



## Review

## Understanding the complexities of ethnic-racial socialization processes for both minority and majority groups: A 30-year systematic review



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## ABSTRACT

In order to promote positive intercultural relations, reduce racism and promote harmony in diverse societies, we must better understand the processes by which both minority and majority children and young people learn about and negotiate racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity, processes known as ethnic-racial socialization. A critical gap within the field of ethnic-racial socialization is a systematic literature review that includes a diverse range of population groups. The primary goal of this paper is to systematically review research over the past 30 years that has examined ethnic-racial socialization processes for both minority and majority children and young people. Studies ( $n=92$ ) that included implicit or explicit ethnic-racial socialization as a primary outcome variable along with examination of racism/discrimination, intergroup contact and/or cross-cultural interactions were reviewed. Our main findings highlight that the majority of studies continue to focus on the ethnic-racial socialization of African American children by parents. However, emerging studies involving different ethnic-racial and cultural groups demonstrate the need to consider how multiple social and environmental factors and multiple influential agents differentially impact on the types of messages used with children and young people. Implications for future research, in relation to the adoption of multi-level frameworks and understanding the contribution of multiple agents across a range of contexts, are discussed.

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## 1. Introduction

Comprehending how people are socialized into understanding race and ethnicity is a challenging issue for scholars – one that is further complicated by the increasingly diverse cultural contexts in which we live. Throughout the world, factors such as globalization, natural disasters, political conflict, increasing urbanization and poverty have all resulted in expanding migration both within and between countries, permanently changing the social and cultural landscape. In recent years, the populations of many high-income countries have become increasingly ethnically, racially and culturally diverse through arrival of both humanitarian and refugee entrants as well as skilled migrants (United Nations, 2002). These population movements, combined with existing histories of marginalization and exclusion of minority groups such as indigenous populations and those from African and Caribbean backgrounds within many of these host countries, have resulted in complex intercultural contexts and challenges related to multiculturalism and social cohesion (Hage & Bennett, 2008).

In this global context, children and young people must acquire skills and capacities to negotiate multicultural contexts within their everyday lives (Hughes et al., 2006; Levy & Killen, 2008). In order to create and promote harmonious societies, children and young people need the skills and attitudes to think positively about racial, ethnic and cultural diversity. As attitudes and behaviours towards people who are different to oneself are learnt in childhood (Katz, 2003; Kelly et al., 2007; Ramsey, 2008), we must better understand the processes by which children and young people learn about and negotiate racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity (including issues of racism and prejudice) so that positive skills and attitudes might be promoted and negative ones can be countered. Parents, families, educators, and communities must also be able to successfully navigate these increasing levels of cultural diversity in order to foster supportive and nurturing environments for children and young people from both majority and minority racial and ethnic groups. This includes knowledge of effective ways to promote positive attitudes, counter negative attitudes and/or enable effective responses to racism when it occurs (Author et al., 2009; Neblett et al., 2008). Children and young people are particularly vulnerable to racism's harmful effects (Refugee Health Research Centre, 2007; Zubrick et al., 2005), with racism negatively impacting health and wellbeing, educational and social outcomes both in childhood and throughout life (Author et al., 2012; Pachter & Garcia Coll, 2009; Sanders-Phillips, Settles-Reaves, Walker, & Brownlow, 2009; Sanders-Phillips, 2009).

The processes by which children discuss and learn about racism and diversity are the focus of this review. These processes, known as ethnic-racial socialization, involve both verbal and non-verbal messages about the meaning and significance of race and ethnicity; racial and ethnic group membership and identity; racial and ethnic stratification; and intergroup and intragroup interactions (Hughes et al., 2006; Lesane-Brown, 2006; Neblett et al., 2008). Previously the terms 'racial socialization' and 'ethnic socialization' have been used to describe similar processes in different groups. Given the increasingly interchangeable use of race and ethnicity as concepts (Brubaker, 2009), the term ethnic-racial socialization (Hughes et al., 2006) will be used in this review.

Research on ethnic-racial socialization emerged over twenty five years ago (Aboud, 1989; Bowman & Howard, 1985; Norheim & Asada, 2009; Peters, 1985), and has concentrated on four main themes: cultural socialization, preparation for bias, promotion of mistrust, and egalitarianism (see Boykin & Toms, 1985; Hughes et al., 2006 for the development of these constructs). Generally, cultural socialization refers mainly to promoting cultural pride, teaching cultural knowledge and practicing cultural traditions. Preparation for bias has been used predominantly with children from minority ethnic-racial groups and alerts children to the possibility that they may experience racism or other forms of prejudice because of their racial, ethnic or cultural background and focuses on developing appropriate coping strategies. Promotion of mistrust refers to practices that teach children to be cautious of people from different racial, ethnic or cultural backgrounds based on

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