

## Examining Cultural Socialization Within African American and European American Households

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This preliminary study explored the cultural socialization processes of 227 African American and European American parents of elementary schoolchildren. The Cultural Value Socialization Scales (K. M. Tyler, A. W. Boykin, C. M. Boelter, & M. L. Dillihunt, 2005) were used to garner parents' reports of their cultural value socialization activities at home. The scales contained written vignettes depicting persons involved in activity that reflected a specific cultural value. Ethnocultural values examined were communalism, verve, movement, and affect, and mainstream cultural values included individualism, competition, bureaucracy, and materialism. Regression analyses reveal that being an African American parent was predictive of competition and materialism scores. Race was not a significant predictor of the remaining cultural value socialization scores. Limitations to the study are discussed.

*Keywords:* African American and European cultural values, cultural socialization

For many education researchers, discontinuity between the cultural activities found in the households of low-income African American students and those salient in public school classrooms lies at the heart of academic difficulties (Gay, 2000; Lee, 2001). To thwart the perceived effects of cultural discontinuity and enhance the classroom experiences of this population, most agree that classroom instruction and curricula must reflect aspects of these students' indigenous culture (Gay, 2000; Rogoff, 2003). However, education researchers must first corroborate the existence, salience, and utility of African American children's indigenous cultural values, particularly those values salient during their out-of-school socialization activities.

To address this, this preliminary study examines the cultural socialization practices of low-income African American and European American parents of elementary-level students. In addition, given the findings that European Americans endorse cultural val-

ues originally deemed unique to African American populations (Gaines et al., 1997; Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002; Tyler et al., 2007), it is important to discern whether such culture-laden socialization practices and values are unique to African Americans. A brief literature review on culture, socialization, and African American cultural socialization is provided below.

### Culture and Socialization

Culture has been defined as the set of values, beliefs, and activities found within a given group of people (Betancourt & Lopez, 1993). Within the definition of culture is the concept of worldview, which provides a comprehensive interpretation of reality for a given cultural group (Boykin, 1998). Specific cultural values emerging from these worldviews often reflect the interests, priorities, preferences, goals, and behaviors of the group. They also inform within-group socialization messages, particularly those transmitted from parent to child (Boykin, 1998).

Socialization has been defined as the process by which people acquire the behaviors and beliefs of the social world they live in (Arnett, 1995). Two socialization processes have been discussed in the literature (Arnett, 1995). One is deliberate socialization, which refers to the intentional activities of the parents or socializing agent in the training of the child. A second socialization process is enculturation, in which persons acquire the contents and perspectives of their cultural milieu without explicit instruction or training (Arnett, 1995). Parents tend to draw their socialization practices from the cultural values they were socialized toward (Maccoby, 1992; Rogoff, 2003). The result is often young children's internalization—through deliberate socialization or enculturation—of similar cultural values and behaviors (Marshall, 1995).

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### African American Cultural Socialization

Most of the work speaking to the socialization experiences of African American children has focused on the internalization of messages and beliefs about race and racism (Hughes et al., 2006; McHale et al., 2006). Yet for some, racial socialization processes and messages are but one aspect of the total socialization experience that exists for African Americans (Boykin, 1986).

In his triple quandary theoretical framework, Boykin (1986) presents three distinct realms of psychosocial experience that characterize African American socialization processes. The first, the mainstream Western realm, focuses on the socialization toward mainstream societal values. These are believed to reflect a Western–Anglo Saxon worldview (Boykin, 1986; Rogoff, 2003). Some of these mainstream societal values include individualism, competition, bureaucracy, and materialism.

A second realm of psychosocial experience, the minority realm, speaks to the socialization messages and activities that reflect African Americans' experiences with racial discrimination, prejudice, and oppression (Boykin, 1986). Racial socialization and its corollaries (e.g., racial identity and race-related stress) are typically found here. Finally, in the Afro-cultural realm (Boykin, 1986), African American parents are believed to socialize their children toward specific cultural values that reflect a West African worldview. These values include communalism, verve, affect, movement, spirituality, expressive individualism, social time perspective, orality, and harmony (Boykin, 1983).

Much of the theoretical literature has unequivocally supported the view that African American children come to school with preferences for these cultural values (Boykin, 1986, 1998; Gay, 2000; Lee, 2001). Only two studies, however, have supported this claim empirically. Tyler, Boykin, Miller, and Hurley (2006) found that 81 African American fourth-grade students reported that their own households contained significantly more communal and verve activities and practices than individualistic and competitive activities and practices. Also, Tyler, Boykin, Boelter, and Dillihunt (2005) surveyed 71 African American parents of elementary schoolchildren and found that parents reported significantly higher socialization scores for communalism over individualism and competition, whereas bureaucracy was endorsed significantly more than verve and movement.

Although limited by small sample and effect sizes, along with a race-homogeneous sample, these past studies illuminate that African American children are socialized toward specific cultural values that, according to the literature, are not as salient in their classroom learning experiences (Boykin, Tyler, & Miller, 2005; Boykin, Tyler, Watkins-Lewis, & Kizzie, 2005; Gay, 2000; Tyler, Boykin, & Walton, 2006). The current study extends these findings by seeking to address whether variation in at-home socialization activities can be predicted by race. To examine this research question, socialization reports of both African American and European American parents were examined.

### Method

#### Sample

Two hundred twenty-seven parents of elementary-age schoolchildren from seven different elementary schools in the Midwest participated in the study (126 African Americans and 101 Euro-

pean Americans). Average age of the parents was 37, with 74% older than age 30. Average household size was four. Sixty percent reported an annual income of under \$30,000. Mothers made up 78% of the sample, and 56% were not married.

#### Instruments

*Cultural value socialization scales.* The current study assessed parents' socialization practices of specific cultural values at home through vignettes. The cultural values include communalism, verve, movement, affect, individualism, competition, bureaucracy, and materialism (Boykin, 1983). In brief, the vignettes each described male and female characters carrying out several tasks at home in ways that reflected a specific cultural value. Cultural value socialization vignettes were between 10 and 12 lines long and had readability indices equivalent to a fifth-grade reading level. More information regarding the development of the cultural value socialization vignettes and samples can be found in Tyler et al. (2005).

The cultural value socialization score for each vignette was derived using items assessing the frequency of participation in specific, culture-laden behaviors at home. These items followed each cultural value socialization vignette. The vignettes were counterbalanced to minimize order effects. After reading the vignettes, participants responded on a 4-point Likert-type scale reporting how often they carried out the same culture-laden activities at home (i.e., 1 = *almost never*, 2 = *not often*, 3 = *often*, and 4 = *almost always*). The midpoint was 2.5 for each scale.

#### Procedures

Parents were recruited from seven elementary schools in the Midwest. Parents at each school received a letter introducing the purpose of the questionnaire, the research team, and the location for the research. Seventy-five percent of the letters sent to parents across all school sites were returned. This indicated that 75% of the parents sampled were interested in participating in the study. Following explanation of informed consent procedures at each school site, parents completed and returned the questionnaire to an on-site research team member. Parents were paid \$10 for their participation.

### Results

#### Data Analysis Plan

To address the major research question, several multiple regression analyses with correction for familywise error were computed. Cultural value socialization scores were criterion variables, and race was the major predictor variable in the study. Additional variables included in the regression analyses were education level (elementary, high school, and college), income level (under \$10,000, \$10,000–\$19,999, \$20,000–\$29,999, \$30,000–\$39,999, \$40,000–\$49,999, and \$50,000 and above), parent marital status (not married and married), and age (continuous). These variables were included because some research has shown significant associations between various demographic factors and socialization activities (Brown, Tanner-Smith, Lesane-Brown, & Ezell, 2007; Hughes et al., 2006; Maccoby, 1992; Marshall, 1995; McHale et al., 2006; Peters, 1985).

Given that the majority of the sample was mothers (78%) of elementary schoolchildren, parent gender was not included in the regression analyses. Race, marital status, and education level were dummy coded before regression analyses. An interaction term for race and income was computed to determine whether it would be significantly predictive of the cultural value socialization scores.

*Multiple regressions.* To discern the predictive ability of race and other demographic variables on derived cultural value socialization scores, several multiple regressions equations were computed. Statistically significant regression models emerged for the competition,  $F(5, 196) = 2.94, p < .01$ , and materialism,  $F(5, 196) = 3.37, p < .01$ , socialization scores. Examination of the standardized betas showed that being an African American parent was significantly predictive of higher competition ( $\beta = 0.51, t(1) = 2.91, p < .01$ ) and materialism ( $\beta = 0.50, t(226) = 2.84, p < .01$ ) socialization scores. Table 1 lists the means, standard deviation and beta coefficients for each cultural socialization mean.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the cultural value socialization activities of African American and European American parents of elementary schoolchildren. Using multiple regression analyses, the results show that regardless of age, marital status, or race, parents report communal, vervistic, movement-oriented, affective, bureaucratic, and individualistic socialization activities to the same relative degree. In this study, African American parents tended to socialize their children toward competition and materialism more than did European American parents. There were no significant differences between African American and European American parents on the other cultural socialization measures.

Although the literature regarding African Americans' orientation toward competition is mixed (Bergin & Cooks, 2000; Brown et al., 2007; Ogbu, 2003), African American parents' endorsement of competition is aligned with some literature (Hughes et al., 2006; Peters, 1985). Here, it is argued that many African American parents believe that their children, regardless of gender, must become competitive in school and in life. Also, the means for materialism and competition were below the scale midpoints for both African American and European American parents. Thus,

although being African American was significantly predictive of slightly higher materialism and competition scores, examination of the descriptive statistics reveals that these cultural values are not overwhelmingly prevalent in the households of either group. Moreover, both African American and European American parents reported relatively low movement and vervistic cultural value socialization at home.

Overall, the present findings suggest that race is significantly predictive of two of four mainstream cultural values and is not significantly predictive of the four ethnocultural values said to permeate the lives of African American and other ethnic minority populations. In particular, examination of the descriptive statistics reveals that African American and European American parents (a) highly endorse communal, affective, and bureaucratic activities at home; (b) do not fully endorse individualistic and competitive behaviors at home; (c) report means for movement and verve that are slightly below the midpoint; and (d) do not maintain much socialization toward materialism at home. Given these findings, it is likely that the negative effects of cultural discontinuity are likely to arise for both African American and European American students. More research is needed to empirically substantiate such a claim.

Limitations and Future Directions

One contribution of this study is that education researchers and stakeholders have data to support the existence of a complex cultural socialization process occurring in African American and European American households. There are, however, some limitations to the current study. First, the correlational nature of the data limits conclusions because no causal inferences can be made. Second, parents' income level may have played a role in the cultural value socialization reported by parents in both racial groups. For example, the data show that income was significantly predictive of lower individualism, competition, and materialism socialization scores for all parents. Although the schools that parents' children attended contained a majority of students ( $\geq 5\%$ ) who qualified for free and reduced lunch rates, it is clear from these data that variability in parents' income is associated with their socialization practices toward mainstream societal values. The marginal significance for the Race  $\times$  Income interaction terms

Table 1  
Regression and Descriptive Summaries for Cultural Value Socialization Scores

Variable	Communalism	Verve	Movement	Affect	Individualism	Competition	Bureaucracy	Materialism
African American ( $\beta$ [ $p$ ])	-.02 (.89)	-.10 (.58)	-.14 (.43)	-.29 (.11)	.28 (.11)	<b>.51 (.01)</b>	.01 (.97)	<b>.50 (.01)</b>
Married ( $\beta$ [ $p$ ])	-.04 (.69)	-.05 (.61)	-.00 (.98)	.07 (.49)	.05 (.61)	.03 (.76)	.11 (.23)	.02 (.83)
Elementary ( $\beta$ [ $p$ ])	-.08 (.36)	.12 (.15)	-.00 (.95)	-.09 (.27)	.16 (.07)	-.02 (.79)	-.12 (.15)	.04 (.62)
College ( $\beta$ [ $p$ ])	-.08 (.40)	-.11 (.23)	-.03 (.76)	.00 (.96)	.13 (.15)	.11 (.21)	-.03 (.74)	.09 (.33)
Age ( $\beta$ [ $p$ ])	.04 (.61)	.00 (.99)	-.02 (.81)	.08 (.33)	-.10 (.22)	.12 (.14)	-.15 (.07)	-.11 (.19)
Income ( $\beta$ [ $p$ ])	.07 (.64)	-.10 (.47)	-.16 (.26)	-.07 (.60)	<b>-.34 (.01)</b>	<b>-.28 (.04)</b>	-.03 (.83)	<b>-.28 (.04)</b>
Race $\times$ Income ( $\beta$ [ $p$ ])	-.06 (.80)	.15 (.49)	-.02 (.95)	-.17 (.44)	.30 (.16)	.40 (.07)	-.33 (.11)	.40 (.06)
<i>M</i>	3.31	2.19	2.18	3.1	2.03	1.95	2.77	1.53
<i>SD</i>	0.64	0.85	0.79	0.66	0.78	0.88	0.78	0.67
African American	3.3	2.08	2.13	2.99	2.11	2.13	2.90	1.63
European American	3.3	2.29	2.24	3.23	1.94	1.73	2.60	1.40
$\alpha$	.88	.91	.90	.87	.90	.84	.90	.87

Note. Boldface values indicate beta coefficients significant at the .05 level or lower.

for two of the eight cultural value socialization scores also indicates that cultural values reported by parents could also be a function of their class status. Future research should more closely examine the role of socioeconomic status in the reported cultural value socialization activities of African American and European American families. It is possible that the similarity in most of the cultural value socialization scores could have resulted from class similarities between the two sets of parents rather than similarities in the worldviews that foster the cultural values examined in this study.

Given that data were collected at the sites where the parents' children attend school, it is also likely that social desirability may have influenced the results. Parents may have reported those household socialization activities that they believed teachers would endorse in their own classrooms. Future research should add a social desirability index to determine any association between this measure and parents' cultural socialization activities.

In addition, although there is new information on the presence of specific cultural values permeating the socialization activities of African American and European American families, there are still no data to support the presence of cultural discontinuity in the academic lives of children in these families. To assess the presence of cultural discontinuity, future research must also begin to compare parents' and students' reports of specific cultural values to those endorsed by classroom teachers. Finally, the data presented here do not provide a rationale for why parents maintained such culturally aligned behaviors at home. Future research should use mixed-methodology assessments to better understand the presence and purpose of specific cultural values in the lives of African American and European American households.

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