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# Conversations About Race: Parent-child Conversations About Race and Implications for Adolescent Coping and Color-blindness

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## Introduction

Racial socialization is the process by which parental figures transmit messages about the place of race in society to their children. Though majority and minority group adolescents may experience the process of constructing their racial self-concept differently, they are each likely to have experiences that are racially coded, such as encounters with prejudice, stereotypes, privilege, or discrimination. Shared conversations about race, if they occur, have the potential to allow parents to better prepare adolescents to effectively respond and react to these negative experiences, develop a positive racial and cultural identity, and refrain from adopting a racial ideology that denies the importance of race (Barr & Neville, 2008; Hughes et al., 2006; Juang & Syed, 2010).

Assessing racial socialization messages has been done through analyzing protective and proactive messaging types. Protective messages are messages centered on the existence of racial tensions, with the goal of preparing an adolescent for future discriminatory experiences and conceptualizing issues of race as a means for understanding experiences of discrimination. Proactive messages focus on the reality of the meaning of race in society, but are more positivistic. (Barr & Neville, 2008).

Conversations about race were expected to relate to adolescent color-blindness levels and coping responses because racial socialization provides adolescents with an understanding of the importance of race in society. Therefore, they are more likely to be able to contextualize experiences of discrimination against a historical and cultural framework and utilize productive coping strategies.

This study was designed as an examination of racial socialization conversations between parental figures and adolescents, and how these conversations impact coping with discrimination and levels of colorblindness.

### Aims of this Study

1. To examine if minority and majority adolescents differ in their likelihood of experiencing a race-related conversation with their parents and/or racial discrimination.
2. To examine if minority and majority adolescents differ in their levels of colorblindness and/or coping approaches.
3. To determine if having a race-based conversation with a parent, as well as one's level of colorblindness, predict the kinds of coping approaches that an adolescent employs,

## Participants

**119 adolescents ( $M_{age} = 18.95$ ,  $SD = 1.06$  years)**

- Data collected at OWU
- 73 females, 46 males
- 39 minority race, 80 Caucasian
- 8.4% African-American, 7.56% Hispanic, 7.56% Asian American or Pacific Islander, 2.52% Biracial, 6.72% Other

## Method: Narrative Prompts

**Race Conversation Narrative** The prompt read, "Please describe an important conversation you have had with a parental figure that focused on your race. In your description, be sure to include information about how old you were when the conversation took place, the details of the conversation itself, what prompted the conversation, and how you felt during, and after, the conversation."

### Goals of Race Conversation

- Preparation for Bias (e.g., warning against majority culture)
- Education (e.g., learning about place of race in society)
- Emotional Support (e.g., empathy and concern about race experience)

**Discriminatory Experience Narrative** The prompt read, "Please describe a time when you were discriminated against or treated unfairly because of your race. In your description, be sure to include information about what prompted the event, how you responded during the event, and how you felt during and after the event. Finally, do you wish that you had responded differently to the event? If so, how do you wish you had responded, and why?"

### Types of Discrimination

- Violence (or presumed violence)
- Exclusion
- Harassment

Inter-rater reliability was at 95% for the race conversation narratives and 96% for the coding of the discrimination experience narratives.

## Method: Coping and Color-blindness

**Coping Responses** were evaluated using the Response to Stress Questionnaire (RSQ; Connor-Smith et al., 2000), a 57 item questionnaire assessing five possible coping mechanisms:

- Primary engagement coping (e.g., problem-solving)
- Secondary control coping (e.g., cognitive restructuring)
- Disengagement coping (e.g., avoidance)
- Involuntary engagement coping (e.g., rumination), and
- Involuntary disengagement coping (e.g., emotional numbing)

**Colorblindness** was evaluated using the Color-blind Racial Attitudes Scale (CoBRAS; Neville, Lilly, Lee, Duran, and Browne, 2000), a 20 item scale assessing levels of racial color-blindness. CoBRAS subscales measure lack of awareness for:

- Racial privilege (e.g., White privilege)
- Institutional discrimination (e.g., institutional forms of racism and exclusion), and
- Blatant racial issues (e.g., general racial issues and discrimination)

## Results

### Descriptives

- All forms of coping responses were higher for minority adolescents (Table 1).
- All forms of colorblindness were lower for minority adolescents (Table 1).
- Minority adolescents experienced more race conversations and more discrimination (Table 2).
- For both majority and minority adolescents, the most common goal for race-based conversations was education.

### Correlations Between Coping and Colorblindness

- Significant negative correlation found between involuntary engagement and the racial privilege subscale of CoBRAS.
- Significant negative correlation found between involuntary disengagement and the racial privilege subscale of CoBRAS.
- Significant negative correlation found between involuntary engagement and the overall CoBRAS score.
- Neither primary engagement coping nor disengagement coping were significantly correlated with any of the CoBRAS subscales.

### Predicting Coping Responses

- We ran three General Linear Models to predict primary engagement, secondary engagement, and disengagement coping from colorblindness scores and whether individuals had a race conversation or not. We found that if individuals did have a race-based conversation, they were:
  - Marginally more likely to use primary engagement coping ( $F(1, 107) = 3.76$ ,  $\beta = .23$ ,  $p = .06$ ).
  - Significantly more likely to use secondary engagement coping ( $F(1, 107) = 4.19$ ,  $\beta = .24$ ,  $p = .049$ ).
  - Colorblindness did not predict engagement coping strategy, and there were no significant predictors of disengagement coping.

## Conclusions and Future Directions

Overall, we found that minority and majority adolescents did not differ in their likelihood of experiencing a race-related conversation with their parents, although minority adolescents were more likely to experience racial discrimination than their majority adolescent counterparts.

Additionally, minority adolescents used all forms of coping more frequently and had lower levels of color-blind attitudes than their majority counterparts.

We also found that having a racial socialization conversation predicts increased engagement coping strategy use, which has been shown to be an adaptive long-term coping response. Therefore, we can view race-related conversations as providing valuable context for adolescents who then experience discrimination.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Majority (n=80) Mean	Majority (n=80) SD	Minority (n=39) Mean	Minority (n=39) SD
Age	18.98	1.03	18.92	1.13
<b>CoBRAS Scores:</b>				
Racial Privilege	25.05	7.98	22.15	7.47
Institutional Discrimination	23.06	6.13	19.05	5.29
Blatant Racial Issues	14.91	5.66	11.53	4.28
Overall CoBRAS score	62.97	17.27	52.63	13.68
<b>RSQ Scores:</b>				
Primary Engagement	18.39	4.55	22.86	4.28
Secondary Engagement	22.04	5.66	22.84	5.62
Disengagement	22.05	5.84	25.11	5.64
Involuntary Engagement	22.57	6.77	28.37	8.71
Involuntary Disengagement	17.69	4.21	20.45	5.19

Table 2. Frequency of Race Conversations and Discrimination

Variable	Majority (n=80) % Cases	Minority (n=39) % Cases
Race Conversation Occurred	71.3%	79.5%
<i>Goal of Race-based Conversation:</i>		
Preparation for Bias	3.8%	30.8%
Education	52.5%	53.8%
Emotional Support	1.3%	12.8%
Racial Discrimination Experienced	43.8%	79.5%
<i>Type of Discrimination Experienced:</i>		
Violence	0%	17.9%
Exclusion	21.3%	20.5%
Harassment	21.3%	51.3%