

Racial Socialization Messages Influence Later Self-Esteem in African American Youth

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Abstract

The current study examined parent and student reports of racial socialization in Grade 5 along with student reports of self-esteem in Grades 5 and 7. The Racial Socialization Scale (adapted from Hughes & Chen, 1997) assessed two types of racial socialization messages: cultural socialization and preparation for bias. Based on the literature the authors expected cultural socialization messages to increase self-esteem and preparation for bias messages to either increase self-esteem. However the relationship of preparation for bias messages and later self-esteem is unknown, this may increase or decrease self-esteem. Regression analysis revealed that students' reports of racial socialization in Grade 5 significantly predicted their self-esteem in Grade 7. Cultural socialization messages were positively related, and preparation for bias was negatively related to later self-esteem.

Introduction

• Research indicates that African American children face several challenges, including countering institutionalized racism, negative race-based stereotypes, and discrimination, among others. In this context, scholars have turned their attention to identifying protective factors that promote resilience. Racial socialization has been argued to ease the difficulty of adolescence for African Americans by instilling pride and imparting race-related coping strategies. Racial discrimination negatively influences self-esteem, but optimal racial socialization reduces these negative effects (Harris-Britt, Valrie, Kurtz-Costes, & Rowley, 2008). The current study examines changes in self-esteem due to received parental racial socialization messages from fifth to seventh grade.

Hypotheses

- The authors expect a positive relationship with received cultural socialization messages at Time 1 and self-esteem at Time 2.
- The relationship between preparation for bias messages and self-esteem is uncertain:
 - Preparation for bias messages may lead to an increase in self-esteem across time due to advanced preparation and the transmission of coping mechanisms.
 - Or it might be that preparation for bias may have a negative relationship with self-esteem across time by making a child more perceptive and potentially more sensitive to perceiving situations as discriminatory
 - Lastly, the relationship between preparation for bias messages and self-esteem may be dependent on the amount received. Too much or too little preparation for bias may lead to a decrease in self-esteem, however a moderate amount may lead to an increase in self-esteem.

Method

Participants

• The total number of participants involved in both waves of the study totaled 314 (182 females, 132 males) and had a mean age of 13.0 years. The participants of this study came from 14 urban middle schools (with a mean of 69% African American students) in the Southeastern region of the United States.

Measures

Racial Socialization

Two subscales of the Race Socialization Scale (Hughes & Chen, 1997) were used to measure the extent to which parents engaged in certain behaviors that prepared their children for racial bias (Preparation for Bias, 9 items; e.g., "Said that people might treat you badly due to race") and encouraged pride in one's racial group (Racial Pride, 6 items; e.g., "Done things to celebrate Black history."). Youth and parents rated on a 5-point Likert scale the frequency with which they received or transmitted each message. The subscales at T1 and T2 alpha levels were greater than 0.80.

Self-Esteem

The 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory (RSE; Rosenberg, 1965) is a self-report measure used in the current study to assess participants' global self-esteem. The items were answered on a 4-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*) (e.g., "I feel that I have a number of good qualities"). This measure was internally consistent for the current sample (T1 $\alpha=.70$; T2 $\alpha=.77$).

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables

Variable	M (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Time 1											
1. Self-Esteem	3.38 (.46)	----									
2. Child: Cultural Socialization	2.93 (1.04)	0.25**	---								
3. Child: Preparation for Bias	2.72 (.93)	0.13	.69**	---							
4. Parent: Cultural Socialization	3.33 (1.04)	0.04	.31**	.18**	---						
5. Parent: Preparation for Bias	2.84 (1.03)	0.49	.28**	.23**	.67**	---					
Time 2											
6. Self-Esteem	3.36 (.45)	0.39**	.16**	0.01	0.05	0.11	---				
7. Child: Cultural Socialization	2.96 (.98)	0.03	.31**	.23**	.21**	.16**	.17**	---			
8. Child: Preparation for Bias	2.83 (.92)	0.03	.21**	.18**	.15*	.18**	0.09	.75**	---		
9. Parent: Cultural Socialization	2.95 (.99)	-0.06	.16**	0.08	.57**	.39**	.06**	.21**	0.11	---	
10. Parent: Preparation for Bias	2.69 (.96)	-0.46	0.09	.14*	.42**	.14*	0.04	.20**	.19**	.73**	---

Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Self-Esteem across Time

Variable	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	(SE B)	β	B	(SE B)	β
Constant	2.02	0.21	---	1.83	0.24	---
Self-Esteem at T1	0.27	0.06	0.38**	0.39	0.06	0.41
Parent Income	0.01	0.01	0.07	-0.01	0.01	-0.01
Parent Education	0.02	0.02	0.07	0.02	0.02	0.1
Cultural Socialization	0.08	0.04	0.18**	-0.02	0.04	-0.03
Preparation for Bias	-0.11	0.04	0.21**	0.05	0.04	0.1
Model R^2 (adjusted)	.202 ($p<.000$)			.199 ($p<.000$)		
Model F	11.75			9.49		

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

- Parents reported more cultural socialization than preparation for bias $F(1, 269) = 23.37, p < .01$.
- Students' reports of racial socialization in Grade 5 significantly predicted their self-esteem in Grade 7, $F(5, 232) = 11.75, p < .001$, after controlling for parental income, parental education and Time 1 self-esteem explaining 20.2% of the variance.
- Cultural socialization messages were positively related, and preparation for bias was negatively related to later self-esteem.
- Parent-reported racial socialization messages, was also significant $F(5, 233) = 10.93, p < .001$, explaining 19.0% of the overall variance. However, neither parent-reported cultural socialization messages nor preparation for bias messages were significant predictors of children's Grade 7 self-esteem.

Discussion

Consistent with other studies, parents reported transmitting more messages than children reported receiving, and cultural socialization messages were more common than preparation for discrimination. The relations between child-reported racial socialization in Grade 5 and Grade 7 self-esteem indicate that cultural socialization may serve as a compensatory factor leading to higher self-esteem, whereas an over-emphasis on racism may be a risk factor for African American youth.

References

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