



Links between patterns of racial socialization and discrimination experiences and psychological adjustment: A cluster analysis



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A B S T R A C T

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This study used a person-oriented analytic approach to identify meaningful patterns of barriers-focused racial socialization and perceived racial discrimination experiences in a sample of 295 late adolescents. Using cluster analysis, three distinct groups were identified: Low Barrier Socialization-Low Discrimination, High Barrier Socialization-Low Discrimination, and High Barrier Socialization-High Discrimination clusters. These groups were substantively unique in terms of the frequency of racial socialization messages about bias preparation and out-group mistrust its members received and their actual perceived discrimination experiences. Further, individuals in the High Barrier Socialization-High Discrimination cluster reported significantly higher depressive symptoms than those in the Low Barrier Socialization-Low Discrimination and High Barrier Socialization-Low Discrimination clusters. However, no differences in adjustment were observed between the Low Barrier Socialization-Low Discrimination and High Barrier Socialization-Low Discrimination clusters. Overall, the findings highlight important individual differences in how young people of color experience their race and how these differences have significant implications on psychological adjustment.

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Research has consistently linked perceived racial discrimination to deleterious physiological and psychological outcomes (Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009). As a result, there has been increased scholarly interest in factors that may precipitate or mitigate this relationship. Racial socialization has been proposed as one important factor that may shape the experiences and outcomes associated with discrimination (Hughes et al., 2006). Racial socialization refers to the process of communicating messages about race with the aim of bolstering a sense of racial pride and connectedness, as well as preparing for possible discriminatory encounters (Hughes & Chen, 1997). It is likely that racial socialization shapes the way individuals react to discrimination experiences and this may in turn influence psychological outcomes. Yet, few studies have directly and empirically examined the ways in which socialization practices intended to raise awareness about racial prejudice and discrimination may have implications for the negative effects of racial discrimination.

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In the present study we employ a person-centered analytical approach to simultaneously examine perceived discrimination and racial socialization experiences. In doing so, we have two primary goals: 1) to identify different ways in which socialization practices and racial discrimination are configured within individuals, and 2) to investigate how the configurations are related to depressive symptoms, anxiety, somatization, and satisfaction with life.

Racial socialization

There is agreement that most racial minority parents engage in racial socialization of their children (Hughes, 2003; Hughes & Chen, 1997; Hughes & Johnson, 2001; Phinney & Chavira, 1995). Given this, scholars have attempted to unpack and enumerate the specific types of the messages that are transmitted. Most notable in the racial socialization literature, Hughes and Chen (1997) presented a typology representing the prevalent socialization messages parents transmit to their children. The three emergent messages comprised cultural socialization, preparation for bias, and promotion of mistrust. Cultural socialization messages are centered on teaching children about their cultural history and heritage. Preparation for bias messages are intended to prepare for future experiences with discrimination and prejudice. Promotion of mistrust messages encourages out-group mistrust and wariness of interracial interactions.

Much of the available research on racial socialization has focused primarily on messages intended to bolster a sense of cultural attachment (e.g., cultural socialization) and much less is known about messages that are intended to inform on what to expect from out-group members (e.g., preparation of bias or promotion of mistrust). The majority of the studies that have examined cultural socialization or messages about cultural knowledge and heritage provide evidence of its association with higher psychological functioning and well-being (Coard & Sellers, 2005; Constantine & Blackmon, 2002; Hughes & Chen, 1997; Neblett, Philip, Cogburn, & Sellers, 2006; Stevenson, Reed, Bodison, & Bishop, 1997). In contrast, the limited work that has examined racial socialization regarding discrimination and out-group members has produced conflicting patterns of results. Constantine and Blackmon (2002) examined the relationship between racial socialization experiences and self-esteem among Black adolescents. They found that messages that emphasize cultural pride and knowledge as well as messages that alert youth to discrimination were associated with higher self-esteem. The authors suggest that alerting youth to discrimination may not only foster the development of healthy self-perception, it may also equip them with tools to face race-based hostility. Similarly, messages meant to prepare for potential discrimination and prejudices seems to attenuate youth of color's vulnerability to stereotype threat (Hughes et al., 2006).

There is another body of work that paints a different picture. For example, Hughes, Witherspoon, Rivas-Drake, and West-Bey (2009) found that preparation for bias is associated with lower self-esteem and ethnic affirmation, antisocial behavior, and more negative academic outcomes. Another study that examined the race-related experiences of adolescents with immigrant parents found that youth who expected discrimination also reported higher depressive symptoms, lower self-esteem and greater conflicts with parents than those who did not have such expectations (Rumbaut, 1994). Evidence suggests that the mistrust of racial out-groups might also be associated with negative outcomes. Taylor, Biafora Jr., and Warheit (1994) found that racial mistrust of White Americans and White institutions was correlated with the disposition to deviance among Black adolescents. Although the two studies examine racial attitudes and not racial socialization, conceptually, they highlight that the barriers-focused properties of preparation for bias and promotion of mistrust messages may lead its recipients to expect discrimination and inadvertently put them at risk for less favorable psychosocial outcomes. In addition, research suggests the racial attitudes and worldviews often emerge out of socialization experiences (Worthington, Navarro, Loewy, & Hart, 2008).

Certainly, the apparent contradiction between the two sets of findings might be a product of the differences in study design, assessment tools, and demographic compositions. Nevertheless, these findings indicate that racial socialization about racial barriers and out-group members is a complex and precarious process. In line with this suggestion, Fischer and Shaw (1999) found racism-related socialization to be a moderator between discrimination and psychological functioning among African American young adults. In particular, they found a negative relationship between perceived racist events and overall mental health among young adults who reported low levels of preparation for bias socialization, whereas they found a nonsignificant relationship at high levels of preparation for bias socialization. These findings, in tandem with the divergent results from the other studies discussed, highlight that there may be nonlinear associations between racial socialization, racial discrimination, and psychological outcomes. It seems that racial socialization messages focused on race-related barriers and mistrust may indeed be protective and assuage negative self-concept by offering racial minorities a narrative to externally attribute race based hostility (as suggested by Taylor et al., 1994). Yet, an overemphasis on potential discrimination events and racial barriers may also leave recipients quite vulnerable and have unintended negative consequences (as suggested by Hughes & Johnson, 2001).

In sum, there is a clear need to further understand the multifaceted nature of racial socialization, particularly those centered on bias preparation and out-group mistrust given their direct conceptual association to racial discrimination and their potential role in buffering or precipitating effect of discrimination on psychological adjustment. Accordingly, this present study heeds the call by Coard and Sellers (2005) for changes in analytical strategies to better capture the synergistic nature of the impact of racial socialization on outcomes and their recommendation to employ more person-center approaches, such as cluster analysis. Indeed, person-centered approaches, such as cluster analysis, are apt for assessing holistic and interactional nature of human experiences by identifying a finite set of configurations of multiple variables of interest within individuals (Bauer & Shanahan, 2007). In contrast, variable-centered analyses or traditional linear models focus on

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