Parental Racial Socialization and the Academic Achievement of African American Children: A Cultural-Ecological Approach

By: Christian A. Friend, Andrea G. Hunter and Anne C. Fletcher

Abstract:

Using a cultural-ecological approach, this study examined: (a) associations between parental racial socialization and child academic achievement and (b) variations in these associations across child gender and family socio-economic status. Participants were 134 fifth grade African American children and their mothers. Multiple linear regression analyses were used to examine associations between two components of parental racial socialization (preparation for bias, pride development) and academic achievement (GPA) and the moderating effects of gender and SES on these associations. Preparation for bias and pride development did not significantly predict academic achievement. However, gender moderated the association between preparation for bias and academic achievement. Greater frequency of preparation for bias messages delivered to boys increased GPAs. However, as the frequency of preparation for bias messages delivered to girls increased, GPA decreased. SES did not significantly moderate the associations between either dimension of racial socialization and academic achievement.

Keywords: Racial socialization – Academic achievement – African American children

Article:

The academic disparities between African American and European American students have been widely documented (Becker and Luthar 2002; Flores 2007). The achievement gap between African American and European American students begins early in students' academic careers. During the elementary school years, the racial disparity in academic achievement widens and becomes a stable gap during the secondary school years (Gagne 2005; Viadero 2008). African American students also tend to have lower levels of educational attainment, higher rates of grade retention, higher rates of school suspensions, and higher rates of expulsions than their European American counterparts (Carpenter and Ramirez 2007; Fenning and Rose 2007). This disparity not only reflects the inequities of the educational system, but also reinforces them by offering African American students inferior opportunities to participate in the top tier of today's global economy. Indeed, students who fail to successfully navigate the educational system are less likely to reach top-tier positions (US Census Bureau 2005), less likely to escape working class positions, less likely to become upwardly mobile (US Census Bureau 2005), and are at increased risk for poverty (US Department of Education 2003).

Scholars have theorized about the roles of ecological contexts, culture, and family processes in explaining academic outcomes among African American children. Recent efforts have focused on models which examine the cultural and ecological factors that influence the academic achievement of African American children. There has been a shift away from examining the deficits of students and families as solely responsible for academic achievement (Asante 1991; Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995; Stewart 2008). This shift has led educational researchers to examine the characteristics of various environments (e.g. school, home, and neighborhood) as contributing to the academic achievement of students. Developmental and family studies scholars have argued that cultural and ecological factors influence a variety of child competencies, including academic competence (McLoyd 2006; Ogbu 1981; Slaughter-Defoe et al. 1990). They have also argued for the importance of examining the performance of African American students, without comparison to their European American counterparts, in an attempt to identify successful adaptation and coping strategies.

Given the racial and economic inequities reflected in the American education system, it is important to ask what African American families can do to promote the academic success of children. Research framed by a cultural-ecological perspective has the potential to identify culturally-specific parenting practices that African American parents could use to help create positive outcomes for their children (Garcia Coll et al. 1995; Hughes et al. 2006; Lesane-Brown 2006). Educational scholars have argued that disproportionately high rates of low achievement and school failure among African American children reflect the ways in which race and culture

are constructed within and by the American educational system (Asante 1991; Diamond et al. 2007; Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995; Majors and Billson 1993; Ogbu 2004). That is, many American public schools assume a set of European American, middle-class, male values and espouse these values as norms. Thus, the cultural norms of African American children and families may conflict with established values of their schools. This "cultural-mismatch" may affect the academic outcomes for African American students. Racial socialization is a culturally-specific parenting practice by which African American parents indoctrinate their children with the attitudes, perceptions, values, and behaviors that parents deem appropriate for their ethnic group (Rotherman and Phinney 1987). African American parents may use this parenting practice to help their children adapt to these challenges within the school context. It is through racial socialization that parents attempt to provide their children with the awareness and skills needed to cope with the race-based challenges they will face and to create positive outcomes in spite of barriers.

Within the last decade, studies of racial socialization have moved from an articulation and identification of racial socialization messages to examining the associations of such messages with parental characteristics, child outcomes, and contextual factors (Hughes et al. 2006; McLoyd 2006). The existing literature provides little evidence that racial socialization, when measured globally, has an influence on academic achievement. However, there is evidence that the racial socialization subscales of preparation for bias and pride development have an influence (Hughes et al. 2006; Hughes and Chen 1997). Although existing studies have considered links between racial socialization and academic achievement, this remains an emergent literature with respect to academic achievement during middle childhood and early adolescence, the impact of different dimensions of racial socialization practices on academic achievement, and the moderating effects of gender and SES. Further study of the associations between racial socialization and academic achievement, as well as how these associations vary within different ecological contexts, could help to identify specific strategies that African American parents might use to help their children become academically successful. Using a cultural-ecological perspective, the aim of this study is to explore cultural-specific parenting practices that might help African American children navigate the American educational system and support their academic achievement. Specifically, this study examines: (a) the associations between parental racial socialization and child academic achievement, and (b) the variations in these associations across child gender and family socio-economic status.

A Cultural-Ecological Approach to Academic Achievement: Effective Environment, Adaptive Culture, and Child Competence

In their review and integration of frameworks for the study of ethnic minority children's academic achievement, Slaughter-Defoe et al. argued that "frameworks that emphasize how cultural/ecological factors influence achievement supply the most desirable foci for future research efforts…" (Slaughter-Defoe et al. 1990:364). Cultural-ecological models focus on how a population's cultural values and the personal attributes and behaviors of its members interact with environmental demands to generate strategies and tasks designed to meet such demands. These models draw on earlier research on parental socialization that focused on the practical problems of how to rear children and the interactive processes by which individuals acquire the values, attitudes, and skills of the society to which they belong (Garcia Coll et al. 1996; Ogbu 1981; Slaughter-Defoe et al. 1990). This study draws on cultural-ecological models developed by Ogbu (1981) and Garcia Coll et al. (1996) that focus on the experiences of ethnic-minority children and families. These models provide a framework for understanding African American parents' use of culturally-specific socialization practices to foster personal identity and self esteem; develop competencies; foster feelings of belongingness to kinship networks; and help children to cope with racism, oppression, and discrimination. Figure 1 depicts the cultural-ecological model used in this study linking parental adaptive culture (racial socialization) and child competence (academic achievement), as well as the potentially moderating role of effective environment (race, gender, and social class).
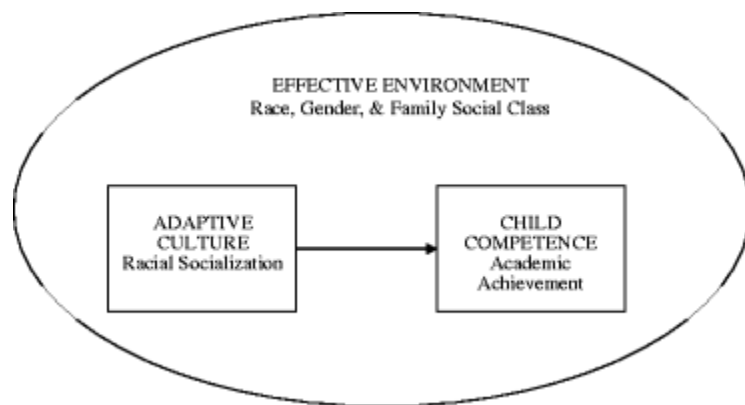

Fig. 1 Influences of effective environment and adaptive culture on child competence: a cultural-ecological model

The ecologies of ethnic minority children are shaped by social inequality. Ogbu (1981) and Garcia Coll et al. (1996) focus attention on culturally-based responses to the unique challenges ethnic minority populations face and the sociopolitical histories from which traditions, cultural tasks, and legacies emerge. Ogbu, drawing on theories of cultural anthropology and human ecology, focuses on how ecological systems influence the ways in which parents socialize their children to acquire specific competencies. Ogbu begins his discussion of ecological systems by

discussing the concept of effective environment. Effective environment refers to ecological demands faced by a population. Ogbu argues that such demands shape a population's efforts to sustain itself and to ensure its physical survival. Drawing on this concept, Garcia Coll et al. highlight social position (e.g., race/ethnicity, social class) and social stratification mechanisms (e.g., racism, oppression, segregation), emphasizing the roles of each in creating promoting or inhibiting environments (e.g., neighborhoods, schools, workplaces) which together form the effective environment for ethnic minority children and their families.

Effective environment influences the cultural norms of a population and results in the creation of adaptive culture. Adaptive culture includes traditions, cultural legacies, emergent cultural tasks, and context-specific models of success or competence as well as a population's specific childrearing techniques designed to develop these competencies. The construct of adaptive culture draws attention to ethnic-minority families' culturally-based responses to the unique challenges they face. For example, African American families continue to be confronted with a lack of equitable educational opportunities. At the same time, many African American families have the belief that educational success is the major portal to economic success in the United States (Davis-Kean 2005; Ford 1993). African American parents may attempt to cope with this conflict by providing certain types of racial socialization intended to develop child competencies which are believed to help their children successfully navigate the inequities of the educational system.

Race/ethnicity and minority status are critical for understanding the effective environments of African American children; however, Ogbu and Garcia Coll et al. also highlight the importance of social class and gender in defining the effective environments of children and their families. The ecological demands families face vary by social class. Specifically, families from different social class backgrounds vary in terms of exposure to neighborhoods, communities, schools, and other social institutions that vary in resources, social and cultural capital; exposure to physical and psycho-social risks; racial/ethnic composition; and opportunities available to children and their families (Ogbu 1981; Bronfenbrenner 1994). Hughes and Chen (1997) found that social class impacted parents' attitudes about race and race relations and their experiences in the workplace; these attitudes and experiences in turn impacted parents' racial socialization messages and practices. As an indicator of social position and social stratification, gender also shapes the effective environments of children and families. Child gender impacts family-level processes and childrearing techniques which ultimately influence specific gendered cultural tasks and competencies which also intersect with race and ethnicity (Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn 2005; Thomas and King 2007). For example, ethnic minority boys/men are more likely to be viewed as threatening (Sampson and Laub 1993; Stevenson et al. 2002) and report more discrimination than do ethnic minority girls/women (Borrell et al. 2006; Fisher and Shaw 1999).

Thus, social class and gender combine to affect aspects of adaptive culture which the socialization strategies African American families enlist in rearing their children.

The Influences of Racial Socialization on Academic Achievement

Based on a review of the racial socialization literature, Hughes et al. (2006) identified four major dimensions of racial socialization: cultural socialization, preparation for bias, promotion of mistrust, and egalitarianism. Cultural socialization refers to parenting practices that teach African American children about their racial history or heritage and is also referred to as pride development. Preparation for bias refers to parenting practices focused on preparing African American children to be aware of, and cope with discrimination. Promotion of mistrust refers to the parenting practices designed to socialize children to be wary of people from other races. Egalitarianism involves socializing children to believe that all people are equal and should be treated with a common humanity. A limited number of studies have examined associations between aspects of racial socialization and academic achievement (Hughes et al. 2006) and a limited few have focused on middle childhood and early adolescence. Based on these studies, it can be tentatively concluded that associations between racial socialization and academic or cognitive competencies may vary by type of socialization message.

Studies in early and middle childhood suggest that type of message, how it is delivered, and reporter (mother versus child) all moderate the strength of association between racial socialization and academic achievement. Caughy et al. (2002), in a study of pre-school children and their mothers, found that an Afrocentric home environment was positively associated with factual knowledge and problem-solving, but parental racial socialization messages as reported by mothers were not associated with their children's cognitive abilities. Marshall (1995) found that children in middle-childhood who reported racial socialization had lower levels of academic achievement. However, mothers' report of racial socialization was not related to children's academic achievement. Looking at different types of racial socialization messages, Smith et al. (2003) found that mothers' reports of socialization toward racial-ethnic pride were associated with higher academic achievement.

During adolescence as well, the presence and type of racial socialization messages has been linked with academic achievement. Bowman and Howard (1985), in a study of youth from adolescence to early adulthood, examined associations between academic achievement and racial socialization messages regarding preparation for bias, pride development, self-development, and egalitarianism. Results indicated that youth who received preparation for bias messages received higher school grades than those who received no socialization messages. Neblett et al. (2006)

found that racial socialization messages about self-worth and participation in activities or behaviors involving African Americans were positively related to self-reported grade point averages among adolescents. However, Miller and MacIntosh (1999) found no significant associations between racial socialization and academic achievement when controlling for risk and protective factors. While the existing literature provides little evidence that racial socialization, when measured globally, has an influence on academic achievement, there is evidence that the racial socialization subscales of preparation for bias and pride development have an influence (Hughes et al. 2006; Hughes and Chen 1997).

The Roles of Child Gender and SES in Relation to Racial Socialization

Existing studies on parental racial socialization have emphasized race as an ecological context; however, a cultural-ecological perspective suggests that race, gender, and social class work together to shape effective environment. Much attention has been focused on the different racial experiences, risks, and parenting needs of African American boys (Garcia Coll et al. 1995; Noguera 2003; Sewell 1997). However, it is unclear the extent to which parental racial socialization strategies may vary by child gender. Hughes et al. (2006) argued that socialization messages may differ by gender because parents expect their daughters and sons to have different types of experiences in schools and other social contexts. However, there is mixed evidence in regard to the effect of child gender on the type and frequency of parental racial socialization messages. Some studies have found that boys are more likely to receive preparation for bias messages while girls are more likely to receive messages about racial pride (Bowman and Howard 1985; Thomas and Speight 1999); however, others have found no significant gender differences in racial socialization practices (Caughy et al. 2002; Scott 2003).

Parental experiences with race and discrimination vary by social class, as do the ecological challenges and risks parents and their children face (Hughes and Chen 1997; Ogbu 1981). Such differences may influence parental racial socialization messages and practices (Hughes and Chen 1997). African American families that are more affluent report more frequent racial socialization than do lower SES families (Hughes et al. 2006). Preparation for bias and cultural socialization messages (both practices that teach about racial history or heritage) are both delivered with less frequency among parents in clerical jobs, sales jobs, machine trades, or service occupations than by parents with professional or managerial positions (Hughes and Chen 1997). Likewise, research has indicated that parents with higher incomes and more education are more likely to deliver cultural socialization and preparation for bias messages to their children (Caughy et al. 2002; McHale et al. 2006). Middle-class parents are also more likely to focus on discrimination and mistrust and are less likely to deliver egalitarian messages than are lower or higher SES

parents (Caughy et al. 2002; Thornton 1997). Caughy et al. (2002) found that African American parents with higher incomes were more likely to have homes with an Afrocentric environment than were African American parents in lower income brackets.

Interestingly, existing research has failed to consider whether associations between racial socialization and child academic achievement might vary based on child gender or family SES. Given evidence suggesting that the ecological contexts created by such factors place different demands on children and their families, it is of interest to consider whether the effectiveness of different types of racial socialization messages in relation to child academic competence might also differ for boys versus girls and within families from different SES backgrounds.

Current Study

Ogbu (1981) and Garcia Coll et al. (1996) drew attention to parenting, childrearing techniques, and socialization strategies as means to address the demands of the effective environment and to support the development of competencies needed to meet specific cultural tasks. Based on a cultural-ecological perspective, we, examined: (a) associations between two parental racial socialization strategies (preparation for bias and pride development) and child academic achievement and (b) variations in these associations across child gender and family socio-economic status. We hypothesized that these types of racial socialization would be positively associated with academic achievement, and that such associations would be moderated by child gender and social class. The direction of moderating effects of gender and SES were not hypothesized given the absence of empirical work focusing on such effects.

Methods

Participants

Participants were 132 African American fifth grade children and their mothers. Children were 55% female and 45% male with a mean age of 10.29 years (SD = .52). Three of the children in the sample were in fourth grade (all had been retained in school the previous academic year), with the remaining children being fifth graders. Mothers in the sample had a mean age of 37.41 (SD = 6.06). The sample was diverse with respect to socioeconomic status with mothers ranging from unemployed with little education to executive/professionals with graduate education. The sample had a mean Hollingshead social class score of 37.72 (SD = 10.51), which is indicative of skilled craftsmen, clerical, or sales workers.

Procedures

Parents with third grade children enrolled in 9 elementary schools in the southeastern region of the United States during the 2001–2002 school year were contacted and asked to participate in a school-based data collection. Data collected within schools were not analyzed for the current project. Consent for participation in the school-based study was provided by parents of 85% of third grade children. Criteria for participation in subsequent home interviews included European American or African American ethnicity (the two most prevalent ethnic groups within the region). Other ethnic groups were represented in such small numbers in participating schools so as to preclude consideration of ethnicity as a variable within models had such families been included. Criteria for participation in subsequent home interviews also included children residing with biological mothers or adoptive mothers. The focus on mothers was based on research indicating that mothers are more likely to be responsible for the day-to-day care and supervision of children (Helms and Demo 2005; Lareau 2000). The other criteria for participation in home interviews included children born in the United States, and children having participated in the school-based portion of the project. Mothers were contacted by telephone and asked to participate in initial interviews. Four hundred and four families (79% of eligible families) agreed to participate in initial interviews. This group represented 46% of all children enrolled in the target grades and schools at the time of recruitment, with the discrepancy between these two participation percentages explained largely by ineligibility for home interviews. Ineligibility was due to failure to obtain completed consent forms for the earlier, school-based portion of the project ($n = 41$), parental refusal for the school-based portion of the project ($n = 92$), or failure of children to meet demographic screening criteria ($n = 180$).

Participants in the current study were African American families ($n = 134$) participating in the larger, mixed-method, longitudinal study focused on parental involvement in children's peer relationships. Research assistants then contacted parents of eligible students to recruit mothers and children for an in-home component of the project. In-home data collection involved face-to-face interviews and supervised questionnaire completion with mothers and children conducted separately. When possible, interviews were conducted by a same-race interviewer to remove any potential cultural biases and to eliminate any cross-racial discomfort during the interview. Home visits took one to two hours to complete. Mothers signed consent forms for their own and their children's participation and children provided assent before each interview began. Parents were given cash incentives and children were given small, school-related gifts. Children's grades in four major academic subjects (Math, English/Reading, Science, and Social Studies) were collected from teachers at the end of the school year.

Community and School District Profile

Participating families resided in a mid-sized southeastern county that was diverse with respect to social class and ethnicity. Thirty-one percent of the county's population was African American, and 39% of the population in the county's most populous city was African American. The income of the county population varied; 27% of households earned less than $25,000 per year, 27% of households earned between $25,000 and $49,999, 30% of households earned between $50,000 and $99,999, and 16% of households earned $100,000 or more. All of the children initially recruited for the study were third grade students attending one of nine elementary schools in the same school district. The schools varied in racial composition and size.

During the 2007–2008 school year, the district from which schools and families were recruited contained schools spread throughout urban, suburban, and rural areas. Fifty-percent of the student population qualified for free or reduced lunch. The student population was comprised of 40% European American students, 41% African American students, 9% Hispanic/Latino students, 5% Asian students, 1% Native American students, and 4% Multi-ethnic students. With respect to academic achievement, 54% of all fifth-grade students in the district were at or above grade level in reading. Thirty-seven percent of the district's fifth-grade African American students were at or above grade level in reading. Thus, during the 2007–2008 school year approximately six out of ten of the district's African American fifth-grade students were below grade level in reading.

Measures

Child gender was coded as either 0 (female) or 1 (male). Family social class was measured using the Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Social Status (Hollingshead 1975) which relies on mothers' reports of parental education level and occupation.

Mothers completed the Parents Experience of Racial Socialization Scale (Stevenson 1999). This is a 40-item scale that measures how often parents report they communicate specific racial socialization messages, verbally or physically, to their children. The measure contains four subscales: Cultural Survival, Spiritual Coping, Preparation for Bias, and Pride Development. Response options are 1 (never), 2 (a few times), or 3 (lots of times) and responses are averaged to yield scale scores. The current study focuses on the Preparation for Bias and Pride Development subscales because these dimensions are most frequently associated with academic achievement in the existing racial socialization literature. The preparation for Bias subscale

includes twelve items and measures the degree to which parents socialize their children to understand that racism exists and is an obstacle for them (sample item "Racism is real and you have to understand it or it will hurt you"; Cronbach's alpha=.88 for this study). The pride Development subscale includes 8 items, and measures the degree to which parents socialize their children to be proud of their race (sample item "You should be proud to be black"; Cronbach's alpha=.77 for this study).

Academic achievement was measured using grade point average (GPA). Grade point average was calculated using teacher reported grades from target children's four core classes: reading, math, science and social studies. Letter grades were assigned numeric scores such that A=4.0, B=3.0, C=2.0, D=1.0, and F=0.0. Grades were then averaged creating a summary measure of grade point average. The mean grade point average for the sample was 2.94 (SD = .77), with GPA ranging from .75 to 4.0.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Preparation for bias and pride development were significantly and positively correlated ($r = .66$, $p < .01$). As the frequency of preparation for bias messages parents delivered to their children increased, so did the frequency of pride development messages. GPA was significantly negatively correlated with both gender ($r = -.36$, $p < .01$) and SES ($r = .21$, $p < .05$). Girls had higher GPAs than boys and higher levels of SES were associated higher GPAs. There were no statistically significant associations between either dimension of racial socialization and GPA (Table 1).

Table 1 Correlations, means, and standard deviations for all study variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Pride development					
2. Preparation for bias	.66**	–			
3. SES	−.14	−.17	–		
4. Gender[a]	−.05	−.03	.00	–	
5. GPA	.10	.02	.21*	−.36**	–
Mean	22.25	19.81	37.72	.45[b]	2.94

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
SD	5.7	3.45	10.51	–	.77

Associations Between Racial Socialization and Academic Achievement and the Moderating Effect of Child Gender

Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analyses were conducted to determine whether racial socialization strategies were associated with GPA controlling for gender and SES and to test for moderating effect of gender. Regression results are presented in Table 2. The full model was significant and explained 22% of the variance in academic achievement, $F(6, 94) = 5.72$, $p = .000$, adjusted $R^2 = .22$. On the first step of the regression, child gender ($\beta = -1.17$, $p = .03$) was a significant negative predictor of academic achievement and SES ($\beta = .28$, $p = .002$) was a significant positive predictor of academic achievement. Boys and children from families with lower SES had lower GPAs. On Step 2, pride development and preparation for bias, entered simultaneously, were not significant predictors of academic achievement. However, there was a significant interaction between preparation for bias and gender ($\beta = 1.08$, $p = .03$).

Table 2 Ordinary least squares regression analysis: GPA on child gender, family SES and child gender X socialization interaction terms

Predictor	B	SE	ß
Child Gender	−1.79	.82	−1.2*
Family SES	.02	.01	.28**
Parental Racial Socialization			
Preparation for Bias	−.02	.021	−.14
Pride Development	−.01	.03	−.05
Gender X Preparation for Bias	.07	.03	1.08*
Gender X Pride Development	−.02	.05	−.25

*p < .05, **p < .01 (*n* = 134)

To further understand the significant preparation for bias x gender interaction effect, this association was examined separately for boys versus girls, controlling for gender and SES. These associations are depicted graphically in Fig. 2. For boys, preparation for bias and GPA were

positively correlated (r = .26, p = .04). The correlation between preparation for bias and GPA for girls was negative, but not significant (r = −.18, p = .08).
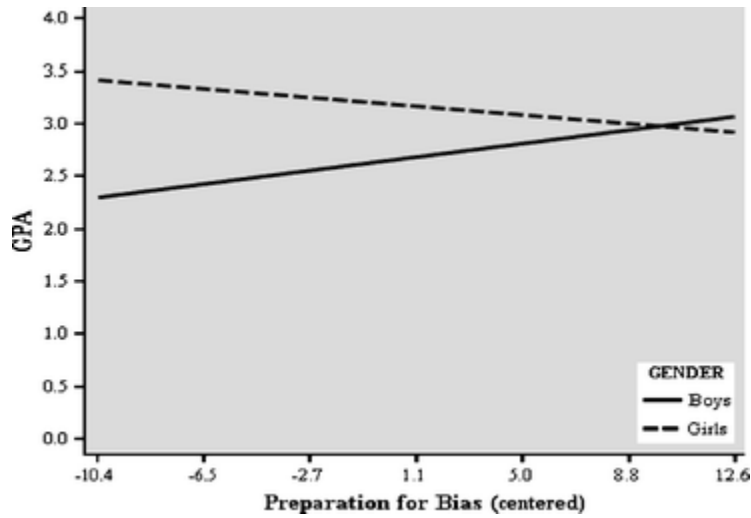

Fig. 2 Preparation for bias and GPA by gender

Associations Between Racial Socialization and Academic Achievement and the Moderating Effect of Family SES

It was also hypothesized that SES would moderate the association between racial socialization and academic achievement. We conducted a second OLS regression analysis to test SES as a potential moderator of racial socialization-academic achievement associations. The model was significant, explaining 22% of the variance in academic achievement, $F(6, 94) = 4.42$, $p = .00$, adjusted $R^2 = .22$. The first two steps of this regression analysis were identical to those reported in the previous section. On the third step of the regression we entered racial socialization x SES interaction terms. These interaction terms were not significant (Table 3).

Table 3 Ordinary least squares regression analysis: GPA on child gender, family SES and child gender, SES X socialization interaction terms

Predictor	B	SE	ß
Child Gender	−.58	.14	−.38**
Family SES	.01	.01	.15
Parental Racial Socialization			
Preparation for Bias	.01	.04	.03
Pride Development	−.03	.06	−.12
Family SES X Preparation for Bias	.00	.02	.03
Family SES X Pride Development	.01	.02	.13

Discussion

Educational success is imperative for the future economic, social, and emotional well-being of youth (US Department of Education 2003). In the face of an often oppressive educational system, the practices that African American families employ to help their children be academically successful have the potential to improve child well-being. Cultural-ecological theory posits that effective environment (race, gender, and social class) influences culturally-specific parenting practices which, in turn, affect the development of child competencies (Garcia Coll et al. 1996; Ogbu 1981). We examined the associations between two aspects of parental racial socialization (preparation for bias and pride development) and child academic achievement (GPA) and how differences in effective environment (child gender, family SES) might moderate these associations. Parental racial socialization was not a significant predictor of academic achievement and SES was not a significant moderator. However, gender did moderate the association between preparation for bias and academic achievement. Preparation for bias was positively associated with GPA for boys only.

African American boys and girls are both subject to the influences of race and racism; however, experiences with race and racism are gender-specific (Borrell et al. 2006; Casella 2003; Fisher and Shaw 1999; Sampson and Laub 1993). Ethnic minority boys are more likely than their female counterparts to be perceived as a threat (Casella 2003; Sampson and Laub 1993). Ethnic minority boys report more discrimination than do ethnic minority girls (Borrell et al. 2006; Fisher and Shaw 1999). In the school setting, African American male students are often viewed as "dangerous" or "troublemakers" (Bodwitch 1993; Casella 2003). They are sometimes viewed as "not fitting into the school" (Casella 2003) and are overrepresented in exclusionary discipline practices (Fenning and Rose 2007). Ferguson (2000) argues pre-adolescent African American males critically examine, dispute, and evaluate the meaning and purpose of these labels which are attached to them. Thus, preparation for bias messages may be particularly protective for boys, and may help them better to understand and cope with the racism they encounter. Sanders (1997) found that African American students who were highly aware of racial discrimination responded to it in ways that benefited their academic achievement. Similarly, Miller and MacIntosh (1999) found that racial socialization protected African American adolescents against discrimination and, thereby, positively influence academic achievement. However, Sanders (1997) and Miller and MacIntosh (1999) did not consider whether these associations were moderated by gender.

When African American boys receive higher levels of preparation for bias messages they may be better prepared to understand and cope with the racism they encounter. Boys may then be able to employ specific behaviors as mechanisms to cope with the racism they encounter. As noted, African American boys may engage in attempts to be less threatening or to "fit -in" with the school culture. "Acting White" is one behavioral strategy, described by Fordham and Ogbu (1986), which some African American students may engage in, in order to be academically successful. "Acting White" refers to the adoption of European American cultural and linguistic norms in order to create desired outcomes within social institutions which value European American middle-class male norms. Teachers associate European American cultural characteristics with higher achievement (Bodwitch 1993; Casella 2003; Fenning and Rose 2007). African American boys who experience more racial socialization, specifically preparation for bias, could use "acting White" as a mechanism to help them cope with the racism and discrimination which threaten their academic success and to help them successfully negotiate relationships with teachers and school administrators. For African American boys who know that they are perceived as dangerous or troublemakers in a school setting, "Acting White" may be a strategy to successfully address these racist assumptions they experience in the school setting; thereby having a positive impact on their academic achievement.

Over the last several years, there have been a plethora of school, community, and faith-based youth programs developed that target African American boys (Hare and Hare 1985; Kunjufu 1984; Noguera 2008). Academic interventions targeting African American boys tend to focus on school-based group mentoring programs that focus on self-discipline, character education, and personal goal setting and are designed to socialize African American boys with the competencies required to be academically successful (Holland 2009; Stuht 2009). The results presented here suggest that it may be beneficial to include within these programs an explicit emphasis on preparation for bias as a strategy for helping African American boys to cope with race-based barriers that may negatively impact their academic achievement.

While African American girls may not be perceived as a threat or may not report discrimination as frequently as African American boys, they are certainly exposed to racism. The intersection of race and gender provides African American girls with a different experience of racism than their male counterparts (Collins 1998). Fordham (1993) argues that racism and sexism together create representations of African American girls as having "nothingness". Black girls are expected to remain voiceless or silent because they, and their voices, are not valued in a racist and sexist educational setting. Girls who receive high levels of preparation for bias messages may be more aware of the racism that exists in their schools, and look for ways to oppose representations of nothingness. Fordham (1993) suggests that girls who make efforts to subvert constructions of "nothingness" are often viewed as "loud" and labeled "those loud Black girls". In a setting that

values adherence to European American, male norms, this "loudness", particularly from an African American girl, may be considered defiant and oppositional, which may lead to negative behavioral referrals and adverse effects on the grades of girls. More research is needed to understand how the intersection of race and gender impacts the academic performance of African American girls, and how parental racial socialization messages may support development of social and academic competencies.

Fordham (1993) identified two ways that African American girls become academically successful within oppressive school contexts by: "(1) becoming and remaining voiceless or silent or, alternatively, (2) impersonating a male image- symbolically—in self presentation, including voice, thinking, speech pattern, and writing style, in the formal school context" (Fordham 1993:10). Fordham noted that these strategies are used as a means of defying the oppression that girls encounter. When African American girls have higher levels of preparation for bias they may become more aware of the racism that exists in the context of their schools. They may then choose one of the behaviors outlined above as a means of coping with this racism. Thus, the impact of preparation for bias on children's GPA may vary by the specific behavior African American girls adopt to cope with the racism they encounter; as is also suggested by Miller and MacIntosh (1999) and Sanders (1997).

Limitations and Directions for Further Research

The cultural-ecological perspective used in this study suggests that effective environment shapes the association between one aspect of racial socialization(preparation for bias) and academic achievement. However, race, gender, and social class as aspects of effective environment do not operate independently of each other. Rather, effective environment is a measure of how a variety of ecological variables interact to create a unique environment within which these associations occur (Collins 1998). Accordingly, race and gender cannot be considered separately when attempting to understand the influences of the effective environment. As Collins (1998) argues, race, gender, and social class are intersecting social locations that are structured by interlocking systems of subordination and domination. However, this study was unable to account for the complex ways in which social class may interact with other aspects of the effective environment (i.e., race and gender) to shape associations between adaptive culture and child competence. Limited sample size precluded us from further modeling these effects across distinctive social classes and conducting multi-group analyses. Further research should more closely examine diverse social classes among African Americans and gender differences in racial socialization within and across social classes, especially in relation to children's developmental outcomes. Also, links between racial socialization and academic achievement may be mediated by third variables such as ethnic identity (Harpalani 2002), child-teacher relationships (Smith 1984) or

parent involvement (Coard et al. 2004) which may be more proximally related to children's academic competencies. Further research on this topic should focus on identification of such mediator variables.

Developmental theories have pointed to the importance of recognizing the bidirectional influences that characterize parent–child relationships (Peterson and Hann 1999). Parent racial socialization measures used in this study provided information on the type and frequency of racial socialization messages delivered by mothers as reported by mothers. It is important that further studies on this topic consider the dyadic nature of parental racial socialization. Also, the measures we used did not provide information on the type and frequency of racial socialization messages that are received or internalized by the child. Associations between racial socialization and academic achievement likely vary based on whether racial socialization messages are reported by parents or by children (Marshall 1995).

As is the case in most studies of child socialization, this work focused on mothers. Given the gendered component of racial socialization, it would be of interest to explore fathers' perceived racial socialization and its implications for boys and girls. It would also be of interest to consider differences in the impact of socialization practices by family structure (single-parent and two-parent family households).

Associations between adaptive culture and child academic competence are best understood as a complex series of parenting practices, child coping strategies, and interactions experienced within the family and school context. Qualitative and mixed-methods studies may also help us to better understand the manner in which parents craft racial socialization messages to specifically target their children's academic achievement, what specific coping mechanisms children who receive racial socialization messages are likely to employ to cope with racism in the school setting, and how these patterns and processes may differ across gender and social class groups. Mixed-method and qualitative studies would also help to explicate the intersections of race, gender, and class and how the distinctive effective environments that result from such intersections may influence associations between racial socialization and academic achievement. Cross-sectional developmental studies are methodological approaches that can help us to better understand associations between racial socialization and academic achievement. However, longitudinal studies would allow researchers to examine how associations between racial socialization and academic achievement unfold over time. If we are to better understand the links between racial socialization and academic achievement, it is important to explore cross-sectional associations among variables and the manner in which such associations unfold over time and development.

In closing, the academic achievement of African American children has been the subject of decades of research. However, we are just beginning to understand ways that culture, ecological contexts, and family processes converge to impact African American parenting practices and children's academic achievement. There are expanding opportunities to examine culturally-specific parenting practices and their influences on child outcomes from a cultural-ecological perspective. Research on racial socialization is an example of an emerging literature that seeks to better understand the aforementioned links. The current study adds to this emerging literature by using a cultural-ecological model to guide the study of associations between racial socialization and academic achievement and how these associations are impacted by ecological contexts. The use of a socio-economically diverse sample of exclusively African American students in late childhood also makes a contribution to our understanding of the developmental variation in these processes. There is a wealth of knowledge to obtain about the myriad of cultural and ecological factors that influence parenting practices in ethnic minority families and how these parenting practices influence child outcomes. Findings from this research can contribute not only to academic knowledge, but also to the practical knowledge of parenting practices that can be employed to help African American children to develop academic, social, and emotional competencies and positive outcomes.

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