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# Racial Discrimination and Resilience in African American Young Adults: Examining Racial Socialization as a Moderator

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## Abstract

Research has indicated that racial discrimination places African Americans at risk for psychological distress, in which they experience low levels of well-being. Yet many African Americans are resilient, or have preserved well-being, when faced with this adversity. Using a strength-based approach, this study determined whether racial socialization messages preserved African Americans' resilience when experiencing racial discrimination. Results with a sample of 290 young adult African American college students indicated that overall racial socialization messages, as well as specific messages to appreciate cultural legacy, moderated the relationship between racial discrimination and resilience. As expected, racial discrimination was negatively related to resilience for students who reported fewer racial socialization messages, and racial discrimination was no longer negatively associated with resilience for students reporting a greater number of these messages. Additionally, racial socialization messages predicted unique variance in resilience.

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Although race relations are improving in the United States, largely via the efforts of the civil rights movement, racism continues to adversely affect the lives of African Americans and serves as a barrier between them and the American dream. Racism, defined as “beliefs, attitudes, institutional arrangements, and acts that tend to denigrate individuals or groups because of phenotypic characteristics or ethnic group affiliation” (Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999, p. 805), has unfortunately been used by individuals and groups to justify their harmful and discriminatory treatment of others (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005). For instance, African Americans are discriminated against in a plethora of ways, including being called racial slurs, unjustly accused of wrong doing, and denied loans or admittance by banks and academic institutions (Landrine & Klonoff, 1996). Racial discrimination is embedded in every structure of American society (i.e., social, economic, political, psychological, cultural, and institutional) and can result in many detrimental consequences for African Americans (Utsey, 1998).

Indeed, numerous studies have linked reports of racial discrimination to negative psychological, physiological, and behavioral outcomes in African American samples (e.g., Bowen-Reid & Harrell, 2002; Caldwell, Kohn-Wood, Schmeelk-Cone, Chavous, & Zimmerman, 2004; Fischer & Shaw, 1999; Harris-Britt, Valrie, Kurtz-Costes, & Rowley, 2007; Neblett, Phillip, Cogburn, & Sellers, 2006; Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003). For example, racial discrimination threatens mental health, self-esteem, and academic motivation in African American adolescents (Wong et al., 2003) and is a strong risk factor for violent behavior in young African American adults (Caldwell et al., 2004). Some individuals who are subject to racist incidences may develop posttrauma responses (e.g., shock, betrayal, and powerlessness; Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005). In addition, racist experiences have been associated with somatic complaints (e.g., headaches), negative affect, depression, and anxiety in college students of African descent (Bowen-Reid & Harrell, 2002).

While studies examining racial discrimination’s association with psychological distress are steadily growing, various researchers have begun to question what can be done to offset its deleterious repercussions (Miller, 1999). Some scholars have argued that it is beneficial to examine this question using resilience (i.e., preserved psychological well-being) as a possible outcome as

opposed to solely focusing on psychological distress (Brown, 2008; Miller, 1999; Neblett et al., 2008; Utsey, Bolden, Lanier, & Williams, 2007). Resilience is “overcoming the negative effects of risk exposure, coping successfully with traumatic experiences, and avoiding the negative trajectories associated with risks” (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005, p. 399). Studies have shown that many children and adults are able to adapt to stressors, as evidenced by their positive behavior patterns and favorable outcomes (Garmezy, 1991). Some may possess qualities that make them resilient, while others could be nurtured in environments that teach them to be resilient (McCreary, Cunningham, Ingram, & Fife, 2006). Whereas psychological distress addresses the potential negative effects of discrimination, focusing on resilience as a likely outcome suggests that African Americans could find meaning in their adversity and emerge from adversity with their resilience, or well-being, intact. Garmezy, Masten, and Tellegen (1984) constructed a protective model of resilience suggesting that there may be factors that buffer individuals from the influences of risk factors, reducing the likelihood of negative outcomes and thereby preserving or even increasing their resilience. These protective factors or moderators, then, may “impart a kind of immunity against stress” (Garmezy et al., 1984, p. 102).

Though many African Americans have had to cope with a number of adversities (e.g., poverty, dangerous neighborhoods, and racial hostility), they manage to overcome their circumstances and develop into healthy adults. Yet the experiences of resilient African Americans remain understudied (Barbarin, 1993; Brown, 2008; Miller, 1999; Miller & MacIntosh, 1999; Utsey et al., 2007). Given the negative social and mental health outcomes that some African Americans experience, various authors agree that examining the resilience of African American populations is of great importance (e.g., Barbarin, 1993; Davis & Stevenson, 2006; Garmezy, 1991; Luthar, Doernberger, & Zigler, 1993; Miller, 1999; Utsey et al., 2007). It is especially imperative to examine the connection between racial discrimination and resilience, given that racial discrimination may preclude an individual’s ability to positively cope and overcome various circumstances (Sue & Sue, 2008). Various authors have noted that it is common for oppressed groups, such as African Americans, to have an external locus of control, attributing their problems to often realistic barriers that could very well impede their success (e.g., racism, classism, and sexism; Hammack, 2003; Sue & Sue, 2008; Uomoto, 1986; Wheaton, 1980). Although this attribution may help African Americans consider environmental contributors to their behavior, it may also encourage fatalism and a sense of helplessness, as they believe that they have little to no power to change their environment (Hammack, 2003; Sue & Sue, 2008; Uomoto,

1986). In the face of continuing racism, African Americans may be unable to be resilient without some form of defense.

Using a resilience approach helps mental health providers acknowledge that, while racial discrimination places African Americans at risk for psychological distress, many do not succumb to it and instead are resilient (Neblett et al., 2008). This fact has led various researchers to articulate factors that contribute to African Americans' ability to overcome distress from racial discrimination (e.g., Brown, 2008; Fischer & Shaw, 1999; Harris-Britt et al., 2007; Sellers & Shelton, 2003). Aspects already present in African American culture may be protective (Miller, 1999; Miller & MacIntosh, 1999; Utsey et al., 2007), and they need to be thoroughly examined in this role. One such protective factor steadily receiving more attention is racial socialization.

Racial socialization involves various explicit and implicit messages that provide African American youth with healthy methods for coping with the realities of racism and racial hostility (e.g., Boykin & Toms, 1985; Bynum, Burton, & Best, 2007; Spencer, 1983; Stevenson, 1994; Stevenson, Cameron, Herrero-Taylor, & Davis, 2002). Although the content of racial socialization messages may vary, some common themes have been found. For example, Hughes et al. (2006) noted that cultural socialization messages were commonly reported in studies examining the racial socialization of African American children (e.g., Caughy, O'Campo, Randolph, & Nickerson, 2002; Sanders-Thompson, 1994; Thorton, Chatters, Taylor, & Allen, 1990). Cultural socialization messages include the encouragement of cultural pride and the promotion of cultural knowledge, such as exposure to African American history and traditions (Hughes et al., 2006). In addition, caregivers may also incorporate messages regarding the history and current state of racial oppression African Americans have faced, referred to as *preparation for bias* messages. Caregivers may incorporate ways to cope with the racial stress and discrimination an African American youth might encounter in interracial interactions (Hughes et al., 2006; Stevenson et al., 2002).

Studies have found that various factors may impact the initiation, frequency, and type of messages that African Americans receive (Hughes et al., 2006). For example, Coard and Sellers (2005) noted that racial socialization may often occur after a child has experienced a negative racial encounter as opposed to beforehand. Older parents may be more likely to engage in racial socialization than younger parents, which may be related to more life experience surrounding issues of race (Thorton et al., 1990). Parents may also adjust their messages based on the gender and age of the child (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Hughes & Chen, 1997). Parents may be more likely to focus on messages of racial pride with girls, while focusing on messages regarding racial barriers

with boys (Thomas & Speight, 1999). When deciding on the appropriate developmental age to deliver certain messages, parents may choose to wait until the child reaches adolescence to discuss issues of racial inequality (Hughes & Chen, 1997). Often, studies focus on the provision of racial socialization messages by parents and other caregivers, given their role as primary social agents (Hughes et al., 2006). However, it is possible that children may receive racial socialization messages from other individuals who have significant roles in their life (e.g., community and church members, peers, teachers, and role models; Brown, 2008; Greene, 1992).

In spite of its complexity, racial socialization is believed to help the development and reinforcement of racial and cultural pride and proactive coping mechanisms that allow African Americans to adequately handle racist experiences (Bynum et al., 2007; Neblett et al., 2006; Stevenson et al., 2002; Stevenson, Reed, Bodison, & Bishop, 1997). Authors have speculated that racial socialization is important for the successful development of children's racial identity (Stevenson et al., 2002). Researchers have found a positive relationship between racial socialization and self-esteem (Stevenson et al., 1997), academic achievement (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Caughy et al., 2002), and psychosocial functioning (Caughy et al., 2002; Scott, 2003; Stevenson, 1997). There is growing evidence that racial socialization messages are associated with decreased negative psychological well-being and increased positive well-being in African Americans (Belgrave, Chase-Vaughn, Gray, Addison, & Cherry, 2000; Caughy et al., 2002; Coard & Sellers, 2005; Frabutt, Walker, & Mackinnon-Lewis, 2002; Stevenson et al., 2002). For example, Caughy et al. (2002) found that parents who promoted African American culture had preschool children with better problem-solving skills, greater amounts of factual knowledge, and fewer behavioral problems. Bynum et al. (2007) revealed that African American college students who reported that they had received messages to be proud of their culture also reported less depression, anxiety, somatization, and psychoticism. Given this evidence, it is imperative for researchers to examine whether racial socialization protects African Americans' psychological adjustment when they experience discrimination.

Acknowledging and understanding the benefits of racial socialization and its protection against racial discrimination may be especially important for the field of psychology in its efforts to produce culturally competent providers of psychological services. Yet only a few studies have examined whether racial socialization protects or moderates the link between discrimination and psychological adjustment. If it is indeed a moderator, racial socialization would affect the strength or direction of this relationship (Frazier, Tix, &

Baron, 2004). For instance, Fischer and Shaw (1999) investigated whether racial socialization messages (i.e., assessed by racial barrier messages such as "Blacks don't always have the same opportunities as Whites") moderated the relationship between African American college students' experiences with racial discrimination and their mental health. Indeed, they found that racial discrimination was associated with poorer general mental health only for African American college students who reported a low number of racial socialization messages. Also, Harris-Britt et al. (2007) examined the moderating effects of racial socialization (i.e., assessed by cultural pride messages such as "Talked about being Black" and preparation for bias messages such as "People might treat you badly due to race") on the association between perceived racial discrimination and self-esteem within a young adolescent sample. Again, racial socialization messages buffered the negative impact of racial discrimination. In a longitudinal study conducted with a sample of African American adolescents, Neblett et al. (2008) further found that racial socialization reduced the negative impact of racial discrimination on psychological adjustment.

While these studies support the protective nature of racial socialization, the next step for research is to examine how it could alter the connection between racial discrimination and resilience (Brown, 2008; Miller, 1999; Miller & MacIntosh, 1999). Although general mental health and self-esteem are important indices of psychological well-being, they do not directly reflect one central component of this construct: preserved or enhanced resilience when encountering negative situations and threats to well-being. Resilience seems especially relevant to examine in this context, as it reflects African Americans' ability to persevere and maintain a positive sense of self when faced with omnipresent racial discrimination. Receiving racial socialization messages has been found to be significantly related to resilience among African American college students (Brown, 2008). As such, examining whether racial socialization protects the resilience of African Americans in the face of racial discrimination is worthwhile to explore and would add incrementally to the research in this area.

Consequently, we investigated whether racial socialization messages preserve resilience when racial discrimination is perceived. Our young adult African American sample distinguishes the current study from previous studies of racial socialization and resilience that have sampled children and adolescents (see Hughes et al., 2006; Utsey et al., 2007). Examining these constructs at this developmental stage is important because young adults are (a) likely to confront racism, the myth of meritocracy, and unequal privilege

in new contexts such as college and the work force and (b) developmentally more likely to think abstractly and analytically, which assist in their understanding race issues (Hughes et al., 2006). Thus, they may be able to more easily identify and have language for both overt and covert acts of racial discrimination such as microaggressions, which are frequent yet often brief “verbal, behavioral and environmental indignities” (Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, & Torino, 2007, p. 72). Whether they are intentional or unintentional, microaggressions are hostile, derogatory, and insulting and affect recipients’ well-being as they often are left questioning whether an incident was in fact discriminatory (Sue et al., 2007).

We hypothesized that racial socialization messages would moderate the connection between racial discrimination and resilience. Specifically, we expected that there would be a significant negative relationship between racial discrimination and resilience for participants who received a low number of racial socialization messages. We also anticipated that racial discrimination would no longer be negatively associated with resilience among participants who received high levels of racial socialization (i.e., a nonsignificant relationship). Furthermore, we proposed that, among participants who reported a high level of racial discrimination, those who received a low number of racial socialization messages would be less resilient than those who had received a high number of racial socialization messages.

In addition to general racial socialization messages, we explored specific racial socialization messages to determine which messages provided a buffer against discrimination. Various studies have consistently found that cultural pride messages (e.g., “Never be ashamed of your color”) resulted in improved academic performance (Caughy et al., 2002) and psychological adjustment (Neblett et al., 2008). Also, messages to cope with various forms of antagonism using spirituality and religion and messages that emphasize the significance and awareness of African and African American history have helped individuals cope with racial hostility and promote adjustment (Bagley & Carroll, 1998; Bowen-Reid & Harrell, 2002). Therefore, we expected that participants who received a high level of these three specific messages would be more resilient than participants who reported receiving a low level of these messages. We further assessed participants’ tendency to respond in a socially desirable manner, as we did not want their tendency to project a favorable image rather than accurate assessment of themselves to confound the analyses. Because we used two pathways to recruit participants (i.e., an introductory psychology course and multicultural student organizations), we considered whether the method of recruitment was associated with the study

variables. We planned to control for socially desirable responding and recruitment method in the analyses if they were associated with racial discrimination, racial socialization, or resilience.

## Method

### *Participants and Procedure*

Following approval by a university institutional review board, participants were recruited from an online research website for a large introductory psychology course and from an email solicitation sent to multicultural student organizations at a large Midwestern university. Participants were asked to contact the investigator to receive a code number to permit access into the study. For both samples, the survey was administered online via *SurveyMonkey*, an Internet survey software company. *SurveyMonkey* provided the URL and server space for the data to be stored temporarily until administration was completed. Because online and paper-pencil data collection produce equivalent scores (e.g., Cronk & West, 2002; Epstein, Klinkenberg, Wiley, & McKinley, 2001), we chose to collect data online because of its accessibility and efficiency. Introductory psychology students received course credit for their participation, and students from multicultural student organizations were given the option of including their e-mail address if they wished to be entered into a lottery drawing to win \$50. In order to ensure anonymity, email addresses were collected and stored separately from participants' responses.

Surveys were screened for duplicate copies by examining the origin of submission (i.e., IP addresses), email addresses, and code numbers. No duplicates were found. Those who did not identify as Black or African American were not included in the data set. Nine participants were removed because their questionnaires were less than 75% complete. In order to control for inattentiveness and random responding, several items were placed throughout the survey that instructed the participants to choose a specific response choice (e.g., "Please choose *never* for this question"). As a result of failing one or more validity checks, eight additional participants were removed.

The final sample consisted of 290 participants ranging in age from 17 to 34 years ( $M = 20.73$  years,  $SD = 3.66$ ). Of these participants, 193 (141 women and 52 men) were introductory psychology students and 97 (82 women and 15 men) were from multicultural student organizations. The large difference between the number of female and male participants is consistent with the 2:1 ratio for African American females compared with African American

males enrolled at the university and is consistent with research findings that African American women vastly outnumber African American men in higher education settings (Allen, 1992; Kaba, 2008). The majority identified solely as Black/African American (92.4%). The others (7.5%) identified as biracial (i.e., African American and another ethnicity such as White, Latino, and Caribbean/West Indian). Participants classified themselves as first-year students (44.8%), sophomores (19.3%), juniors (8.6), seniors (8.3%), postbaccalaureate students (1.7%), graduate or professional students (12.8%), and "other" (4.5%; e.g., law student, full-time employee, nondegree resident fellow).

## Measures

**Racial discrimination.** The Schedule of Racist Events (SRE; Landrine & Klonoff, 1996) contains 18 items designed to assess the frequency with which African Americans encountered racial discrimination, or culturally specific stressful life events (e.g., "How many times have you been treated unfairly by strangers because you are Black?"). For each item, participants indicate the frequency or degree to which they have (a) experienced the racist event within the past year (SRE-Recent), (b) experienced the racist event over their lifetime (SRE-Lifetime), and (c) found the racist event to be stressful (SRE-Appraisal). The SRE uses a 6-point Likert scale ranging from *not at all* (1) to *extremely* (6). Although the entire measure was administered, only the SRE-Recent scores were examined in order to reduce the number of analyses performed and to reduce redundancy in the presentation of findings. This decision was based on Landrine and Klonoff's (1996) finding that racist events that had taken place in the past year (SRE-Recent) were a more salient predictor of stress-related psychiatric symptoms and less limited by recall bias. Additional empirical support for the sole use of this subscale was demonstrated by Fischer and Shaw (1999) who found the SRE-Recent and SRE-Lifetime to be highly correlated ( $r = .84$ ). The ratings given for each SRE-Recent item were added to obtain a subscale score ranging from 18 to 108. Higher scores indicate greater frequency of racial discrimination.

Landrine and Klonoff (1996) found scores on the SRE-Recent subscale to be both reliable and valid with African American adolescents and adults. They reported an internal consistency reliability (i.e., Cronbach coefficient alpha) coefficient of  $\alpha = .95$  for SRE-Recent scores. They also uncovered that this subscale demonstrated concurrent validity via its positive correlation with psychiatric symptoms from the Hopkins Symptom Checklist-58 ( $r = .34$ ;

Derogatis, Lipman, Rickels, Uhlenhuth, & Covi, 1974) for African Americans. In the present study, the coefficient alpha for SRE-Recent scores was .92.

**Racial socialization.** The Teenager Experience of Racial Socialization scale (TERS; Stevenson et al., 2002) contains 40 items designed to measure participants' perceived frequency of racial socialization messages from parents or caregivers during childhood and adolescence. This instrument is frequently used in studies of racial socialization (see Hughes et al., 2006) and consists of five subscales. The Cultural Coping With Antagonism subscale (CCA) contains 13 items that represent messages concerning the importance of struggling successfully through racial hostilities and the role of spirituality and religion in that coping (e.g., "Only God can protect against racism"). The Cultural Pride Reinforcement subscale (CPR) consists of 9 items that endorse the teaching of pride and knowledge of African American culture (e.g., "You should be proud to be Black"). The Cultural Appreciation of Legacy subscale (CLA) includes 5 items concerning cultural heritage issues such as enslavement and knowing historical issues for African Americans (e.g., "Knowing African culture is important"). Cultural Alertness to Discrimination subscale (CAD) contains 6 items focused on teaching youth to be aware of the barriers of racism in society and the racial challenges between African Americans and Whites (e.g., "Whites have more opportunities than Blacks"). Last, Cultural Endorsement of the Mainstream subscale (CEM) consists of 6 items representing messages expressing the relative importance of majority culture institutions, the values and the affective and educational benefits that African Americans can receive by being involved in these institutions, and the irrelevance of discussing issues of racism and African American culture (e.g., "Black children feel better in White schools").

Item responses can range from *never* (1) to *lots of times* (3). A total scale is calculated by summing all items. A total scale score can range from 40 to 120, with higher scores reflecting a higher frequency of racial socialization messages received from parents and caregivers. Respective subscale items are summed to generate the total subscale score. Stevenson et al. (2002) reported Cronbach's coefficient alpha estimates of  $\alpha = .91$  (total TERS),  $\alpha = .85$  (CCA),  $\alpha = .83$  (CPR),  $\alpha = .74$  (CLA),  $\alpha = .76$  (CAD), and  $\alpha = .71$  (CEM) with adolescents, demonstrating internal consistency reliability of its scores. Brown (2008) reported coefficient alphas for the five TERS subscales (i.e.,  $\alpha = .85$  for CCA,  $\alpha = .67$  for CPR,  $\alpha = .70$  for CLA,  $\alpha = .85$  for CAD, and  $\alpha = .62$  for CEM), as well as the full 40-item scale (.90) with a college-aged population. It was not strongly correlated with a measure of beliefs about racial socialization (rather than perceived frequency of racial socialization), supporting the discriminant validity of the TERS's scores. In the current study,

the 40-item TERS scale had a coefficient alpha of .91. The internal consistency reliability estimates for the five subscales were  $\alpha = .86$  for CCA,  $\alpha = .67$  for CPR,  $\alpha = .74$  for CLA,  $\alpha = .89$  for CAD, and  $\alpha = .62$  for CEM.

**Resilience.** The Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC; Connor & Davidson, 2003) is a 25-item scale designed to assess an individual's level of resilience in the face of adversity. This measure was chosen based on its ability to assess for resilience in nonclinical samples as well as its measurement of skills necessary for effective problem solving, strength that can arise from a stressful situation (e.g., discrimination), and actively confronting stress rather than adopting strategies to avoid it. It was originally designed to capture resilience from posttraumatic stress, and given the similarity between long-term consequences of posttraumatic stress and perceived racism (Marsella, Friedman, & Spain, 1993), the CD-RISC is an appropriate measure for this study. Examples of items are "I am able to adapt to change" and "I am not easily discouraged by failure." The CD-RISC item responses range from *rarely true* (0) to *nearly true all the time* (4). Total scores can range from 0 to 100. Items are summed, and higher scores reflect greater resilience. Connor and Davidson (2003) reported an internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) coefficient of .89 among a sample of individuals from the general public who were not actively seeking counseling and from outpatient clinics who were actively receiving therapy. Additionally, test-retest reliability ( $r = .87$ ) was obtained after two consecutive clinical visits. Evidence for convergent validity was demonstrated by the positive relationship ( $r = .83$ ) between the CD-RISC and the Kobasa (1979) hardiness measure. Importantly, the CD-RISC's psychometric properties have been supported with African American samples (e.g., Brown, 2008; Steinhart, Mamerow, Brown, & Jolly, 2009). In the present study, the coefficient alpha for the CD-RISC was .92.

**Social desirability.** To determine whether participants' tendency to respond in a socially desirable manner was associated with their reports of discrimination, resilience, and racial socialization, we also had them complete the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (BIDR; Paulhus, 1988). The BIDR is a 40-item instrument designed to assess the tendency to give self-reports that are honest but positively biased (self-deceptive positivity, e.g., "I always know why I like things") and the deliberate favorable self-presentation to an audience (impression management, e.g., "I never swear"). Item responses range from *not true* (1) to *very true* (7). Subscales can be created to reflect self-deceptive positivity and impression management; however, we only used the total score to provide an overall assessment of socially desirable responding. After appropriate items are reverse-scored, one point is added for each "6" or "7" item response, and responses are summed to obtain subscale

**Table 1.** Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations of Resilience, Racial Discrimination, Racial Socialization, and Social Desirability ( $N = 290$ )

Scale	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Resilience	76.02	13.23	—								
2. Racism	34.72	14.32	.01	—							
3. Racial socialization	89.20	12.8	.20**	.32**	—						
4. CCA	29.11	5.83	.19**	.29**	.90**	—					
5. CPR	23.89	2.54	.33**	.06	.75**	.58**	—				
6. CLA	11.59	2.45	.18**	.29**	.80**	.69**	.56**	—			
7. CAD	13.68	3.43	.07	.46**	.70**	.45**	.42**	.54**	—		
8. CEM	8.87	2.24	-.05	.03	.52**	.36**	.31**	.20**	.25**	—	
9. Socially desirable responding	11.67	6.18	.39**	-.16**	-.05	-.06	.04	-.08	-.06	-.05	—

Note: CCA = Cultural Coping With Antagonism subscale; CPR = Cultural Pride Reinforcement subscale; CLA = Cultural Appreciation of Legacy subscale; CAD = Cultural Alertness to Discrimination subscale; CEM = Cultural Endorsement of the Mainstream subscale.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

scores. Therefore, total BIDR scores can range from 0 to 40, with higher scores reflecting a greater general tendency to present the self in a favorable rather than honest manner. In a sample of college students, Paulhus (1988) reported an alpha estimate of .83 for the total BIDR. For the present study, Cronbach's  $\alpha = .82$  for total BIDR scores.

## Results

Descriptive statistics and the relationships between the variables were computed; these findings are presented in Table 1. Resilience was positively associated with overall racial socialization as well as specific racial socialization messages such as pride reinforcement, coping with antagonism, and appreciation of legacy. Racial discrimination was also positively associated with overall racial socialization as well as specific racial socialization messages such as alertness to discrimination, coping with antagonism, appreciation of legacy, and pride reinforcement. Resilience was not related to racial discrimination, underscoring the possibility that there may be third variables that attenuate or buffer this association. Indeed, Frazier et al. (2004) suggested that the relationship between the predictor (i.e., racial discrimination) and outcome (i.e., resilience) may be attenuated or even be nonsignificant when moderators are present.

Racial discrimination and resilience were related to socially desirable responding; therefore, we controlled for socially desirable responding in the regression analyses. Furthermore, a MANOVA (multivariate analysis of variance) revealed that the type of recruitment method (introductory psychology classes vs. multicultural student organizations) was associated with the measures of interest,  $F(10, 279) = 4.32, p < .01$ , Wilks's  $\Gamma = .87$ . Specifically, students from multicultural student organizations reported receiving a higher number of caregiver messages to appreciate their cultural legacy,  $F(1, 289) = 6.98, p < .01$ , and be alert to discrimination,  $F(1, 289) = 5.54, p < .05$ , and a lower number of caregiver messages to endorse mainstream institutions,  $F(1, 289) = 6.96, p < .01$ . Thus, in addition to social desirability, we also controlled for recruitment method in the analyses.

### *Tests of Moderation*

As specified by Aiken and West (1991) hierarchical moderated regression (HMR) analyses were conducted to test whether racial socialization was a moderator of the link between racial discrimination and resilience. This is the preferred statistical method for identifying the presence or absence of moderating effects (Frazier et al., 2004).

Prior to conducting the tests for moderation, scale scores for the predictor and moderator were centered in order to reduce multicollinearity between the main effect and interaction terms, as recommended by Frazier et al. (2004). Social desirability and the type of recruitment method were each entered at Step 1 of each moderation analysis to partial out (i.e., control for) the influence of these variables. The predictor variable (i.e., racist discrimination) and proposed moderator variable (e.g., racial socialization) were entered at Step 2 of the analysis. Finally, at Step 3, the interaction term reflecting the product of the predictor and moderator (e.g., racial discrimination  $\times$  racial socialization) was entered. Evidence for a moderator effect is noted at Step 3 by a statistically significant increment in  $R^2$  (i.e.,  $\Delta R^2$ ) and beta weight. Statistically significant interactions are notoriously difficult to detect in nonexperimental designs; therefore, the use of liberal alphas (e.g., .10 or .25) has been recommended (McClelland & Judd, 1993). Because four hierarchical moderated regressions were performed (i.e., for overall racial socialization, cultural pride messages, cultural coping with antagonism messages, and cultural appreciation of legacy messages), an alpha of .025 (.10/4) was set. Additionally, moderator effects typically account for only 1% to 3% of unique variance in the criterion (McClelland & Judd, 1993). Although this percentage appears to be small,  $\Delta R^2$  values of .02 or above signify unique and meaningful

contributions to the criterion (Cohen, 1992; McClelland & Judd, 1993). Thus, in order to interpret an interaction, it had to be significant (i.e.,  $p < .025$ ) and account for at least 2% of unique criterion variance. All regression analyses are presented in Table 2.

As hypothesized, overall racial socialization moderated the link between perceived racial discrimination and resilience,  $\beta = 1.32$ ,  $t(289) = 2.78$ ,  $p < .01$ . This interaction accounted for 2% of the variance in resilience beyond the variance accounted for by social desirability, recruitment method, and the individual predictor and moderator variables.

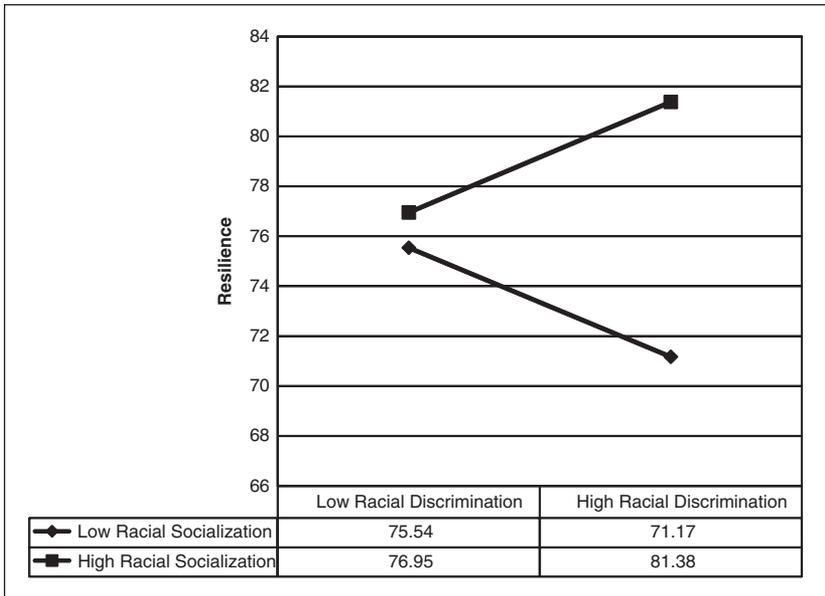
Figure 1 represents the corresponding regression slope graphed for this significant interaction. This regression slope was obtained by using predicted values for the criterion (i.e., resilience) calculated from representative groups 1 *SD* above the mean and 1 *SD* below the mean on both racial discrimination and racial socialization. These predicted values were obtained via the procedure outlined by Aiken and West (1991). Specifically, the respective unstandardized regression coefficients for each centered variable were multiplied by its appropriate value (i.e., 1 *SD* or -1 *SD* of the predictor for the first term, 1 *SD* or -1 *SD* of the moderator for the second term, and the product of the standard deviations of the predictor and moderator for the interaction term), summing these products, and then adding the constant value. At high levels of discrimination, participants who reported receiving a high amount of racial socialization messages had significantly higher resilience scores than participants who reported receiving a low amount of racial socialization messages,  $t(289) = 21.27$ ,  $p < .05$ . An analysis of the simple slopes (Aiken & West, 1991) showed that racial discrimination was negatively associated with resilience for participants who reported low (1 *SD* below the mean) levels racial socialization,  $\beta = -.30$ ,  $t(289) = -3.03$ ,  $p < .01$ , whereas racial discrimination was no longer negatively associated with resilience for participants who reported high (1 *SD* above the mean) levels of racial socialization,  $\beta = .08$ ,  $t(289) = 1.03$ , *ns*.

We then ran three hierarchical moderated regressions to test our hypothesis that certain specific racial socialization messages (i.e., cultural pride reinforcement, cultural coping with antagonism, and cultural appreciation of legacy) would each moderate the relationship between racial discrimination and resilience. As predicted, cultural appreciation of legacy buffered this relationship,  $\beta = .87$ ,  $t(289) = 2.24$ ,  $p < .01$ , accounting for 2% of the unique variance in resilience. Figure 2 represents this significant interaction. At high levels of discrimination, participants who reported receiving a high amount of messages to appreciate their cultural legacy had significantly higher resilience scores than participants who reported receiving a low amount of these

**Table 2.** Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Resilience From Perceived Racist Events, Racial Socializations, and Their Interactions (*N* = 290)

Step	Predictor	B	SE B	$\beta$	Cumulative $R^2$	Adjusted $R^2$	Incremental $R^2$	$t(289)$
1	Socially desirable responding	0.83	0.12	0.39	.16	.15	.16	7.18*
	Recruitment type	2.63	1.52	0.09				1.74
2	Racism	0.00	0.05	0.00	.21	.20	.05	.01
	Racial socialization (overall)	0.23	0.06	0.22				3.94*
3	Racism $\times$ Racial socialization	0.01	0.01	1.32	.23	.21	.02	2.78*
Analysis predicting resilience from perceived racist events, CPR messages, and their interactions								
1	Socially desirable responding	0.83	0.12	0.40	.16	.15	.16	7.18*
	Recruitment type	2.63	1.52	0.09				1.74
2	Racism	0.02	0.05	0.03	.25	.24	.09	.47
	CPR messages	1.98	0.35	0.30				5.67*
3	Racism $\times$ CPR messages	0.04	0.03	0.77	.25	.24	.00	1.61
Analysis predicting resilience from perceived racist events, CCA messages, and their interactions								
1	Socially desirable responding	0.83	0.12	0.39	.16	.15	.16	7.18*
	Recruitment type	2.63	1.52	0.09				1.74
2	Racism	0.01	0.05	0.01	.20	.19	.04	.23
	CCA messages	0.47	0.13	0.21				3.73*
3	Racism $\times$ CCA messages	0.02	0.01	0.70	.21	.20	.01	2.10
Analysis predicting resilience from perceived racist events, CLA messages, and their interactions								
1	Socially desirable responding	0.83	0.12	0.39	.16	.15	.16	7.18*
	Recruitment type	2.63	1.52	0.09				1.74
2	Racism	0.02	0.05	0.02	.19	.18	.03	.32
	CLA messages	1.04	0.30	0.19				3.43*
3	Racism $\times$ CLA messages	0.05	0.02	0.87	.21	.20	.02	2.24*

Note: CPR = Cultural Pride Reinforcement subscale; CCA = Cultural Coping With Antagonism subscale; CLA = Cultural Appreciation of Legacy subscale.  
\* $p < .025$ .

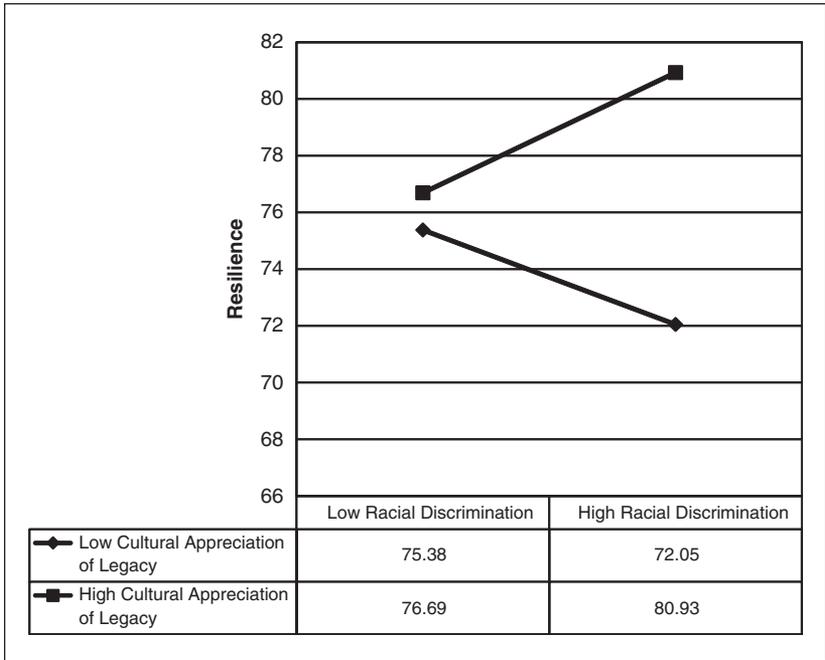


**Figure 1.** The interaction of racial discrimination with racial socialization in predicting resilience

messages,  $t(289) = 3.62, p < .05$ . The simple slopes analysis demonstrated that racial discrimination was negatively associated with resilience for participants who reported low levels of cultural appreciation of legacy,  $\beta = -.28, t(289) = 2.75, p < .05$ . Yet for participants who reported high levels of cultural appreciation of legacy, racial discrimination no longer was related to resilience,  $\beta = .08, t(289) = 1.08, ns$ . Unexpectedly, cultural pride reinforcement and cultural coping with antagonism did not moderate the relationship between racial discrimination and resilience. It is noteworthy that cultural pride reinforcement,  $\beta = .30, t(289) = 5.67, p < .025$ , cultural coping with antagonism,  $\beta = .21, t(289) = 3.73, p < .025$ , and cultural appreciation of legacy,  $\beta = .19, t(289) = 3.43, p < .025$  each independently predicted resilience in a positive direction.

## Discussion

This study examined whether racial socialization moderated the link between perceived racial discrimination and resilience among a sample of young adult



**Figure 2.** The interaction of racial discrimination with cultural legacy of appreciation in predicting resilience

African American college students. To obtain a clearer understanding of this process, we controlled for social desirability and recruitment method (i.e., psychology classes and multicultural student organizations) within our analyses. General racial socialization (i.e., participants’ recollections of a variety of caregiver messages) as well as socialization messages specific to emphasizing the appreciation of cultural legacy moderated this relationship, thereby supporting our hypotheses. Specifically, for participants who reported fewer racial socialization messages, greater racial discrimination was associated with lower resilience. In contrast, for participants who reported a greater number of racial socialization messages, greater racial discrimination was no longer negatively associated with resilience. In fact, among participants who reported higher levels of racial discrimination, those who had received a high amount of racial socialization messages had significantly higher resilience scores than those who received a low amount of racial socialization messages. The moderator effects obtained in this study are consistent with magnitudes

typically found for significant interactions within nonexperimental designs (McClelland & Judd, 1993). As such, our findings contribute substantially to the budding research that has supported racial socialization in the lives of African Americans (e.g., Bowman & Howard, 1985; Bynum et al., 2007; Caughy et al., 2002; Fischer & Shaw, 1999; Scott, 2003; Stevenson, 1994).

Unexpectedly, two specific racial socialization messages (i.e., cultural pride and coping with antagonism or racial hostility by using spirituality and religion) did not moderate the link between racial discrimination and resilience. Cultural pride messages appear to serve as strong buffers for children (Caughy et al., 2002). However, African American young adults in college face a multitude of racial discrimination issues in various academic, social, and employment environments (Landrine & Klonoff, 1996). Thus, simply being proud of African American culture and coping with racial hostility via spirituality/religion are not sufficient to buffer racial discrimination; they may need various racial socialization messages at their disposal. Hearing multiple messages that express cultural pride, awareness of discrimination issues, preparation for how to negotiate discriminatory environments, understanding and appreciation of cultural heritage, and understanding the inequality of mainstream institutions may be essential for their resilience.

Yet certain racial socialization messages may be more valuable than others in counteracting racial discrimination. For instance, caregiver messages that underscore the understanding of and appreciation for the history of African Americans, such as their struggle for equality (i.e., cultural appreciation of legacy) may be more helpful than messages that simply instruct children to be proud of being an African American without providing a foundation for why they should be proud (e.g., the history and legacy of civil rights). Indeed, various scholars have argued for the importance of African Americans understanding their cultural legacy (e.g., Caughy et al., 2002; Stevenson et al., 2002). Hughes et al. (2006) noted that exposing African Americans to information about enslavement, important historical figures (e.g., Ida B. Wells and Martin Luther King Jr.), and celebrating cultural holidays is associated with their psychological well-being.

Discrimination apart, it is an important finding that several specific racial socialization messages were *directly* associated with resilience. Indeed, scholars have asserted that teaching African Americans to have pride and knowledge about their culture as well as cultural heritage issues (e.g., enslavement) are imperative to their identity development and well-being (Bagley & Carroll, 1998; Brown, 2008; Stevenson, 1994; Stevenson et al., 1997). Spirituality and religion, which are rooted in the values of many African American communities (Boyd-Franklin, 2003), and are included within racial socialization messages on

coping with antagonism, have been found to contribute to positive functioning among African Americans (Bowen-Reid & Harrell, 2002).

No bivariate relationship was uncovered between resilience and racial discrimination for our sample. This finding may be attributed to variables such as racial socialization moderating this link. Furthermore, because our sample consisted of very resilient individuals as exemplified by the high mean on the resilience scale, their high resilience may have attenuated or even hidden the expected inverse relationship between racial discrimination and resilience. Graduate and professional students, who consisted of 12.8% of the sample, tend to be high in academic achievement and have good personal resources. Different findings may emerge for a community sample of African American individuals. Still, African American young adults at predominantly White colleges and universities also face a great deal of adversity (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999). With the increase in African Americans attending these academic institutions (Cabrera et al., 1999), it is necessary to understand the resilience of these individuals as well.

### *Implications*

African American families must prepare children for the race conscious world without immobilizing the development of their identity and authentic self (Lipford-Sanders, 2002). This groundwork requires a balance of messages that inform African American children about the reality of race relations (e.g., racial barriers) in society with messages that instill pride and hope for a prosperous future (Stevenson & Davis, 2002). Thus, African American parents need to be able to prepare children without instilling feelings of helplessness. Our results provide ideas for how this preparation can be implemented with children's well-being preserved.

We argue that racial socialization has great potential to be central to this endeavor. Racial socialization appears to have direct and indirect benefits, and mental health professionals thus need to encourage African American families to assume this teaching style with their children. Racial socialization could provide African American youth with the tools necessary to (a) directly facilitate their resilience as well as (b) proactively cope with racial barriers, which in turn also could aid their progress in becoming resilient adults. Our findings have additional implications for mental health professionals who provide therapy for African Americans. Paying special attention to the factors that may facilitate positive outcomes for African American clients is essential (Miller, 1999). For instance, knowledge of these factors can help mental health providers establish rapport with their African American clientele, gather

information, and formulate meaningful intervention strategies that are culturally relevant (Lipford-Sanders, 2002). Our findings suggest that racial socialization may be one such factor.

Greene (1992) and Stevenson and Davis (2002) outlined the use of racial socialization in the context of family therapy (i.e., parent education and training) and therapeutic work with children and adolescents. Racial socialization may also be useful in psychotherapy with adults, providing adult clients and mental health providers with a framework for which to understand and interpret the clients' worldview and experiences (Stevenson & Davis, 2002). Discussing issues of race and racial identity may help establish rapport with African American clients by demonstrating that these are acceptable topics to bring into the therapeutic environment and that mental health providers are aware of the impact that racial socialization may have in their clients' lives (Greene, 1992). Additionally, mental health providers may serve as another socializing agent for clients. For instance, they could provide their African American clients with positive messages that incorporate indigenous coping strategies (e.g., spirituality; Stevenson et al., 2007), which could assist in their coping with antagonism and racial hostility within their environment (e.g., college campus, work). Last, through the incorporation of racial socialization messages, mental health providers can provide a supportive environment in which their clients can begin to identify and understand the negativity of racial microaggressions and learn ways of coping with possible feelings of rejection and confusion that result from racist experiences (Greene, 1992).

If we are to have a thorough understanding of resilience and the ability to overcome adversity, then we must begin to explore this process across cultures and the developmental life span. Having a thorough understanding of the risk and resilience of ALANA (African American, Latino, Asian American, and Native American; Helms & Cook, 1999) populations is necessary for having a comprehensive model of resilience that is empirically supported and culturally fitting for all ALANA individuals, regardless of age (Utsey et al., 2007). This model should be inclusive of cultural factors that serve to buffer the effect of negative environmental aspects unique to oppressed groups, such as racism. Additionally, through exploration of resilience at different developmental levels, we can begin to understand the changes that may take place in individuals' levels of resilience and factors that facilitate their resilience as they mature.

### *Limitations*

Limitations of this study need to be addressed. The results of this study are correlational; thus, the causal direction of the relationships cannot be confirmed. In addition, the measures embedded in this survey were not counterbalanced,

and order effects may have influenced the results. This study also involved a convenience sample of African Americans affiliated with one Midwestern university, which may differ from African Americans in the larger community. There may be important regional differences that were not reflected in this sample. Consequently, readers are cautioned about making generalizations to the African American community as a whole.

All measures used in the present study were self-report and, therefore, were based on participants' memory and their perceptions of their behavior and the behavior of others. However, these perceptions have value in understanding how participants are affected by racist events and how they have processed the racial socialization messages they have received. It is also noteworthy that racial discrimination was positively related to racial socialization. Perhaps receiving racial socialization messages helps African Americans become aware of the incidence of discrimination, which then may raise their racial consciousness as well as promote their resilience as they find meaning in their adversity. Our findings support this assertion, as participants with the highest resilience scores reported not only the most racial socialization messages but also the highest level of racial discrimination. Last, it should be noted that participants who presented an overly favorable impression scored higher on resilience and lower on racial discrimination. It appears, then, that socially desirable responding is an important variable to control for in research on resilience and racial discrimination.

### *Future Directions*

Research on the psychosocial impact of racism is still in the beginning stages (Stevenson, McNeil, Herrero-Taylor, & Davis, 2005), even though various scholars have noted the contribution of racism and racial disparities on the physical health of African Americans (Utsey et al., 2007). Examining other cultural factors (e.g., racial identity, social support networks) that may protect African Americans from psychological distress, especially when faced with racism, is necessary. Factors such as social support and racial identity development can have positive impact on outcomes for African Americans (Dressler, 1985; Sellers, Caldwell, Schmeelk-Cone, & Zimmerman, 2003). Thus, further exploration of these cultural factors and their interaction with aspects such as environment (e.g., neighborhoods), gender, age, and socio-economic status may provide information on their associations with resilience and a higher quality of life for African Americans.

Additional research is needed in the area of racial socialization as well. The relationship between racial socialization and well-being is complex (Hughes et al., 2006). We may begin to understand this complexity through longitudinal

studies that could provide a more thorough understanding of how African American children process the racial socialization messages they receive and construct them into their own understanding of race as adolescents and adults. It would also be beneficial to continue to explore how racial socialization could be used in a therapeutic setting with African American clients of all ages.

### **Conclusion**

We empirically demonstrated that reports of receiving general racial socialization messages, as well as specific messages to appreciate cultural legacy, were associated with higher levels of African Americans' resilience when they reported high levels of racial discrimination. As long as racism and discrimination continue to exist, African American families will have the task of combating the negative messages that their children receive from the broader society. This process is both a direct and indirect part of African American culture and may be essential to ensure the mental and physical health of African Americans. If mental health providers are to understand what can be done to prevent the negative consequences of racial inequality for our African American youth, we will need to further explore what has contributed to the resilience of African Americans.

### **Authors' Note**

This study represents an abbreviated version of Danice L. Brown's doctoral dissertation completed under the direction of Pamela Highlen at The Ohio State University.

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