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A review of the empirical assessment of processes in ethnic–racial socialization: Examining methodological advances and future areas of development

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A B S T R A C T

A rapid increase in the empirical literature on ethnic–racial socialization has led to the development of numerous assessments that capture various aspects of the ethnic–racial socialization process. To examine the methodological advances, this paper uses the Process Model of Ethnic-Racial Socialization (PMERS) to systematically review the assessment of ethnic–racial socialization among ethnic minority families in order to review how existing measures assess differential processes of ethnic–racial socialization. Using PsycINFO, ERIC, IngentaConnect, and JSTOR databases, 41 measures were identified that report information on the ethnic–racial socialization process. Findings suggest that existing measures largely consist of explicit assessments of parental and/or youth beliefs and verbal behaviors as measures of the ethnic–racial socialization process. Few measures have captured the behavioral and affective domains of the ethnic–racial socialization process and the implicit and subtle transmission of messages regarding race and ethnicity. Further, methodological approaches in the assessment of ethnic–racial socialization have largely used self-report surveys, suggesting the need for integration of other methods. Areas for future development are discussed using the PMERS framework.

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Introduction

The past two decades have seen an increase in examinations of the salience of unique socialization processes for ethnic minority youth, spawning a rapid expansion in empirical literature on ethnic and racial socialization (Hughes, 2003; Hughes & Chen, 1997; Hughes & Johnson, 2001; Knight, Bernal, Cota, Garza, & Ocampo, 1993; Phinney & Chavira, 1995; Stevenson, Reed, Bodison, & Bishop, 1997; Thornton, Chatters, Taylor, & Allen, 1990). Foundational to this growth is the development of empirical measures of ethnic and racial socialization processes across different ethnic minority groups (e.g., Caughy, O'Campo, Randolph, & Nickerson, 2002; Hughes & Chen, 1997; Hughes & Johnson, 2001; Thornton et al., 1990; Umaña-Taylor & Fine, 2004). Within the literature on racial socialization, numerous new measures capture the socialization process by which ethnic minority parents prepare their children to understand and cope with race and existing racial barriers and instill racial pride (e.g., Hughes & Chen, 1997; Hughes & Johnson, 2001; Stevenson, Cameron, Herrero-Taylor, & Davis, 2002; Thornton et al., 1990). Parallel to this is an increase in the number of empirical measures of ethnic socialization that assess the socialization of cultural retention, ethnic identity achievement, and affiliation toward one's ethnic group in the face of mainstream pressures to assimilate (e.g., Knight et al., 1993; Umaña-Taylor & Fine, 2004).

Although this diversity of empirical measures has led to an expansion of the literature, particularly in the development of constructs, there has been little movement in the methodological approaches used to assess ethnic–racial socialization. To date, most empirical measures have used self-report surveys as the primary method for assessing ethnic–racial socialization, with a few studies using other approaches (Hughes et al., 2006; Lesane-Brown, 2006). Moreover, existing measures tend to aim at capturing the content of transmitted messages instead of assessing the specific mechanisms of socialization through which these messages are delivered from parent to child (Lesane-Brown, 2006). In response to this, we will review the methodological advances made by existing empirical measures of ethnic–racial socialization and then identify future directions in measurement that can enhance both theoretical and empirical approaches to examining ethnic–racial socialization processes among ethnic minority families.

Foundational conceptualizations in the empirical assessment of ethnic–racial socialization

As the literature on ethnic–racial socialization has expanded, leading scholars have highlighted the need for central conceptual frameworks that synthesize existing literature and guide future empirical research (Hughes et al., 2006). Recently, scholars have made theoretical advances in the conceptualization of ethnic–racial socialization message content as well as the process or mode of transmission. We examine the implications of two theoretical papers that have served as the foundation for our systematic review of the empirical assessment of the ethnic–racial socialization process.

Content of messages

Much of the empirical literature has examined the key contents of ethnic–racial socialization messages (Hughes & Chen, 1997; Hughes & Johnson, 2001; Stevenson, 1994; Stevenson et al., 2002). These studies have resulted in a range of empirically derived racial and ethnic socialization constructs that generally describe the transmission of cultural messages – such as cultural socialization (Hughes & Chen, 1997); cultural pride reinforcement (Stevenson et al., 2002); cultural embeddedness, African American history, heritage, and cultural values (Brown & Krishnakumar, 2007); familial ethnic socialization (Umaña-Taylor & Fine, 2004); or enculturation of familial and cultural values (Choi, Kim, Pekelnicky, & Kim, 2013) – or messages about racial issues – such as racism awareness training, cultural alertness to discrimination, and cultural endorsement of mainstream (Stevenson, 1994, 1995; Stevenson et al., 2002); preparation for bias and promotion of mistrust (Hughes & Chen, 1997); and coping with racism and discrimination, promoting cross-racial relationships, and racial barrier awareness (Brown & Krishnakumar, 2007). In an attempt to integrate the diversity in the various conceptualizations of ethnic and racial socialization message content developed, in a recent review Hughes et al. (2006) synthesized the literature using a central framework consisting of four empirically defined content domains (cultural socialization, preparation for bias, promotion of mistrust, and