



# A review of race socialization within Black families <sup>☆</sup>

Chase L. Lesane-Brown

*Department of Psychology and Human Development, Vanderbilt University, Peabody College #512,  
230 Appleton Place, Nashville, TN 37203-5701, USA*

Received 16 May 2005; revised 29 January 2006  
Available online 5 April 2006

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## Abstract

This manuscript provides a critical and comprehensive review of research on race socialization within Black families. Race socialization is defined as specific verbal and non-verbal messages transmitted to younger generations for the development of values, attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs regarding the meaning and significance of race and racial stratification, intergroup and intragroup interactions, and personal and group identity. Reviewed are published articles that address either analytical or theoretical approaches to understanding Black families' race socialization practices. First, theoretical perspectives of the race socialization process are reviewed. Second, this review defines race socialization in Black families. It then describes modes of message transmittal. Next, it focuses on three domains of research on race socialization: (a) prevalence, (b) content, and (c) race socialization as a predictor of child and adult outcomes. It concludes by outlining important challenges and issues in the literature to encourage the development of future research.

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*Keywords:* Race; Socialization; African American; Review; Black families; Identity

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This paper examines the process of socialization around the status of race. In previous studies, socialization to race as a status has been neglected whereas socialization to other topics such as politics, gender, and religion have received a great deal of attention. Race is

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<sup>☆</sup> This work was supported in part by an NIMH training grant (T32-MH18921) and NICHD grant (P30HD15052). This research was conducted as a portion of the author's doctoral dissertation, submitted to the Department of Psychology, University of Michigan. I thank my dissertation committee (Drs. Toni Antonucci, Cleopatra Caldwell, Richard Gonzalez, James Jackson, and Robert Sellers) and Drs. Tony Brown, Bruce Compas, and Howard Sandler for their helpful comments on an early draft.

*E-mail address:* [chase.lesane-brown@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:chase.lesane-brown@vanderbilt.edu)

not substantively different from these other more frequently studied topics; however, researchers have not adequately theorized the relationship between socialization to race as a status and other socialization processes. So, it is not clear how socialization to race is linked to general socialization practices. This manuscript will attempt to lay out an organizing framework and appraise existing research representing the state of the field. The theoretical contribution of this paper then is not to develop a new theory around socialization, but to highlight linkages between empirical studies on socialization to race with seemingly unrelated literatures such as family processes, socialization processes, and life course development.

Black parents play a pivotal role in educating their children about the structural and psychological implications of race as a stratification status. To raise physically and emotionally healthy Black children, Black parents must buffer information their children receive about race (Murray, Stokes, & Peacock, 1999). Black parents must socialize their children to understand (1) Black culture and how to interact with other Blacks, (2) how to get along with other racial groups, and (3) how to cope with their oppressed minority status (Boykin & Toms, 1985). The process of preparing Black children to understand their unique heritage, culture, and the meaning of membership in a low status racial group is commonly referred to as race socialization (Hughes & Chen, 1997; Peters, 1985; Stevenson, 1994; Thornton, Chatters, Taylor, & Allen, 1990).

The process of race socialization is important to understand for several reasons. First, race socialization links seemingly unrelated literatures such as family processes, socialization processes, life course development, and identity formation. Second, messages about race and racism can interact with the content of other socialization messages. For example, gender roles are often learned in the context of race roles (McRae & Noumair, 1997). General cultural expectations are often shaped by racial expectations (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). And political ideology is often shaped by racial ideology (Stewart, Settles, & Winter, 1998). Third, it implicates the development and stability of racial attitudes across the life course. Fourth, it focuses on a population that is often not the subject of scientific studies (i.e., Black families). Fifth, race socialization is increasingly regarded as crucial for the development of Black children's racial identity, self-esteem, and attitudes, values, and beliefs regarding race. Yet, despite the importance of and interest in the concept, there is considerable ambiguity concerning the exact meaning of the term and the optimum method of measuring the process.

This paper provides a critical review of research on race socialization in Black families. First, theoretical perspectives of the socialization process which link race socialization to socialization in general are outlined. Second, definitions of race socialization in Black families are reviewed and integrated. Third, modes of parental transmission of race socialization messages are described. Fourth, empirical domains of the race socialization literature are discussed: (a) prevalence of race socialization messages, (b) content of race socialization messages, and (c) race socialization as a predictor of child and adult outcomes. This paper concludes by suggesting directions for future research on race socialization in Black families.

### **Theoretical perspectives of the socialization process**

This section links race socialization to general socialization practices using three theoretical perspectives (i.e., ecological theory, life course perspective, and social-cognitive

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