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As Black families navigate a racialized society, Black parents often engage in racial socialization as a way to prepare their children for and to protect against the negative racial encounters that they will likely experience. Racial socialization is the process by which parents transmit messages of race and racial pride within the context of broader society, as well as racial discrimination and how to cope with those encounters (Coard & Sellars, 2005). Over the last decade, the racial socialization literature has provided much detail as to what goes on during this dyadic process, with many studies utilizing parent and self-report measures. However, little research has utilized observational methods of examining racial socialization and/or focused on how parents of younger children engage in racial socialization. Informed by Garcia Coll et al.'s (1996) integrative model for the study of developmental competencies in minority children, which acknowledges how social and societal factors can influence family processes, along with observational dyadic data from the Parent-Child Race-Related Observational Measure (PC-ROM) (Coard & Wallace, 2001), this study examined the ways in which parents verbally communicate race-related content and suggest racial coping strategies when engaging in racial socialization with their children. This study also examined differences in parents' racial communication as a result of parental race-related stress and gender of child. Findings revealed an emergence of pattern differences in parents' racial communication as a function of race-related stress. That is, parents with high race-related stress had more proactive racial communication. Findings also revealed that there were

no particular patterns that emerged that suggested differences in parents' racial communication as a function of child's gender. These findings provide insight into observed racial socialization processes among parents and their young children. They also fill a current gap in the racial socialization literature by providing future guidance on how to intervene and support Black parents in having challenging conversations.

BLACK PARENTS' OBSERVED RACIAL SOCIALIZATION BEHAVIORS AND  
THE INFLUENCE OF RACE-RELATED STRESS

by

Keadija C. Wiley

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Approved by

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Committee Co-Chair

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Committee Co-Chair

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis written by KEADIJA C. WILEY has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Co-Chair \_\_\_\_\_

Committee Co-Chair \_\_\_\_\_

Committee Member \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Acceptance by Committee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Final Oral Examination

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Black families in the United States face a unique set of challenges as a result of belonging to a marginalized racial group, that is viewed as inferior to others within society (Caughy, O'Campo, Randolph, & Nickerson, 2002). Many of these challenges stem from experiences of racism and discrimination that have a negative influence on social emotional development and psychological and physical health (Hughes et al., 2006; Trent, Dooley, & Douge, 2019). Unfortunately, no matter the age, Black youth are not immune to experiencing these racial encounters. The negative impact that these experiences have on Black youth has been documented by many (Davis et al., 2017; Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000; Gibbons, Gerrard, Cleveland, Wills, & Brody, 2004; Reynolds & Gonzales-Backen, 2017; Romero & Roberts, 1998; Simmons et al., 2002). In order to protect their children against the effects of racism and discrimination, Black parents often socialize their children in a manner that equips them with critical tools to navigate a society in which they are viewed as less than.

Although some progress has been made towards becoming a society that encompasses racial equality and equity for minoritized racial groups, research has indicated that minoritized individuals continue to be negatively impacted by the adverse effects of negative racial encounters, especially minoritized children (Trent, Dooley, & Douge, 2019). Children and youth of color are especially vulnerable to the deleterious



effects of racism and discrimination due to these early life experiences having a substantial role on development and later life experiences. For both, Black children and adults, there is no boundary to where these encounters can occur including work, school, the neighborhoods they live in, and other public spaces. In addition, these negative encounters can have a wide range of impacts such as academics, well-being, social-emotional development, mental health, stress levels, and much more. Being that Black youth and adults are experiencing such negative encounters, it's important to understand how they are navigating these experiences.

As racism and discrimination continue to be an issue in society, it is also important to understand the processes that take place in Black families that serve as a form of protection. Black parents experience their own personal encounters with racism and discrimination, and as a result often provide their children with information on what can be expected in these encounters, how to solve problems when these situations occur, and how to cope and move forward (McNeil, Reynolds, Fincham, & Beach, 2016). For Black children, these lessons typically prevent increased effects of negative outcomes. This process that many Black families engage in is racial socialization.

Racial socialization is the process in which parents provide their children with messages about their racial background, what this means for their position in the larger context of society, and how to navigate and cope with racism and discrimination (Coard & Sellars, 2005). Many Black parents, who know that their children will ultimately encounter these negative experiences, engage in racial socialization and view it as an integral aspect of their children's development. Racial socialization allows parents to

prepare their children for what to expect during racial encounters, as well as to offer suggestions on how to handle these situations.

With thinking about racial socialization as a process, messages that children receive are not always in a verbal format; parent-child conversations are just one method in which parents can racially socialize their children (Lesane-Brown, 2006; Hughes et al. 2006; Umaña-Taylor & Hill 2020). Conversations such as this are considered verbal messages. Verbal messages of racial socialization are messages that children directly or indirectly receive via parent-child conversations or observing conversations (Lesane-Brown, 2006). Children can also receive nonverbal messages. Nonverbal messages of racial socialization are messages that parents communicate through cultural or ethnic behaviors and environments (Caughy, Randolph, & O'Campo, 2002). This could include parents buying their children Black main characters, books with all Black characters or displaying certain items within the home.

In addition to the way in which parents communicate racial socialization differing, the type of messages that parents provide can also vary. Given that the type of messages parents provides vary, each message is given for a specific reason and is often given during different developmental periods (Edwards & Few-Demo, 2016; Hughes & Chen, 1997) . Furthermore, parents' racial socialization process can also differ based on various factors such as a child's age, child's gender, and even parents' personal experiences (Hughes & Chen, 1997; Neblett, Smalls, Ford, Nguyen, & Sellars, 2009; Saleem et al., 2016; Smith, Reynolds, Fincham, & Beach, 2016). Due to many studies that examine parents' racial socialization practices relying on self-report, the

consideration of observed behaviors is essential, as it allows for a better understanding of what takes place during this process and the differences between how parents engage in it (Smith-Bynum, Anderson, Davis, Franco, & English, 2016).

One of the reasons racial socialization can be considered so critical is due to the United States long history with race and the mistreatment of certain racial groups. The term *race* was first known as a word that was a general categorizing term such as type or kind between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries (Smedley, 1999a, 1999b; Smedley & Smedley, 2005). However, during the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, race gradually began to develop as a term that was used to characterize populations of people. With the establishment of slavery as legal, groups of people became labeled as European American, Native American/Indian, or non-European, non-Native. This characterization of groups was formed as justification for the oppression of Africans (non-European, non-White). With this came the belief that Africans were different from all other human beings, were the lowest level on the social hierarchy, and even beliefs that there were genetic differences (Smedley & Smedley, 2005).

Over the centuries, these past beliefs about the conception of race continue to exist and have become critical to the existing social structure (Smedley & Smedley, 2005). Despite the abolishment of slavery and based on the way in which race has been built into the United States social structure, many Black individuals experience some type of racial oppression such as racism, discrimination, or prejudice, which can result in negative consequences based on the level of threat, perception, and internalized oppression (Thomas, Speight, & Witherspoon, 2010). *Racism* can be defined as

an organized system of oppression founded on the social categorization and stratification of social groups into races that devalues and disempowers groups considered to be inferior and differentially allocates to them valued opportunities and resources within society (Feagin, 2006; Priest & Williams, 2017 p. 2; Williams, 2004).

Racial discrimination is considered the unfair treatment of individuals based on race, with prejudice considered having negative judgements and attitudes about individuals based on race (Harrell, 2000). Racism is embedded within society based on a historical context that is rooted in injustice and the continued systematic oppression of large groups of people at the institutional and policy level, therefore it exists as a result of discrimination and prejudice (Harrell, 2000). As these oppressive beliefs and behaviors have been passed down from generation to generation, they continue today in more subtle formats, yet still discriminate against individuals from certain racial groups. Although these more modern forms of racism are more subtle, they are intertwined into various aspects of life, creating a more racialized society, leaving Black parents feeling the need to equip their children with tools to navigate these inevitable experiences.

Another reason for which racial socialization can be considered critical, is due to its protective nature (Saleem & Lambert, 2016). For people of color, life stressors typically include stress that is brought about due to unfortunate experiences that are related to race (Harrell, 2000). This race-related stress can be defined as, “race-related transactions between individuals or groups and their environment that emerge from the dynamics of racism, and that are perceived to tax or exceed existing individual and collective resources or threaten well-being” (Harrell, 2000, p. 44). For Black youth, race-related stress has the potential to lead to internalizing and externalizing problems (Simons

et al., 2002). It can also impact the Black family unit and how parents socialize their children around race-related issues. When Black parents provide racial socialization messages to their children as a protective factor against the negative influence of racism and discrimination, they are not only teaching them to have cultural pride, but also ways in which to cope with these negative experiences (Anderson & Stevenson, 2019). Some scholars have defined coping as “conscious, volitional efforts to regulate emotions, cognition, behavior, physiology, and the environment in response to stressful events or circumstances” (Compas, Connor, Saltzman, Thomsen, and Wadsworth, 2001, p. 89; Gaylord-Hardne, Gipson, Mance, & Grant, 2008; Seaton, Upton, Gilbert, & Volpe, 2014). Johnson (2005) posits that Black children’s racial coping contributes to the development of more global and situational coping strategies. Global coping, paired with ethnic identity and cultural traditions, protect children against ongoing race-related experiences within context in which these situations can occur as a result of racially charged climates (Johnson, 2005). Although for Black children their racial coping can influence other types of coping, messages from their parents also influence the way that they cope.

Based on previous research and the role that race plays in society, it is evident that racial socialization plays a critical role in Black families, particularly for the positive development of Black youth. Although research has led to a great deal of knowledge on the process, there is still more to be examined on specifically what parents do during the racial socialization process. In doing this, it is also important to consider theoretical models that consider social and cultural factors. Using Garcia Coll et al.’s integrative

model for the study of developmental competencies in minority children, which considers how factors such as race and race-related stress can influence the racial socialization process, along with data from the PC-ROM (Coard & Wallace, 2001), in which Black parents and children engage in race-related communication and interactions, the current study aimed to:

1. Examine the ways in which parents verbally communicate race-related content and provide racial coping strategies when racially socializing their children.
2. Examine how parents' race-related stress influences the ways in which parents verbally communicate race-related content and provide racial coping strategies when racially socializing their children.
3. Examine differences in the ways in which parents verbally communicate race-related content and provide racial coping strategies when racially socializing their sons versus their daughters.

## CHAPTER II

### THEORETICAL MODEL AND LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a rich and growing literature on the racial socialization process, the messages that parents transmit to their children during this engagement, and the various factors that can influence it. Despite decades of studying racial socialization, little research has examined the dyadic process through observation. In order to contribute to filling this gap, the current study examined how parents verbally communicate race-related content and provide racial coping strategies while racially socializing their children, along with the ways in which outside factors (e.g., parental race-related stress, child gender) may be associated with parents' conversations with their children.

#### **An Integrative Study for the Developmental Competencies of Minority Children**

Developmental theories can play an important role in informing our understanding of children and the diversity of processes that occur during childhood (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Erickson, 1950; Garcia Coll et al., 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). Despite the progression of such theories and their acknowledgement of differences in the process of child development, many fail to address issues that children of color face within a larger sociocultural context (Sue & Sue, 1990). Many of these mainstream theories do not acknowledge factors such as race, ethnicity, culture, prejudice, and discrimination, and take on a comparative perspective in which white middle class populations are considered normative and compared with populations of color.

With many of the mainstream theories failing to acknowledge social factors impacting minority children, early Black theorists recognized and discussed the limitations of these mainstream theories, while calling for theories that were relevant to the study of Black youth. For example, Ogbu (1981) argued that universal models of development make assumptions that human competence originates within the home, human competence can be analyzed with a focus on micro-level analysis, and that children's later success in school and the adult life is due to the acquisition of white middle-class competencies through white middle-class child-rearing practices. McLoyd (1990) also acknowledged the need for theories relevant to Black children's development, due to many models labeling minority children as unfavorable compared to White children, suggesting they are abnormal or incompetent.

Garcia Coll et al. (1996) argued that children and families of color face specific factors regarding race, ethnicity, and culture that force them to engage in adaptive practices that will allow children to have positive developmental outcomes that lead to success. In an effort to address the shortcomings of earlier theories, Garcia Coll et al. proposed an Integrative model for the study of developmental competencies in minority children. With this model, Garcia Coll and colleagues addressed two major considerations; a) constructs that are specific to populations of color and their developmental processes, and b) constructs that are relevant to non-minority populations but differ for minority populations due to individual factors. There is an emphasis placed on social position factors such as race, class, and gender and their influence on developmental pathways. However, it is not social position factors that directly affect



developmental outcomes but rather societal factors such as racism, prejudice, discrimination, and other forms of oppression. For children of color, societal factors like racism influence the environment that they experience. These environments can be considered inhibitive or promotive. According to Garcia Coll et al., inhibiting environments are the result of a lack of resources that do not facilitate the positive development of child competencies. In contrast, promoting environments possess an adequate amount of quality resources that support the positive development of children. These inhibiting and promoting environments lead to the creation of an adaptive culture. This adaptive culture is made up of goals, beliefs, and values that are different from the dominant culture and are paired with inhibitive/promotive environments to influence family processes. The adaptive culture, family processes, and individual characteristics lead to the specific developmental competencies for children.

Similar to Garcia Coll et al.'s (1996) integrative model, the current study took into consideration how social factors (race) and societal factors (parental discrimination experiences), lead to an adaptive culture which influences family processes (parent racial socialization behaviors) among Black families.

## **Literature Review**

### **Racial Socialization**

Living in a racialized society, Black parents and children experience racialized encounters in various contexts that have shown to be detrimental to factors such as their academic achievement and psychological well-being (Caughy, O'Campo, & Muntaner, 2004; Wang & Huguley, 2012). As a result of this, Black parents are often compelled to

transmit messages related to culture or experiences with race to their children (Huguley, Wang, Vasquez & Guo, 2019). Some of these messages serve to instill a sense of pride in youth, while others serve to protect children against the unsafe racial encounters that they may one day experience. This process that Black parents and other parents of color engage in the transmission of messages to their children regarding race is considered racial socialization.

Due to the multifaceted nature of racial socialization, there is no one definition to define the dyadic process. In an effort to have a more broadly defined process, Lesane-Brown (2006) defined racial socialization as the verbal and non-verbal communication of messages, typically to younger individuals. These messages serve the purpose of assisting youth to develop a system of values and beliefs around race and its importance, help navigate interactions with individuals of the same and different race, and develop a racial identity (Lesane-Brown, 2006). Living in a racially conscious society, Black children will undoubtedly encounter discriminatory events, therefore these messages help to buffer the effects of these experiences by helping Black children understand what it means to be a person of color and teaching them skills such as problem-solving and coping, which are essential for navigating life as a person of color. For Black parents, their own experiences with race can influence the way in which they engage in racially socializing their children, leading them to provide specific types of messages, which can also be dependent upon child level factors (Smith, Reynolds, Fincham, & Beach, 2016).

**Observing Racial Socialization.** Over the last decade, there have been improvements in the measurement of racial socialization (Umaña-Taylor & Hill, 2020).

Some of these improvements include the development of measures that takes into consideration construct and context, the consideration of racial socialization that takes place during earlier developmental periods, the development of methods that assist with the creation of racial socialization interventions, and a look at how various racial socialization profiles exist within families lived experiences. Despite these many advancements, there continues to be few studies that use observational measures of racial socialization to examine the dyadic process in the moment. Many studies that report on the racial socialization process utilize self-report measures. This can be due to the use of observational measures in research being costly, time consuming and studies having high attrition rates (Johnson, 2005).

Although small in number, observations of racial socialization have captured cultural pride, as well as messages transmitted by parents to both younger and older children. Considering the role of the home as a socializing environment, Caughy, Randolph, and O'Campo (2002) developed the Afrocentric HOME Inventory, which measures the number of cultural artifacts in African American homes. This observational measure is considered a measure of parents' cultural socialization. Smith-Bynum, Anderson, Davis, Franco, and English (2016) also utilized observational methods to examine parent-child dyads actively engaged in the racial socialization process. Taking an observational approach was believed to advance our understanding of how parents convey racial socialization messages in the moment, model certain behaviors, and evoke certain responses throughout the conversation.

With similar goals in mind, Johnson (2005) also took an observational approach and assessed parents' transmission of messages around racial coping using the Racial Stories Task (Johnson, 1996). The Racial Stories Task (RST) is a measure that involves presenting school aged African American children with a series of vignettes that depict a racial conflict. Children are asked to respond with how the conflict should be solved. Johnson (2005) used responses from this RST as a mechanism to start conversations between parents and their children. These conversations allowed for an investigation of how parenting processes during racial socialization assist children in understanding racial coping. Coding of these parent-child dyads captured parents' interactions, as well as parents' racial contextualization during conversations.

In order to further the study of racial socialization, it is important to consider not only self-report measures, but observational measures as well. Although self-report measures take less time and are easier to administer, observing the active racial socialization process allows for gaining essential information on parents' behaviors during racial socialization. These examinations get at what parents actually say and do during this dyadic process.

**Content of Messages.** One facet to consider in what parents do during the racial socialization process is the type of messages that parents provide. This is related specifically to the content of the messages, which can vary based on when they are delivered. This can be influenced by factors such as where a child is developmentally, including age (Blanchard, Coard, Hardin, & Mereoiu, 2019; Hughes & Chen, 1997). For example, although children become aware of race at a young age, they do not fully

understand the depths in which race infiltrates life until the age of nine or ten. This may result in parents providing fewer or different types of messages to their younger children. The content of messages that parents transmit can also vary based on child gender (Caughy, Nettles, & Lima, 2011; McNeil, Reynolds, Fincham, & Beach, 2016; Neblett, Smalls, Ford, Nguyen, & Sellars, 2009; Saleem et al., 2016; Thomas & Speight, 1999).

The primary types of messages that parents can transmit include cultural socialization, preparation for bias, promotion of mistrust, and egalitarianism (Hughes et al., 2006). The types of messages that parents provide vary, and past research has indicated that cultural socialization messages are the most prominent types of messages that parents communicate, as well as the most commonly studied dimension of racial socialization (Huguley, Wang, Vasquez & Guo, 2019; Lesane-Brown, 2006). This suggests that parents place focus on having their children learn and understand the positive aspects of being Black (cultural pride). This may also suggest that parents find cultural socialization messages more suitable to use across developmental periods in comparison to other content messages (Umaña-Taylor & Hill, 2020).

Looking more closely into the specific content of racial socialization messages, cultural socialization is one type of message that parents can provide to their children. Cultural socialization messages consist of parents' messages about the culture, heritage, and history of African Americans (Hughes et al., 2006). These types of messages emphasize taking pride in one's race. These messages involve parents providing information about important African American figures and inventions, books, music, movies, traditional holidays, food, and other culturally-relevant items and experiences

(Hughes et al., 2006; Huguley, Wang, Vasquez & Guo, 2019). The next type of message is preparation for bias. These racial socialization messages consist of parents warning their children about inequalities and discrimination that they may encounter as a result of being African American and how to handle such situations (Atkin, Yoo, & Yeh, 2019). The third type of racial socialization message is the promotion of mistrust, or messages that promote carefulness and distrust of other racial groups (Atkin, Yoo, & Yeh, 2019). Much research has been conducted on messages that promote distrust, and although a small number of studies have found that a larger percentage of parents transmit this type of message, many others found that very few parents use promotion of distrust when talking to their children about race (Hughes et al., 2006). The fourth type of message that parents transmit is egalitarianism, or messages that take away the emphasis of the importance of race and place more focus on other characteristics, such as hard work and virtue, to overcome racism (Gaskins, 2015; Hughes et al., 2006).

***Preparation for Bias.*** Preparation for bias messages in particular play a unique role in the racial socialization process. As the second most commonly studied message of racial socialization, preparation for bias ultimately teaches children how to “anticipate, process, and/or cope with racial discrimination encounters” (Hughes et al., 2006; Huguley, Wang, Vasquez & Guo, 2019 p. 439; Stevenson, 1994). For example, Kiang, Supple, and Stein (2018) examined how social interactions predict longitudinal changes, using latent profiles of discrimination and socialization. Findings indicated positive outcomes for children who were accustomed to both, positive and negative racial experiences. Work by Neblett, Rivas-Drake, and Umaña-Taylor (2012) also suggested

that racial socialization acts as a protective mechanism that shields children against the detrimental effects of discrimination. Although there have been studies such as these which suggest that children being equipped with racial coping strategies, as a result of preparation for bias messages, is beneficial for their adjustment, other studies have presented findings suggesting that preparation for bias is not beneficial for youth of color. For example, Atkin, Yoo, and Yeh (2018) examined the relationship between racial socialization messages and psychological distress, with results indicating that there was no relationship between preparation for bias and children's psychological distress. French and Coleman (2012) also examined preparation for bias messages, but instead examined associations with racial ideologies. Results indicated no relations between the two factors. Findings from each of these studies make it evident that there is not yet a clear understanding of the influence that preparation for bias messages may have on children's adjustment. Given that preparation for bias messages are associated with racial coping, more researchers are beginning to delve deeper and to explore specifically how parents can assist with enhancing their children's racial coping (Anderson & Stevenson, 2019; Anderson, McKenny, & Stevenson, 2018; Anderson, McKenny, Mitchell, Koku & Stevenson, 2018). However, this research is largely focused on adolescents.

### **Gendered Racial Socialization**

In addition to parents' racial socialization messages differing in relation to the age of their children, they can also differ as a result of children's gender. When it comes to experiences centered around race, young boys and girls can have different experiences. For example, Black boys can be viewed as more threatening than Black girls (Stevenson,

Herrero-Taylor, et al., 2002). As a result of this, parents may have different motives when racially socializing their children, leaving boys and girls to receive different messages.

Just as there have been discrepancies around defining racial socialization and the influence of the process on Black youth, there have also been mixed findings regarding the gender differences in parents' racial socialization practices. Bowman and Howard (1985) examined the racial socialization messages that boys and girls receive. Results indicated that girls were more likely to receive no messages about race or messages about racial pride. In contrast, boys were more likely to receive messages that placed an emphasis on racial barriers and egalitarianism. Other research that has examined gender differences in racial socialization has produced similar findings. For example, findings from Thomas and Speight (1999) indicated that although both boys and girls received messages on race, parents tended to give boys more messages on negative stereotypes and suggestions for how to cope with racism. For girls, they typically received more messages about the importance of achievement and racial pride.

More recent research that has looked at the racial socialization practices of parents have found similar and contrasting findings. In a study that examined racial socialization and racial identity, Neblett, Smalls, Ford, Nguyen, and Sellars (2009) reported that girls were more likely to receive moderate to high frequencies of racial socialization messages, in comparison to boys who were more likely to receive low frequencies of messages. This finding differed from those reported by Bowman and Howard (1985) in which boys were more likely to receive racial socialization messages than girls. Similar to Thomas and Speight (1999), other research has also found that boys and girls both receive



messages, but the type of messages differ based on gender, such that girls receive more cultural socialization messages and boys receive a combination of cultural socialization, coping, and promotion of mistrust (Caughy, Nettles, & Lima, 2011). More research on the racial socialization messages that girls and boys receive is needed to gain a better understanding of why these differences exist.

### **Parental Race-Related Stress as an Influential Factor in the Racial Socialization Process**

Given that children primarily receive messages of racial socialization from caregivers, it can be expected that parents who have experienced discrimination will expect their children to have similar experiences at some point, thus leading them to be more likely to provide their children with the tools to navigate these experiences. Conversations in which these messages are transmitted often occur after a negative experience with race (Coard & Sellars, 2005). More specifically, the types of messages that parents provide during racial socialization can reflect their beliefs surrounding race (Hughes, 2006). For example, preparation for bias has been found to be associated with parents' perceptions of interpersonal prejudice at work (Hughes & Chen, 1997), whereas promotion of mistrust has been linked to parents' perception of discrimination at the institutional level.

Smith, Reynolds, Fincham, & Beach (2016) explored the relationship between previous experiences of racial discrimination and youth racial socialization in African American families. Although mothers and fathers transmitted different types of messages, when parents had experienced increased levels of perceived racial discrimination

experiences, they were more likely to provide their children with racial socialization messages as a result of this. Despite there being potential differences in the types of messages that are transmitted by parents based on discrimination experiences, these messages still serve as a protective factor against the negative racial encounters that children may experience (Caughy, O'Campo, & Muntaner, 2011).

### **The Proposed Study**

The goal of the current study was to examine what takes place among parent-child dyads during the racial socialization process, as well as to examine the ways in which parents' race-related stress and child gender influences the way in which parents engage in racially socializing their children. More specifically, the current study aimed to a) identify how parents go about interacting with their children during the racial socialization process, b) identify if parents contextualize conversations around race during an observational task and if so, to what extent, and c) identify the racial coping strategies that parents suggest their children utilize if found experiencing a negative racial encounter. In addition, the current study aimed to examine differences in how parents communicate and provide racial coping strategies during the racial socialization process, as function of children's gender. The current study also aimed to examine how parents' race-related stress is associated with how parents communicate race-related content and provide racial coping strategies while racially socializing their children. This examination allowed for a better understanding of the content and process parents engage in during the racial socialization process and factors that may influence it. Based on the current racial socialization literature, it is important to examine this dyadic process through observation

and not rely solely on self-report measures. Additionally, it is imperative to examine the racial socialization process between parents and younger aged children.

The current study aimed to explore these factors with the following research questions:

*Research Question 1.* What are the ways in which parents verbally communicate race-related content and provide racial coping strategies, when racially socializing their children?

*Research Question 2.* How do parents' race-related stress contribute to the ways in which parents verbally communicate race-related content and provide racial coping strategies when racially socializing their children?

*Research Question 3.* What are the differences in the ways in which parents verbally communicate race-related content and provide racial coping strategies when racially socializing their sons versus their daughters?

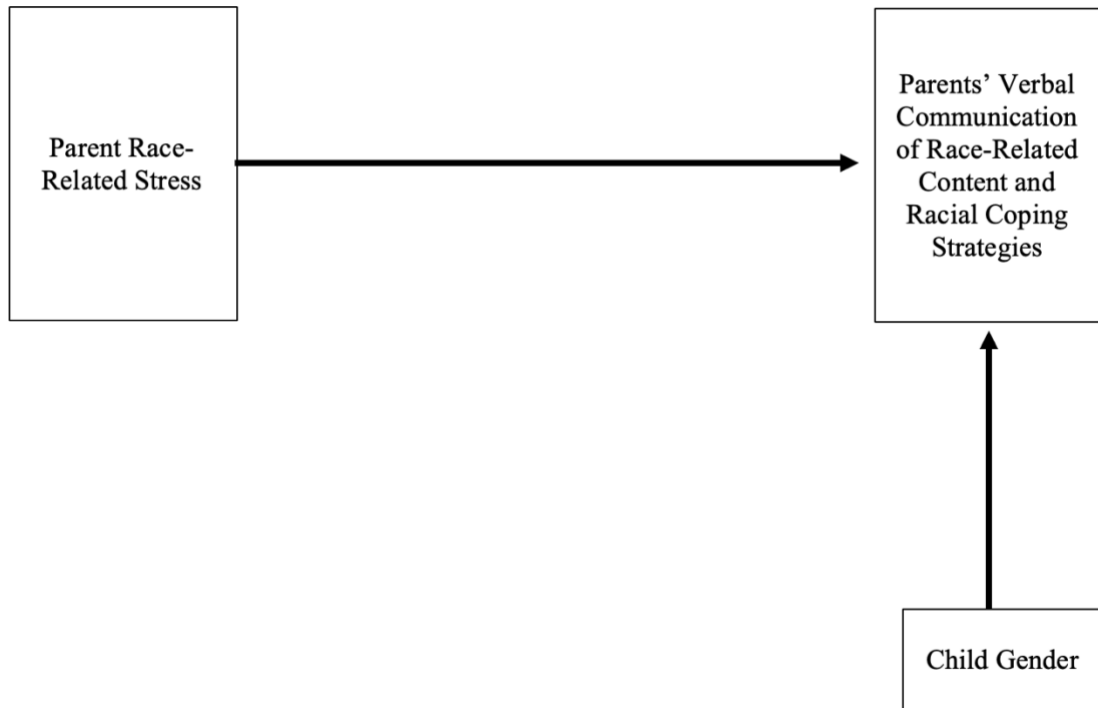


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Relationship Between Parents' Race-Related Stress, Parents' Verbal Communication of Race-Related Content and Racial Coping Strategies, and Child Gender

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

#### **Data Source**

The data used were drawn from a study that used PC-ROM as an observational measure. PC-ROM is a parent-child observational measure of race-related communication and interaction that was developed to be acceptable to parents and children, use within the home or clinical settings, and use as a sole measure or additional measure to parent-report measures of racial socialization (Coard & Wallace, 2001). The study from which these data were drawn took place in 2003, in a northeastern state. The study aimed to examine the feasibility of implementing the Black Parenting Strengths and Strategies (BPSS) program with low-income, urban African American children ages five through eight and their families in a community-based setting. Using parenting practices that are specific to African American parents, BPSS aimed to assist parents with promoting positive social, cultural, and emotional health in their children, along with academic success. With data collected across two timepoints, the PC-ROM observational measure captured any changes in race-related parent-child interactions. The current study did not aim to capture the changes that took place as a result of the intervention, therefore only baseline data from timepoint 1 was used.

## **Participants**

Participants for the study were recruited from schools and community agencies in low-income neighborhoods. The criteria for participant selection specified that participants must self-identify as Black or African American, with a maternal and paternal familial history of U.S. born African ancestry for at least two generations. The purpose of defining African American in this manner was due to the prevalence of extended family networks in Black families. Given this, it is important to take into consideration the influence of other caregivers in the racial socialization process and upbringing of Black children. African American was also characterized in this manner due to the potential differences among African Americans, Africans and West Indian/Caribbean (Phelps, Taylor, & Gerard, 2001).

The study sample was made up of 20 parent-child dyads, who lived in predominantly Black or mixed neighborhoods. Caregivers were primarily mothers with a mean age of 34.1 years (23-58). Many of the caregivers were single, had a high school diploma or some college education, and a range of different incomes (\$5,000 - \$60,000 or more). Child participants consisted of 50% boys and 50% girls, with a mean age of 6 years, 1 month (4 years, 11 months – 6 years, 9 months). Most of the children attended charter schools that were predominantly Black. All demographic information can be viewed in Table 1. In addition to the exclusion criteria on the basis of race, dyads were also excluded if the child had been diagnosed with a mental disorder, major medical disorder or neurological disorder.

## **Procedure**

The PC-ROM contained three segments which included: Book Choice/Story Time, Doll Play, and Chit Chat. It was administered by trained female African American interviewers, in a playroom/classroom setting. Each playroom/classroom setting was equipped with an audio- and video-taping system. Interviewers explained each segment and its purpose to participants before administering the measure. After parents gave their consent, interviewers gave verbal instructions to parents. Parent and child's behavioral responses were record by hand. The PC-ROM was coded by two female African Americans. In addition to the three segments, parents also completed an assessment with demographic information and self-report measures of race-related stress and racial identity.

## **Measures**

### **Family Demographic Form**

Each parent completed a family demographic form prior to completing the four segments of the PC-ROM. This form collected demographic information on both, parents and children. Information on parents consisted of relationship to child (*1=biological mother/father, 2=adopted mother/father, 3=foster mother/father, 4=biological grandmother/grandfather, 5=other*), birthplace, age, gender (*0=female, 1=female*), marital status (*1=married to/living with subject's natural or adoptive father, 2=married to/living with someone other than father, 3=committed relationship, 4=single, 5=divorced, 6=separated, 7=widowed*), education status (*0=no school, 1=less than seven years of school, 2=junior high school, 3=high school, 4=high school graduate,*

5=technical/trade school, 6=some college, 7=associate degree, 8=college graduate, 9=graduate/professional training, 10= graduate/professional degree, 11=N/A, 12=Do not know), occupation (1=employed full time for pay, 2=employed part time for pay, 3=homemaker, 4=full time student, 5=leave of absence for medical reason, 6=unemployed for less than 6 months but expects to work, 7=unemployed less than 6 months does not expect to work, 8=unemployed greater than 6 months but expects to work, 9=unemployed greater than 6 months does not expect to work, 10=retired, 11=other), currently receiving public assistance (0=No, 1=Yes), and household gross income (1=under \$5,000, 2=\$5,000-\$9,999, 3=\$10,000-\$14,999, 4=\$15,000-\$24,999, 5=\$25,000-\$39,999, 6=\$40,000-\$59,999, 7=over \$60,000, 8=Do not know). Information gathered on children consisted of age, gender (0=male, 1=female), and type of school (1=regular public school, 2=regular private school, 3=charter school, 4=parochial school, 5=special school for children with emotional/behavioral problems, 6=special school for handicapped children, 7=not in school). The family demographic form also asked for racial makeup of the neighborhood and community in which families lived, as well as the school the children attended (1=predominantly black, 2=mixed, 3=predominantly white).

## **PC-ROM**

The PC-ROM was divided into three segments: Book Choice/Story Time, Doll Play, and Chit Chat. Under the Book Choice/Story Time segment, parents were asked to select a book to read to their child. Book choices included *Bright Eyes, Brown Skin* (African American), *Courtney's Birthday Party* (African American and White), or



*Friends* (White). After selecting a book, parents were asked the reason for the book selection (e.g., Race, Gender, Neutral, or Do Not Know). Parents were then asked to spend two minutes making a story of their own with the book that was chosen, followed by three minutes of story time with a book that is given to them (*Boundless Grace*).

During the second segment, Doll Play (four minutes), parents were given three dolls (representing light, medium, and dark skin color). With these dolls, they were instructed to ask their children a series of questions. These questions included *Which doll would you most like to play with?*, *Which doll is nice doll?*, *Which doll is the best in school?*, *Which doll looks mean?*, *Which doll looks like a White child?*, *Which doll looks like a Black child?*, *Which doll looks like a African American child?*, and *Which doll looks like you?*. Parents were encouraged to ask follow-up questions to children's responses.

In the last segment, Chit Chat (six minutes), parents were asked to watch a video segment from the animated movie, *Our Friend Martin*, with their child that displayed an age appropriate racial encounter. Upon viewing the video, parents were instructed to talk with their child for three minutes about what they viewed in the video (unprompted). After this, they were instructed to spend another three minutes discussing with their child how they would want him/her to handle a similar situation (prompted). Observers coded the frequency of racial socialization messages transmitted from parent to child while they discussed the video.

### **Inventory of Race-Related Stress (IRRS)-Brief Version(B)**

The IRRS-Brief Version (IRRS-B) was a multidimensional measure of the race-related stress that African Americans experience as a result of racism and discrimination (Utsey, 1999). Prior to the development of the IRRS-B, the IRRS was created, which similarly, measured race-related stress experienced by African Americans. The IRRS-B, which contained 22 items, was created due to the extended amount of time needed to complete the 46 item IRRS (Utsey, 1999). The IRRS also included unrelated or extreme items that were not good indicators of race-related stress. In addition to asking about personal experiences, the survey also asked respondents to take into consideration stressful experiences that had happened to individuals close to them, such as family members.

The IRRS-B consisted of three subscales, which included Cultural, Institutional, and Individual Racism, as well as a Global Racism score (Utsey, 1999). The Cultural Racism subscale consisted of 10 items and measured racism that was experienced when one's culture was criticized in a derogatory manner. Examples of items that measured Cultural Racism are "You notice that crimes committed by White people tend to be romanticized, whereas the same crime committed by a Black person is portrayed as savagery, and the Black person who committed it, as an animal" and "You notice that when Black people are killed by the police, the media informs the public of the victims criminal record or negative information in their background, suggesting they got what they deserved." The Institutional Racism subscale consisted of 6 items and measured racism that was experienced due to being embedded in policies and practices of any

institution. Examples of items that measure Institutional Racism were “You were treated with less respect and courtesy than Whites and other non-Blacks while in a store, restaurant, or other business establishment.” and “You were passed over for an important project although you were more qualified and competent than the White/non-Black person given the task.” The Individual Racism subscale consisted of 6 items and measured racism that was experienced at the interpersonal level. Examples of items that measured Individual Racism were “White people or other non-Blacks have treated you as if you were unintelligent and needed things explained to you slowly or numerous times.” and “Whites/non-Blacks have stared at you as if you didn’t belong in the same place with them; whether it was a restaurant, theater, or other place of business.” A global racism score was formulated from the sum of the standardized scores of the three subscales.

This questionnaire used a 5-point Likert scale that examined whether or not respondents had experienced an event and the degree to which the experience had caused stress (*0=This never happened to me., 1=This event happened, but did not bother me., 2=This event happened and I was slightly upset., 3=This event happened and I was upset., 4=This event happened and I was extremely upset.*). Based on this scale, scores for the Cultural Racism subscale ranged from 0 to 40. Scores for the Institutional and Individual Racism subscales ranged from 0 to 24. Higher scores indicated an individual had experienced more race-related stress.

### **Analytic Plan**

The concurrent mixed-method study used an in-depth qualitative design that included multiple phases of analysis including 1.) identifying themes and patterns, 2.) the

coding of parent-child dyads, and 3.) interpretation of data. The aim of this study was to explore the ways in which parents verbally communicate race-related content, as well as suggest racial coping strategies, when racially socializing their children. Also examined were variations in parents' communication of race-related content and racial coping strategies by parents' race-related stress and child gender.

### **Qualitative Analysis**

**Coding Protocols and Content Coding.** The Chit Chat segment of the PC-ROM was used to examine the ways in which parents verbally communicate race-related content and suggest racial coping strategies when racially socializing their children. Use of the Chit Chat segment provided data that was comparable to naturally occurring parent-child conversations centering race in a way that is not captured from self-report measures (Miles & Huberman, 1994). It also provided meaning and context into what parents verbally communicate during the racial socialization process, as well as how they communicate. For this examination, in order to explore how Black parents verbally communicate race-related content, provide racial coping strategies, and consider the influence of parents' race-related stress and child gender, emphasis was placed on parent-child dyadic interactions, if and how parents contextualized the conversation around race, and racial coping strategies that parents suggested. There was also a focus on themes that evolved from inductive coding, including parents probing to learn what was age appropriate, showing regard for their children's emotions, and their use of cultural socialization messages. The aim of this was to explore the process of how parents communicate race-related content to their young children, as well as explore the specific

messages that parents communicate. To explore the process, as well as the content that parents communicated during racial socialization, there were different coding strategies used include content coding, deductive coding, and inductive coding.

Each parent-child assessment video (Chit Chat segment only) was viewed in order to do inductive coding and observe any themes and patterns among dyads. There was also consideration given to potential codes from preexisting coding schemes, that would be used for later deductive and content coding. A detailed description of factors that were coded during analysis is listed below and includes parent-child dyadic interactions, contextualization around race, racial coping strategies, parental racial communication, and the influence of parental race-related stress and child gender. The segments were reviewed by a coding team of which all were African American women. The author served as the master coder, while the remaining two coders were used to assess reliability purposes. All parent-child assessment videos were coded twice. If any discrepancies were found between coders, they were resolved with discussions between coders, with each coder presenting their reasoning for a code until a single code was able to be agreed upon.

***Parent-Child Dyadic Interactions.*** The purpose of examining parent-child dyadic interactions was to capture the dyadic communication and interactions that took place between parents and their children when discussing a potential negative racial encounter. Given Garcia Coll's (1996) integrative model, it is important to consider the communication process that takes place between parents and children during racial socialization. This is especially important as Black parents and children are exposed to

environments that lead to a culture which influences family processes. With consideration of this adaptive culture, Johnson (2005) posited that parents demonstrate various ways of interacting with their children when it comes to communicating race-related content. This gives parents and their children an opportunity to have a dialogue that allows them to work through solving racial dilemmas and understand what it means to be Black in a racialized society, but in a manner that is fitting for their particular relationship. For example, in the current study, parents' race-related stress is believed to have the potential to influence communication with their children when discussing race-related content.

In this examination, parent-child dyadic interactions focused on the way parents communicated with their children about race. More specifically, the way parents talked to and with their children, as well as how their children responded to queries. In order to explore how parents went about interacting with their children, previous research that examined parent-child interactions was utilized to adapt codes that captured parents' communication of race-related content (Johnson, 2005). Building on previous studies that examined parent-child interactions and communication in Black families, Johnson (2005) utilized codes that captured how parents interacted with their children during race-related conversations. This included factors such as parents' role in the conversation, how parents provided explanations and asked questions, and how parents agreed with or rejected input from their children (Black & Logan, 1995; Johnson, 1996; 2004). In addition to building on Johnson's work, the examination and development of codes for how parents interacted with their children while communicating race-related content also

took into account that racial socialization is considered to be bidirectional, with communication from both, parents and children (Hughes & Chen, 1999).

In order to capture the dyadic interactions between parents and their children during racial socialization conversations, codes from Johnson (2005) were revised and four codes were developed. These four codes included *1=questioning*, *2=unidirectional instruction*, *3=bidirectional*, and *4=bidirectional with extension*. Table 4 displays the way in which each code was defined. For example, row 2 of Table 4 indicates that questioning is described as a parent who predominantly asks their child questions during the Chit Chat segment. It is also important to note that because the Chit Chat segment required parents to have prompted and unprompted discussions with their children, interactions between both discussions were considered independent of one another. This was due to the thought that prompted versus unprompted discussions would have the potential to elicit different responses from parents.

***Contextualization Around Race.*** How parents verbally communicated race-related content and provide racial coping strategies included how they contextualized the conversation around race was coded. This was based on the content of parents' discussion and how they handled the meaning of race in their interactions with their children during the Chit Chat segment. The conceptualization of how parents contextualize conversations around race when racially socializing their children was based on Johnson's (2005) previous work that suggested there were linkages between parents contextualizing conversations around race and how children grow to understand race and racial coping.

Being based on previous research, codes that captured how parents navigate communicating race-related content were developed to identify if parents established race as a theme in a conversation during an observational task and the extent to which parents established race as a theme (Johnson, 2005). Although Johnson (2005) only identified parents as contextualizing the conversation around race or not, there were some parents in the current study who contextualized the conversation around race in different ways. As a result of this, this led to codes that included *1=no contextualization*, *2=moderate contextualization*, and *3=extensive contextualization*, which has been defined in Table 2. As indicated in Row 2 of Table 2, no contextualization around race consisted of parents making no statements or asking questions about race, the understanding of race, or race-related issues. Moderate contextualization around race consisted of parents making some statements or asking some questions about race and the understanding of race-related issues, but the entire conversation was not centered around race. Extensive contextualization consisted of parents making multiple statements or asking various questions about race, the understanding of race, and race-related issues, by centering the entire conversation around race. The way in which parents contextualized the conversation around race was considered for the entire duration of the Chit Chat segment, not just portions of the task.

***Racial Coping.*** In addition to examining how parents develop race as a theme and contextualize conversations around race, there was also consideration for what racial coping strategies parents suggest to their young children when facing a stressful racial encounter. Similar to the examination of parents' contextualization or decontextualization



around race during racial socialization, this also provided insight into the specific information parents are communicating to their children about race. The development of codes, along with how they are defined, emerged from empirical research conducted by Johnson (1996, 2005), which examined the ways in which young children cope with potential encounters of racial discrimination. Codes from Johnson's work were adapted to fit an appropriate analysis of data from the Chit Chat segment. Although Johnson's (1996) work examined the ways in which children responded to instances of racial discrimination, these responses were translated to potential suggestions that Black parents give their children on how to deal with negative racial encounters. After a review of the dyadic interactions that took place during the Chit Chat segment and the translation of Johnson's codes to responses that Black parents utilize when discussing racial coping, it was determined that there were five primary response that parents suggested to their young children when racially socializing them.

Based on the review, the five codes that emerged to describe parents suggested racial coping strategies included, *1=adult authority*, *2=moral reasoning*, *3=conflict avoidance*, *4=conflict confronting*, and *5=no racial coping strategy*. The way in which each racial coping strategy was defined can be found in Table 3. For example, row 2 of Table 3, indicates that adult authority is defined as relying on an adult authority figure to assist when presented with a negative racial encounter. An example of a parent suggesting this strategy to their child would be:

I would want you to come and tell me what she said, just so I can make sure you would be safe, and then maybe I would be able to talk to his mother or father to

see if ya'll could still be friends. That's what I would want you to do. And I wouldn't want you to feel bad.

Table 3 also lists how other strategies suggested by parents were defined. These include 1.) a sense of moral reasoning which was defined as displaying righteousness, and social convention, as well as extending to religious doctrine or the understanding of social rules, 2.) conflict avoidance, which was defined as avoiding the stressful, painful, or challenging situation by attempting to get away from the problem, 3.) conflict confronting, which was defined as confronting the situation, and 4.) no racial coping strategy, in which the parent did not suggest a racial coping strategy to their child.

***Parent Racial Communication.*** With consideration to the content that parents provide their children with, as well as how they engage in racial socialization, a typology was also created that was reflective of parents' racial communication. This was established using each of the components mentioned above (dyadic interactions, contextualization around race, and racial coping strategies) as a set of subfactors to parents' racial communication. The goal was to examine how parents would be labeled based on how they racially socialize their children. Each of these components were utilized as a set of subfactors to parental racial communication due to the way in which racial socialization is defined, as well as support from a conceptual model that considers the development of minority children. For example, given racial socialization is defined as the process by which parents transmit messages of race, racial pride, and methods of coping within the context of a broader racialized society, it is critical for parents to contextualize these conversations around race in order to get the message across to their

children. Furthermore, it is critical to gain an understanding of what and how parents engage in the racial socialization process. As previous research has suggested, racial socialization is a bidirectional family process in which both, parents and children, are involved. Additionally, Garcia Coll's integrative model (1996), indicated that the adaptive process that parents go through while racially socializing their children, influences children's future developmental competencies and how they then respond to negative racial encounters. This typology allowed various critical factors to be considered as they relate to parents' racial communication.

Through utilizing parent-child dyadic interactions, contextualization around race, and suggested racial coping strategies as a subset of components to characterize parent's racial communication, three typologies emerged. As seen in Table 5, these included, 1.) proactive communication, 2.) reactive communication, and 3.) passive communication. As seen in row 2 of Table 5, a parent with passive communication may have communicated with their child in a bidirectional aspect, as well as suggested a racial coping strategy in a subtle manner, but does not contextualize the conversation around race given the centralized nature of race in racial socialization. Differing from passive communication, reactive communication consisted of a parent who did contextualize the conversation around race. However, this parent may have communicated in a bidirectional process but not suggest a racial coping strategy to their child or the reverse may have occurred. A reactive parent also did not engage in either of these as they only contextualize the conversation around race. Parents who engaged in all three, including contextualizing conversations around race, communicating with their child in a

bidirectional manner, and suggesting a racial coping strategy to their child, were considered to have proactive communication. Each parents' racial communication was labeled using one of the three typologies.

**Analysis and Interpretation of the Influence of Race-Related Stress and Child Gender.** Following the analysis of each parent-child dyad, parents' race-related stress was examined to consider its influence on how parents verbally communicate race-related content and provide racial coping strategies. Using parents' individual racism scores from the IRRS-B, a median split led to the characterization of parents as experiencing low or high race-related stress. This data, along with the analyses gathered from observing and coding each parent-child dyad, was used to examine any differences in how parents communicated race-related content and provided racial coping strategies as a function of parents' race-related stress. Analyses from the parent-child dyads were also examined to explore any differences as a function of child gender. Upon review of what was suggested qualitatively, a chi-square test was run in order to determine if this mapped on to quantitative analyses.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

The purpose of the current study was to observe parent-child dyads to understand how Black parents verbally communicate race-related content and suggest racial coping strategies as components of racial socialization. The below findings detail how parents interact with their children when engaging in racial socialization, as well as the content that parents provide when communicating about race. This examination considered if and how parents contextualized conversations around race, parents' use of cultural socialization messages, and parents' suggestions of racial coping strategies. Variations in the way in which parents communicate race-related content and racial coping strategies as a function of parents' race-related stress and child gender were also explored.

#### **Parent-Child Racial Communication**

In the following analysis, detailed findings are presented on the way in which parents verbally communicate race-related content and suggest racial coping strategies to their children during racial socialization. This examination of parents observed behaviors was specific to how or the process in which parents go about to communicate race-related content.

#### **Parental Information Checking for Age Appropriateness**

More than half of the parents probed for age appropriateness before becoming fully engaged in the conversation. This checking typically consisted of parents asking their child a single question, immediately after viewing the video clip of the racially

charged encounter. For example, “What do you think?” or “What’d you think about that?” Other parents checked with their children by asking questions such as “What happened?”, “What was that about?” or “Why’d the mother say that?” (referencing the mother from the video clip, who makes a negative racial remark). Despite there being differences among parents in the way in which they verbally communicated race-related content, almost all parents explored what their child knew before further engaging in the conversation.

In many instances, children’s responses to these questions determined how parents then engaged in the conversation. For example, the start of the discussion between Patricia and her daughter went as follows:

Parent: You understand what was going on?

Child: Uh huh. She pulled their ears...And they were yelling because she pulled them too hard.

Parent: Not that she pulled their ears. Why did she pull their ears?

Child: Because they were not supposed to wear the clothes, the color clothes.

Parent: Clothes, the color clothes?

Child: Because then they’ll get all dark all over.

In this instance, it was evident that Patricia’s daughter did not understand the racialized nature of what took place in the video she had just viewed with her mother. She perceived what she had viewed in the video to be a result of the clothes that the children were wearing. With this response, Patricia recognized that her daughter did not hold an accurate understanding of race or racial injustices and even acknowledged it with the

research staff administering the task. Patricia then used her daughter's response for guidance on how to proceed with the discussion and took this opportunity to inform her daughter on what really occurred in the video, going on to explain to her,

Well actually, the reason why she did that is because back in those days Black people and White people weren't supposed to play together. They weren't supposed to be around each other, so she was angry with her sons because they were playing with Black children.

For the remainder of the discussion, Patricia used the conversation as a way to teach her daughter about race.

In the example above, Patricia acknowledged that her daughter was not yet aware of certain aspects of race and at one instance made the comment to her daughter "You don't know this...". However, she did not let her daughter's lack of knowledge on race-related matters at the moment prevent her from communicating race-related content, as well as suggesting to her daughter how to cope with a similar situation. This seemed to have potentially been a result of the child's age, as there were other parents who inquired with their children about what they understood from the *Our Friend Martin* clip at the start of the discussion. Similar to Patricia, these parents also commented on their child's lack of knowledge as it relates to race and race-related issues or their lack of prior conversations with their child on the subject. Tiffany began the discussion with her son by asking "Wow, what just happened?", probing for what he knew or did not know. During the task, she also commented to the research staff, "He totally does not understand racism." Tiffany later made it an effort to explain to her son what had taken place in the video clip and suggested what to do if ever in a similar situation.

Given racial socialization involves the transmission of various types of messages, it has been suggested that the content in which Black parents provide their children can differ based on children's developmental stage and age (Hughes & Chen, 1997). With consideration for children's age, especially younger children, discussing a topic such as that of race may be difficult for Black parents. As a result, Patricia and Tiffany, along with other parents potentially wanted to ensure that they were entering an already difficult conversation with knowledge of what their child did and did not know in order to be prepared. This gave parents the opportunity to determine what information to provide their child with during the discussion. It also gave parents the chance to decide what information to shield from their children.

For some parent-child dyads it was evident that prior conversations in which race-related content was communicated had occurred before. Thus, in addition to probing for age appropriateness, parents appeared to test their children's knowledge based on previous conversations. For example, Melody began the discussion by asking her daughter "What do you think was going on?" and she responded, "Randy, his mother was saying that he couldn't play with the African American because they were black people." Melody's daughter responded in a manner that suggested she understood what took place in the *Our Friend Martin* video clip. Given her daughter's acknowledgement of having an understanding of the clip, Melody went on to provide what appeared to be new information to her daughter on racial injustices. In doing this, she also referenced former race-related conversations that had previously occurred, asking her daughter "What have I told you before?" Another parent, Jeffrey, even commented "Oh okay, that's good. So,



you noticed that? Hmmm, that's good. Very good, very good, very good" after his son clearly explained what took place in the video clip. During the discussion, Jeffrey's son also talked of information that was linked to cultural pride messages. As Jeffrey realized that his son understood what took place in the video, he displayed a smile and facial expression that showed a sense of pride, as well as relief that his son had recognized what occurred in the video.

As seen in both of the above examples, some parents probed for what their child was aware of as a method of discussing previously discussed race-related content. This appeared to be their way of letting their child know that what was being discussed was important and that they should not forget it. Melody, for example, commented to her daughter at one instance "Pay attention, this is very important". However, no matter the reason for parents probing behaviors, or whether conversations had previously occurred, parents simply wanted to inquire about their child's knowledge in order to provide their child with information that was appropriate for their current understanding of race.

### **Emotion Regard**

As parents discussed the racialized encounter from the video clip with their child, not only did they engage in checking for previous knowledge that their child held, many parents also displayed some form of emotional regard; that is, showing concern for their child's emotions. More specifically, parents seemed to be interested in knowing how viewing such a negative racial encounter made their child feel or how potentially experiencing such an encounter would make their child feel. This was evident as many of the parents asked questions such as "How would that make you feel?", "How did you

feel about that?”, “Is that a good feeling?”, “Do you think you’d be upset?”, or “Would that make you sad?” Similar to parents checking with their child before fully engaging in the discussion, parents showing regard for their child’s emotions was not exclusive to the content or process that parents went about while racially socializing their children and making suggestions on how to cope. Parents showed some form of emotional regard for their child no matter what other interactions and behaviors they engaged in.

Dunbar, Leerkes, Coard, Supple, and Calkins (2017) indicated that parental racial socialization and emotion socialization are linked to children’s social-emotional development, therefore it is not uncommon for parents to engage in emotion socialization while simultaneously engaging in racial socialization. For example, when asked “How does that make you feel?” or some variation of this question, children often responded “Sad”, “Bad”, or “Angry”. While many parents expressed to their children that it was normal to experience these feelings from what had been viewed in the video or what could potentially happen to them, some parents also expressed to their children that they did not have to have feelings of anger, sadness, or shame. For example, Sheila said to her son “If you didn’t do nothing wrong, then there’s no reason for you to feel bad... You can’t let people make you feel bad when you haven’t done nothing to them.” Melody had a similar response for her daughter when she expressed that she would feel bad if that happened to her. She told her daughter,

That’s the whole thing, that you don’t need to feel bad because that’s their problem. They have a problem with you. You don’t have a problem with them. You know who you are right? I want you to pay attention because this is important. You’re gonna always know who you are and that nobody’s better than you. They may be different, but they’re not better than you. So, you know, don’t

let them put their stuff off on you. Just stick to who you are and like you said people have to learn how to get along with each other, but you don't be disrespectful if it's an older person. You can say how it made you feel but you don't have to carry it on like 'oh I'm less than them'. Okay? Because you're just as smart, just as pretty, or whatever the case is. Long as you know that, you don't have to worry about what other people think.

In both instances, Sheila and Melody stressed to their children that the negative actions of others should not control the emotions that they experience. Melody went on to let her daughter know that if a similar situation did occur, it was acceptable for her to express her emotions and how it made her feel.

With parents showing a concern for their children's emotions, as well as offering solace for the negative emotions that their children expressed feeling, parents were cultivating a type of awareness in their children that seems essential for how they manage their future emotions around negative racial encounters. Experiencing racism, racial discrimination, or any sort of racial injustice can be taxing on an individual, no matter what age. As negative emotions can lead to racial stress, this not only affects Black parents and children at the individual level, but also at the group level (i.e. family processes). It also has the potential to lead to other negative outcomes related to individual's mental and physical wellbeing (Anderson & Stevenson, 2019; Trent, Dooley, & Douge, 2019). Some parents also seemed to evoke cultural pride as a way to relieve negative emotions brought on by the negative racial encounter in the video clip; as some parents described to their children, rather than being succumbed to negative emotions, be proud of being Black and who you are.

## **Reciprocity and Parent-Child Communication of Race-Related Content**

In addition to behavioral patterns being observed for how parents go about communicating race-related content, the process of how they interact with their children during racial socialization was also examined. This was examined for both, prompted and unprompted discussions that occurred during the Chit Chat segment. Unprompted discussion consisted of parents having the opportunity to freely discuss the video clip with their child, whereas prompted discussion called for parents to discuss how they would want their child to handle a similar situation. Findings indicated that when not prompted to have a specific discussion, parents communicated with their child through questioning their child (10 parents), having a bidirectional interaction with their child (7 parents) and having a bidirectional interaction with their child in which extensive information was incorporated (3 parents). When prompted to discuss with their child how to handle a similar situation as that in the video clip, parents continued to engage in the same types of interactions, however half of the parents (10 parents) continued to communicate with their child through questioning, 8 parents through having a bidirectional interaction with their child, and 2 parents through having a bidirectional interaction in which extensive information was included in the conversation (2 parents).

Parents who went about communicating race-related content by questioning their child primarily asked their child a series of questions, without making any or few statements that added race-related content to the conversation. For example, Barbara began the unprompted discussion with her daughter by stating “I’m going to ask you some questions” and asked her two questions. These two questions included “What

happened? Explain” and “Where do you think that was at? What time?” Although Barbara only asked her daughter two questions, as her daughter made an attempt to answer these questions, Barbara asked her various follow up questions. In a similar manner, yet during unprompted discussion, Lisa communicated how to cope with a similar situation by questioning her daughter. During the discussion, Lisa asked her daughter a series of questions including “How would you feel if someone told you that they couldn’t play with you because you are a Black girl?”, “What would you do about it?”, “Would you be sad?”, “What if the mother says you can’t play together because of your color?”, “Do you think you would still be their friend?”, “Would you cry if somebody hurt your feelings like that?”, and “How do you think I would feel if someone said that to you?” Lisa was even repetitive with some of the questions that she asked, asking her daughter the same question multiple times. Barbara and Lisa both primarily asked their children questions, which their children responded to. However, answering Barbara and Lisa’s questions was the only contribution that the children made to the conversation. The children did not ask any questions or make any statements outside of those in response to being asked questions. Both mothers also did not make any statements that added information to the conversation.

Although, Barbara and Lisa went about communicating race-related content and racial coping strategies by asking their children a series of questions, they did so for potential specific reasons. As previously described, parents went about probing their children for what they did and did not understand regarding race. Although the discussion was unprompted, this series of questions seemed to serve as Barbara’s approach to

learning what it was that her daughter did and did not know. As for Lisa, although she was prompted to talk with her daughter about how she would want her to handle a similar situation, doing so can be difficult for parents. Similar to Barbara, this left the possibility that Lisa wanted to inquire how her daughter would go about handling a similar situation, much like parents checked for information at the start of conversations.

Additionally, some parents delivered race-related content and racial coping strategies by communicating in a bidirectional or extensive bidirectional manner. Parents communicating in a bidirectional process assisted their child in understanding what took place in the video, and engaged in a back and forth with their child which allowed them to agree with or reject comments made by their child, as well inform them of potential new information. Extending beyond this were parents who communicated in a process that was considered bidirectional but with extensive additional information. This was similar to parents communicating in a bidirectional manner, but differed such that these parents went beyond the typical back and forth interaction to ensure their child understood the content of the discussion and provide their children with explanations. These explanations were typically parent's way of explicitly explaining racial injustices, such as discrimination and prejudice.

Rose, for example, communicated a racial coping strategy to her daughter during the prompted discussion through a bidirectional interaction. She began the conversation by asking her daughter questions such as "How would you handle that situation?" and "Would you have done anything differently?" As the discussion unfolded, Rose informed her daughter that she agreed with how she would handle a similar situation and also

explained to her daughter that everyone is equal which makes it acceptable to play with children of different races. Rose's daughter was also engaged in the back and forth nature of the conversation as she talked with her mother about the video clip and at one moment asked her mother, "What do you think?" regarding the situation. From observing the conversation, it was evident that the discussion between Rose and her daughter was a bidirectional process, as they both were engaged and contributed to the conversation; asking and answering questions, as well as making statements that added information to the discussion. Similar to Rose, Melody communicated race-related content to her daughter through a bidirectional interaction but with extension. Just like Rose, Melody asked her daughter questions and made statements that added new knowledge to the discussion. As seen in statements Melody made to her daughter, Melody also went further to explain prejudice and racism to her daughter, while ensuring that she understood what occurred in the video clip. This is something that Rose did not do. However, for both parent-child dyads, the mother and child were both involved in a back and forth exchange, however, Melody went beyond this in a way that Rose did not.

Being that parents' way of communicating race-related content was observed during the entire Chit Chat segment, it became clear that parents did not always engage in the same process of communicating across prompted and unprompted discussions. Parents' way of communicating sometimes changed. However, findings suggested there were no patterns found in how parents shifted their process of communication across unprompted and prompted discussions. This shift in communication was likely brought on by differing feelings regarding the racial socialization process based on the type of

discussion. For example, unprompted discussion required open conversations in which parents determined the topic. Considering the age of the children, it is not unusual that many parents went about communicating through questioning their child to get a knowledge of their understanding. Despite the differences in how parents interacted with their children during the racial socialization process, they did what they were comfortable with.

### **Parental Communication: Race-Related Content and Racial Coping Strategies**

In an attempt to examine how parents verbally communicate race-related content and suggest racial coping strategies when racially socializing their children, consideration was also given to the specific content that parents provided their children with. This was achieved by exploring the level of racial contextualization that parents used, if parents suggested a racial coping strategy, and if so, what type.

#### **Contextualizing Race**

Parents contextualization around race reflected the content that they delivered to their child and how parents centered the meaning of race in their conversations. These included three levels of racial contextualization: no contextualization, moderate contextualization, and extensive contextualization.

There was a small number of parents (5 parents) who did not contextualize the conversation around race. These parents did not engage in asking their child any questions or make any statements to their child that were centered around race, the understanding of race, or race-related issues. For example, Jackie did not so much as



mention race to her grandson during the discussion. She did not use the racial labels of 'Black' or 'White' as did other parents, to note the racial differences of the children playing together. Although these parents made no mention of race, they did not fail to continue to engage in other similar behaviors to parents who did contextualize the conversation around race. For example, Crystal began the conversation with her son by asking "What do you think about that? Why didn't they want them to be friends?". Even when her son responded, "Cause of the color of their skin", Crystal did not racialize the conversation. She went on to later ask her son "How would that make you feel?" and "What would you do?", but still did not make any mention of race. For these parents who did not center the conversation around race, many had children who were distracted by other elements within the classroom or playroom in which the task took place, causing parents to have an increased focus on their child's behavior. There is also the possibility that these parents were not ready to have such a discussion with their child at the moment. For example, although Tiffany centered race as a theme in the conversation with her son, she said to him "I'm glad you don't understand because it would limit you". Parents who did not contextualize the conversation around race may have had similar sentiments.

More than one-half of the parents (15 parents) did center the conversation around race. These parents engaged with their child, asking questions or making statements, that placed some aspect of race or racial injustices as the central topic. Although a majority of the parents contextualized conversations with their child around race, they did so in different ways. Some parents engaged in moderate contextualization, whereas others

engaged in extensive contextualization. Parents who moderately contextualized the conversation around race were selective in the specific content that they disclosed, in a way that parents who extensively contextualized the conversation around race were not. It was apparent that there were limits to what was discussed. For this group of parents who moderately contextualized the conversation, they discussed with their child differences in racial groups, specifically Blacks and Whites, helped their child make sense of what occurred in the video clip, as well as made suggestions for what to do if experiencing a similar encounter. However, they did not go so far as to discuss matters such as racism, discrimination, or how race affects Black people at a systemic level. Elizabeth for example, explained to her son while watching the video clip “She doesn’t want her sons to play with Black kids”. She then went on to explain this to her son again ensuring that he understood why the children from the video were unable to play with one another. She later went on to say to her son, “That’s not right, right? ...Martin Luther King must’ve felt bad right? You should always be able to play with any color kid. White and Black kids should play together.” Here it could be seen that Elizabeth wanted her son to understand differences among racial groups and how they are treated, as well as encourage him to play with children of all races, but she did not go beyond this in her discussion. Similar to Elizabeth, Portia engaged in moderate contextualization and said to her son,

I liked that when they were playing baseball, they were all friendly. They were friends towards one another. They were friends until the mother came and she said negative things towards Martin Luther King and the colored children, against the White children, her sons. It was like her son was too good to play with the

Black children, which to me taught negativity. It didn't teach her child to have unity to other children, to play with other children...Color doesn't mean anything.

Further into the conversation she discussed with her son how he should handle a similar situation. Portia explained to him,

To me, people who are like that are ignorant and they're not open minded to sharing their views with other people or exploring other options or ideas. It's like they're close minded. They're self-centered. They only think about themselves, their color, their race. They're not open to sharing ideas about other people's race, culture, or background. I wouldn't want you to be like that.

Throughout the conversation, Portia explained to her son that the children in the video could not play together due to their race or skin color. She also passed on to her son her beliefs about individuals who judge others based on their race. Portia did not go on to explain factors such as racism, but she explained what she felt was appropriate for her son. Based on these parents' moderate contextualization, they wanted to racially socialize their children by providing information that they felt was appropriate for a young child, while holding back other information. Tiffany for example, expressed to her son "I can't explain to you about racism. You'll understand later in life." She indicated why she racially socialized her son in the manner that she did; providing some information while holding back other information.

Additionally, there was a small group of parents (5 parents) who extensively contextualized the conversation around race. Parents who engaged in extensive contextualization made multiple statements or asked multiple questions about race, race-related issues, or the understanding of race during the entire conversation. For these

parents, there were no limits to the content that they offered their children. Racism is a systematic issue that impacts all aspects of the lives of Black individuals. Although some children may not understand this and some parents may be hesitant to explain this to their younger aged children, many of these parents did so in a manner that their children understood. Nick for example, immediately made the conversation about race when his first question for his daughter upon watching the video clip was, “What did that White lady say?” Although Nick’s daughter expressed that she did not understand what had occurred in the video, he used that as an opportunity to explain it to her. He said to her,

That’s the way it used to be a long time ago...You probably won’t have to worry about that, these days but you might. It’s still some people like that. That’s called prejudice; when one person doesn’t like another person because of their skin color, that’s called prejudice and that’s not good.

In this conversation, Nick, who engaged in extensive contextualization, immediately racialized the conversation and despite his daughter not having a strong understanding of the concept of race, he did not hold back on the information that he provided her with. Ebony also engaged in extensive contextualization and did not hold back on the information that she delivered to her daughter in their discussion. Upon explaining the context of the video to her daughter to ensure that she understood what had taken place, Ebony even went on to explain to her daughter the historical context of the N-word; letting her know to never let anyone call her such a word. Similar to other parents who extensively contextualized the conversation around race, Ebony held no limits regarding the content that she delivered to her daughter on the issue of race. She wanted her

daughter to be informed and prepared if found experiencing a similar situation to that in the video clip.

**Cultural Socialization: History as a Lesson.** As parents contextualized conversations around race, many parents also engaged in providing their children with distinct cultural socialization messages while doing so. More specifically, parents used the *Our Friend Martin* video clip that was viewed during the Chit Chat segment as an opportunity to discuss past elements of history while discussing race and race-related issue. Parents seemed to utilize the video clip as a historical marker that allowed them to teach their child a piece of historical information, as well as contribute content that provided knowledge on race and racial discrimination to the conversation. This appeared to assist parents with helping their child make sense of the negative racial encounter that had been viewed in the video clip, as well as assist with suggesting how to cope if found in a similar situation. For example, a portion of the conversation between Kathy and her son went as follows:

Parent: Why did she say that...Do you know why she didn't want her sons to play with the Black boys? (referencing the White mother in the video clip)

Child: Because the White boys gotta stay away from the Black boys case they got their own side.

Parent: Because they're different?

Child: Umm huh.

Parent: Do you know why they had it like that back then, a long time ago?

Child: No.

Parent: Well it was, ummm, back then, a long time ago...they had Blacks on one side and Whites on the other side. And the White people didn't want the Black people doing too much. They didn't want them to vote. They didn't want them to do anything. So that's why Martin Luther King tried to help when he got older.

In the above example, Kathy's son acknowledged that there were differences among the children, but he also indicated that he was unaware of why these differences existed. By contextualizing the conversation around race, Kathy used this as an opportunity to inform her son of information, that he did not previously know; specifically, information related to Black history.

Although parents used the video clip to engage in cultural socialization messages, specifically as it relates to Black history, it was evident that parents held different beliefs about how to centralize the historical nature of what took place in comparison to the current time period. More specifically, parents held different beliefs on how the encounter from the video clip compared to their child's potential future experiences with race and racial discrimination, as well as how they suggested their children cope with potential negative racial encounters. Some parents held the belief that the racialized encounter took place long ago, therefore their child would be less likely to experience a similar encounter as a result of advancements in racial equality. Other parents felt that although the encounter in the video took place long ago, their child could still experience a similar situation. This difference led to some differences in what messages parents conveyed to their children. For example, Amy explained to her child,

You play with White people at school don't you...That's how it's supposed to be, but when Martin was growing up, they didn't want White kids and Black kids playing together. But now, we all can be together and play together and talk

together and work together. We can do all of that now. But did you see how Randy and Miles played together? Because they were in our time. Back in Martin's time they didn't want White kids and Black kids playing together.

In this example, Amy suggested to her daughter that what occurred in the *Our Friend Martin* video clip happened long ago, and she is less likely to experience such an encounter due to living in a new era. Mary expressed similar sentiments to her son as she said to him,

His momma didn't want him to play with the Black kids because back then you would get in trouble if you or your kids was talking to Black people. Okay, it's not like it is now. It was like slavery back then. White and Black people couldn't talk. The colored people had to stay with the colored people. The White people had to stay with the White people. You can play with any color now. That's the reason why Martin Luther King died for freedom; for our freedom and for the White's freedom too.

As can be seen from the explanation that Amy and Mary provided to their children, both mothers held similar ideals on how they wanted their child to view race, along with the historical nature of the video. As each mother explained to their child what took place, they did so within the context of the time period when Martin Luther King Jr. was alive, teaching their child a piece of history. They also established a clear divide between the time period in the video clip and the time period in which they lived. Amy and Mary were somewhat optimistic that their child would not encounter similar experiences to those that they were discussing.

Contrary to the parents in the example above, other parents appeared to have less of an optimistic view that their child would not experience similar encounters. Instead, these parents discussed the historical nature of the video and used it as tool to caution

their child that this could potentially happen to them despite the difference in time period. This was also the transmission of preparation for bias messages, which according to the racial socialization literature is Black parents' method of warning their children about race and racial discrimination that can be experienced due to being Black. For example, Melody held a similar view and explained to her daughter,

What did you learn about Martin Luther King? Back in his time, there was a lot of what people? There was a lot of White people who were prejudice and what? What's another word that starts with an r?...Racist people, that means they don't like certain races, and colors; people that are different. There was a lot of that going on back in Mar??r? Back in their time they had a lot of segregation, separate. Like Black people over here, and white people over there. They had to ride separate buses, eat at separate places, drink at separate water fountains...What if that was to happen now...What'd I teach you? That all people are equal and the same. They have differences but no one is better than the others. You know? And you have to not let that harm your self-esteem, you know to have that make you feel bad if that happened to you, which it might happen to you one day, because there's still racism and prejudice in the world.

Although Melody had obviously held previous conversations on race-related content with her daughter, she still delivered cultural socialization messages as she discussed the historical nature of the video clip to help her daughter make sense of what took place. Unlike Amy and Mary, Melody also cautioned her daughter that although what happened to Martin Luther King Jr. took place long ago, it could very well happen to her because racial injustices continue to exist and affect Black individuals.

### **Racial Coping Strategies**

As parents communicated race-related content, they also provided racial coping strategies for how to handle negative racialized encounters. Although a majority of the parents suggested racial coping strategies to their children during the prompted



discussion of the Chit Chat segment, they did so in different ways. Some parents were explicit in suggesting a racial coping strategy to their child. Most of these parents framed their suggestion as “If you were in that situation, I’d want you to…” or “If you ever find yourself in a similar situation, what you have to do is…” For example, Teresa explicitly suggested a racial coping strategy to her daughter when she said, “If that happened to you, I would want you to find out why they wouldn’t want you to play with the other kid.” For Teresa, there was no doubt in how she wanted her daughter to cope with a similar situation, allowing her to give her daughter a straightforward solution on how to respond. Parents who did not explicitly suggest a racial coping strategy asked their child a question, which could potentially leave the child unsure if this is how he/she should handle a similar situation. For example, Kendra said to her son, “Would you say, ‘since she doesn’t want me to play with her son, let me leave him alone and not play with him anymore.’ Is that what you’d do?” Kendra provided her son with a racial coping strategy but never confirmed with him that it is what he should do if in a similar situation.

**Types of Racial Coping Strategies.** Whether stated explicitly or in a more subtle manner, there were also various racial coping strategies that parents suggested to their children during the racial socialization process that took place during the Chit Chat segment. These included moral reasoning, seeking adult authority, conflict avoidance, and conflict confronting.

Moral reasoning was the strategy that parents most often suggested (6 parents) to their child when racially coping with a negative racial encounter. This strategy was described as having a sense of fairness, righteousness, and social convention. It also

extended to religious doctrine and the understanding of social rules. Moral reasoning was a strategy that considered whether or not an action was right or wrong. Shannon suggested a moral reasoning strategy to her son when discussing what to do if found in a similar situation. At the start of the conversation, Shannon asked her son “Is that fair?”, indicating to her son that some sort of moral wrongdoing had occurred. She later suggested to him,

If that was me and I was there, I would tell their mommy that we’re all the same. Not because I’m Black and he’s White, doesn’t mean we can’t play together.” In Shannon’s suggestion to her son, she conveys the message to him that not allowing children to play together due to their race is wrong and that everyone is equal and should be treated as such.

As Shannon suggested to her son what to do if found experiencing a negative racial encounter, she implied that it is acceptable to play with children of other races and anyone that says otherwise is wrong. The way in which Shannon began the conversation with her son, indicated that it was a matter of fairness for her as to why she suggested to her son that it’s acceptable for White and Black children to play together. Patricia held similar sentiments as she discussed with her daughter how to cope with a similar situation. She also included a piece of religious doctrine as she told her daughter,

No matter where people come from or what they look like, we’re supposed to love everybody. Who teaches us to love everybody...God says that no matter what color you are, we’re all supposed to love each other.

In this statement to her daughter Patricia engaged in teaching religious doctrine to her daughter as it relates to race-related issues.

Seeking an adult authority figure was also a racial coping strategy that parents (3) suggested to their children on how to cope with a future negative racial encounter. This strategy meant that a child was to seek out an adult authority figure to manage a negative racial encounter, instead of managing it themselves. For example, as Melissa suggested to her son what to do if in a similar situation as that in the video clip, she said to him

I would want you to come and tell me what she said, just so I can make sure you would be safe...So you would have to come let me know so that I can make sure you'd be safe, okay? And then maybe I would be able to talk to his mother or father to see if ya'll could still be friends. That what I would want you to do.

In explaining to her son what to do in a similar situation, Melissa stressed to him that he should inform her of similar instance so that she could ensure his safety. Melissa made it clear to her son that he should not handle such encounters alone.

Similar to parents suggesting seeking an adult authority as a method for coping with a negative racial encounter, some parents also suggested conflict avoidance as a strategy. Conflict avoidance was described as avoiding the situation that could be stressful, painful, or challenging, by attempting to escape the problem. Although conflict avoidance did not involve seeking an adult authority figure, it was similar in that it required the child to remove themselves from the harmful situation. Portia, for example, suggested to her son,

If you were in a situation like that, playing basketball or baseball with someone who was a different color from you, it would be an adult coming to say something to you. I wouldn't want you to argue with an adult or parent. I wouldn't want you to stand there and argue with them. I'd just want you to walk away from a situation like that and when you would get home with me, we can discuss it. You can tell me about it, and we can talk about it.

Based on Portia's suggestion to her son, he should remove himself from the situation and it is then that he can include her as an adult figure to discuss what has occurred. For Portia, having her son remove himself from a potential similar situation was her way of letting him know that instead of engaging with negativity from such an encounter, he should just exit the situation.

Different from the other strategies that parents suggested, one parent suggested to her child to confront the conflict brought about from a potential negative racial encounter as the one in the video clip. This parent was Teresa and she said to her daughter, "If that happened to you, I would want you to find out why they wouldn't want you to play with the other kid." Although Teresa did not encourage her daughter to confront the situation in an aggressive manner, she still encouraged her to confront the potential individuals in the situation with hopes of obtaining an explanation for negative racialized behavior.

An examination of the racial coping strategies that parents suggested to their children indicated that most parents wanted their child to respond in a manner that was not only about fairness, but was also non-confrontational and age appropriate. Given the age of the children, and their potential limited understanding of a negative racial encounter, parents wanted their children to respond in a way that they were confidently able to do as young children. Unfortunately, responding in ways other than those suggested by a majority of the parents (moral reasoning, seeking adult authority, and conflict avoidance) has the potential to lead to being disciplined in school settings, school suspension, or even death. As some of the parents expressed, they wanted to ensure that their children were safe. Considering the violence against Black bodies that has

historically taken place in the United States, Black parents want to protect their children and keep them safe, as well as equip their children with how to keep themselves safe.

Sarah did not hide this from her daughter, as she explained to her why she should inform her if ever found experiencing an encounter similar to that from the *Our Friend Martin* video. Sarah explained to her daughter,

I wouldn't want you to argue back with them. I wouldn't want you to yell or scream. I wouldn't want you to do any of that. I would just want you to keep holding your tongue and then come straight home and explain to me what happened, and we could talk about it. Because sometimes when people are feeling hateful or angry, they do things that are totally out of reason like fighting or arguing or hitting people. They could even get a gun, or do dangerous things like that, so I wouldn't want you to get in any more danger than necessary. So, you come straight home if you ever hear anybody speaking like that and those dangerous ways that you're not equipped to handle... That's how I'd want you to handle it.

Similar to other parents, Sarah expressed that she felt her daughter was unable to handle such a situation. She also informed her daughter of the danger that she faces as a result of others hate. Sarah desired to keep her daughter safe, therefore like other parents, she would rather assist her daughter in responding to a negative racial encounter.

Despite many of the parents providing their child with a racial coping strategy for potential similar situations, some parents did not provide their child with a coping strategy. For these parents, they did not suggest any type of coping mechanism to their child, in a subtle manner or explicitly. Parents not providing their child with this information when instructed to do so during prompted discussion was not exclusive to parents who interacted with their children in a particular manner or communicated specific content while racially socializing their child. For example, there were several

parents who contextualized the conversation around race, providing their child with race-related content, who did not provide their child with a racial coping strategy. Coping with racism and discrimination has the potential to be difficult, possibly causing these parents to have trouble expressing to their child how to handle these negative encounters.

### **Parent Racial Communication**

There were three forms of parental racial communication including passive, reactive, and proactive. Passive communication was the first type of racial communication, with only a few parents (5 parents) being labeled as having passive communication. These parents did not contextualize the conversation around race. They also typically interacted with their child by primarily asking questions and did not provide racial coping strategies. For example, Crystal did not contextualize the conversation with her son around race, did not suggest a racial coping strategy to her son, and primarily only asked him questions. Crystal was not observed as actively racially socializing her son, indicating her passive racial communication. This was somewhat evident as her son suggested that the children in the video clip could not play together “Because of the color of their skin”. Although Crystal’s son called attention to the racialized nature of the video, she did not then contextualize the conversation around race in order to communicate race-related content. Crystal, along with other parents who had passive racial communication may have struggled with having such conversations or may have simply believed that certain messages were not yet appropriate for their child.

Parents with reactive racial communication (5 parents) did contextualize the conversation with their child around race. However, they did not engage in both, a

bidirectional interaction with their child, as well as suggest racial coping strategies to their child. Parents who engaged in reactive communication displayed only one or neither of these behaviors. Gloria for example contextualized the conversation with her son around race in an attempt to have him understand what occurred in the video clip. However, she did so by primarily asking her son questions. Gloria also did not suggest to her son how to handle a similar situation as the one from the video clip. Although Gloria communicated race-related content, she was not proactive and did not interact with her son in a bidirectional manner or inform him on what to do if experiencing a negative racial encounter.

Many of the parents (10 parents) were considered to have proactive racial communication. This meant that they contextualized conversations with their child around race, engaged in communicating through a bidirectional interaction, and suggested racial coping strategies to their children during the Chit Chat segment. For example, Jeffrey was considered as having proactive racial communication. He contextualized the conversation with his son around race; explaining what took place and what racists behaviors look like. Jeffrey also communicated with his son in a bidirectional manner and provided a clear explanation to his son on what he should do if ever in a similar situation as that in the *Our Friend Martin* video. Jeffrey was proactive in his racial communication such that he not only communicated race-related content to his son, but he also interacted with his son in a bidirectional manner by actively engaging him in the conversation and suggested how to cope if found experiencing a negative racial encounter. He was not reactive, by providing his son with race-related content but

failing to provide coping mechanisms for handling racial encounters and he was not passive, by ignoring the centralized nature of race in the discussion. Unlike parents with passive and reactive racial communication, parents with proactive racial communication had little or no difficulties with racially socializing their children. These particular parents wanted to communicate race related content, as well as provide racial coping strategies while having an open dialogue with their child.

These differences in parents' racial communication indicate that parents had different ways of communicating race-related content and providing racial coping strategies. More specifically, parents had different ways of communicating race-related content when it surrounded a potential negative racial encounter. This reinforced Johnson's (2005) proposition that parents interact and communicate with their children in various ways, even as it relates to racial socialization.

### **Cultural Ecology: Parental Stress, Child Gender, and Racial Communication**

As Black parents engage in the racial socialization process, they are going about transmitting certain messages to their children within the context of a racialized society. These messages provide a sense of pride, awareness of history and culture, caution for discrimination, and methods for coping. However, as parents provide these messages to their children, they have likely endured the very things that they are warning their children about. As a result, the individual experiences that parents encounter has the potential to influence the way in which they provide race-related content to their children. As seen in Garcia Coll's (1996) integrative model, the negative encounters that Black parents experience due to social and societal factors has the potential to influence family



processes, leading them to go through an adaptive process in which they adapt to the environment around them. This adaptive process leads parents to racially socialize their children and also has an influence on children's developmental competencies.

Similar to what the integrative model describes, parental race-related stress is one factor that can influence how parents engage in the racial socialization process. Although not a negative experience such as race-related stress, gender ideals and beliefs also have the potential to influence the racial socialization process. As a result, additional examinations were completed to observe if parental race-related stress and child gender influenced the way in which parents verbally communicated race-related content, as well as suggested racial coping strategies when racially socializing their children.

### **Parental Race-Related Stress**

With scores that could range from 0 to 24, Table 6 indicates that the mean for individual racism was  $M=12.05$  ( $SD=6.46$ ). In order to complete further analyses, a median split was conducted to characterize parents as experiencing high individual racism or low individual racism. From the median split, 11 parents were characterized as experiencing low individual racism, whereas 9 parents were characterized as experiencing high individual racism. Parents experiencing high individual racism, endured more experiences that they found to be stressful such as being treated differently than Whites when shopping, being treated as if they don't belong because of being Black, or being treated as if they weren't as smart or intelligent as Whites. Parents who were considered to be low on their individual racism had fewer of these experiences or found them to be less stressful.

## **Parental Race-Related Stress and Racial Communication**

Parents' race-related stress influenced how they engaged in the racial socialization process ( $\chi^2(2, N=20) = 6.67, p = .03$ ). Parents who had experienced high individual race-related stress had different racial communication from that of parents who had experienced low race-related stress. More specifically, parents who experienced high race-related stress were typically observed as engaged in proactive racial communication. These parents these parents were more likely to engage in contextualizing the conversation around race, engage in a bidirectional interaction during communication, and offer suggestions for what to do if presented with a similar situation as that in the video. For example, Sarah was labeled as having high individual race-related stress, along with proactive racial communication. During the Chit Chat segment, Sarah went about extensively contextualizing the conversation around race by explaining race and race-related issues to her daughter. Sarah also provided her daughter with a racial coping strategy, suggesting to her "I would just want you to hold your tongue and then come straight home". Not only did Sarah provide her daughter with a racial coping strategy, she also provided her daughter with a very detailed description of why she should implement this strategy, citing concern for her safety and wellbeing. Similar to Sarah, other parents who had experienced high race-related stress also were likely to have a proactive racial communication. Given the influence that race-related stress may have on individuals, parents experiencing high levels may have felt compelled to inform and prepare their children for what could potentially occur.

### **Child Gender and Racial Communication**

Parents communication of race-related content and racial coping did not vary based on gender ( $\chi^2(2, N=20) = .80, p = .67$ ). However, further analysis did suggest that that parents more often showed emotional regard with their daughters than with their sons. That is, parents were more likely to ask their daughters about how the negative encounter from the video clip made them feel than they were their sons.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

In the current study, the way in which parents communicate race-related content and suggest racial coping strategies when racially socializing their children was examined. In addition to this, the current study also examined the influence of parents' race-related stress and child gender on how they engaged in the racial socialization process. The purpose of this was to provide greater insight into what takes place during the racial socialization process for parents and younger children. Moreover, this study provided insight into both the process and content of the racial socialization process. Furthermore, using observations of parent-child dyads allowed for racial socialization conversations to be captured in a naturalistic setting. This is especially critical given the small racial socialization literature on younger aged children.

The findings from this study are consistent with what is known about racial socialization; it is a dynamic process that consists of various types of messages and ways of communicating race-related information (Hughes et al., 2006; Umaña-Taylor & Hill, 2020). Parents in the study communicated different race-related content during the racial socialization process and interacted with their children in various ways. Although some parents may have communicated content that was similar or suggested the same racial coping strategy, no parents were the same in how they engaged with the racial socialization process with their child. Careful consideration of this was an indication of the different beliefs that parents may hold about what race-related content to deliver to

their child, as well as how the racialized encounter in the video that was viewed would relate to their child's future experiences. This is important to recognize, as it is often times assumed that due to similar experiences, Black people are a monolithic group of people. However, just as Garcia Coll's (1996) integrative model illustrates the adapted family processes that take place as a result of social and societal factors, findings from this study have shown that even among Black parents, there are differences in how Black parents communicate race-related content to children.

Some of the differences in how parents engaged in racial socialization were a result of the race-related stress that parents experienced as an individual. Children receive racial socialization messages from their parents, who may experience individual race-related stress in their everyday experiences. Given parents experience their own stress from race-related issues and worry of their children experiencing similar encounters, they engage in racial socialization in a certain manner. As findings from this study indicated, higher race-related stress leads parents to be more proactive in their racial communication. This can be understood as Black parents' method of not only warning their children of the potential negative encounters, but also preparing them for how to handle such encounters.

Although there were differences in parents' racial communication, parents used the historical context of the video which seemed to provide them with an ease to having these discussions. The historical undertones of the video made it easier for parents to discuss with their child what had occurred and why. In observing the discussion among each parent-child dyad in which the conversation is racialized, it was evident that the

children were aware of who Martin Luth King Jr. was. Being that conversations centering race can be difficult for parents to have, especially with younger children, using the context of the video as a tool when children were already familiar with who Martin Luther King Jr. is, seemed to make having the discussion easier and more comfortable for parents. Although the parents were given free range during part of the discussion and later asked to discuss racial coping, the inclusion of experiences of Martin Luther King Jr. was a way for parents to center the conversation around race to some degree and provide cultural socialization messages, which has been found to be messages that parents utilize more often when racially socializing their younger children (Umaña-Taylor & Hill, 2020).

Despite parents having different beliefs about how to communicate race-related content and suggest racial coping strategies, findings also indicated that many parents did hold some type of concern for their child's age and how they would process messages centering race. This can be understood in terms of the perception that young children may not yet understand race or race-related issues, leaving parents to question if and how to have these discussions. However, even when parents were concerned with their child's age and was observed checking in with their child on what they did and did not understand, parents still provided race-related content and racial coping strategies. Given the racialized nature of society and its potential negative influence on Black children, Black parents often feel it is necessary to communicate racialized messages and ways of coping to their children. This suggests that although parents want to preserve their child's childhood, they also want to equip them with the necessary tools to navigate society. This

may also explain why most parents were not passive but reactive or proactive in their racial communication.

There was a small group of parents who did not contextualize the conversation around race, failing to provide any race-related content. This can be understood within the context of various factors including neighborhood, school, socioeconomic status and even the difficulty of racial socialization. Many of the children in the study (70%) attended a predominantly Black school and most of their families resided in predominantly Black or mixed neighborhoods. Considering this type of environment, some parents may have believed it to be unnecessary to provide race-related content and racial coping strategies to children of this age, when they are mostly surrounded by individuals of the same race. Perhaps parents felt these are conversations to be had when children are older and experiencing more of the world by themselves.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

Although this study contributed to the growing study of racial socialization in Black families, there are some limitations that can be identified. One limitation to this study is that the population was drawn from a large city in a northeastern state. This makes the findings less generalizable to populations in other locations.

Another limitation to the current study is that the time in which data collection occurred does not reflect the current political and racial climate of the United States. Since data collection, which took place in 2003, the United States has experienced several transitions. One of the most notable was the election of the first person of color as President of the United States. During this time, many believed that we had entered a post

racial society. However, the end of that decade proved this to be wrong, as the reality sat in that there was continued racial tensions (Rivas-Drake & Umaña-Taylor, 2019). In addition, the United States has experienced the Black Lives Matter Movement, along with the increased publicizing of Black and brown people being brutally murdered at the hands of police. With the increased usage of social media and the commonality of owning cellular devices, exposure to these events is now inevitable, likely leading Black families to experience a different form of race-related stress that they may not have experienced during that time period. The current racial climate may also lead Black parents to be more or less inclined to have conversations around race with their children and discuss how to cope with these negative encounters.

It is important for future studies to consider the above factors when examining Black parents' race-related communication and factors that have the potential to affect these behaviors. Future studies should also continue to examine racial socialization using observational measures. Although self-report measures are useful and add knowledge to the literature, there is value in observing what parents actually do during such critical conversations. More attention should also be paid to how Black parents racially socialize their younger aged children. Gaining a better understanding of this would potentially aid in interventions that assist parents of younger children, as they struggle having these conversations as well. Furthermore, in addition to gaining a better understanding of the racial socialization process itself, future studies should also take into consideration parents' thinking during the racial socialization process. For example, understanding factors such as why they engage in racial socialization, why they engage in certain



communication or behaviors, why they provide certain racial copings strategies, and what they find difficult about racial socialization. Future studies should also continue to consider the influence of these conversations on children, how they cope, and navigate a racialized society.

### **Implications and Conclusions**

The goal of the current study was to examine what parents were actually doing while racially socializing their young children during an observational task, as well as examine the effects of gender and race-related stress on these behaviors. Study findings indicated that Black parents verbally communicate race-related content in various ways when racially socializing their young children. There is no one size fits all when it comes to the racial socialization process. Although some communication and behaviors may be considered more ideal, absence of these should not be held against Black parents negatively. Parents know their children and may feel as if they are not developmentally ready to have conversations about race. As this study showed, parents may also want to preserve their children's innocence while they are young. Not matter if parents decide to communicate race-related content and provide racial copings strategies or not, it does not take away from the reality that these conversations are difficult to have. Although many parents may strive to be proactive and center these conversations around race, they may continue to struggle with teaching their young children racial coping skills. Study findings also indicated that Black parents' individual race-related stress influences how they have race-related conversations with their young children. This suggests that not

only do they need interventions for how to racially socialize their children, but they also need support in managing their own race-related stress.

Black parents who have children of various ages partake in racially socializing their children. No matter what age, these conversations lead parents to communicate race-related content and racial coping strategies in various ways that will hopefully equip their children with the proper tools for living in a racialized society. Based on the findings from this study, it is evident that interventions and supports are needed to assist Black parents in having already difficult conversations. These tools will help Black children and families to thrive in a society that often does not view them as valuable.

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APPENDIX A

DATA TABLES, CODING DEFINITIONS, AND EXAMPLES

**Table 1**

**Demographic Information of Sample (N=20)**

Parent Characteristics	M (SD) or %
Caregiver's Relationship to Child	
Biological Mother/Father	95%
Biological Grandmother/Grandfather	5%
Other	
Caregiver's Age	
23-58 years old	34.1 (7.94)
Caregiver's Gender	
Male	10%
Female	90%
Caregiver's Marital Status	
Married to/Living with Child's Natural or Adoptive Father	15%
Single	70%
Separated	15%
Caregiver's Education Status	
High School Graduate	30%
Some College	45%
College Graduate	20%
Graduate/Professional Training	5%
Household's Gross Income	
\$5,000-9,999	10%
\$10,000-14,999	15%
\$15,000-24,999	20%
\$25,000-39,999	20%
\$40,000-59,999	20%
Over \$60,000	15%

Child Characteristics	
Child's Age	
4 years, 11 months – 6 years, 9 months	6 years, 1 month (7 months)
Child's Gender	
Male	50%
Female	50%
Child's School	
Regular Public School	15%
Charter School	80%
Not in School	5%
School, Neighborhood, and Community Characteristics	
Racial Makeup of School Setting	
Predominantly Black	70%
Mixed	30%
Predominantly White	0%
Racial Makeup of Neighborhood	
Predominantly Black	45%
Mixed	50%
Predominantly White	5%
Racial Makeup of Community	
Predominantly Black	40%
Mixed	45%
Predominantly White	15%



**Table 2**

**Extent of Parent Contextualizing Conversation Around Race**

Extent of Contextualization	Description
Not at all	Parent does not make statements or ask questions about race, the understanding of race, race-related issues, etc.
Moderate	Parent makes some statements or asks some questions about race, the understanding of race-related issues, etc., but the entire conversation is not centered around race
Extensive	Parent makes multiple statements or asks multiple questions about race, the understanding of race, race-related issues, etc., centering the entire conversation around race

**Table 3**

**Racial Coping Strategies Suggested by Parents**

Racial Coping Strategy	Definition	Example
Adult authority	Reliance on an adult authority	“I would want you to come and tell me what she said, just so I can make sure you would be safe. And then maybe I would be able to talk to his mother or father to see if ya’ll could still be friends. That’s what I would want you to do. And I wouldn’t want you to feel bad.”
Moral reasoning	Fairness, righteousness and social convention; extends to religious doctrine or the understanding of social rules	“I would tell his mommy that we’re all the same. Just because he’s white and I’m Black doesn’t mean we can’t all play together.”
Conflict avoidance	Avoiding the stressful, painful, or challenging situation by attempting to get away from the problem	“You should say ‘since she doesn’t want me to play with her son, let me leave him alone and not play with him anymore’ because I don’t want you to get hurt”
Conflict confronting	Confronting the situation	“If that happened to you, I would want you to find out why they wouldn’t want you to play with the other kid.”
No racial coping strategy	No strategy provided	

**Table 4**

**Parent-Child Dyadic Interactions**

Method of Interaction	Description
Questioning	Refers to the parent predominantly asking the child questions.
Unidirectional Instruction	Refers to the parent predominantly making statements or commands without engaging in any type of bidirectional process. The child does little talking with this method.
Bidirectional	Refers to the parent assigning roles to oneself or the child to assist the child in understanding, agreeing or rejecting comments made by the child. Both the parent and the children are engaged in the conversation with this method.
Bidirectional with extension	Similar to the bidirectional engagement, however, parents go beyond to provide explanations, as well as ensure the child understands the information being discussed.

**Table 5**

**Parental Racial Communication**

Racial Communication	Description
Passive	Parent may communicate in a bidirectional process, as well as suggest a racial coping strategy to child, but does not contextualize the conversation around race.
Reactive	Parent contextualizes the conversation around race and either communicates in a bidirectional process or suggest a racial coping strategy. Parent can also contextualize conversation around race and not engage in either of the other two behaviors.
Proactive	Parent contextualizes the conversation around race, communicates in a bidirectional process, as well as suggests a racial coping strategy to child.

**Table 6**

**IRRS-B Subscale Intercorrelations, Means, and Standard Deviations**

<b>IRRS-B Subscales</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
1. Cultural Racism	-	.623**	.710**	.906**	29.45	5.05
2. Institutional Racism		-	.484*	.818**	10.40	4.57
3. Individual Racism			-	.852**	12.05	6.46
4. Global Racism				-	.00	2.58

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$