimination.

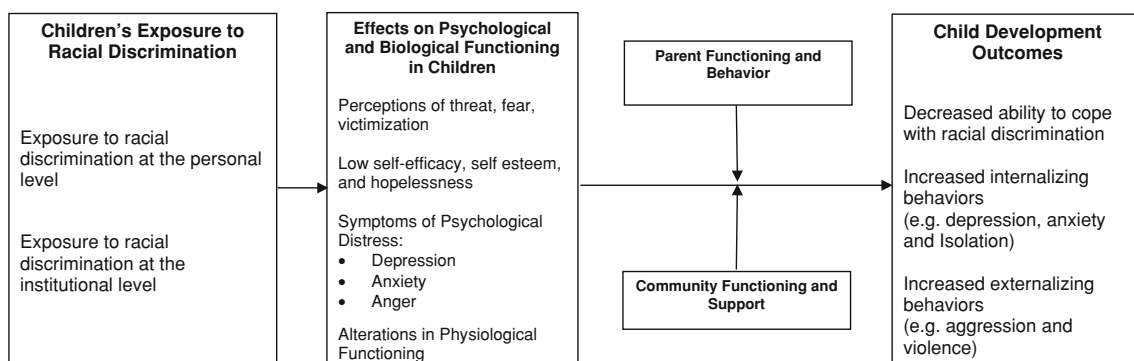## Conceptual Model of the Impact of Racial Discrimination on Outcomes in Children of Color

Childhood is an important period for the development of perceptions regarding the self, social relationships and social realities (Simons et al. 2002; Spencer and Markstrom-Adams 1990). Being the object of racial slurs or excluded from activities with peers may induce fear and a sense of threat while diminishing a child's sense of worth and control and fostering mistrust of others (Simons et al. 2002). Seeing the effects of exposure to racial discrimination on family and friends can reinforce and exacerbate these fears in children and may be especially damaging for younger children who do not understand the source of harsh or negative behaviors in parents or other adults (Simons et al. 2002). By the age of 10 or 11, children are also more aware of moral issues, equity, and social justice (Turiel 1997). Therefore, exposure to racial discrimination, directly and indirectly, can reinforce feelings of injustice, powerlessness, and victimization (Simons et al. 2002).

Based on this literature review, a conceptual model of the impact of exposure to racial discrimination on children of color is presented. The model is divided into three major components that suggest sequential relationships and pathways between children's exposure to racial discrimination; their responses to racial discrimination; and the effects on child outcomes. First, the model highlights children's exposure to racial discrimination in the form of personal and institutional experiences of discrimination in children of color. In the second section of the model, psychological distress and alterations in physiological responses that may be associated with exposure to racial discrimination are described. In the third section of the model, child development outcomes that may be related to difficulties in successfully coping with racial discrimination and associated with an increased likelihood of internalizing and externalizing behaviors in youth of color are presented. The impact of parent behavior and functioning as well as community support and functioning are presented as variables that may mediate or moderate the effects of experiences of racial discrimination on children of color. The model is not intended to describe the full range of factors influencing parenting skills and child outcomes in communities of color. Rather, it illustrates the potential impact of exposure to racial discrimination as a form of violence that may significantly influence child outcomes directly and indirectly through parenting behaviors and through children's observations of the impact of discrimination on friends, family and community residents (Fig. 1).

Future Directions for Research on the Impact of Racial Discrimination on Children of color

In this section, we examine strategies for improving the knowledge base regarding children's exposure to racial discrimination and incorporating research on children's experiences of racial discrimination into future research

Fig. 1 Conceptual model of the impact of racial discrimination on child outcomes

and theoretical conceptualizations of violence exposure in youth. Suggestions for addressing conceptual and measurement issues related to exposure to racial discrimination are discussed and recommendations for expanding the focus of research on children's exposure to violence to include the potential effects of exposure to racial discrimination are made. In the first section, gaps in the existing literature children's exposure to violence are identified. The subsequent discussion is divided into three sections that include an overview of conceptual and theoretical issues related to the study of racial discrimination; measurement issues related to the assessment of racial discrimination and future directions for research.

Gaps in the Existing Literature

Finkelhor et al. (2005a, b, 2007) have urged investigators in the field of children's exposure to violence to examine and evaluate the full range of violent experiences to which children may be exposed. The lack of studies on the impact of less recognized forms of violence such as experiences of racial discrimination has resulted in: (1) potential exaggerations of the contribution of a single type of victimization to mental health problems in children exposed to violence; (2) a lack of data on interrelationships among types of victimization and the influence of these interrelationships on children's psychological functioning, and (3) a failure to identify subgroups of victimized children who are at high risk for poor mental health due to chronic or multiple victimization. Therefore, data on the interconnections between various forms of violence has not been incorporated into theory or research on child violence exposure (Finkelhor et al. 2005a, b, 2007).

Several investigators have also argued that developmental studies of children of color must consider community and/or contextual variables that may be *unique* to their everyday lives (García-Coll et al. 1996; McLoyd 1990; Quintana et al. 2006; Simons et al. 2002; Spencer 1990). As this review of literature documents, these everyday experiences often include racial discrimination, whose impact as a chronic and potentially traumatic event in the lives of children of color, should not be overlooked (Aneshensel 1992; Cooper 2001). The failure to examine the independent contribution of experiences of racial discrimination as a source of violence in the lives of children of color ignores the unique links between multilevel ecological factors and development in children of color and limits opportunities to increase our understanding of resilience and risk in youth whose normative experiences require ongoing adaptive coping strategies related to race and ethnicity (Jessor 1991; Quintana et al. 2006; Spencer and Markstrom-Adams 1990; Stevenson et al. 1997).

Theoretical and Conceptual Issues

In a recent article on challenges to theory and research on child development for youth of color, emphasis was placed on assessing the external validity of current theories of child development across populations of youth (Quintana et al. 2006). An understanding of the ways in which development is influenced by race and ethnicity was also stressed. The findings on racial discrimination highlight the importance of developing models of children's violence exposure that expand the definition of violence to include exposure to racial discrimination, examine the external validity of current models of the effects of violence exposure across different groups of children, and incorporate the assessment of racial discrimination into existing studies. A more comprehensive ecologic approach to violence exposure studies of children in communities of color is likely to yield theories and data that reflect a more nuanced and complete understanding of the multiple sources of violence exposure to which children of color may be exposed and the likely effects of this exposure.

As Spencer and Markstrom-Adams (1990) have noted, a framework of development that includes and attends to the significant influences (e.g., coping with racial discrimination) and developmental milestones (e.g., racial socialization) for children of color is likely to: (1) identify environmental factors that may uniquely affect outcomes in children of color who are exposed to violence; (2) identify the role of social status variables (e.g., secondary social status, ethnicity) in determining child development outcomes in communities where children are exposed to multiple forms of violence; (3) address the subjective experiences of violence across a range of domains (family, community, school, society) in children and parents; (4) account for the coping strategies that may be most common and/or effective in dealing with concurrent exposure to multiple forms of violence; and (5) link sequential relationships between antecedent factors such as secondary social status, responses to other stressors such as exposure to interpersonal and community violence, psychological responses, and behavioral outcomes. For example, at this point in the field of children's violence research, it may be important to acknowledge and address the fact that, for many children of color, exposure to interpersonal and community violence occurs in the context of and may exacerbate the impact of living in families and communities that are constantly challenged by experiences of racial discrimination at the microsystem and macrosystem levels.

Greater attention should also be paid to conceptual and theoretical distinctions between the constructs that are related to exposure to racial discrimination in order to operationalize these constructs in future research. For

example, social stratification and social class are both related to racial discrimination, and to each other, but they are different concepts. As indicated, social stratification refers to the long-term social processes that result in the hierarchy of groups in a society while social class has been largely defined by economic status and education (Muntaner et al. 2000). Social stratification is influenced by SES and education but is primarily determined by current and past social policies and historical, political, and cultural conditions (Cooper 2001; Gregoria et al. 1997; Lavis et al. 2003). Thus, individual and within-group differences in SES do not necessarily reflect historical and group differences in social stratification and location in a social hierarchy that are related to racial discrimination. Therefore, indicators of SES and social stratification should not be used interchangeably as markers of exposure to racial discrimination. Similarly, race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status are neither equivalent nor interchangeable (Williams 1999; Williams and Williams-Morris 2000). While socioeconomic status clearly influences mental health, there is a consistent contribution of race/ethnicity to mental health that is independent of SES (Williams and Williams-Morris 2000). Therefore, both SES and race/ethnicity must be considered when evaluating outcomes in children of color (McLoyd 1990).

Measurement and Assessment Issues

The development of more comprehensive theoretical models of children's exposure to racial discrimination in communities of color will require the measurement and assessment of exposure to racial discrimination as well as the measurement of constructs such as racial identity and racial socialization. In the past, measures of racial discrimination have been based on self-report, which is a well-documented and accepted approach to the measurement and assessment of stress and trauma (Clark et al. 1999; Harrell 2000; Simons et al. 2002; Turner and Avison 2003; Wong et al. 2003). Simons et al. (2006) reported significant correlations between parent and children's reports of discrimination within the family and community. Ruggiero and Taylor (1995), using experimental conditions, also found that individual attributions of personal discrimination appear to be accurate representations of an objective reality. Physiological measures of racial discrimination also correlate with self-reports of racial discrimination (Harrell et al. 2003; Hughes et al. 2006).

It is important to note; however, that the appraisal of any event as discriminatory or abusive is based on a combination of constitutional, socio-demographic, psychological, and behavioral factors (Bynum et al. 2008) and self-report measures of exposure to racial discrimination may be among the best measures for assessing what may be

relatively low-frequency events that are hard to capture through observations (Wong et al. 2003). Indeed, the child or adult who is being assessed may be the only one who knows about or can remember these events. Although the psychological impact of exposure to racial discrimination may be great, Wong et al. (2003) found that the actual number of racial discrimination events may be quite small and virtually impossible to document by means other than self-report.

Wong et al. (2003) also found that relying on teachers or other adults to report incidents of racial discrimination for children is potentially invalid. As they note, "Given that it is socially undesirable to admit to racial discrimination, it is unlikely that teachers and/or other adults or children will report that they treat others differently based on race/ethnicity. It also may be the case that teachers and other adults or children do not realize that they are discriminating based on race/ethnicity" (Wong et al. 2003, p. 1226).

Ultimately, while individual experiences of discrimination vary within communities of color, it is the *perception* of an experience that is most important to our understanding of its impact on psychological functioning (Clark et al. 1999; Franklin-Jackson and Carter 2007; Harris et al. 2004; Verkuyten 2002). By definition, racial discrimination is, like other types of violence, subjective and failing to assess its impact may sacrifice many of the most theoretically meaningful social experiences related to mental health in youth of color (Aneshensel 1992).

Current theories and measures of violence exposure in children do not adequately account for the life circumstances of children of color and exposure to racial discrimination is generally excluded from these measures (Aneshensel 1992; Banks et al. 2006; Bulhan 1985; Dion et al. 1992; Eitle and Turner 2003; Finklehor et al. 2005; Harrell 2000; Human Rights Documentation Center 2001; Johnson and Jennison 1994; Kessler et al. 1999; Krieger and Sidney 1996; Peters and Massey 1983; Thompson 1991; Turner and Avison 2003; Utsey 2000; Williams 1999). Yet, Kessler et al. (1999) rank experiences of racial discrimination as major life events that are commensurate with the death of a loved one, loss of job, or divorce, and conclude that experiences of racial discrimination are one of the most important of experiences that have been implicated as causes of mental health problems and psychological distress in groups of color in the US.

The measurement of constructs that may mediate or moderate the effects of racial discrimination, such as racial identity (i.e., identification with one's ethnic group) and racial socialization, are important areas of future focus, but the lack of instruments in languages other than English and measures that have been normed on groups of children other than African Americans is a significant deficit (Spencer and Markstrom-Adams 1990). Even when

existing instruments are translated into other languages, there is the problem of non-equivalence in items, words, and concepts (Ommeren et al. 1999). There may also be difficulties in the translation of constructs. For example, successful racial socialization for children of color may require some rejection of values of the dominant culture that may be associated with positive mental health on traditional measures (Spencer and Markstrom-Adams 1990). Thus, the reference group that serves as the basis for the development of measures of the effects of racial discrimination and associated outcomes is extremely important.

The developmental progression of children in their awareness of race and its attributions also has implications for the potential influence of the race/ethnicity of the investigators who assesses exposure to racial discrimination. Potential differences in children's responses to questions regarding race may be related to the race/ethnicity of the experimenter asking the questions—especially when younger children are assessed (Spencer and Markstrom-Adams 1990). These findings serve to remind us as researchers that issues of race/ethnicity not only influence the outcomes of our research, but may also impact the validity and integrity of the data that we collect. These issues should be addressed as we develop future study protocols.

Future Research Directions

As stated, a primary goal of this article is to encourage researchers in the field of children's exposure to violence to expand the definition of violence to include exposure to racial discrimination in children of color. Child development theorists, including those focused on children's violence exposure, have concluded for some time that a sense of stability and trust in the future and secure connections to family and community are critical preconditions for positive mental health in youth and that mental health is related to perceptions of control of life circumstances (Jessor 1991; Quintana et al. 2006; Stevenson et al. 1997; Weinstein 1993). As this review of literature indicates, exposure to racial discrimination may severely limit the degree to which these prerequisites for mental health can be met. Exposure to racial discrimination significantly influences perceptions of well being and the ability to impact future outcomes; connections between families and connectedness to the community; the ability of youth to view clear pathways to achieving future goals; and fosters feelings of marginalization as well as decreased self-efficacy and perceptions of control over life that increase the likelihood of poor mental outcomes (Garbarino 2001; Sanders-Phillips 1996a, b; Taylor et al. 1991; Taylor and Jackson 1990). These effects are particularly important to our

understanding of youth of color whose sense of general efficacy is dependent on the nature of their social experiences and the larger social structure in which they live (McLoyd 1990, 2004).

Exposure to Multiple Forms of Violence

Little attention has been paid in the existing literature on children's exposure to violence on the interconnections and potential pathways between exposure to multiple forms of violence and outcomes in youth of color (Amaro and Raj 2000; Krieger 2003; Nazroo 2003; Sanders-Phillips 1997; Williams et al. 2003). The extent to which exposure to multiple sources of violence may contribute to *heterogeneity* within and/or between racial/ethnic groups in psychological functioning and developmental outcomes is largely unknown. Thus, one goal of evaluating the role of exposure to racial discrimination research on children's responses to violence is to examine the impact of this source of violence on *within- and between-group* differences and to identify subgroups of youth of color who, due to their exposure to multiple sources of violence, may be at especially high risk for poor outcomes.

Implications for Intervention

Since most of the previous studies of children's exposure to violence did not examine the effects of exposure to racial discrimination, we have little data on strategies that may be successful in promoting adaptive coping in children of color who may be exposed to multiple forms of violence including racial discrimination. In addition, existing findings on children's exposure to violence do not have clear implications for the development of prevention programs for youth of color who are also exposed to racial discrimination. For example, Franklin-Jackson and Carter (2007) have argued that the potential impact of racial discrimination on psychological functioning may be greatest for youth of color since they have not developed or do not have access to psychological resources that allow older adults to cope more effectively with racial discrimination. This conclusion may be particularly true for children who are living in homes and communities where there are also high levels of interpersonal and/or community violence (Garbarino 2001).

Future research on children's exposure to violence that includes assessments of effects of children's experiences of racial discrimination may provide insights into potential interventions and prevention strategies. For example, significant relationships between exposure to racial discrimination, exposure to other forms of violence such as interpersonal and community violence, and psychological distress would suggest that violence prevention and

intervention efforts for youth of color may need to address the impact of racial discrimination on responses to interpersonal and community violence and mental health. The significant relationships that have been reported between racial discrimination, anger, and aggression in youth of color, particularly African American males (e.g., Simons et al. 2002; Stevenson et al. 1997) may also have important implications for violence prevention programs for youth of color. The findings suggest that learning to cope more effectively with racial discrimination may decrease anger and aggression in youth of color since the aggression may be related to their inability to regulate anger expression, suppression, and control that is precipitated by their exposure to racial discrimination (Stevenson et al. 1997). These findings in conjunction with findings that communities of color with a high prevalence of racial discrimination among residents are also more likely to have high levels of community violence underscore the need for future research that explores the connections and interrelations between racial discrimination, social cohesion, and other forms of violence in communities of color.

Findings also suggest that the responses of youth to racial discrimination can be successfully addressed while promoting positive mental health (Fetterman 1996; Potts 2003). Resiliency may be tied to youth empowerment (Campbell and McPhail 2002; Grant et al. 2003; Grills et al. 1996; Garwick and Auger 2003; James et al. 2003; Lykes et al. 2003; McIntyre 2000; Moane 2003; Prillentsky 2003; Ramella and De La Cruz 2000; Varas-Diaz and Serrano-Garcia 2003; Wallerstein et al. 1997; Watts et al. 1999; Watts and Serrano-Garcia 2003; Wilson et al. 2006). Youth empowerment programs foster positive mental health by promoting self-efficacy and actively engaging youth in social action projects to address the problems and issues that impact their lives (Ceballo 2000; McIntyre 2000; Ramella and De La Cruz 2000; Wallerstein 1992, 2002; Wilson et al. 2007). The success of these programs worldwide suggests that that exposure to racial discrimination is a *bona fide* cause of psychological distress in youth of color that can be successfully addressed (Cooper 2001; Kaplan 2000). More research is needed on the degree to which empowerment programs may be effective in protecting children of color from the effects of exposure to multiple sources of violence, including racial discrimination, in their daily lives.

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