Relations Between Parent-Child Discussions on Racism and Ethnic Identity Formation in Black and Hispanic Youth

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ABSTRACT

Ethnic-racial socialization is a fundamental process in identity development in which children adopt values and beliefs about their ethnic group. A child's connection to their cultural background can result in better academic, behavioral, and emotional outcomes for children of color. This study examined relations between parent-child discussions about racism and features of the child's ethnic identity in a sample of 79 Black and Hispanic children (M_{age} = 11.09). Video recordings of parent-child dyads were collected at home in a racial socialization observation task (RSOT) as they discussed a hypothetical scenario of a school counselor exhibiting ethnic discrimination toward a student. Recordings of the interactions were rated to objectively measure parent and child qualities including parental support, addressing issues of physical safety, child agency and externalizing behaviors, as well as dyadic affective mutuality. Child self-reports of their ethnic identity were collected from the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM).

Findings indicated a weak negative relationship between ethnic identity scores and parents promoting issues of physical safety overall, with stronger negative relationships for Hispanic boys. For the same group, child externalizing factors and parent addressing physical safety had a strong positive relationship. Other significant associations between RSOT ratings and child ethnic identity varied across child race/ethnic groups and gender. These findings indicate that differences in how children understand messages from their parents are associated with differences in ethnic identity formation. More research is needed to understand the gendered aspects of ethnic-racial socialization and its implications for interpreting parental preparation for racial discrimination.

INTRODUCTION

It is well documented that identity formation is one of the core aspects of adolescence[3]. Ethnic identity, defined as "feeling good about one's background, and being happy with one's group membership, as well as feelings of belonging and attachment to the group" [8] is becoming consolidated as youth are moving through middle childhood and is likely a booster for self-regard, particularly in school [2]. As such, researchers are examining ethnic identity as an important component in motivations promoting academic achievement [6].

Ethnic identity is not developed by the child alone. Ethnic-racial socialization describes the process by which children receive messages about race and ethnicity from caretakers [1]. Through these practices parents can influence the child's knowledge and expectations about their own ethnic group, and also how connected they feel to their group [4,5,7].

Studies of linkages between developing ethnic identities and features and qualities of parents' ethnic-racial socialization practices has focused predominantly only the adolescent period [5]. Studies in the formative years of middle childhood are needed.

MEASURES

RSOT (Racial Socialization Observational Task) [6]

•This observational procedure elicited parent-child discussion of 3 vignettes, 5 min. Each) illustrating racial bias, prejudice, and discrimination. It was collected in Wave 6 (ages 10-11 years). 7 items (e.g., IIF. Addresses issues of wellbeing.)

•The three vignettes represent racially charged situations at a store, with a police officer, and at school. The present study includes data from the school vignette.

•The parent-child dyad listens to the vignette scenario recording and discusses how they would handle the situation.

MEIM (Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure) [8]

•The MEIM assesses ethnic identity development in school-age children. It was collected from the child in Waves 6 (ages 10-11 years). 12 items (e.g., 3. I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me.)

•Each item was rated using 4-point scales from Strongly disagree (1) to Strongly agree (4).

•Includes two subscales: affirmation, belonging, and commitment (affective component) and ethnic identity search (developmental and cognitive component).

• Reliability in Wave 6 was strong, alpha > .80.

RESULTS

All groups

• Overall, parents promoting issues of physical safety had a weak negative association with total MEIM scores. Suggestions to the child for responding to the scenario also had a weak negative relationship with the ethnic identity search subscale of the MEIM.

• Child agency had a weak positive association with total MEIM scores and the affirmation subscale.

• Dyadic affective mutuality had a mild positive association with child beliefs about racism and child agency, with a moderate positive association with the child being respectful of the parent. It also had a weak to moderate negative association with child externalizing problems.

Table 1.

Correlation Coefficients, All Groups – Parent RSOT Measures.

Variable	1a	1b	1c	2	3	4	5	6
1a. MEIM Total								
1b. MEIM - EIS Subscale								
1c. MEIM - Affirmation Subscale								
2. Beliefs about existence of bias, prejudice, racism	-.09	-.14	-.01					
3. Beliefs about egalitarianism	-.02	-.02	-.03	.31**				
4. Parent is supportive of child	-.14	-.08	-.16	.28*	.16			
5. Addresses and promotes respect for authority	-.05	-.15	.05	.02	-.14	-.03		
6. Addresses and promotes issues of physical safety	-.24*	-.22	-.16	-.23*	-.08	-.01	.10	
7. Suggestions/directions to child of responding to scenario	-.20	-.23*	-.11	.28*	.15	.29*	.30**	.10
** p < 0.01 (2-tailed); * p < 0.05; N = 79; MEIM - Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure; EIS - Ethnic Identity Search								

Table 2.

Correlation Coefficients, All Groups – Dyad/Child RSOT Measures.

Variable	1a	1b	1c	2	3	4	5	6
1a. MEIM Total								
1b. MEIM - EIS Subscale								
1c. MEIM - Affirmation Subscale								
2. Dyad: Felt security/ affective mutuality	-.13	-.16	-.06					
3. Beliefs about existence of bias, prejudice, racism	.03	-.03	.07	.31**				
4. Beliefs about egalitarianism	.09	.10	.05	.17	.21			
5. Child is respectful of parent	.10	.08	.09	.61**	.12	.19		
6. Child agency	.23*	.17	.27*	.44**	.45**	0.21	.39**	
7. Child negative affect - Externalizing	-.17	-.06	-.21	-.41**	-.22*	-.16	-.48**	-.30**
** p < 0.01 (2-tailed); * p < 0.05; N = 79; MEIM - Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure; EIS - Ethnic Identity Search								

Table 3.

Correlation Coefficients, Hispanic Boys - Parent RSOT Measures.

Variable	1a.	1b.	1c.	2	3	4	5	6
1a. MEIM total								
1b. MEIM - EIS Subscale								
1c. MEIM - Affirmation subscale								
2. Beliefs about existence of bias, prejudice, racism	.45	.43	.35					
3. Beliefs about egalitarianism	.21	.16	.18	.44				
4. Parent is supportive of child	.09	-.01	.13	-.12	0			
5. Addresses and promotes respect for authority	-.58*	-.39	-.56*	-.29	-.27	-.64**		
6. Addresses and promotes issues of physical safety	-.70**	-.49*	-.66**	-.40	-.18	-.50*	.94**	
7. Suggestions/directions to child of responding to scenario	-.20	-.06	-.25	.21	.23	-.09	.18	.24
** p < 0.01 (2-tailed); * p < 0.05; N = 17; MEIM - Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure; EIS - Ethnic Identity Search								

Table 4.

Correlation Coefficients, Hispanic Boys - Dyad/Child RSOT Measures.

Variable	1a.	1b.	1c.	2	3	4	5	6
1a. MEIM total								
1b. MEIM - EIS Subscale								
1c. MEIM - Affirmation subscale								
2. Dyad: Felt security/ affective mutuality	.25	-.03	.39					
3. Beliefs about existence of bias, prejudice, racism	-.11	-.18	-.03	.05				
4. Beliefs about egalitarianism	.14	.08	.14	.31	.26			
5. Child is respectful of parent	.17	.05	.19	.78**	-.21	.13		
6. Child agency	.34	.03	.48*	.53*	.02	-.01	.49*	
7. Child negative affect - Externalizing	-.43	-.17	-.51*	-.63**	.29	-.27	-.47	-.37
** p < 0.01 (2-tailed); * p < 0.05; N = 17; MEIM - Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure; EIS - Ethnic Identity Search								

Hispanic boys

• Parent respect for authority and promoting issues of physical safety had a moderate negative association with total MEIM scores and moderate negative associations in both subscales. This variable was also moderately negatively associated with parent support and highly positively associated with promoting respect for authority.

• Parent respect for authority had a moderate negative association with total MEIM scores and the affirmation subscale.

• Child agency had a moderate positive relationship with the affirmation subscale, with moderate positive associations with child respect of parent and dyadic affective mutuality.

• Affective mutuality had a strong positive association with the child's respect for parent, and a moderate positive association with child agency and a moderate negative association with child externalizing problems.

• Child externalizing problems were negatively associated with the affirmation subscale.

PARTICIPANTS

• *N*= 80 (55.5% Black; 44.4% Hispanic) of a larger sample of 399 children (45% Black, 55% Hispanic) followed over 8 waves from ages 2.5 to 12-13 years in the Dallas Project on Educational Pathways (DPREP). The 80 families are those, randomly selected, with whom the Racial Socialization Observation Task (RSOT) was collected in their home in Wave 6 (mean child age = 11.09 (SD = .29) years). 87.7% of children received free or reduced meals at school.
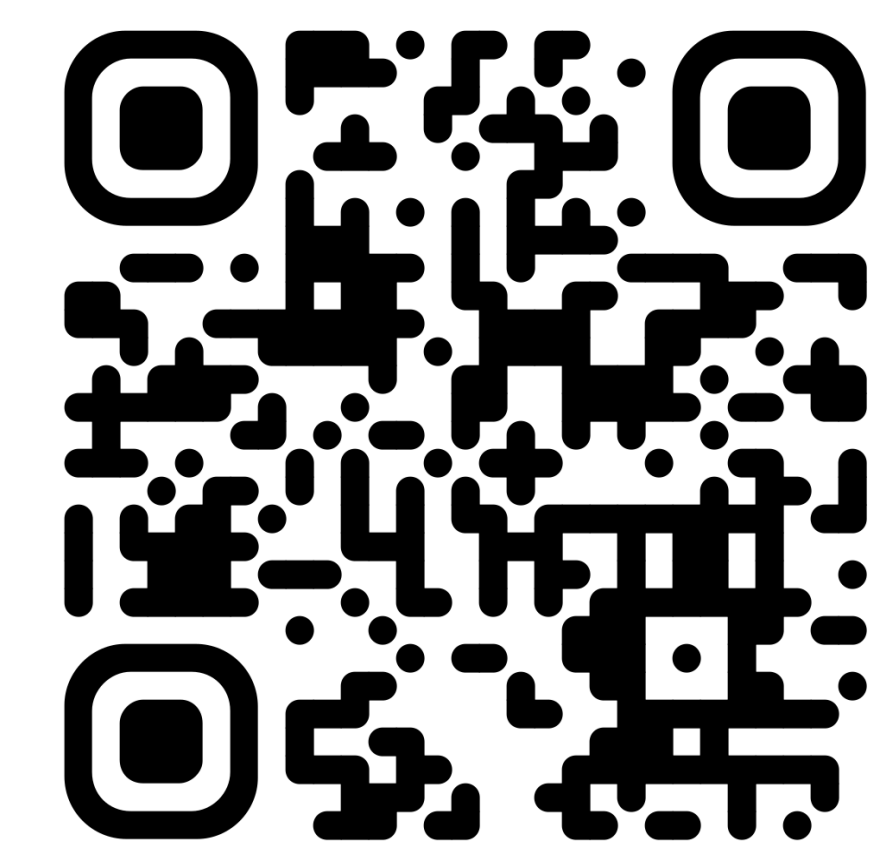
DISCUSSION

This study explored the relationship between parenting qualities, ethnic-racial socialization, and youth ethnic identity in Black and Hispanic children during middle childhood. While parental supportiveness, addressing of wellbeing, and affective mutuality were not found to be associated with ethnic identity scores as hypothesized, child agency was. Discussing physical safety also showed a weak negative association with ethnic identity, particularly stronger for Hispanic boys, highlighting complexity, but underlying mechanisms require further investigation.

The study emphasizes the need for nuanced understanding of ethnic-racial socialization and its implications for parental preparation for racial discrimination. The individualized nature of ethnic identity formation, influenced by cultural and contextual factors, is highlighted.

Enhancing academic, behavioral, and emotional outcomes in children of color necessitates understanding factors that promote positive ethnic identity. Future research should explore ethnic-racial socialization complexities among diverse racial, ethnic, and gender subgroups.

REFERENCES

CONTACT/ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS