

A Qualitative Examination of the Maternal Racial Socialization of African American Preschool  
Children

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## ABSTRACT

The salience of racial socialization among African American families has received considerable attention in the literature; however, few scholars have examined how the process of racial socialization unfolds in families with very young children. This study investigated how African American mothers of preschool-age children approached the process of racial socialization. I interviewed African American mothers who were at least age 18 (N=12) with biological children between the ages of three and five to explore the following: (a) the strategies and messages used during the racial socialization process, (b) how mothers' perceptions of colorism influenced the content of messages, and (c) mothers' perceptions of external forces that influenced their children's racial socialization experiences. I applied an integrated Black feminist-child development theoretical framework and grounded theory methodology to examine how African American mothers negotiated intersectionality when racially socializing their preschool-age children. Four major themes emerged from data analysis: motherwork as conscientization, bidirectional process in maternal racial socialization, skin tone politics in maternal racial socialization, and defining African American motherhood. From these themes, I concluded that mothers preferred to use cultural and egalitarian strategies and messages with their preschool-age children. Maternal racial socialization has a bidirectional component that involves mother-child conversations about race that occur when the child notices differences in people based on skin color, a race-related situation occurs, or the child initiates it. Colorism did not directly influence the content of racial socialization messages but did inform maternal interactions with extended family members. For African American women, motherhood is characterized by societal expectations and pressures for African American children.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

### Background

Researchers from several disciplines have examined the complex nature of child socialization. Given the growing cultural and racial diversity in the United States, a burgeoning group of researchers has sought to examine racial socialization among racial and ethnic minority families. Racial socialization refers to the messages and practices parents use to prepare their children for life as members of their own race and educate them about intergroup relations with other racial and ethnic groups (Hughes & Johnson, 2001; Thornton, Chatters, Taylor, & Allen, 1990). Racial socialization among African American families, in particular, has received considerable attention in the literature. For African American families, racial socialization has become a necessary component of parenting (Caughy, O'Campo, Randolph, & Nickerson, 2002; Franklin, Boyd-Franklin, & Draper, 2002; S.A. Hill, 1999; White-Johnson, Ford, & Sellers, 2010) due in part to the history of slavery of African Americans and the continued marginalization and stigmatization of African Americans in U.S. society (S.A. Hill, 1999). "For African American people, parenting has too often been consigned to teaching kids to survive and to not submit to the inequities of racism. There is no choice in this regard" (Franklin et al., 2002, p. 120). This is not to say that racial socialization does not occur among other racial and ethnic groups. Hughes (2003) and Hughes and colleagues (2006) argued that parents from all racial and ethnic groups probably convey messages about race and intergroup relations to their children; however, racial socialization is particularly salient in the lives of racial and ethnic minorities. For instance, studies on racial socialization have shown that most African American parents report engaging in racial socialization practices with their children (Hughes & Chen, 1997; Hughes & Johnson, 2001).

Despite the attention this phenomenon has received, few scholars have examined how the process of racial socialization unfolds in families with very young children (Suizzo, Robinson, & Pahlke, 2008). I have addressed that gap in the racial socialization literature by using an integrated Black Feminist- child development theoretical framework to explore how cultural factors influenced the maternal racial socialization of young African American children. I used the Integrative Model for the Study of Developmental Competences in Minority Children (Garcia Coll et al., 1996) and Black Feminist theory (Collins, 2000) as a theoretical framework for this study. From this point forward, this model will be referred to as the Integrative Model.

Garcia Coll and colleagues (1996) highlighted, comprehensively, those factors that interacted to form the distinct process of the development of children of color (see Appendix A). Black Feminist theory (Collins, 2000) complemented the Integrative Model (Garcia Coll et al., 1996) and was used to provide another theoretical lens to examine how intersectionality informed mothers' racial socialization process and the lived experiences of African American mothers and children. Intersectionality referred to how race, class and gender coalesced to form the distinct life experiences of African American women (Crenshaw, 1993). Additionally, I explored how colorism influenced the process of maternal racial socialization. Colorism is "an intraracial system of inequality based on skin color, hair texture, and facial features that bestows privilege and value on physical attributes that are closer to white" (Wilder & Cain, 2011, p. 578). This study was a grounded theory exploration with African American mothers from low-income and middle-class families and their preschool-age children (i.e., ages three to five years old).

### **Rationale for the Study**

I believe that the examination the racial socialization of preschool-age children is imperative because of the developmental tasks experienced by this age group. Preschool-age children are negotiating early stages of identity development; moreover, the successful negotiation of these stages is influenced by the culture and society in which they live (Erikson, 1950; 1965). Identity development at this stage is crucial as it influences identity formation later in life (Erikson, 1950; 1965). Further, Demo and Hughes (1990) postulated that racial identity in adulthood is shaped by the parental racial socialization messages received in childhood. Racial socialization has implications for the early racial identity development of African American children because it helps impart to them what they need to know in order to develop a healthy identity and live in U.S. society. In a similar vein, examining the racial socialization of very young children is important because they are aware of and form ideas about phenotypic differences in people (for example see Clark and Clarks' (1947) classic doll study); therefore, understanding how parents address racial differences among people with their children is important.

McAdoo (2002) and Peters (2007) noted that researchers have not paid enough attention to within-group differences among African American families. In order to gain views that are generally applicable to any population of racially and ethnically different people, it is necessary to study within group differences (McAdoo). Previous studies have shown that racial

socialization varies by parental gender, marital status, and education (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Thornton et al., 1990). This study was significant because it examined within-group differences among African American mothers with preschool-age children through the use of a sample of low-income and middle-income mothers with varying marital statuses and levels of education.

Another reason why this topic was a significant course of study is that the sociohistorical contexts surrounding African American families have changed in recent decades. Historical changes and cultural variations shape the lives of children (Morrow, 2003). These phenomena in childhood should not be overlooked when studying aspects of parenting, in particular the parenting among racial and ethnic minority populations. Hughes and colleagues (2006) proposed that the process of racial socialization is likely to become increasingly important in the lives of children as they are being challenged to negotiate environments rich in diversity. This study explored how African American parents prepare their children to negotiate those contexts in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Lastly, this study was important because more rigorous research methods to examine maternal racial socialization, an aspect of African American parenting. Tamis-LeMonda, Briggs, McClowry, and Snow (2008) reviewed the literature on methodologies used in research on parenting in African American families and noted that, while vast improvements have been made, researchers should employ more rigorous methods to tap into the rich dimensions of and influences on African American parenting. The authors urged researchers to make sure that their measurement of African American parenting is grounded in the experiences of parents. This study examined maternal racial socialization from the perspective of African American mothers through the use of an in-depth qualitative interview and grounded theory methodology.

### **Purpose of the Study**

In this study, I explored how African American mothers engage their preschool-age children in the racial socialization process. This study focused on examining the content of messages conveyed to children during the racial socialization process. Additionally, I examined how intersectionality and colorism contribute to the maternal racial socialization process. The overall purpose of this study was to move beyond the current limitations in the literature on racial socialization to a deeper, more informed understanding of how intersectionality and colorism influence how racial socialization happens in African American families.

## **Research Questions**

In this study, racial socialization was operationalized as the strategies that parents use to impart cultural norms and values to children and to teach them about interracial group relationships and sociocultural interaction. Based on my review of the literature, I devised these research questions:

1. What are the maternal racial socialization strategies that African American mothers use with their preschool-age children?
2. What is the content of maternal racial socialization messages?
3. How do mothers' perceptions of colorism influence the content of maternal racial socialization messages?
4. What are mothers' perceptions of external forces that influence their children's racial socialization experiences?

The Integrative Model (Garcia Coll et al., 1996) and Black Feminist theory were used as a theoretical framework to address the research questions of this study (see Appendix B).

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### Overview of the Theoretical Framework

In this section, I present a review of the Integrative Model (Garcia Coll et al., 1996) and Black Feminist Theory (Collins, 2000). The model was originally based on social stratification theory (Attewell & Fitzgerald, 1980). The model was an outgrowth of the authors concerns that existing mainstream, theoretical frameworks did not address the diversity and strengths of minority groups (Garcia Coll et al., 1996). Further, researchers have continued to assess racial and ethnic minority children's development, including African American children, based on the prototypical development of Caucasian, middle-class children (Lillard, 1998; Miller, 2002; Peters, 2007). The Integrative Model differs from mainstream theories of child development because social position was the central construct of the model; whereas, mainstream theories have ignored how social position influences the development of children of color (Garcia Coll et al., 1996). In the Integrative Model, social position refers to race, class, ethnicity, and gender as separate variables that work together to influence the development of racial and ethnic minority children (Garcia Coll et al., 1996). Black Feminist theory fits with the social position construct of the Integrative Model as they both emphasize how race, class, and gender intersect to influence the lives of African Americans. Eight constructs constitute the model and they include: (a) social position, (b) social stratification mechanisms (i.e., racism, prejudice, discrimination, and oppression) (c) segregation (d) promoting and inhibiting environments, (e) adaptive culture, (f) child characteristics, (g) family, and (h) developmental competencies.

After synthesizing the Integrative Model (Garcia Coll et al., 1996) with the racial socialization literature, four themes emerged from my synthesis that best describe how the model explains the racial socialization of young African American children: social position, sociohistorical forces, ecological contexts and child influences. These themes compelled me to choose the model as part of my theoretical framework because they illuminate how the model captures the major findings in the racial socialization literature while placing those findings in a child development context. These themes guide my interpretation of responses to my research questions and overall understanding of the process of maternal racial socialization. Further, my synthesis revealed how Black Feminist theory was needed to complement the Integrative Model to examine in greater depth how the intersection of race, class and gender inform mothers' racial socialization practices and impact African American child development. In this overview of the

theoretical framework, I provide a detailed explanation of each construct (i.e., social position, social stratification mechanisms, segregation, promoting and inhibiting environments, adaptive culture, child characteristics and developmental outcomes) of the Integrative model (Garcia Coll et al., 1996) while linking a construct to one of my themes of the model and use the racial socialization literature to frame my discussion. I provide an overview of Black Feminist theory (Collins, 2000) while discussing the social position construct because, after my review of the literature, that is where it fits best with the model as it provides a culturally sensitive, Afrocentric lens to examine how African American mothers negotiate intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1993) and colorism (Wilder & Cain, 2011) in the process of racial socialization.

Throughout my discussion, I refer (a) the types of racial socialization messages common among African American parents (i.e., cultural socialization, preparation for bias, promotion of mistrust, and egalitarianism), (b) sociodemographic and gender differences in racial socialization, and (c) external forces that may influence racial socialization. The types of racial socialization serve as sensitizing concepts in this study.

**Social position and Black Feminist Theory.** Social position is the main construct of the Integrative Model (Garcia Coll et al., 1996). It is one of my synthesized themes for the model because it is a common thread that explains how all of the constructs operated in the lives of racial and ethnic minority children. The social position variables (i.e., race, class, ethnicity, and gender) influence child development indirectly through social stratification mechanisms (i.e., racism, prejudice, discrimination, and oppression); furthermore, they overlap and have cumulative effects on child development (Garcia Coll et al., 1996). In the Integrative Model (Garcia Coll et al., 1996) social position variables intersect and have aggregate effects on child development resulting in a distinct process of development for children of color that Caucasian children do not share.

Child development scholars rarely use feminist concepts when examining aspects of child development, but the feminist concept of intersectionality is appropriate for this dissertation because African American mothers as sources of racial socialization of young children are examined. Black women “exist within an intersectionality matrix” (Few, 2007, p. 454) which is composed of multiple layers of oppression. “An intersectionality matrix is a specific location where multiple systems of oppression simultaneously corroborate and subjugate to conceal, deliberate, marginalizing ideological maneuvers that define “Otherness” (Few, p. 454). Given

that Garcia Coll and colleagues (1996) emphasized intersectionality, it is a natural complement to Black Feminist theory (Collins, 2000). Miller (2006) urged feminist scholars to incorporate child development theory into their scholarship to better capture the experiences of women given that their lives are often intertwined with the lives of their children. Garcia Coll et al. (1996) argued that the process of development is different for African American children because of the “unique ecological circumstances” (p. 1893) they experience that Caucasian children do not; therefore, a Black Feminist perspective allowed me to discuss how African American mothers perceived and reacted to those distinct ecological experiences.

The tenets of Black Feminism are: (a) African American women have a history of fighting against multiple systems of oppression, (b) analysis of how African American women and their families cope with and survive interlocking oppressions of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation, (c) challenge and eliminate negative images of African American women, and (d) activism (Collins, 2000). In the case of racial socialization, the ideologies of Black Feminist theory illuminate gender differences in racial socialization. For example, Black Feminist theory can be used to explain how African American mothers address negative images of African American women through racial socialization (for examples, see Collins, 1987, 2000; Stephens & Few, 2007; Thomas, Witherspoon, & Speight, 2004) Unlike other feminist theories, Black Feminists have acknowledged the similarity in the struggles of African American women and men (The Combahee River Collective, 1977). For instance, S. A. Hill (1999) reported that African American parents believe that race shapes the futures of their sons more so than their daughters; further, parents emphasized having good self-esteem to girls more than boys. Bowman and Howard (1985) documented that parents tended to stress racial barriers to their sons and racial pride to their daughters. Likewise, Thomas and Speight (1999) reported that African American boys received more messages indicative of preparation for bias (i.e., messages about negative stereotypes and coping strategies); whereas, African American girls received more cultural socialization messages (i.e., messages about racial pride). It is important to note that the girls in Thomas and Speight’s study received messages about being independent, practicing abstinence, and not be taken advantage of in relationships with men; whereas, boys did not receive those messages. The feature of commonality of struggle in Black Feminist Theory allowed me to examine how African American women prepared their daughters and sons to cope with racism, prejudice, discrimination and oppression.

Garcia Coll and colleagues' (1996) social position construct highlights how colorism may influence the content of maternal racial socialization messages. Colorism is “an intraracial system of inequality based on skin color, hair texture, and facial features that bestows privilege and value on physical attributes that are closer to white” (Wilder & Cain, 2011, p. 578). Further, Wilder and Cain (2011) found that some African American women believed that their families were the most significant source of information about skin color (Wilder & Cain). The role, if any, of colorism in the maternal racial socialization process was examined. Garcia Coll et al. argued that social position was central to the development of children of color, thereby, providing child development scholars with a theoretical model to use to examine how intersectionality influences racial socialization and other aspects of racial and ethnic minority children's development.

**Sociohistorical forces.** The theme, sociohistorical forces, encompasses the social stratification mechanisms (i.e., racism, prejudice, discrimination and oppression) and segregation constructs of the Integrative Model (Garcia Coll et al., 1996). Based on my synthesis of the model with the racial socialization literature, I suggest that by including social stratification mechanisms and segregation as constructs in the model, Garcia Coll et al. (1996) draw attention to how racism, prejudice, discrimination, oppression and segregation have influenced African American child development on a sociohistorical level. Garcia Coll and colleagues highlighted the significance of racism in particular in the lives of children of color because children of all races may encounter prejudice, discrimination, and oppression for other reasons such as social class, ethnicity, and gender; however, racism is unique to children of color.

Garcia Coll et al. (1996) identified three types of segregation that affected the development of children of color (i.e., residential, economic, and social and psychological). Wilson (2007) argued that residential and economic segregation in the United States is stratified along class lines affecting opportunities across the life span for African Americans. The opportunities within those class lines operated differently for African Americans as compared to Caucasians; moreover, the opportunities gap between African Americans and Caucasians does not show any signs of closing in the near future (Wilson). Social and psychological segregation happens when racial and ethnic minority families are denied access to mainstream society's social and emotional resources due to social stratification mechanisms (Garcia Coll et al.).

By using social stratification mechanisms and segregation as constructs in their model, Garcia Coll and colleagues remind child development scholars that African American child development must be understood with a sociohistorical context.

From my review of the Integrative Model (Garcia Coll et al., 1996) and the racial socialization literature, I included parental racial socialization messages in my sociohistorical forces theme. Based on my review, I suggest that parental racial socialization messages are responses to how the social stratification mechanisms and segregation operate in the lives of African Americans. Further, sociohistorical changes in U.S. society influence the content of racial socialization messages. Miller (2002) noted that “Industrialization, urbanization, immigration, the Depression, and the civil rights movement brought changes in what children needed to be taught in order to develop a healthy personality at their time in history” (p. 148). While racial socialization continues to be a necessary function of African American parenting (Franklin et al., 2002), the meanings connected to parental messages about race have changed over time. For example, bell hooks (1981) noted that, in the times of slavery in the United States, slave mothers socialized their children to understand their position as slaves in order to avoid physical punishment by slave masters; moreover, slave girls were socialized in the same fashion as boys but avoiding rape was also imparted to girls. On the other hand, Hughes and colleagues (2006) identified four types of racial socialization messages used by contemporary African American families: (1) cultural socialization; (2) preparation for bias; (3) promotion of mistrust; and (4) egalitarianism and silence about race. These types of racial socialization messages serve as sensitizing concepts in this study. I discuss each type of racial socialization in detail.

***Cultural socialization.*** One type of racial socialization message is cultural socialization. Cultural socialization describes those racial socialization messages and practices that foster a sense of racial pride and teach children about cultural history (Caughy, O’Campo et al., 2002). Cultural socialization practices include instilling racial pride through the use of cultural artifacts, discussions about cultural and racial history and engaging in cultural practices and celebrations (Hughes et al., 2006). Some African American parents prefer cultural socialization methods as positive ways to racially socialize their young children (Coard, Wallace, Stevenson, & Brotman, 2004; Suizzo et al., 2008).

***Preparation for bias.*** Preparation for bias is another type of racial socialization

message that is included in the sociohistorical forces theme. Preparation for bias messages prepare children for future experiences with racism and discrimination (Hughes & Chen, 1997). For example, Banks-Wallace and Parks (2001) reported that African American mothers encouraged their daughters to develop protective, coping strategies in order to survive encounters with racism and maintain their self-esteem. Cooper (2007) reported that African American mothers encouraged academic success as a survival strategy against racism. Caughy and colleagues (2002) reported that parents who imparted messages about preparation for bias also practiced cultural socialization by having cultural artifacts in their homes.

***Promotion of mistrust.*** Promotion of mistrust is another type of racial socialization message that is included in the sociohistorical forces theme. Promotion of mistrust refers to racial socialization that teaches children to be cautious and distrustful during interactions with members of other racial and ethnic groups (Hughes & Chen, 1997). Parents in Hughes and Johnson (2001) reported engaging in promotion of mistrust socialization practices after their children had been treated unfairly. The findings of Hughes and Johnson suggest that promotion of mistrust messages from parents may occur in a reactive more than a proactive context. In short, promotion of mistrust messages may have greater implications for social interaction than the other types of messages because they teach children to be wary of people from other racial and ethnic groups.

***Egalitarian.*** Egalitarian messages are the fourth and final type of racial socialization messages included in the sociohistorical forces theme. Egalitarian messages are those messages that stress “interracial equality and coexistence” (Neblett et al., 2008, p. 190). Egalitarianism is sometimes referred to in the racial socialization literature as mainstream socialization (see Bowman & Howard, 1985). Egalitarianism is sometimes linked with silence about race messages in the literature. In my review, however, this link did not appear very often; therefore, my review focuses more on egalitarian messages. From my review of the literature, I noticed that egalitarian-based messages may work in concert with or mask other message types. For example, S. A. Hill (1999) reported that an African American father in her study emphasized teaching his son to be a man and “not a Black man;” further, the father believed that being a man meant being respectful to women. Perhaps this father is teaching his son that being a man and being respectful to women outweighs race or skin color. I suggest that this father is actually preparing his son to combat negative images of African American males in society; thus, his

message of egalitarianism is also a message of preparation of bias. Egalitarian messages may be linked to other types of racial socialization messages; however, more research is needed to disentangle that possible connection.

Sociodemographic differences in the racial socialization of African American children are included in my theme of sociohistorical forces. Sociodemographic differences are included in this theme based on findings in the racial socialization literature. Thornton and colleagues' (1990) classic study of African American parental racial socialization found that racial socialization efforts varied by sociodemographic variables including parental age, gender, marital status, region of the United States, and neighborhood composition. In a similar vein, Hughes and colleagues (2006) reviewed the literature on racial socialization and noted that parents of higher SES were more likely to engage in racial socialization than parents of lower SES. S.A. Hill (1999) reported that parents of higher SES were more likely to recognize racism and identify that their children had been mistreated because of it; on the other hand, lower SES parents tended to blame a lack of parental education rather than prejudice or discrimination as the catalyst for child mistreatment. The sociohistorical forces theme illuminates how the social stratification mechanisms and segregation constructs, types of racial socialization messages and sociodemographic differences have influenced African American child development.

**Ecological contexts.** Ecological contexts are another major theme apparent in my synthesis of the Integrative Model (Garcia Coll et al., 1996). African American children are exposed to different contexts that contribute to their development including their racial socialization. The constructs from the model that are included in this theme are promoting and inhibiting environments, family, adaptive culture and developmental competencies. The developmental competencies construct is related to the segregation construct (Garcia Coll et al.) which is included in the sociohistorical forces theme I devised; however, my review of the racial socialization literature suggests that the developmental competencies construct fits better with the ecological contexts theme given the influence that different environmental contexts have on African American culture and the development of African American children.

In this study, promoting and inhibiting environments are considered external forces of racial socialization. Promoting environments were those environments that have enough adequate resources to meet a child's needs and are compatible with other environments in the child's life; on the other hand, inhibiting environments resulted from a lack of sufficient

resources to address a child's needs or from a mismatch between the family environment and other environments the child is exposed to such as schools and neighborhoods (Garcia Coll et al.). In the case of maternal racial socialization, promoting and inhibiting environments are external forces of racial socialization that can either reinforce or challenge the content of maternal racial socialization messages. In a related vein, diversity within African American families creates varying racial socialization experiences for African American children.

Schools, neighborhoods and families are promoting and inhibiting environments that influence on the racial socialization of young children. As is the case with most of the racial socialization literature, studies on racial socialization of African American children within the contexts of schools and neighborhoods focus on older children, so I have included some of those studies to help frame my discussion of promoting and inhibiting environments. Schools are ecological contexts that African American children are exposed to that can either support or contradict the racial socialization messages that African American mothers emphasize at home. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) discussed the notion of "acting white" and that African American children are socialized by other African American children that doing well academically is associated with Whiteness and being White is undesirable. Acting white challenges parental racial socialization messages about being well-educated to overcome racism (for examples see S.A. Hill, 1999; Suizzo et al., 2008).

The racial socialization literature suggests that teachers influence the racial socialization of African American children in schools. "Teachers bring different experiences and knowledge of racial structures into school that provide a framework from which to interpret, to organize information, to act" (Ferguson, 2001, p. 89). Moore (2002) reported that African American early childhood teachers described their model students as those students who are lighter skin, middle-class, from two-parent homes, people-oriented, well-behaved, female, and conform to mainstream cultural beliefs. In a related vein, Hyland (2005) studied how Caucasian teachers at a mostly African American elementary school understood their roles as teachers of African American children and found that teachers' "whiteness" informed their teaching of African American children and interactions with African American families resulting in "unintentional racism." While these studies are not examples of direct forms of racial socialization in schools, they support Garcia Coll and colleagues' argument that social position and the social

stratification mechanisms, in particular racism, affect child development by permeating throughout the environments in which African American children exist.

Research shows that the content of parental racial socialization messages varies by type of neighborhood and the SES of families (Caughy, Nettles, & Lima, 2011; Thornton et al., 1990). Caughy, Nettles, O'Campo, and Lohrfink's (2006) found that parents who lived in neighborhoods with adverse conditions emphasized promotion of mistrust messages more so than parents who lived in predominately Caucasian neighborhoods. Further, African American children who have more educated neighbors held more positive racial attitudes; on the other hand, children living in poverty-stricken neighborhoods had more distrustful racial attitudes (Smith, Atkins, & Connell 2003). More research is needed to explore the effects of neighborhoods on the racial socialization of young African American children.

African American families are heterogeneous and African American children are exposed to varying home environments that help create individualized racial socialization experiences. Caughy, Randolph, and O'Campo (2002) argued that the home environment is vital in the racial socialization of young children because parents of toddlers and preschoolers may use more indirect methods of racial socialization. More specifically, parents may racially socialize their young children unintentionally through home environments that foster racial pride (Caughy, Randolph, et al., 2002). Socioeconomic differences among African American families account for some of the varied racial socialization experiences of young children. As discussed earlier, low-income and middle-class African American parents differ in the racial socialization messages they transmit to their children (for examples see S.A. Hill, 1999; Hughes et al., 2006; Thornton et al., 1990). Existing research on neighborhood and racial socialization speaks to the socioeconomic differences in parental racial socialization messages: however, more research is needed to better understand the complex nature of the interaction of SES, neighborhood, and the home environment.

The adaptive culture construct stems from the historical experiences of a group of people and the current environmental challenges they experience that are created by promoting and inhibiting environments (Garcia Coll et al., 1996). Caughy and colleagues (2006) argued that parental racial socialization practices can be viewed as part of the adaptive cultures of African American families. In a related vein, family communications are indicative of the adaptive culture of a family (Garcia Coll et al.). The adaptive culture construct cuts across the

sociohistorical and ecological context themes and highlighted how historical and environmental experiences have manipulated the cultures of racial and ethnic minorities.

Developmental competences in racial and ethnic minority children are the last construct included in the ecological contexts theme. Developmental outcomes of African American children are the result of interrelated processes that occur among the segregation, promoting and inhibiting environments and family constructs (Garcia Coll et al., 1996). The developmental outcomes of African American children targeted in this research are coping with racism and racial preferences. I could not examine coping with racism directly because of the young age of the children in this study. Instead, children's racial preferences were measured and analyzed and used to compel mothers to think about how their young children may be coping with racism at this age and developmental period. Garcia Coll et al. (1996) argued that their Integrative Model can be used to examine a variety of child outcomes; moreover, their model compels child development scholars to consider how segregation, promoting and inhibiting environments and family processes work together to shape the development outcomes of African American children.

**Child influences.** Child influences are the fourth theme that emerged from my review of the Integrative Model (Garcia Coll et al., 1996) and the racial socialization literature. The child characteristics construct is included in this theme. Garcia and colleagues provided several examples of child characteristics that influence development. Based on my synthesis of the child development and racial socialization literature, the child influences that may impact the process of maternal racial socialization the most are child skin color, gender, age, and agency.

Given the occurrence of skin color stratification within the United States (Hochschild & Weaver, 2007; Keith & Herring, 1991) and within African American families (Wilder & Cain, 2011), examining the role of skin color in African American children's racial socialization experiences is imperative. I predicted that the skin color of children will work in tandem with mothers' understanding of colorism to influence how the process of maternal racial socialization happens in African American families with young children.

Child gender adds another variable that mothers must consider when socializing their children about race. This study addressed how child gender and skin color interact to influence maternal racial socialization strategies and the content of maternal racial socialization messages. Although I have reviewed the works of scholars who have examined how gender informs

parental racial socialization, more research is needed to examine more intentionally how gender impacts the maternal racial socialization process with young children. This dissertation research addressed that gap in the literature.

Studies have shown that child age affects when parents begin transmitting racial socialization messages and the content of those messages. Hughes and Chen (1997) reported that African American parents of younger children are less likely to impart messages about discrimination, prejudice, and mistrust than parents of older children. On the other hand, as children grow older, parents increase messages about preparation of bias and promotion of mistrust (Hughes & Chen). Further, African American parents seem to prefer using cultural socialization to racially socialize young children (Coard et al., 2004; Hughes & Johnson, 2001; Suizzo et al., 2008). This study attempted to uncover specifically how mothers approach the racial socialization process including what factors, including child age, inform that process.

Child agency refers to children's self-directed behaviors that influence their interactions and relationships with their family members; furthermore, as children develop they devise more complex and advantageous means to exact agency (Cummings & Schermerhorn, 2003). Child agency is often a neglected dimension of family relationships; however, Garcia Coll et al. (1996) noted the influence that children exert on their families and how child characteristics influence parenting. As previously discussed, socialization is a bidirectional process; however, few scholars pay attention to the influences that child characteristics and behaviors have on the socialization process (Grusec & Davidov, 2010). In a similar vein, Hughes et al. (2006) argued that few scholars have examined the bidirectional aspect of the process of racial socialization. By including the impact that child influences have on family relationships, the Integrative Model (Garcia Coll et al., 1996) can be used to examine how child characteristics and behaviors influence the process of racial socialization of young children. In this study, I examined how child characteristics and behaviors influenced the maternal racial socialization process.

## Chapter Three: Methods

### Research Design

This study was an in-depth qualitative exploration using grounded theory methodology (GTM, Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This study examined the process of maternal racial socialization of young African American preschool children, an untapped population of African Americans in the racial socialization literature, who are simultaneously negotiating multiple identities; moreover, Shields (2008) suggested that qualitative inquiry rather than quantitative methods are more applicable for studies when intersectionality is part of the theoretical framework. GTM allows for the study of a research topic without having to make a priori hypotheses (Patton, 2002) and since this was one of the first studies to explore the maternal racial socialization of African American preschool-age children in depth, qualitative inquiry was appropriate. The Integrative Model (Garcia Coll et al., 1996) and Black Feminist Theory (Collins, 2000) were integrated to form the theoretical framework of this study. I used grounded theory methodology in the design and analyses of this research.

A two-part, semi-structured, audiotaped qualitative interview was used to assess how African American mothers engage their preschool-age children in the racial socialization process and react to their children's skin color preferences. A modified version of The Clark Doll Test (MCDT, Jordan & Hernandez-Reif, 2009) was used to examine African American preschoolers' racial preferences and attitudes. The MCDT activity was videotaped with the permission of each mother.

### Rigor of the Study

The value of a qualitative study depends heavily on the rigor of the study (Patton, 2002). The rigor of this study was established through the use of *memos*, rich *field notes*, *transferability* through the use of a purposive, snowball sample and *credibility*. Throughout the course of data collection and analysis, I wrote memos. Memos, written accounts of researchers' conceptualizations of the data, are essential components of grounded theory analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I made short notes in the margins of transcripts and on participant biosketches that triggered my rumination about possible themes of the data, how the theoretical model captures the data and my feelings as an African American woman researcher during research on other African American women. I also took field notes. Field notes are rich, vivid descriptions of observations including where observations occurred, what happened during the observations,

details about the setting, who was there, and accounts of social interactions and activities that transpired during the observations (Patton, 2002). Field notes are important in grounded theory work because they allow the researcher to remain immersed in the empirical data while, simultaneously, creating more confidence in study findings (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Additionally, I completed a biosketch on each participant that contained demographic and notes of additional information gathered during the interview such as information about extended family members that informed my memo writing, field note writing and analyses.

Transferability is particularly important in terms of rigor. Transferability refers to the degree of generalization in study findings (Patton, 2002) and is accomplished by using a purposive sample and providing solid, substantive descriptions of qualitative findings lead to transference in qualitative research (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002). I used a purposive sample of African American mothers with preschool-age children who met predetermined eligibility criteria (see Appendix H) and provided thorough descriptions of my findings.

I established the credibility of this study in several ways. One way that credibility was ensured was through the use of a grounded theory design. Patton (2002) argued that grounded theory methods (GTM) lend credibility to a study. GTM allows the researcher to explore phenomena leading to results “grounded in the empirical world” (Patton, p. 125). Grounded theory is beneficial to researchers because it allows them to develop expertise in the area studied while, simultaneously, providing them with the tools to modify the theory when new information emerges in the literature (Glaser, 2001).

Another way to ensure credibility is through *triangulation*. Triangulation involves using multiple research methods or analytic perspectives in research (Patton, 2002). In my study, triangulation consisted of involving my dissertation committee chair in the coding process and data analysis. Additionally, dissertation committee members were consulted during the dissertation proposal defense to evaluate and determine that each interview question was consistent with the study’s research questions. My review of the literature also served as another method of triangulation. Published research studies offered secondary sources of data that were used to triangulate my data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Lastly, triangulation was achieved through comparing children’s responses on a modified version of the Clark Doll Test (Jordan & Hernandez-Reif, 2009) with findings from other studies that have used this test.

Credibility was also established through the use of an audit trail; more specifically, the chair of the dissertation committee monitored and critiqued data collection and analyses to ensure quality and the minimization of bias (Patton, 2002). Also, I established credibility by being reflexive. Being reflexive allowed me to remain cognizant of my biases and how they influenced the way I conducted the study and interpreted findings (Allen, 2000). I wrote memos and diagrams and maintained detailed field notes to help ensure the credibility of this study. Memos, diagrams and field notes reflected the rigor of the study.

The handling of negative cases in a qualitative study can enhance the credibility of the study by allowing researchers to consider alternative explanations for their findings (Patton). Since few researchers have studied maternal racial socialization processes in African American families with very young children, I included negative cases to help me better examine and understand this topic. Further, including negative cases boosted credibility by showing the consumers of my research that I have not tried to align the data toward a specific direction; instead, I included all cases that yielded rich information even if they were not indicative of explanations that I had surmised (Patton). My discussion of *conspicuous absences* (Banks-Wallace & Parks, 2001) tied into the handling of negative cases and enhanced the credibility of the study by illuminating how my findings diverged from what is typically reported in the literature. “Conspicuous absences are those things that were not said that one would have expected to be part of the discussion” (Banks-Wallace & Parks, 2001, p. 82).

In this study, I included information about my credibility as a researcher because in qualitative research “the researcher is the instrument” (Patton, 2002, p. 566). I have had extensive training in children and families, not only from an academic perspective but also from a clinical perspective. I have taken many courses in several disciplines (i.e., African American studies, counseling and development, early childhood education, human development, social work, sociology, and women’s studies) that have addressed child and family development in some respect. Additionally, I attended the American Psychological Association’s Advanced Training Institute on Research Methods with Diverse Racial and Ethnic Groups which included training in qualitative methodology. I have worked directly with families in a clinical setting while providing wraparound services to children and families. My academic and clinical insight into families proved invaluable to me as I collected and analyzed data in this study. Also, I am a native and lifelong resident of South Carolina where I obtained my sample. My background as a

South Carolinian allowed me to take an insider perspective (emic) and my professional training allows me to take an outsider perspective (etic) (Patton, 2002).

Additionally, I used two methods characteristic of research on African American mothers and children to help make this research credible: probing mothers to tell stories about racial socialization experiences and including a discussion of conspicuous absences (Banks-Wallace & Parks, 2001). Asking participants to tell stories of their experiences tapped into the rich tradition of storytelling in African American culture which is also a mode of transmission of racial socialization in African American families (Banks-Wallace, 1999; Banks-Wallace & Parks, 2001). Banks-Wallace (2002) noted that stories are “touchstones” that serve to build close relationships between tellers and listeners. “Touchstones are things that remind people of a shared history and/or past” (Banks-Wallace, 2002, p. 411). Stories made shared beliefs more consistent across generations and transmitted cultural values (Banks-Wallace, 2002). Storytelling complemented a grounded theory approach because participant stories or narratives assisted researchers in ensuring that the theory that emerged from the research was “grounded in the data” (Birks, Mills, Francis, & Chapman, 2009, p. 405).

A discussion of conspicuous absences has been used in previous research on maternal racial socialization of children and provided alternative ways for interpreting and understanding phenomena (Banks-Wallace & Parks, 2001). From a GTM perspective, knowledge of concepts central to the literature can fuel theorizing, give insight on how to approach and interpret the data, inform the semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix C), provide an additional source of data (i.e., secondary data), help scholars come up with innovative ways to study phenomena, and validate the findings of studies (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Those concepts from the literature that did not appear in my research findings (i.e., conspicuous absences) provided a different alternative for comprehending the process of racial socialization in African American families with preschool-age children. This study used grounded theory methods; moreover, participants’ stories and the use of conspicuous absences informed the theory that emerged from the data. A qualitative, grounded theory design was used in this study and steps were taken to make this a rigorous study through the use of memos, rich field notes, transferability, a purposive, snowball sample and by establishing credibility.

## **Pilot Study**

A pilot study was conducted and used to inform the choice of theoretical framework and interview questions used in this study. The pilot study examined how maternal mind-mindedness (Meins, Fernyhough, Russell, & Clark-Carter, 1998) informed the process of maternal racial socialization among African American mothers with preschool-age children. Maternal mind-mindedness refers to mothers' degree of sensitivity to the mental states of their children during mother-child interaction (Meins et al., 1998). A semi-structured qualitative interview and a structured play activity between mothers and children were used to examine the role of maternal mind-mindedness in the process of racial socialization. My dissertation advisor and I concluded that maternal mind-mindedness did not inform the racial socialization process. On the other hand, mothers discussed how colorism informed their conversations with their children, especially their daughters. Mothers in the pilot study discussed having to explain differences in hair texture and skin color to their daughters and offering alternate beauty scripts to them. Mothers demonstrated an understanding of the intersection race, class, and gender in the lives of African American women that informed their racial socialization messages. Based on the pilot study, I replaced maternal mind-mindedness as a theoretical guide with an integration of the Integrative Model (Garcia Coll et al., 1996) and Black Feminist theory (Collins, 2000). Additionally, the mother-child structured play activity was replaced with the MCDT (Jordan & Hernandez-Reif, 2009) to stimulate mothers to reflectively think about the racial socialization experiences of their children.

## **Procedures**

### **Eligibility Criteria**

The eligibility criteria that used in this study was that participants must (a) identify as Black or African American, (b) mothers must have been at least 18 years old, (c) children must have been between the ages of three and five, and (d) all participants must have lived in South Carolina. This study focused on mothers and children of African American ancestry and excluded individuals who were biracial, multiracial, Caribbean, or of Hispanic descent; therefore, participants had a maternal and paternal family history of U.S. born African American ancestry dating back at least two generations (Coard et al., 2004). Coard and colleagues established exclusion criteria based on Phelps, Taylor, and Gerard (2001) whose research findings revealed that African American college students' scores on measures of cultural

mistrust, racial identity, and ethnic identity were statistically different from African and West Indian/Caribbean college students' scores. "Thus, the type and degree of experiences encountered by African Americans in the United States, historically and currently, due to group membership may affect their outlook and worldview" (Phelps et al., 2001, p. 214). Since this study examined mothers and children of primarily African American descent, the findings of Phelps and colleagues was used to establish exclusion criteria in this study as well. I chose to use African American mothers and children from South Carolina in this study because they are rarely used in racial socialization research. Typically, populations from South Carolina, in particular the Low Country region, are used for research on language development including studies on dialect.

### **Recruitment Process**

Institutional Review Boards at both Virginia Tech and a participating institution in South Carolina approved this study. After IRB Approval was received, I began recruiting and making contact with participants. Participants were recruited through the use of a letter (see Appendix D), flyer (see Appendix E), word of mouth, and the use of social media websites including a page created for the study on Facebook and advertisements placed on Craigslist (see Appendices F and G).

The letter and flyer described the study and were posted in local African American-owned businesses such as barber shops and beauty salons. Recruiting participants through social networking web sites is becoming increasingly popular among social scientists. Ramo, Hall, and Prochaska (2010) used Craigslist to recruit participants for their study on young adults who smoke cigarettes. Craigslist has a "volunteers" section for designated U.S. geographic locations that researchers can post weekly advertisements on to recruit study participants (<http://www.craigslist.com>; Ramo et al., 2010). In addition to recruiting participants through Craigslist, participants were also recruited through Facebook. A Facebook page, which functioned as an advertisement for the study, was created and included information about the study and ways for potential participants to contact the researcher. Recruiting participants on Craigslist and Facebook required me to take special precautions that ensured participant confidentiality. In the advertisement on Craigslist, potential participants could only contact me privately so that no one else on the website could see that they were interested in participating in the study. The Facebook page for the study had special privacy settings that ensured participant

confidentiality. For instance, I made the friends list for the page visible only to me. Next, I supplied my private contact information on the page for potential participants to contact me privately without other Facebook users being able to see which Facebook users had contacted me about the study (van Eden-Moorefield, 2009).

I recruited participants through Head Start centers in South Carolina as well. Through a participating university in South Carolina, I met with an administrative employee of Head Start centers in South Carolina who provided me with contact information for mothers and children who met the eligibility criteria and were willing to participate in the study. Six mother-child dyads were recruited from Head Start centers in South Carolina, three mother-child dyads were recruited from Facebook, and three mother-child dyads were recruited by word of mouth.

Each participant's confidentiality was maintained throughout the study. Each mother and child was assigned a subject number and each mother was assigned a pseudonym that ensured that no one outside of the project could determine their actual identities. The subject number was used to label each participant's semi-structured interview and modified doll test. Each participant (i.e., mother and child) was referred to by that subject number in the analyses. Additionally, mothers were also identified by their pseudonyms, so that no one could determine their actual identities (Patton, 2002).

**Overview of the geographic area.** African American mothers and their preschool-aged children were recruited from the state of South Carolina. South Carolina is located in the southeastern United States and has an approximate population of 4,774, 839 people (SC Budget and Control Board, 2014). In the state of South Carolina, African Americans accounted for 27.9% of the total population and had a per capita income of \$15, 398 (SC Budget and Control Board, 2014). African American children accounted for 32.12% of children under the age of five years old and 31.87% of children between the ages of five years old and 14 years old (SC Budget and Control Board, 2014).

### **Description of the Sample**

The sample used in this study consisted of 12 mother-child dyads. A total of 24 participants were used in this study. Interview data was collected from mothers (see Appendix C) and child participants were administered a modified version of the Clark Doll Test (see Appendices L and M). The 12 mothers who participated in this study varied in age, educational background, occupation and number of biological children. Adult participants were between the

ages of 23 and 36 ( $M=28$ ). The marital statuses of the adult participants were as follows: 66.67% were single/never married, 8.33% were married and 25% were divorced. The education level of the participants was as follows: 8.33% less than a high school, 8.33% GED, 41.67% high school diploma, 16.67 % associate's degree, 16.67% bachelor's degree and 8.33% master of social work degree (MSW). The occupations of the mothers varied considerably as two mothers were cosmetologists and one mother each held one of the following occupations: registered nurse, learning specialist, clinical counselor, graphic designer, dance instructor, certified nursing assistant, assistant manager at a restaurant, customer service representative and medical administration worker. The total number of biological children that the mothers had varied from having one child to four children ( $M=1.67$ ). At the time of data collection, the total household incomes of the mothers varied from between a reported \$0.00 per year to \$120,000 per year ( $M=\$34,750$ ). Per the age requirement of this study, children were between the ages of three years old and five years old ( $M=4.5$ ). In this sample, 25% of the children were girls and 75% were boys. The sample was comprised of children who did attend Head Start (50%) and did not attend Head Start (50%). Demographic characteristics for the sample are presented in Table 1.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

In order to determine participants' eligibility, I conducted an eligibility questionnaire with each mother that obtained demographic information about the mother and child (Appendix H). Once eligibility was determined, a target child was identified. Target children were each mother's oldest preschool-age child. After eligibility was confirmed, I scheduled a time with the mother to collect data from her and her child.

Data were collected in the homes of participants or on the campus of a participating institution in South Carolina. The mothers signed an informed consent form (see Appendix I) and a parental permission form for their children (see Appendix J). The informed consent described the purpose of the study, who would view the data collected, ways data would be used, what sorts of questions would be asked, confidentiality, and potential risks and benefits of participating in the study (Patton, 2002). I read from a developmentally-appropriate child assent script (see Appendix K) and obtained verbal assent from each child prior to administering the MCDT (Jordan & Hernandez-Reif, 2009; see Figure 1 and Appendix L) to them.

After written informed consent was obtained, each mother participated in a two-part, audiotaped, semi-structured interview that lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes (see Appendix

C). Mothers were interviewed alone while the child played with toys in a separate room under adult supervision. If not other adult supervision was available, the child played with toys in one area of the room and the mother was interviewed in another area of the same room. The first part of the interview examined mothers' retrospective accounts of maternal racial socialization strategies.

After the first part of the semi-structured interview, I administered the MCDT (see Appendix L) to each target child while the mothers waited in another room. Mothers were not present for the modified version of Clark Doll Test so that their presence would not influence children's selections on the test. I obtained assent from each child before administering the videotaped MCDT. I presented each child with a set of four computer-generated, cartoon images of child cartoon characters as used by Jordan and Hernandez-Reif (2009; see Figure 1). Permission to use the same images as used by Jordan and Hernandez-Reif (2009) was obtained from SAGE Journals. The images were identical and varied only in skin color (i.e., white, light-brown, medium-brown, and black (Jordan & Hernandez-Reif, 2009)). Girls were shown a set of all female computer-generated images and boys were shown a set of all male computer-generated images. I asked each child to respond to questions about the computer-generated images. The modified version of the Clark Doll Test lasted approximately five minutes. After the MCDT, mothers were shown videotapes of their children participating in the MCDT. After being shown the videotape, each mother participated in the second part of the semi-structured interview that consisted of follow-up questions which examined her reactions to her child's choices on the MCDT.

All mothers and children who chose to participate in this study completed all parts of the study. Mothers and children were compensated separately for their participation. Each mother received compensation in the form of Wal-Mart gift cards worth \$20.00. This amount was determined after I reviewed dissertations from other students in the Human Development Department at Virginia Tech and noted that \$10.00 to \$20.00 is generally the amount paid to participants for compensation. Also, the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB) requested that all participants in studies received some amount of compensation for their participation even if they do not complete all parts of studies.

Wal-Mart gift cards were purchased in \$10.00 denominations in the event that some mothers did not complete the study. Each child participant was compensated with a children's

book. Children would have received the books whether they completed the study or not. Mothers signed receipts in which they acknowledged their children and they received compensation for participating in this study (see Appendix M). Procedures for this study were strictly adhered to and upheld.

Table 1

*Demographic Characteristics of the Sample*

| <b>Participant's Pseudonym</b> | <b>Age</b> | <b>Education</b>       | <b>Occupation</b>                 | <b>Marital Status</b> | <b>Total Number of Children</b> | <b>Yearly Household Income</b> | <b>Age of Study Child</b> | <b>Gender of Study Child</b> | <b>Head Start</b> |
|--------------------------------|------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Angela</b>                  | 31         | Bachelor's Degree      | Registered Nurse                  | Married               | 1                               | \$120,000                      | 5                         | Girl                         | No                |
| <b>Sarah</b>                   | 33         | HS Diploma             | Learning Specialist               | Single                | 1                               | \$30,000                       | 4                         | Boy                          | No                |
| <b>Laura</b>                   | 36         | MSW                    | Clinical Counselor                | Divorced              | 2                               | \$26,000                       | 5                         | Boy                          | No                |
| <b>Diane</b>                   | 24         | Bachelor's Degree      | Graphic Designer                  | Single                | 1                               | \$30,000                       | 3                         | Girl                         | No                |
| <b>Leanne</b>                  | 26         | HS Diploma             | Dance Instructor                  | Divorced              | 1                               | \$30,000                       | 4                         | Boy                          | No                |
| <b>Alana</b>                   | 28         | Associate's Degree     | Student                           | Single                | 2                               | \$0                            | 5                         | Boy                          | Yes               |
| <b>Stacey</b>                  | 23         | GED                    | Cosmetologist                     | Single                | 1                               | \$19,000                       | 5                         | Boy                          | Yes               |
| <b>Pamela</b>                  | 27         | 11 <sup>th</sup> Grade | Certified Nursing Assistant       | Single                | 4                               | \$48,000                       | 4                         | Boy                          | Yes               |
| <b>Dawn</b>                    | 23         | HS Diploma             | Assistant Manager at a Restaurant | Single                | 2                               | \$48,000                       | 5                         | Boy                          | Yes               |
| <b>Zara</b>                    | 27         | HS Diploma             | Cosmetologist                     | Single                | 2                               | \$24,000                       | 4                         | Boy                          | Yes               |
| <b>Michelle</b>                | 26         | HS Diploma             | Customer Service Representative   | Single                | 2                               | \$12,000                       | 5                         | Girl                         | Yes               |
| <b>Jasmine</b>                 | 33         | Associate's Degree     | Medical Administration            | Divorced              | 1                               | \$30,000                       | 5                         | Boy                          | NO                |

*Note.* MSW = Master's of Social Work degree.

## **Unit of Analysis**

In this study, the unit of analysis was the strategies that mothers used to racially socialize their children. In this study, racial socialization was operationalized as the strategies that parents used to impart cultural norms and values to children and to teach them about interracial group relationships and sociocultural interaction. For African American parents, racial socialization included helping children develop strategies for living and functioning in U.S. society as members of a marginalized racial group including ways to cope with racism and discrimination. Maternal racial socialization strategies were included in the category of activity focused units of analysis (Patton, 2002). Activity-focused units of analysis included particular events, occurrences, or incidents (Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) provided the following as examples of activity-focused units of analysis: “critical incidents, celebrations, quality assurance violations, time periods, crises, and events” (p. 231). Since maternal racial socialization strategies were occurrences within African American families, they were the unit of analysis of this study. In this study, mothers’ retrospective accounts of the racial socialization strategies that they have used with their children and mothers’ responses to their children’s preferences on a modified version of The Clark Doll Test (Jordan & Hernandez-Reif, 2009) were used as ways to examine maternal racial socialization strategies among African American families with preschool-age children. Several procedures consistent with credible and rigorous research were used throughout this study which focused on analyzing maternal strategies in the process of the maternal racial socialization of African American preschool children.

## **Instrumentation**

### **Semi-structured Interview**

Mothers participated in a two-part semi-structured interview. The interview questions were based on the literature review including previous research on African American child and family development and the integrated theoretical model used in this study. I asked the same questions to all of the mothers; however, the probes and follow-up questions I used occasionally varied based on mothers’ responses and as a theory about the process of maternal racial socialization began to unfold. The semi-structured interview was audiotaped.

### **The Clark Doll Test**

Children’s ability to distinguish phenotypic differences between people develops quickly during the preschool years (Stevenson & Stewart, 1958) and their conceptualizations of race

depends on their developmental level and experiences (Swanson, Cunningham, Youngblood, & Spencer, 2009 ) Since young children’s comprehensions of race are not as sophisticated as that of adolescents or adults, I examined their racial preferences and attitudes by administering to them a modified version of the Clark Doll Test (MCDT; Jordan & Hernandez-Reif, 2009). The results of this test were used to stimulate mothers to think reflectively about their children’s racial socialization experiences.

The original Clark Doll Test (Clark & Clark, 1947) is an eight item measure used to assess children’s racial preferences, knowledge of racial differences, and racial self-identification. The original requests used by Clark and Clark were:

- (1) Give me the doll that you like to play with or like best
- (2) Give me the doll that is a nice doll
- (3) Give me the doll that looks bad
- (4) Give me the doll that is a nice color
- (5) Give me the doll that looks like a white child
- (6) Give me the doll that looks like a colored child
- (7) Give me the doll that looks like a Negro child
- (8) Give me the doll that looks that you (p. 169).

Clark and Clark (1947) noted that Requests One through Four target racial preferences, Requests Five through Seven target children’s knowledge of racial differences, and Request Eight targets self-identification. Recall that racial socialization in childhood helps shape adult racial identity (Demo & Hughes, 1990). Further, studies on racial socialization in adolescence reveal that racial socialization influences racial identity development (for examples see Miller & MacIntosh, 1999; Neblett et al., 2008; White-Johnson et al., 2010). Clark and Clark’s questions tap into facets of an emerging racial identity in young children.

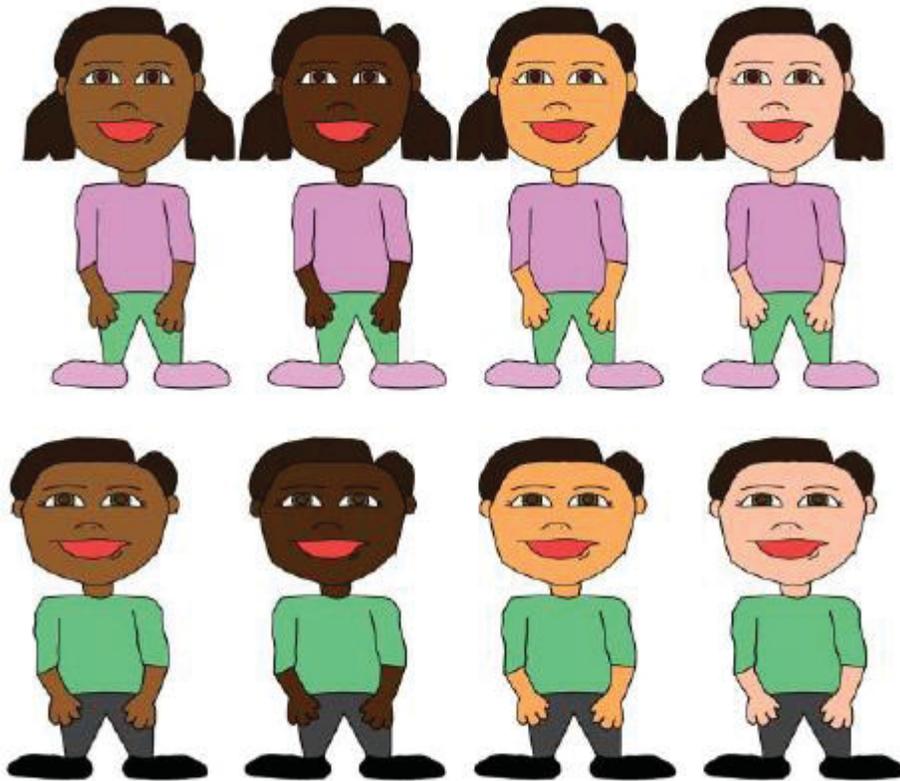
Clark and Clark’s (1947) study revealed the following about African American children: (a) 67% preferred to play with the White doll; (b) 59% selected the White doll as the “nice” doll; (c) 59% selected the African American doll as the doll that “looks bad”; and (d) 60% selected the white doll as having a “nice color”. Further, only 58% of African American children chose the African American doll when asked which doll “looks like you” (Clark & Clark). It is important to note that the findings of Clark and Clark’s study were influential in the landmark court case *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) that found that separate public schools for

African American children and Caucasian children is unconstitutional. Recent studies have found that African American children's preferences for African American dolls can be altered when children are read positive stories about African Americans in an experimental situation (Jordan & Hernandez-Reif, 2009; Powell-Hopson & Hopson, 1992).

The Clark Doll Test (Clark & Clark, 1947) has been replicated and modified several times since it was first used in the mid-1900s. Jordan and Hernandez-Reif (2009) noted that Davis's (2005) documentary rejuvenated researchers' interest in the Clark Doll Test because the documentary demonstrated that some young African American children in contemporary times continue to exhibit preferences for lighter skin tones. Some researchers have questioned the validity of The Clark Doll Test. For example, Burnett and Sisson (1995) made several arguments about the validity of The Clark Doll Test: (a) African American children outgrow racial preferences for Caucasian dolls; (b) children's racial preferences are outcomes of complex psychological processes and exposure to environmental stimuli rather than social stereotypes; and (c) racial preferences may be influenced by children's attributes about themselves. While an in-depth exploration of African American children's racial preferences and attitudes are beyond the scope of this research, they are used to stimulate mother's critical awareness about their children's racial socialization experiences.

**The Modified Clark Doll Test.** Jordan and Hernandez-Reif's (2009) modified version of the Clark Doll Test (MCDT) was used in this study. Two additional questions were added to the MCDT (1) Who is the prettiest? and (2) Who looks like an African American child? The second additional question was a modified version of the request, "Give me the doll that looks like a negro child" (Clark & Clark, 1947, p. 169) In this study, I used cartoon character, computer-generated images of children varying in skin tone from light to dark instead of dolls (Jordan & Hernandez-Reif; see Figure 1) to assess children's skin color preferences. The procedures of the MCDT used in this study differed from the procedures in Jordan and Hernandez-Reif. . Jordan and Hernandez-Reif administered their version of the Clark Doll Test to preschool-age children between the ages of three- and five-years-old, then administered an intervention (i.e., a story about someone of a dark skin tone), then administered the Clark Doll Test again. In this study, preschool-age children between the ages of three and five years old were shown a set of computer-generated images of children reflective of skin tones of African American and Caucasian children and asked questions from the MCDT (Jordan & Hernandez-Reif). In this

study, an intervention was not given to the child participants. In an effort to reduce experimenter influence on participants' responses, I practiced asking the test questions in a non-judgmental way and without inflection in voice tone or using gestures (Jordan & Hernandez-Reif). The MCDT (Jordan & Hernandez-Reif) was used to stimulate reflective thinking in mothers.



*Figure 1.* Samples of cartoons used for the rankings study. From “Reexamination of young children’s racial attitudes and skin tone preferences,” by P. Jordan and M. Hernandez-Reif, 2009, *Journal of Black Psychology*, 35, 393. Copyright 2009 by Association of Black Psychologists. Reprinted with permission.

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed using coding procedures associated with grounded theory. The semi-structured interview consisted of two parts: (1) assessment of the process of maternal racial socialization and (2) mothers’ interpretations of their children’s racial preferences and attitudes on the MCDT (Jordan & Hernandez-Reif, 2009). The semi-structured interviews were audiotaped and transcribed and

immediately analyzed (Merriam, 1998). Coding in grounded theory consisted of three phases: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

I transcribed verbatim both parts of each mother's semi-structured interview. The initial phase of coding was open coding. Open coding is "the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 61). I started open coding while I was transcribing as concepts and linkages to the theoretical model and literature review became evident. I read and reviewed each transcript several times. While coding, I made comments in the margins of which aspects of the maternal racial socialization were being addressed by the mothers including their direct and indirect references to the sensitizing concepts. Open coding involved comparing similarities and differences in participants' accounts of the phenomenon being studied (Strauss & Corbin). Additionally, I made notes in each transcript, when applicable, of my reactions to the participants' responses as an African American woman researcher of the experiences of other African American women to be reflexive and aware of bias that may influence my interpretation of the data. I maintained a list of the frequencies of participants' responses.

After the first phase of coding, I met with my advisor and we discussed whether or not each code reflected the sensitizing concepts and the theoretical model and if the codes actually captured what the participants were trying to convey. After we determined that each code was appropriate, I began the second phase of coding which was axial coding. Axial coding refers to the thorough analysis of a specific variable and allows the researcher to focus on the process of the phenomenon being studied while illuminating relationships among or between other variables identified in the study and assists in the formulation of hypotheses (La Rossa, 2005). The axial codes reflected different behaviors and processes related to maternal racial socialization. Selective coding refers to the process of identifying the core category which best explains the phenomenon and connects all of the other categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In the selective coding process, I identified those themes that cut across all the processes that emerged in the data to best explain how the process of maternal racial socialization of preschool-age children happened in this sample of African American mothers and children. I used the research questions and theoretical model of this study as guides through the coding phases.

### **Researcher's Reflexivity Statement**

This study is a pivotal stop on my journey to learn more about the lives, experiences, and development of African American children. My journey began as a masters-level student at a small, teaching university in South Carolina. As a student there, I began reading, researching, and writing about African American parenting and child development. The more I read about African American families the more I learned about how the sociohistorical experiences of African Americans in this nation has created unique complexities in rearing children for African American parents that parents of other races and ethnicities do not have to negotiate. I began to realize that social status, sexual orientation, race, gender, and the power of the majority group influence how all African Americans experience life. In the case of African Americans, we are often marginalized because of our race and for African American women this marginalization is compounded with deeper types of oppressive experiences because of our gender. As mentioned earlier, “black women exist within an intersectionality matrix” (Few, 2007, p. 454) which influences how we see and experience the world. I knew I was beginning to feel very strongly about African American women and children and their experiences. It wasn't until I started matriculating in a doctoral program that I learned that I was developing a sense of black consciousness (Few, 2007) and a Black Feminist point-of-view (Collins, 2000).

As a doctoral student, I have taken elective courses in Africana Studies, Women's Studies, and an independent study in Black Feminism and Family Studies in addition to required child development courses. I integrated and synthesized what I learned in those courses and gained a deeper, more informed understanding of African American child development as well as a commitment to improving the well-being of all children, in particular, African American children. I am also committed to restructuring how social science research views and represents African American parenting by assisting in the plight of other African American scholars who have begun a transition in social science research from viewing African American parenting from a deficit lens to one that illuminates within-group differences (Tamis-Lemonda et al., 2008).

Although I am committed to research, I realize my own degree of power as an educated, privileged, middle-class, single/never married, southern, African American woman in her early thirties. At the time the data were collected, I had no children; however, I became a mother during the data analysis phase of the study. My privileged status makes me both an insider and

outsider in my research (Few, Stephens, & Rouse-Arnett, 2003). I must practice “active self-reflexivity” (Few, 2007, p. 462) to ensure that I am not perpetuating the marginalization of African American children and women that I am so strongly against. “Self-reflexivity uncovers and unveils theoretical blind spots – internalized and subconscious racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, ethnocentrism, ableism, and xenophobia” (Few, 2007, p. 462). I am aware of and accept the reality that I am African American, but identify strongly with some White, middle-class norms. I hope that by being honest with myself about my social position that I was able to circumvent as much bias as possible from seeping into my research.

As an emerging scholar, I often ruminate about how African American parents approach racial socialization. My parents were raised during segregation and were young adults during the Civil Rights Movement. I have an aunt, older cousins, and a neighbor who were arrested during sit-ins during Civil Rights demonstrations in South Carolina. My parents made sure that I became astutely aware of the sociohistorical experiences of African Americans while socializing me to identify with African American and mainstream culture. My parents talked to me very candidly throughout my childhood and adolescence about issues of race and class including negative images of African Americans. Even as adult, I continue to have those in-depth conversations with my parents. I reflect on my racial socialization experiences and see how my family members’ experiences influenced what my parents told me about being African American. I realize that while there are common themes in parental racial socialization, not all African American parents approach racial socialization the same way.

Even as adult, I continue to have those in-depth conversations with my parents. I reflect on my racial socialization experiences and see how my family members’ experiences influenced what my parents told me about being African American. I realize that while there are common themes in parental racial socialization, not all African American parents approach racial socialization the same way.

Although my family talked very openly about race, I realize that not all African American families have open discussions about race. My familial racial socialization experiences are a potential bias that could have influenced how I interpreted the data. In order to control for biases that stemmed from my familial experiences, I worked closely with my dissertation advisor during data analysis to ensure that my qualitative codes and interpretations of data were grounded in the data and did not reflect any biases stemming from my personal experiences.

In addition to biases that stem from my personal experiences, this research experience increased my awareness of methodological considerations in using the MCDT (Jordan & Hernandez-Reif) with young children. Other researchers have criticized the validity of the Clark Doll Test (for example see Burnett and Sisson, 1995). On the other hand, other researchers have used versions of the Clark Doll Test as early indicators of African American children's racial preferences while stressing that results on those test must be interpreted in an ecological, environmental, sociocultural context, and cognitive-developmental context (Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990; Swanson, Cunningham, Spencer, & Youngblood, 2009). In this study, the MCDT (Jordan & Hernandez-Reif) was used as a prompt to stimulate mothers' reflexive thinking about the racial socialization experiences of their children; however, other scholars using versions of the Clark Doll Test to examine specifically racial attitudes among African American children

Throughout the process of implementing this dissertation, I have learned more about the process of the maternal racial socialization of African American children and the intricacies of African American mothering. By practicing "active self-reflexivity" (Few, 2007, p. 462) throughout this study, I hope that I accurately captured the experiences of my participants without marginalizing or pathologizing them based on my own biases and worldview. My goal with this study was to reveal a true depiction of racial socialization in African American families with young children and the only way to do that was to remain true to the participants and myself.

## **Chapter Four: Findings**

Four major themes emerged from the data: (a) motherwork as conscientization (b) bidirectionality in the process of maternal racial socialization, (c) skin tone politics in racial socialization and (d) African American motherhood. The themes are interrelated and reflect the integrative nature of the data as two of the themes, motherwork as conscientization and bidirectionality in the process of maternal racial socialization, answer more than one research question. The interrelated data and interconnectedness of the themes reaffirms Crenshaw's (1993), Collins's (2000) and Few's (2007) arguments that African American women live in a state of intersectionality where race, class and gender are inextricable from one another and the interconnectedness of those variables helps shape the realities of life for African American women and informs their mothering. The integrated theoretical framework which includes the Integrative Model (Garcia Coll et al., 1996) and Black Feminist theory (Collins, 2000), the sensitizing concepts, coded transcripts of interviews and participants' biosketches are included in the analysis of this study. Direct quotes from mothers are included to give voice to the mothers and illustrate their experiences. The respective subthemes of each major theme are discussed.

### **Motherwork as Conscientization**

Motherwork as conscientization referred to how African American mothers' understanding of intersectionality and critical reflection about the social stratification mechanisms that affected their children's lives informed their racial socialization strategies and messages and spurred them to intervene with external forces operating in the lives of their children. It also reflected how children's racial preferences challenged mothers to think reflectively about and make adjustments to their beliefs about their children's racial socialization experiences. Collins (1994) clarified:

Racial ethnic women's motherwork reflects the tensions inherent in trying to foster a meaningful racial identity in children within a society that denigrates people of color. The racial privilege enjoyed by white, middle-class women makes unnecessary this complicated dimension of the mothering tradition of women of color (p. 57).

In this study, motherwork was reflected in the maternal racial socialization strategies and messages with preschool-age children. Conscientization is "the learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Freire, 2000, p. 35). Conscientization was reflected in mothers' critical consciousness

about the social stratification mechanisms that affect their children's lives and inform their racial socialization strategies and messages. This theme captured the gendered as well as racialized aspects of mothers' strategies and messages. Several subthemes explained motherwork as conscientization: types of racial socialization strategies and messages, sense of social stratification mechanisms, guidelines for external forces, fear of external forces' influence, practice of active intervention against external forces, and reflective thinking. The subthemes as well as their subcategories are discussed in this section.

Motherwork as conscientization helped to answer three of the four research questions of this study:

- What are the racial socialization strategies that African American mothers use with their preschool-age children?
- What is the content of maternal racial socialization messages?
- What are mothers' perceptions of external forces that influence their children's racial socialization experiences?

### **Types of Racial Socialization Strategies and Messages**

Mothers' racial socialization strategies and messages were interrelated. Mothers simultaneously implemented racial socialization strategies and conveyed racial socialization messages. The most commonly used racial socialization strategies were egalitarian socialization and cultural socialization strategies. Egalitarian socialization strategies promote racial equality (Neblett et al., 2008). Cultural socialization strategies promote racial pride in children and teach about cultural history (Coard et al., 2004; Suizzo et al., 2008). All of the mothers reported using egalitarian socialization strategies and most of the mothers (n=11) reported using cultural socialization strategies. Five of the mothers discussed that living in a multiracial world influenced them to use egalitarian socialization strategies. Talking to children was the most commonly reported egalitarian strategy used by all of the mothers. The messages conveyed to children during those conversations included we are all equal no matter what race you are. One mother, Diane, reported using colorblind language to teach her daughter to be colorblind. Diane explained: "I want her to see people. Not a White girl or a Black boy or a Mexican baby or whatever you know? I just want her to see people and so I try to speak as if I see people you know?" One mother, Leanne, reported sending her child to a racially diverse elementary school as an egalitarian socialization strategy as well.

In addition to talking to their children as an egalitarian socialization strategy, all of the mothers in this study believed that their children should socialize with children of other races to promote acceptance of others and an understanding of equality. This socialization happened during structured activities such as going to the park, birthday parties, going to friends' homes and after school activities such as little league sports and camps. Additionally, their children had opportunities for egalitarian socialization experiences through exposure to children of other races at child care centers. Diane believed that socializing her child with children of other races will be instrumental in her daughter's success. When asked why it was important for her daughter to socialize with children of other races, Diane explained:

Yeah it is. Definitely, because we are not in a world of Black people. We are in a world of all kinds of people you know? And in order to be successful I think she has to I guess be accepting of all kind of people. And I guess to encourage that she needs to be around a lot of kids and to socialize with a lot of kids you know?

For Jasmine, her son should socialize with children of other races so that he can adapt to a multiracial society. Jasmine explained:

We live in a society where we're in a melting pot. Everybody's from everywhere and we can't just be in our little world, our little home and then me expect him to be able to adapt to other people and it's a culture shock if I keep him bottled in.

The most commonly reported cultural socialization strategy used was reading books with African American characters in them including books about African American historical figures such as Martin Luther King, Jr. Mothers reported reading those books to convey messages of equality and to foster a sense of belonging in African American children. Three of the mothers in this study had daughters, Angela, Diane and Michelle, and all of them used gendered cultural socialization strategies with their daughters. These strategies included giving African American dolls (n=3) to foster a sense of belonging and equality, providing alternate beauty scripts (n=1) and telling the child she's pretty to foster a sense of belonging (n=1). For example, Diane provided alternate beauty scripts because she believed that her daughter would never be the standard of beauty in society. She emphasized smartness over prettiness to her daughter to instill self-value and self-worth in her in order to prevent her from developing low self-esteem.

Two of the mothers, both of whom had sons, reported using preparation for bias strategies and messages. Preparation for bias refers to parental messages and practices that prepare

children for future experiences with racism and discrimination (Hughes & Chen, 1997). Leanne used a racial socialization strategy of talking with her son about the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) to convey a message to him to be aware that racism exists. Leanne explained:

Not that you're always... so much on guard and on edge but you're aware that oh it could possibly happen. That you're not naïve. That you're not oh no it would never to happen to me; that would never happen to my family.

Alana used the strategy of talking with her son about pulling his pants up and wearing a belt to convey the message that first impressions are important for African American men. Alana explained:

So, I try to instill in him okay pull your pants up, you know, put your belt on look like somebody because if you don't look like... I mean that first impression it speaks all for you. So, that's why I kinda figure that, you know, it's a... it's a big thing out here for our, um, our guys.

The most commonly reported racial socialization strategies were egalitarian socialization and cultural socialization strategies. Mothers used gendered cultural socialization strategies with daughters and preparation of bias strategies with sons.

### **Sense of Social Stratification Mechanisms**

In this study, African American mothers' sense of the social stratification mechanisms that influenced their children's lives informed their racial socialization strategies and messages. Garcia Coll and colleagues (1996) identified and discussed racism, prejudice, discrimination and oppression as social stratification mechanisms that impacted the developmental outcomes of racial minority children. Mothers' sense of the social stratification mechanisms spoke to how their critical consciousness was intertwined with their mothering activities (i.e., using racial socialization strategies and messaging with their children). The mothers demonstrated a critical consciousness of the social stratification mechanisms affecting their children by discussing each one in detail during the interviews. Racism, however, was discussed more than any other social stratification mechanism. Two of the mothers discussed the subtleness of racism. These mothers believed that the subtleness associated with present day racism has the most effect on their children's lives. The racial slur nigger was used by two of the mothers to explain how they understand how racism has operated on a historical and contemporary level in the lives of African American people.

As noted earlier, three of the mothers, Angela, Diane and Michelle, in this study had daughters. For these women, their daughters' possible struggles with discrimination in the workplace influenced their outlooks for their daughters' future. For example, Diane explained: I guess considering the glass ceiling. She...her being a woman already I guess might influence what kinds of positions or pay that she could get. Her being Black, uh a Black woman might influence that further." In a similar vein, Angela explained:

If you have a light, light skin Black person with long hair and then you have my daughter who is like a medium tone, short hair... they may get a job over her. If the hiring manager thinks like society, then they may want closer to White.

It is important to note that Michelle did not discuss how race and gender work together to influence her daughter's future. Michelle had a high school diploma whereas Angela and Diane each had a bachelor's degree. Education level may influence mothers' perceptions of intersectionality as it relates to their daughters' experiences. Exploring education differences in mothers' understanding of intersectionality as it relates to African American child racial socialization is an area for future research. The mothers' in this study demonstrated an understanding of how the social stratification mechanisms (i.e., racism, prejudice, discrimination and oppression) (Garcia Coll et al., 1996) influenced their children's lives and this understanding, in turn, helped form their racial socialization strategies and messages.

### **Guidelines for Influential External Forces**

As noted earlier, the mothers in this study identified external forces that they believed influence the racial socialization experiences of their children. Among those influences the most frequently discussed external forces were extended family members, media and the school system including teachers, principals and administrative staff. The majority of the mothers in this study focused on conversations between their children and extended family members during their discussions about external forces. The majority of mothers in this study (n=7) discussed that it is okay for other people to talk to their children about race as long as the conversations are positive and do not instill racist or discriminatory ideals in the child. For example, Laura explained: "I don't care that other people talk about racial issues, you know, I just, you know, want it to be in a positive way and not a negative way." When it comes to other people talking with her son about race, Sarah believed it is acceptable as long as the conversations reinforce her maternal teachings about race. She explained: "Yeah as long as they, you know, teach him the

same thing that I'm teaching him. You know? There's no color, you know?" For Jasmine, other people talking with her son about race is okay because it exposes him to other people's points of view; however, she believed he should always discuss those conversations with her. She explained: "My point of view isn't gonna be all that he sees growing up, so I'm open to somebody else, not necessarily teaching him or showing him but sparking some interest and then him coming back to me. I don't...don't mind that". It is worth noting that some of the mothers (n=3) discussed that their parents are the most appropriate people, other than the mothers, to discuss race with their children.

A few mothers (n=3) expressed feelings of helplessness over the influences that external forces have on the racial socialization experiences of their children. For those mothers, the influences of external forces were inevitable and uncontrollable. Laura, one of the mothers in this group, talked about how external forces of racial socialization cannot be avoided. She explained:

Children are gonna talk in school and people are raised differently. You know, um, if people were raised in a home that, um, is full of racism it's gonna reflect on the child; when they're at school or anywhere else. So, you know, you can't avoid that. Um, of course no wants to hear, wants their child to hear anything negative but I mean it cannot be avoided.

In a similar vein, Stacey shared feelings of helplessness over the influences of external forces but believed that her strong relationship with her son and her positive influences are barriers against those influences. She shared:

I mean yes because it's gonna happen anyway. I can't shelter him from whenever he goes everywhere else. He's still gonna hear other people talking; other conversations. To be honest, me and him have this relationship we've had ever since he was little. I've always told my son from the time he could talk anytime you want to talk to mommy about something mommy will not be mad at you mommy will not be upset and mommy won't look at you any different. You can always tell mommy anything you need to tell mommy and he's had times you know when might think about something and he'll ask me a question if you know it didn't sit right with him or something. So, he knows he can always come to me ask me things. So, I wouldn't mind because he's probably gonna end up asking me something anyways because we always talk. If he don't ask me, he will probably end up asking his grandma or something. Grandma I heard so and so. You know

I mean it's our job as parents and grandparents to correct that, so either way it goes it will be corrected.

Stacey's views reflect not only her guidelines for influential external forces but also her realization that she cannot protect her children from external forces of racial socialization. Her quote highlighted her understanding of the amount of control she has over other sources of racial socialization and her plans to correct those forces when time arises. The majority of mothers in this study believed that it was okay for other people to talk with their children about race as long as they follow the guidelines set by the mothers.

### **Fear of External Forces' Influence**

Four of the mothers in this study discussed their concerns about the negative outcomes that could result from the influences of external forces. These mothers discussed several possible negative outcomes. Further, they believed that mothers should work to prevent those outcomes. One mother, Pamela, was particularly forthcoming about her concerns about the possible outcomes associated with external forces. She discussed that she did not want anyone besides her to talk to her child about racial issues. She explained:

No, cause I don't want no one to corrupt his mind and think that, you know, um, he's not supposed to be someone's friend or be around this person because he's White or Indian or whatever the situation is. I don't want him to feel uncomfortable going around White people. I don't want him to grow up...I don't want him to feel like he can just say something to someone because of what they did a long time ago. I don't want him to be that type of person. Because, you know, being that type of person being an African American and if you're gonna be that type of person it gets you nowhere. You know, you're making it hard for yourself.

Dawn was concerned that the pressures from society, the neighborhood she lives in and her child's father are influencing her son, who participated in the study, to develop an unrealistic fear of the police. She described those external influences in detail:

Well, I feel like they face more pressures. Like in the neighborhood we stay in majority Black females with children no men and all they see are cops riding up and down the street and if a man does...is in our neighborhood they will pull that guy over ask him for his ID automatically. So, my son has come to the point to where he actually is afraid of the police and I don't want him to feel that way. I don't want him to feel like he should

be afraid of anything especially when you're innocent. So, that's a type of pressure I think he has where he feels like because... he doesn't know it's because... like I look at as you're a male and you're Black. Cause you don't see too many White men in our neighborhood as it is. He doesn't know it's because of his skin because I don't teach him to look at skin but I look at it that way and so because I don't teach him about skin he doesn't see it that way but I see it that way.

When asked to describe those pressures in greater detail, she continued:

I think it's more of his father because his dad is in his life. He sees him on the weekends and I ... I'm not there but, um, one occasion when I came to pick him up or whatever he saw the cops and he dove in the back of my uncle's truck bed and I was like what are you doing? He was like it's the police. They gon' get me and I was like for what. What did you do and he was like I didn't do anything. They gon' get me. So, I don't want him to have that mentality at all, when it comes to any type of authority especially if you're innocent. If you haven't done anything wrong you have no reason to be afraid, hide or anything. It makes you look guilty when you run for no reason.

Some of the mothers in this study feared the negative outcomes that could result from the influences of external influences.

### **Practice of Active Intervention Against External Forces**

Mothers in this study were asked interview questions to explore their reactions to the external forces influencing their children's racial socialization experiences (see Appendix C). Most of the mothers reported that they have intervened or would intervene with external forces in some way. For six out of the eight mothers who reported that they have or would intervene, talking with other adults who are racially socializing their children was the most commonly discussed type of intervention. These mothers felt that an intervention with external forces was necessary. Even when other children were the source of the racial socialization experience, mothers in this study chose to talk to an adult (i.e., parent or teacher) instead of talking with the child. For Stacey, intervening with teachers required dialogue followed by a conversation with her son about the situation:

Well, it would all depend on the situation that's going on. If it was something maybe to do with, like, with school and the teachers then I would, you know, go about having a teacher meeting, you know, with the teacher and talking with the teacher and I would also

bring my son after me and her has talked, so we can clear that up. And, if it becomes a bigger problem then take it to wherever it needs to be taken to get resolved.

Intervening with external forces was challenging for Dawn because her boyfriend was the adult with whom she had to intervene. Dawn described her boyfriend, who was not her child's biological father, as a Muslim who was raised not to trust Caucasian people. Dawn discussed her effort to stop the negative racial socialization messages he told her son about Caucasian people. She shared:

Um, he was raised with a Muslim father. So, he was brought up kinda that way even though his mom was a Christian and his dad taught him don't trust White people. Don't be friends with him. Don't date them. Really don't have anything to do with them unless it was at school and so he still kinda feels that way and plus he got in trouble because he tried to show off to this White girl in the class and she told it on him. And, so he carries that around with him. And so, he'll bring it up and try to talk about it and I'll be like you can't look at it everybody that way. I was like because everybody don't act that way or look at you that way.

When asked to explain how she intervened, she disclosed: "Yes, I told him don't talk like that in front of my kids because I don't want them growing up just negative towards anybody." Mothers in this study discussed that they have or would intervene with external forces to counteract negative messages about race from those forces.

### **Reflective Thinking**

As noted earlier, the vast majority of the mothers realized the impact of external forces on their children's racial socialization experiences while holding guidelines for and intervening against those external forces. In this study, the biological children of mothers in this study were administered the MCDT that was videotaped and shown to mothers to catalyze them to engage in engage in a reflective thinking process about the racial socialization experiences of their children. Four subcategories related to mothers' reflective thinking emerged from showing mothers the videotaped MCDT: results of the MCDT, predictions for child's racial preferences, reactions to and understanding of child's racial preferences, and maternal beliefs about children's racial preferences.

*Results of the Modified Clark Doll Test.* Children were shown images of cartoon characters ranging in skin tone from light to dark and asked questions about them. An example

of a test question is: Who looks nice? The test was videotaped and the results were shown to the mothers in this study. As shown in Table 2, children's responses to the items on the MCDT are presented in terms of percentages of children who chose each cartoon character image per question. Three subcategories related to mothers' perceptions about the MCDT emerged from the data: predictions for child's racial preferences, reaction to and understanding of child's racial preferences and reflective thinking.

The children in this study demonstrated preferences for the lighter skin tone cartoon character images for whom they would like to play with, who is nice, who looks African American and who do you want to be your friend. The majority of the children selected either the lightest skin tone cartoon character image or the darkest skin tone cartoon character image for the child that was bad and the child that was the prettiest. The percentages were evenly distributed among all of the cartoon character images for the one that most closely resembles each child participant.

Based on previous research on racial preferences and attitudes in African American preschool children (Spencer, 1982; Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990; Swanson et al., 2009; Whaley, 1993), the racial preferences in this study may reflect children's underlying cognitive-developmental processes and desire to belong to groups associated with positive stereotypes in society. Spencer and Markstrom-Adams (1990) suggested that in order to truly understand children's racial preferences researchers need to determine if children are responding based on internalized beliefs about racial stereotypes or ecological and environmental stimuli. Since children in this study were not probed to determine the reasons for their choices, I cannot determine if the children were responding based on internal beliefs about race or from influences from external sources such as culture, the family and the environment. Further, limitations in the cognitive-developmental levels of preschool-age children makes it difficult to accurately interpret the results of tests that measure racial preferences and attitudes such as versions of The Clark Doll Test (Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990).

Table 2

*Percentages of Children's Racial Preferences on the Modified Clark Doll Test*

| <b>Item</b>                                      | <b>Medium-Dark Skin Tone</b> | <b>Dark Skin Tone</b> | <b>Medium-Light Skin Tone</b> | <b>Light Skin Tone</b> | <b><i>n</i></b> |
|--|------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Who would you like to play with?</b>          | 16.67                        | 8.33                  | 33.33                         | <b>41.67</b>           | 12              |
| <b>Who looks nice?</b>                           | 8.33                         | 16.67                 | <b>41.67</b>                  | 33.33                  | 12              |
| <b>Who looks bad?</b>                            | 9.10                         | <b>36.36</b>          | 18.18                         | <b>36.36</b>           | 11              |
| <b>Who looks like a White Child?</b>             | 25.00                        | 16.67                 | 8.33                          | <b>50.00</b>           | 12              |
| <b>Who looks like an African American child?</b> | 16.67                        | 16.67                 | <b>58.33</b>                  | 8.33                   | 12              |
| <b>Who looks like a Black child?</b>             | 8.33                         | <b>50.00</b>          | 16.67                         | 25.00                  | 12              |
| <b>Who looks like you?</b>                       | <b>25.00</b>                 | <b>25.00</b>          | <b>25.00</b>                  | <b>25.00</b>           | 12              |
| <b>Who is the prettiest?</b>                     | 25.00                        | <b>33.33</b>          | 8.33                          | <b>33.33</b>           | 12              |
| <b>Who do you want to be your friend?</b>        | 16.67                        | 25.00                 | <b>41.67</b>                  | 16.67                  | 12              |

*Note.* The highest percentages per item and per cartoon character image are in boldface.

<sup>a</sup> For the item, "Who looks bad?", one child could not decide on an image so the percentages for this item were calculated with a sample of 11 instead of 12 child participants.

There are caveats about the results of the (MCDT) that are important to discuss. Spencer and Markstrom-Adams (1990) used developmental, ecological and life span theories to interpret empirical studies on racial attitudes and preferences among African American children and deduced that their pro-Caucasian attitudes and preferences resulted from their understandings of negative stereotypes about African Americans and not mental traits such as personal disorganization. This interpretation was supported by Jordan and Hernandez-Reif's (2009) study in which African American children associated negative stereotypes with African American related images during a pre-test assessment but positive stereotypes during a post-test assessment after hearing a positive story about a dark skin person. Swanson and colleagues (2009) warned that results on measures such as versions of the Clark Doll Test should not be interpreted as internalized negative feelings about the self but reflections of children's "socially constructed positive attributes about white and negative attributes about black" (p. 270). As discussed earlier, African American children are in the early stages of identity development (Erikson, 1950; 1968). Whaley (1993) reviewed the literature and suggested that the process of racial identity development of African American children includes cognitive-developmental processes as well as social and cultural influences. Lastly, Spencer and Markstrom-Adams spoke to the importance of using an intersectional perspective when they argued that the racial identity of children must be understood by taking the developmental level of the child, gender and context into consideration. According to the literature, children's understanding of stereotypes during the preschool years may not influence their racial identity as much as in later years; more specifically, by middle childhood children's understanding of stereotypes have progressed and begin to influence their identity on a personal level (Swanson et al.). Understanding preschool children's racial preferences and attitudes is complex and results on measures such as versions of The Clark Doll Test should be interpreted with caution and in ecological, cognitive-development and sociocultural contexts. It is important to remember that in this study the MCDT was used to illicit reflective thinking in mothers and not to determine with greater specificity the root cause of African American children's racial preferences and attitudes.

*Predictions for child's racial preferences.* Mothers were asked to predict how they believed their children would react to the questions on the MCDT. They varied greatly in their predictions and reasons for their children's preferences. The majority of mothers (n=4) believed that their children would pick from among all of the cartoon characters images to answer the

questions instead of consistently picking the same character. Three of the mothers believed their children would select the cartoon character closest to their own skin tones. Three mothers couldn't predict how their children may react. Another mother thought her child would respond honestly, but couldn't be more specific. Lastly, one mother thought that her child would pick a cartoon character image that looked Caucasian American for all of the questions. The mothers varied greatly in their predictions and reasons for those predictions.

*Reactions to and understanding of child's racial preferences.* For 11 out of the 12 mothers in this study their children's racial preferences on the MCDT (Jordan & Hernandez, Reif, 2009) compelled them to engage in a process of thinking critically about their children's racial socialization experiences including the role that external forces play in that socialization. An understanding of their children's racial preferences emerged from that process. Mothers' reactions and understandings were interrelated. For the majority of the mothers in this group (n=7), their children's racial preferences challenged their beliefs about what their children knew and felt about race. For Laura, watching the video of her son's racial preferences was a shocking experience. Initially, Laura did not know how her son would react to the test questions; however, after watching the video, she expressed her surprise by her child's selections:

Well... when he picked the... when he said the White one, I was like 'wow.' And, then when he said, um, I think he said the White one... chose the White child as nicest or something like that, I was like 'wow.' I mean... but I didn't know who he would choose. I really didn't.

When asked why she was surprised, Laura contemplated the influence of external forces on her child's racial socialization:

I'd think he'd choose somebody, uh, I don't know that looks like him. Yes, that's what I was thinking he may choose... but then again, we are we're around a lot of White children a lot of the time. So that... I have no idea. That could have impacted his decisions. I don't know.

Jasmine expected that her son would answer honestly when asked the questions on the MCDT (Jordan & Hernandez-Reif, 2009). His responses also compelled her to consider how society may have influenced him. She explained:

Wow, society! Um... when he was picking out a lot of the like negative questions and associating them with the darker kid, I didn't like that. It's like our society and, um,

maybe even family and friends, it's like we all associate dark with Black or bad with Black and, uh, I don't really like that but not a whole lot I can do about it other than to embrace who we are and show him our positive sides.

For the mothers in this study, viewing their children's racial preferences caused a period of reflective thinking followed by an understanding of how their children's racial experiences have impacted them.

*Maternal beliefs about child's racial preferences.* To further prompt mother's reflective thinking, they were asked to suggest and discuss questions that they would ask mothers about their children's choices on the MCDT. The majority of the mothers (n=8) who had a reflective thinking experience wanted to ask more specific questions about mothers' beliefs about the reasons behind their children's choices. These mothers wanted to know more about what specific maternal behaviors may influence children to make those selections. Some of the mothers in this study felt like mothers may not be really aware of what they are communicating to their children about race. On the other hand, some of the mothers believed that society plays a greater role in African American children's racial socialization than mothers realize. Out of these eight mothers, three of them wanted mothers to consider what they are truly teaching their children. Dawn explained:

I would want to know, um, ... your child chose this so do you think that you're influencing your child to choose those things by the things that you say or is it just his opinion of what he sees on day-to-day or are you just sitting there telling him, you know, this person's this and this person's this.

When asked why those questions were important to ask, she shared:

Because a lot of people don't think their children are listening when they really are listening. He might be in there playing on a video game but he's also paying attention to what you're saying or what you're doing even though you don't know he is.

In a similar vein, Diane discussed that mothers may not be aware that what they tell and show their children helps them determine what should or should not be important to them. Diane explained: "I might ask what are you teaching them that is important? Does that make sense? Like, what are you saying to them that says this is important or what are you showing to them that says this is important." When asked why those questions were important to ask, she offered:

Because I feel like what we tell them is important. What we show them mostly what we show them is important. It's gonna influence the way they live. The way they decide or the way they make decisions, the way they interact, the way they feel about themselves, and things that we show them that are important are the things that are gonna be important to them. And so they come up or they grow and they learn and they develop into people based on what we teach them and what we show them is important.

Two of the mothers, Angela and Jasmine, wanted mothers to think more specifically about how society may be influencing their children's beliefs about race. Angela clarified:

Because I would wanna know... what makes them make those choices. To see if what we are teaching them is effective. Are they thinking that way because of the parent or are they thinking that way because of teachers or television or friends or books. I wanna know what makes them choose those choices.

Jasmine expressed concerns about how racism in society influences African American children's racial socialization. She suggested: "Um, I would probably ask more along, um, questions it probably would hurt the study, but how does society help or hurt the way we view each other?" When asked why she felt that was an important question to ask, she offered:

Um, because we are products of our environment and as small as our little home, you know, is we live in a bigger home. We live in a state of racism. We live in a city of racism. A world of racism. You know? It gets bigger and bigger as we go out of our house. It just expands and, um, TV shows if your hair is not long and straight and sleek then it's not pretty or if your skin is not matte or not oily or not bright it's not pretty, you know? It's just the things that we see on the cover of magazines and, um, the movies. It's everywhere and, you know, it's just what we choose to address or not address.

Watching the videos of children's racial preferences stimulated the mothers in this study to think reflectively about what they were doing and what society was communicating to children that influenced their children's racial preferences. The mothers' desire to determine if their children are reacting to maternal behaviors or societal influences reflected Spencer and Markstrom-Adams (1990) argument that in order to truly understand African American children's racial preferences researchers must evaluate the underlying factors influences those preferences (i.e., internalized stereotypes and/or ecological and environmental stimuli).

### **Bidirectional Process in Maternal Racial Socialization**

Another theme that emerged from the data was that there seems to be a bidirectional component involved in the maternal racial socialization process. This theme referred to the child behaviors that influenced how and what mothers communicated about race. The majority of mothers in this study talked about a time of readiness for talking about race that was influenced by the child's developmental level and catalysts for racial conversations that included when the child notices differences in skin color, situation arises and child initiates. A small amount of mothers discussed how their children's characteristics and behaviors influenced the racial socialization process.

#### **Time of Readiness**

In this study, 11 out of the 12 mothers discussed a time of readiness for having racial conversations with their children. These mothers believed that there is a right time to talk about race with their children. Out of these 11 mothers, their reasons for the right time to talk to children about race varied considerably. The major reasons for the right time to talk about race that emerged from the data are child's developmental level and catalysts for race conversations including child notices differences in skin color, situation arises and child initiates.

**Child's developmental level.** Four of the mothers reported that they do not talk about race at all with their children because they are not ready developmentally to understand conversations about race. For these mothers their children were too young to understand the social meanings behind race and race-related issues. This finding was similar to previous studies that have found that African American families with young children prefer to use cultural socialization strategies (Coard et al., 2004; Suizzo et al., 2008). Alana explained why she hasn't talked with her son about race:

I haven't. Not with him; not just yet. I don't know right now if he's ready. I feel that, you know, he's kinda young to fully understand the Black and White. He doesn't see any difference. He has White friends, Black friends, and another...I don't know their nationality but he consider everybody as one right now. So, right now I don't speak to him about race.

For these mothers, their children's developmental level influenced their readiness for racial conversations.

**Catalysts for racial conversations with children.** Mothers did not initiate conversations about race but waited to be prompted by their children to have those conversations. Mothers discussed three types of catalysts: child notices differences in skin color, situation arises and child initiates. Some of the mothers in this study reported having conversations about with their children once they noticed differences in other people due to skin color. The situation arises catalyst refers to situations that compelled mothers to talk with their children about race. In some instances, children approached their mothers and initiated conversations about race. Mothers were probed to give examples of each type of catalyst.

***Child notices differences in skin color.*** Three of the mothers in this study reported that they have had conversations about race after their children noticed differences in people based on their skin color. These mothers reported having developmentally-appropriate conversations with their children. Diane described a situation in which she talked with her child about race:

We might have been looking at some pictures on my computer once and I want to say it was about the guy that I was dating recently ... I wanna say it was the last guy that I was talking to, dating. I want to say it was him but I honestly don't remember if it was or not. But, we were looking at pictures and she was saying "Oh, he's brown like me" or "brown like us" is what she said. And, I was like yeah and that was it. It was kinda like, okay.

Angela discussed that the preschool-age is the best time to start having discussions about race because children are noticing differences in skin color. She explained:

Now, would be the perfect time because they know that they are different from other kids when they look at the color of their skin. She started asking about Black kids and White kids like at this age. I think she might have been maybe four and she was asking why are we Black and why are they White. I mean as soon as they are able to know the difference in color. I would say about three or four.

Mothers in this study had developmentally-appropriate conversations about race when their children noticed differences in people based on skin color.

***Situation arises.*** Two of the mothers in this study discussed that they have or would discuss race with their children when a race-related situation occurred. For those mothers, race-related situations made having those conversations with children necessary. Dawn emphasized equality with her son and disclosed that she does not plan to discuss race with him. She believed that having discussions about race may lead him to start

seeing everyone as unequal. She did, however, disclose that she would talk about race if a race-related situation occurred. She explained, “When it becomes an issue other than that you should just look at everybody as they’re just another person.” In summary, some of the mothers in this study believed that conversations about race are necessary only when race-related situations have happened.

*Child initiates.* Stacey, Pamela and Jasmine stated that they would talk about race with their sons after the children initiated the conversation. Jasmine described that she was prepared to have conversations about race with her son; she did not, however, intend to emphasize race with him. She explained:

When he comes to me with a question that maybe he doesn’t understand or why is this or that. But, it’s not something I’m gonna pinpoint and drive in the ground, you know.

When he’s ready, I’ll be ready.

When asked to explain how she would respond to his questions, she responded:

If he were to come to me and ask me why is my skin brown and their skin pink, then I would have to just say God created us to be many different shapes and shades and not everybody’s gonna look alike but we’re all the same. That’s the only way I would be able to start it out.

Stacey felt similarly to Jasmine. She expressed that there was no specific time to talk about race but she was prepared to discuss it when her son initiated the conversation. She explained:

To be honest, I honestly can’t say like a typical age to be honest. My thing is I don’t know. I’m like one of those moms I touch basis on certain things but certain things I leave alone until my child brings to me. So, honestly, I would think it would have to be when he acknowledges something he feels isn’t right or he feels he is being treated different than someone. So, that could be anywhere from him now all the way until he’s 18. I really don’t... I can’t necessarily say when.

The data revealed that having a conversation about race was a bidirectional process between the mother and child that was initiated when the child noticed differences in people based on skin color, a specific race-related situation occurred that warranted a conversation about race or the child initiated the conversation.

## **Child Characteristics and Behaviors**

In the Integrative Model (Garcia Coll et al., 1996) discussed how child characteristics influenced racial and ethnic minority children's racial socialization experiences in families. Mothers in this study were asked to talk about the characteristics and behaviors of their children to determine how they impacted the maternal racial socialization process. The child characteristics were coded into four categories based on the criteria for coding child characteristics discussed in Mein, Fernyhough, Russell and Clark-Carter (1998): mental, behavioral, physical and general. Meins and colleagues (1998) established the following criteria for coding child characteristics:

- mental characteristics refer to cognition, emotions, intelligence and will;
- behavioral characteristics refer to actions and relating with others;
- physical characteristics refer to physical qualities including age, height, weight and skin tone; and
- general characteristics are those characteristics that cannot be classified into one of the other three categories.

For most of the mothers in this study, time of readiness and catalysts for race conversations influenced the racial socialization process more than child characteristics and behaviors. Two mothers, Diane and Leanne, gave specific examples of how their children's characteristics influenced their racial socialization strategies and messages. Both of them discussed having to be careful about what they say to their children about race. Diane discussed that she did not talk about racial and ethnic groups in front of her daughter because she did not want her to identify people based on their race. She explained: "Because I don't want her to ever say look at that White girl mommy! Because that is something that she would do. Ummm...it's...again I just don't want her to be so racially conscious." In a similar vein, Leanne disclosed that she placed her racial socialization messages in a gendered context so that her son would not be so racially conscious. When asked if she talked with her son about race, she clarified:

Not directly. I've spoke with him about it but not in the sense I was telling him this is because you're Black or this is because you're Black. I have spoken to him in the sense that you're a male. That's how I put it to him, so that it's not...he is one of those who repeats everything I say (laughing) and he will go say well my mommy said because I'm

Black I gotta do this (laughing). So, I guess I tell him because you are a growing young man this is how you have to act, this is what you know, because people are gonna expect you to act this way but you gotta act that way. In fact, I recently had that conversation with him after the Trayvon Martin case.

The mothers in this study focused mainly on their children being developmentally ready to understand racial conversations followed by having racial conversations when a child noticed differences in skin color, a race-related situation made having a racial conversation necessary or the child initiated it. Perhaps the age of the children and their developmental levels were reasons why child characteristics and behaviors did not play a major role in children's racial socialization in this study. Perhaps a sample of mothers of older children may have yielded different and more findings for child characteristics and behaviors.

### **Skin Tone Politics in Maternal Racial Socialization**

The theme, skin tone politics in maternal racial socialization, was used to address the research question: How do mothers' perceptions of colorism influence maternal racial socialization messages? This theme referred to the activities and interactions regarding skin tone among African American families. African American families are sources of information about skin color (Wilder & Cain, 2011). Diane was critically aware of a preference for lighter skin children in her family. She explained:

Even my granddad, who I adore, my favorite person in the whole world, my cousin has a two-year-old and she's dark. She's like a dark skin baby and my cousin is light. Well she's lighter than me, um, but her husband is dark and so their baby is dark. My granddad would say stuff like 'Ah she's a dark baby.' Now he says, 'I know it's gonna make Ashley mad. Abigail looks like she's getting lighter.' He'll say it as if he's happy about it and it's like Granddad don't do that. You're my favorite person (laughter). It's obvious that, uh, we're still afflicted by that silliness and my daughter is a light skin girl.

Unlike in the pilot study and in the literature, colorism was not highlighted in mother's racial socialization messages. Colorism was limited to mothers' discussions about experiences of colorism within the extended family, friends or older siblings but not direct communication to the study child.

As discussed in Chapter Three, I included a discussion of conspicuous absences in this study as they provided alternative ways to view the racial socialization of preschool-age African

American children. Conspicuous absences are those things that were expected to be included in conversations but were not mentioned (Banks-Wallace, 2001). I expected that mothers would discuss how preferences for lighter skin within the African American community influence how they racially socialize their children. Additionally, I expected for mothers to share stories about how their children's skin tone influenced their experiences within the household and with extended family members. Those discussions were not a part of mothers' conversations in this study. Children in this study were exposed to conversations about colorism but were not the subject of those conversations. Five mothers in the study explained how colorism was discussed in their families. There was minimal support for the role that skin tone plays in maternal racial socialization messages. Two subthemes were connected to skin tone politics in racial socialization: skin tone socialization and teasing. I discuss these subthemes in detail below.

### **Skin Tone Socialization**

Three of the mothers in this study discussed direct communication with their children about skin tone among African Americans. When asked how skin tone was discussed in her home, Jasmine shared a story of explaining to her son about how to care for his darker skin. She discussed:

We really don't talk about it. I...I have told him though, um, your skin is darker so it's gonna show more scars. It's gonna show more if you're ashy versus, you know, somebody with lighter skin you won't really see it a whole lot.

When asked how skin tone was discussed in her home, Zara shared a story of explaining to her son about how the sun affects skin tone in African American people. She shared:

We was with my parents and I think we were looking at a picture and like everybody was different shades and he was like why I was White in this picture and I look like this now? I'm like when you go out in the sun you get darker. You don't stay that color. You stay out of the sun. You might stay that color.

For Sarah, extended family members played a role in the skin tone socialization of her son. She described how skin tone was discussed in her family:

Like, we might ... you know what I'm saying ... most of the time my sister call him chocolate. She might say, 'Go sit your chocolate self down.' (laughing) Like my nephew he told me today, he said, 'Aunt Sarah, can I have some candy I'm chocolate.' (laughing)

So, most of the time we call him chocolate. So, that's mostly how they look at... you know.

Given that three mothers discussed skin tone socialization, perhaps more probes were needed to prompt mothers to share stories about skin tone socialization.

### **Teasing**

Although children were not engaged in direct conversations about colorism, they were exposed to conversations about skin tone preferences. In this study, teasing was a mechanism of how colorism operates in African American families. For Angela, teasing was used during family arguments. She described:

My sister and my father are darker skin than the rest of us; my mom and my brothers.

And, um, when my sister and I used to argue when we were little I used to call her names like associated with her skin tone; when we were little.

When asked to tell a story about one of those arguments, she continued: "When we would argue I would call her Blackie. I am so embarrassed to say that but I did. I used to call her Blackie when we were little in a negative way. But nothing other than that." For Laura, teasing was used with family members who were much lighter skin than the rest of the family. Laura explained:

My aunt was a lot, a lot lighter than the rest of us and we wondered what was wrong with her cause she looked different (laughing). But, um, I think that was the only time. My cousins were a little darker. But, we were all black people, you know? We never, um, it was never... I don't think anything too major.

When asked to tell a story about the teasing, she shared:

We'd joke that, um, you know, my grandma didn't know who her dad was (laughing).

And, she'd get upset because, um, she really did... she looked so much different from everybody else, I mean. But, we'd just joke about it all the time and she knew. I mean she totally stood out. I mean... I still don't know why she looks like that. I don't know but maybe it's a couple of generations back or something but yeah that's about the most we talked about skin tone.

Data analyses revealed that colorism influenced the family dynamics of mothers in this study but not the racial socialization of their children.

## **Defining African American Motherhood**

African American motherhood is one of the major themes that emerged from the data. This theme referred to the mothering activities that informed the content of maternal racial socialization messages. Aspects of this theme helped to answer the question: What is the content of maternal racial socialization messages? Several of the mothers in this study discussed how being an African American mother informed their mothering and the content of racial socialization messages. The mothers in this study clearly demonstrated an understanding of intersectionality and that understanding was a pervasive thread common in all of their responses. In other words, the mothers had an understanding of how race, class and gender interconnected to create the unique life experiences of African American women and their children (Crenshaw, 1994). Three subthemes related to African American motherhood emerged from the data: meanings of motherhood, roles and othermothering.

### **Meanings of Motherhood**

Several subcategories explained the meanings that the mothers in this study assigned to motherhood. Although the mothers came from diverse backgrounds, similarities in their meanings of motherhood were evident. These subcategories included “it means everything,” commonalities and variations in parenting, stereotypes about African American mothers, raising African American boys, and marginalization.

**“It means everything.”** The majority of mothers discussed how being a mother means everything to them. For these women, being a mother permeated into every aspect of their lives. For Angela, being a mother was something that was indescribable. She explained: “I mean, I can’t even describe it in words what it means to me. I mean I don’t know it’s just... hmmm... I don’t know. It means everything.” Three of the mothers discussed that being an African American mother made them proud. For most of the mothers in this study, motherhood was a most important aspect of their lives.

**Commonalities and variations in parenting.** Four mothers in this study discussed that the state of having children was a bond that connects all mothers regardless of race. On the other hand, six mothers in this study discussed that all mothers had the same common task of raising children as best as they can; however, the way they chose to rear children may vary from mother to mother. For example, Laura explained:

Children are children. Uh, uh I guess everybody... I know people are from different

cultures and they raise their children different but I think it all comes back in a full circle. You know? If you're a parent you wanna raise your children to the best of your ability, you know, regardless of what your race is.

When asked to give an example of how it was the same, she continued: "I feel like, you know, if you love your child you do the best you can to raise them; to be a good parent regardless of your race." For the mothers in this study, raising children is a common task of parenting for all mothers even though mothers may approach it in different ways.

**Stereotypes about African American mothers.** For many of the mothers in this study, African American motherhood was characterized by negative stereotypes about African American mothers. These stereotypes reflected the mothers' understanding of how the intersection of race, class and gender operated in the lives of African American women. The mothers in this study discussed several types of stereotypes about African American mothers. The most common stereotypes mentioned by participants were "angry mother," "welfare mother," and "promiscuous mother." For the majority of mothers in this study disproving those stereotypes influenced their mothering. For Michelle, counteracting negative stereotypes about African American mothers was important and influenced how she raised her children. She explained:

I know I don't want my kids growing up running out being disrespectful and loud and things like that in public you know. It's a certain way, like, I'm real picky about certain images that you have when you're out.

When asked to describe the images, she clarified:

Just cause a lot of time you see a lot of African American mothers and they're with the kids not saying that they're not doing anything right but in public there's a way that you should handle yourself and your children, so that people won't continue to think the same thing about African Americans and women and their kids. Well, I know myself like if I'm out, um, say at for instance at Walmart and I see a child acting up and their mom comes out and straight just start cussing out in Walmart, you know. I know my son showed out one time at Walmart (laughing). A lot of times I just ignore him and let him I mean show out. Some people may say that looks bad on me but I'm not one beat him in front of everybody in Walmart or curse him out in front of everybody in Walmart.

In a related vein, Jasmine believed she had to prove to her son that they can conquer stereotypes about African American women and their children. She shared:

It means you're gonna have to undergo and withstand a lot of scrutiny, um, and it's not always bad but there is a lot of negativity just because of the-, the race itself carries its own and then with me being a mother on top of that. I feel like I'm already in this bottle; this stereotype that I have to conquer on top of everything else. So, I have to prove to my son that we can do it. I can do it. You can do it as well as the world.

When asked to describe the stereotype, she continued:

Um, they don't wanna work. Uh, they... they feel like we're just gonna let somebody treat us any kinda way and we don't wanna really educate ourselves or our children. Um, they feel as if... if we can live off the system then that's enough for us and that's a huge stereotype. Yeah, I'm a single parent but that doesn't stop me. So, if you need assistance, federal assistance, government assistance that's one thing. But, to just stay in that and make it a generational thing that's a stereotype that I refuse to be a part of.

For Dawn, the stereotype of African American mothers as promiscuous was especially problematic. The importance of the intersection of race, gender and class was evident in her discussion about single African American mothers. She explained:

In some cases, yeah girls do have different children by different men but it's not because they sleep around. It's because they fell in love with this one guy he decided he didn't want to stick around. They found someone else and they obviously thought they were in love with him too and he decided not to stick around either. It's not that we're just hey let's have a baby and then you go away and I'm gonna have a baby by somebody else. It's not at all and I don't like the fact that people have that opinion.

When discussing the stereotypes of African American mothers, some mothers discussed the stereotypes of African American children as well. The most common stereotypes about African American boys involved criminal activity, being bad overall and not interested in school. The most common stereotype about African American girls was that they have a bad attitude. Several mothers in this study reported that the most common stereotype about African American children in general was that they were bad and not as smart as other children. The African American mothers in this study were aware of the negative stereotypes of African American mothers and children and challenging those stereotypes was an integral aspect of their mothering.

**Raising African American boys.** Raising African American boys presented unique challenges to the mothers in this study. The majority of mothers in this study discussed how raising African American boys influenced their meanings of motherhood and their mothering. For example, Jasmine discussed the contradictions of motherhood for her and how having a son meant that she must consistently work to better herself. Jasmine explained: “It means that I’m gonna be last in a lot of areas. I’m gonna be bettering myself all because I’m trying to raise a man, so it means the world. It means everything. I love being a mother.”

One of the mothers in the study, Dawn, discussed that African American mothers have to especially nurture their sons because of the pressures that society placed on them. She explained: I really don’t know because I feel kinda like as an African American woman raising an African American man... to me I kinda feel like African American men have a lot of pressure on them from the day they come into this world. Like, they have a lot of pressure on them from all kinda directions. So, as a mom I feel that you need to nurture them more; try to lead them in the right direction because if you just let him be like oh, cause some of them don’t have fathers that are around. So, it’s more of you...you have to nurture him and try to teach him to be a man...

Dawn also discussed the contradictions she experienced in raising an African American boy.

...and sometimes it don’t go your way because he feels like he’s the man of the house he tells you what to do and he kinda like goes his own direction. What he thinks is best. Whether he thinks he’s helping you but really it’s hurting you but he thinks it’s helping you. So, I think more as an African American mother you have to be more nurturing towards your young men.

Jasmine and Dawn described the challenges and contradictions of raising African American boys and how having sons influenced their perceptions of motherhood.

Interestingly, eight mothers in this study discussed that African American boys experienced racism differently than African American girls. Moreover, some of these mothers discussed that African American boys had it harder in U.S. society and were less likely to be accepted by U.S. society. Their responses reflect the constructs of social stratification mechanisms and segregation in the Integrative Model (Garcia Coll et al., 1996), thereby, providing support for using the model as part of the theoretical framework for this study. Mothers awareness of African American boys are disproportionately affected by racism when

compared to African American girls reflected the social stratification mechanism construct of the model. The lack of acceptance for African American boys and men referred to the segregation component discussed in the model. Garcia Coll and colleagues discussed how racial and ethnic minorities have been segregated from society on social and psychological, residential and economic levels. In this study, mothers' discussion of the lack of acceptance for African American boys referred to social and psychological segregation. Raising African American boys created unique circumstances for the mothers in this study; further, they believed that African American boys b encountered more racism than and were less likely to be accepted by society than African America girls.

**Marginalization.** Three of the women in this study discussed the marginalization of African American women. While only discussed by a small number of women, it is important to include marginalization in this section because it emerged during their explanations of African American motherhood. Having to work harder to prove themselves and discrimination in the workplace are common threads in their conversations. When asked what does it mean to be an African American mother, Laura replied:

Proud, um, it makes me proud. I feel like I might, may have to work a little harder to prove myself sometimes. But, it doesn't discourage me or make me think that I can't do anything. I've never felt like because I'm African American I can't do anything. I've never felt that way.

When asked why she felt that way, she clarified:

Because sometimes I feel I like I have to; not only being African American but being a woman too. I feel like I may have to work a little harder just to prove that I can do it and that I am worthy of different chances.

For some of the African American mothers in this study, marginalization was a significant aspect of motherhood.

## **Roles**

Roles was a subtheme of African American motherhood that described the mothering activities related to raising African American children. All of the African American women in this study identified several roles that they fulfilled as mothers. The most commonly cited roles were models, nurturers, providers, supporters and teachers. Out of these roles, the role of teacher

was discussed most often by the mothers in this study. A subcategory, lessons to learn, described what mothers tried to teach their children in their role as teacher.

For Diane, being a teacher to her child was a lifelong process that she consistently tried to do better. She discussed, “But, I wanna do the best that I can and continue to grow and become better so that I am a better person, a better mother, and a better teacher I guess.” When asked why she thought this way, she continued:

Why? Perhaps because I’ve had good teachers. I’m not really sure. Maybe that’s just the way that I’ve been brought up to think. That your mother is supposed to be your first teacher your most important teacher and it just that it’s not really something that...it’s not a why it’s just the way it is. You know? For me anyway.

**Lessons to learn.** Throughout the interview, mothers discussed several lessons that they tried to teach their children. The majority of mothers discussed trying to teach their children about equality and getting along well with others. These egalitarian messages occurred during as well as outside of the racial socialization process. Mothers as teachers was the most commonly discussed role and egalitarian-based lessons were used most often by mothers.

### **Othermothering**

*Othermothering*, the last subtheme of African American motherhood, described the mothering activities of other African American women who helped to racially socialize the children in this sample. Othermothers are women who help *bloodmothers* (i.e., biological mothers) in the raising of and caring for their children; further, othermothers are integral components of African American communities including helping communities confront racial oppression (Collins, 2000). In this study, othermothers contributed to the racial socialization of children by using cultural socialization strategies including buying African American dolls for girls and books with African American characters for girls and boys.

Diane discussed how her mother and friends participated in the cultural socialization of her daughter:

My mom who is...ever since I was little she would not buy me a white doll. I don’t know if I’ve asked for one but that she’s very, no she’ll have a black doll and so she’ll buy them for her. I guess when my friends buy her things they’re black dolls.

In this study, the majority of othermothers were extended family members including grandmothers and aunts and friends of the mothers. One mother in this study, Leanne, discussed her othermothering practices with children. She discussed:

I've worked in child care and I had a mixed class and I know that when it comes to how I deal with the other children that aren't African American and how I deal with the African American children is a little different because of what you know the other people are looking at them. Okay, for instance, I had one child who wants to talk like this like 'what up cuz' and all that and you want to teach him that's not the right way, you know? So, you have to do extra just show him, you know, this is how you need to speak this is how you need to carry yourself when I wouldn't have to do that to, let's say, a White child that's not gonna talk like that anyway because their parents teach them that or because they don't see that as much as an African American child would.

The role of othermothers in this study is consistent with the Black Feminist literature on the importance of othermothers to African American motherhood.

## Chapter Five: Discussion

### Overview

I investigated the process of the maternal racial socialization of preschool-age African American children through the use of an integrated Black Feminist-child development theoretical framework. As discussed earlier, using an integrative theoretical approach allowed me to uncover dimensions of the maternal racial socialization of young African American children not accounted for by traditional child development theories. In this study, 12 mothers participated in a two-part semi-structured interview and their 12 children ages three to five years old were administered the MCDT (Jordan & Hernandez-Reif, 2009). Qualitative data analyses revealed four themes related to the maternal racial socialization of African American preschool-age children: motherwork as conscientization, bidirectional process in racial socialization, skin tone politics in maternal racial socialization and African American motherhood. As in previous studies, most of the mothers in this study used cultural socialization and egalitarian socialization strategies and messages with their young children. As a contribution to the literature, findings of this study revealed that the maternal racial socialization involved the complex interaction of mothers' understanding of intersectionality and their critical consciousness about the social stratification mechanisms (i.e., racism, prejudice, discrimination and oppression) that influenced the development of African American children. Further, the maternal racial socialization of preschool-age children involved a bidirectional process where mothers were most likely to delay having specific conversations about race until one or more of the following occurred: child noticed differences in people based on skin color, child initiated the conversations or a race-related situation occurred that required a direct conversation about race. Colorism did not play a role in the racial socialization of preschool-age children as expected but did influence African American family dynamics. Lastly, African American mothers discussed what African American motherhood meant for them and their children.

In this section, I provide a thematic discussion of the major findings of this study in a racialized and gendered context. The emergent themes are: motherwork as conscientization, bidirectional process in maternal racial socialization, skin tone politics in maternal racial socialization, and defining African American motherhood. Two of the emergent themes, motherwork as conscientization and defining African American motherhood, have synthesized subcategories that are discussed.

### **Motherwork as Conscientization**

Motherwork as conscientization is the first emergent theme and it has the following synthesized subcategories: maternal understanding of intersectionality and mothers' definitions of racial socialization. The racial socialization of children was an aspect of motherwork for African American mothers. Collins (1994) explained that motherwork refers to the complexities involved in fostering a healthy racial identity in racial ethnic children in a society where racial ethnic minorities are marginalized; moreover, middle-class Caucasian women do not face these perplexing mothering tasks because of the favor they receive in society. Although African American mothers belong to different social and economic groups and thereby bring different perspectives to doing motherwork, identity is an integral part of motherwork for all mothers (Collins).

African American preschool-age children are in the early stages of identity development (Erikson, 1950; 1965). Erikson (1965) argued that people in oppressed and minority groups are cognizant of mainstream society's standards but are prohibited from adhering to them; therefore, they may be more likely to integrate and perpetuate negative images about themselves that are pervasive in society. Erikson (1965) argued that the various ways that African Americans use the word nigger to address each other is an example of how minorities have internalized and maintained negative images about themselves in society (see p. 303). Further, the racial socialization messages received during childhood may influence racial identity in adulthood (Demo & Hughes, 1990). Aspects of motherwork that help children form a healthy racial identity are particularly important and pertinent to research on African American child development.

Motherwork is convoluted and no single theory best described nor explained how it operated in the racial socialization of African American preschool-age children. In this study, I used an integrated Black Feminist-child development theoretical framework; however, the data that emerged from this study necessitated the integration of a third theoretical concept to best capture the process of maternal racial socialization of African American preschool-age children. I integrated conscientization, which is both a Black Feminist concept as well as an educational concept, but is better known in articulation by Paulo Freire, an educational theorist. I emphasize conscientization as an educational concept here because it emphasizes an ongoing learning process. In Black feminism, conscientization is a part of consciousness-raising (bell hooks, 1981; Collins, 1998) and the process of emancipatory historiography (Cannon, 1996). Freire (2000)

clarified that conscientization refers to the process of how individuals make sense of the social, political and economic ambiguities that oppress them and the action taken to stop that oppression. Conscientization highlights how racially socializing young children is a dynamic, bidirectional, ongoing learning process for African American mothers. In this case, the concept of conscientization highlights the critical reflection that was involved in the process of motherwork as it related to racial socialization. Freire (2000) argued that action cannot occur without critical reflection. African American mothers in this study demonstrated how their reflective thinking informed how they perceived their children's readiness for racial socialization and how they formulated racial socialization strategies and messages. Including conscientization added another element of analysis to the study of African American women and their families.

Conscientization linked Black feminist theory with the Integrative Model (Garcia Coll et al., 1996). Freire (2000) acknowledged the "duality of the oppressed" (p. 58) by discussing how oppressed people live within the same oppressive social structures that define their lives. His acknowledgment was similar to Few's (2007) argument that African American women must constantly negotiate living within an "intersectionality matrix" of various systems of oppression. In terms of the Integrative Model (Garcia Coll et al.), Freire (2000) focused on oppression which is one of the social stratification mechanisms identified in the model that influences the developmental outcomes of minority children. Further, he discussed how the pervasiveness of oppression influenced the lives of the oppressed including their resistance to it.

Conscientization illuminated how African American mothers' understanding of intersectionality in the context of motherwork and critical consciousness about and resistance to the social stratification mechanisms (i.e., racism, prejudice, discrimination and oppression) that impact African American child development and informed the maternal-child racial socialization process. For example, mothers in this study demonstrated an understanding of standards of beauty in U.S. society and used gendered cultural socialization strategies such as giving African American dolls to their daughters to foster a sense of belonging in them. In a similar vein, mothers discussed how discrimination may influence their daughters' futures, in particular their future employment. Another example of how conscientization informed the maternal racial socialization is mothers' use of developmentally-appropriate racial socialization strategies with children that were based on their understanding of their child's developmental level, the occurrence of race-related situations and whether or not their children initiated the

conversations. Conscientization was a logical choice to connect Black Feminist theory and the Integrative Model (Garcia Coll et al., 1996) because all three theoretical explanations have a common thread of examining how individuals are molded by and live within the same social structures that oppress them.

### **Maternal Understanding of Intersectionality**

Aspects of mothers' understanding of intersectionality were evident throughout the semi-structured interviews. Disentangling race, gender and class in these mothers' responses was an impossible task. For instance, many of these mothers discussed being oppressed as women, marginalized as African American women and stereotyped as single, African American mothers all in one quote. These women's understanding of intersectionality supports Collins (2000) assertion that the intersection of multiple identities is salient in the lives of African American women. In terms of racial socialization strategies, intersectionality was most evident in the racialized gendered cultural socialization strategies that mothers used with their daughters. In this study, mothers and othermothers in the lives of their daughters gave African American girls African American dolls to promote a sense of belonging in a society where they typically do not meet society's standards of beauty. Othermothers are women, other than biological mothers, who provide supplemental mothering to African American children (Collins). Mothers' understanding of racism and sexism influenced how raise their daughters to thrive in an oppressive society where they are undervalued and relegated to a lower-level status (Banks-Wallace & Parks, 2001). Helping African American women develop protective mechanisms against racism and sexism is often a shared responsibility among African American women in communities (Banks-Wallace & Parks, 2001).

The vast majority of mothers in this study chose to use cultural socialization strategies (i.e., strategies that promote racial pride and teach cultural history) (Caughy, O'Campo et al., 2000) and egalitarian socialization strategies (i.e., strategies that promote colorblindness and racial equality) (Neblett et al., 2008) with their young children. The primary use of cultural socialization strategies in this study was consistent with other studies that found that African American families prefer to use cultural socialization strategies with young children (for examples see Coard et al., 2004; Suizzo et al., 2008). The cultural socialization strategies used by mothers in this study were giving and reading children's books with African American characters including books about historical cultural figures such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and

giving daughters African American dolls. The most commonly used egalitarian socialization strategy was talking with children about equality and colorblindness with the message content of “we are all the same.” Additionally, mothers used structured activities and exposure to children of other races to promote acceptance of others. The use of cultural socialization and egalitarian socialization strategies served to help children develop a foundation for understanding the social meanings of race and help them begin to develop protective mechanisms to survive in a racist society.

### **Mothers’ Definitions of Racial Socialization**

In this study, data analyses illuminated a discrepancy between what some of the mothers in this study considered racial socialization and what has been reported as racial socialization in the literature. Hughes and colleagues (2003) asserted that racial socialization occurs through both intentional and unintentional means. Some mothers, however, reported using cultural socialization and egalitarian socialization strategies and messages; on the other hand, those same mothers did not consider those strategies and messages as forms of racial socialization. Those mothers reported that they did not engage in the racial socialization process with their preschool-age children because children are unable, developmentally, to comprehend it. In a similar vein, there were mothers who reported engaging in cultural socialization and egalitarian socialization, but chose not to have explicit, direct conversations about race with their children. Blake (1993) noted that the sharing of cultural information is instinctual for African American mothers and occurs through daily interactions as well as during more structured situations; in turn, children use this information to make sense of the world around them. The maternal racial socialization strategies and messages used by mothers in this study can be dichotomized into implicit and explicit strategies and messages.

Motherwork can be viewed as a “liberatory praxis” (Cooper, 2010, p. 345). I conceptualize conscientization as a form of praxis that occurred for the mothers in this study. Conscientization reflects the critical awareness that mothers have when trying to exert power over external forces of racial socialization while, simultaneously, having feelings of powerlessness over the same external forces. For example, some of the mothers reported having guidelines for external forces that influence the racial socialization of their children while, simultaneously, acknowledging that they cannot control those same external forces. The acts of power coupled with feelings of powerlessness precisely represented Collins (1994) argument

about the paradoxical struggle of power and powerlessness that African American mothers experience when doing motherwork in a Caucasian, middle-class, male dominated society. There is a growing trend of colorblindness and acceptance for all kinds of diversity in U.S. society. Motherwork challenges contemporary notions of a colorblind society because it reflects African American mothers' critical awareness of the racial inequalities that continue to be created and maintained by U.S. society (Cooper, 2010).

### **Bidirectional Process in Maternal Racial Socialization**

The data of this study reflected a bidirectional component of the maternal-child racial socialization process not accounted for by Garcia Coll and colleagues (1996) in the Integrative Model. Child socialization involves the dynamic, bidirectional interaction between parents and children (Grusec & Davidov, 2010); however, few researchers have examined the bidirectional aspect of child racial socialization. The data in this study revealed that African American mothers and children work together during the racial socialization process to develop a critical consciousness of and knowledge about living in a racialized society. African American mothers' conscientization contributed to the bidirectional aspect of the maternal-child racial socialization process as African American mothers believed there is a time of readiness to talk explicitly with their children about race. This time of readiness is based on their children's identification of people based on differences in skin color, the occurrence of a race-related that required a direct conversation about race or child initiated conversations about race.

The data shows that maternal action during the maternal-child racial socialization process includes more than the use of racial socialization strategies and messages but also the underlying process of maternal reflective thinking that informs those strategies and messages. This finding in the data speaks to Freire's (2000) argument about critical reflection as action. "Action and reflection occur simultaneously" (Freire, 2000, p. 128). From a Freirean viewpoint, African American mothers' reflective thinking informed what strategies and message content they deemed suitable and appropriate "at the present time" (Freire, 2000, p. 128) during the maternal-child racial socialization process. Based on the data in this study, maternal racial socialization can be defined as a process that involves the use of developmentally-appropriate strategies and messages that are unique to each child and the constant critical reflection that informs mothers' decisions about which strategies and messages are suitable and appropriate.

Although the data in this study clearly reflected a bidirectional feature of child racial socialization, Garcia Coll and colleagues (1996) used a one-way arrow in their graphical depiction of the Integrative Model to show the influences that child characteristics had on racial socialization. This unidirectional arrow did not account for how mothers' understanding of intersectionality and critical consciousness about the social stratification mechanisms (i.e., racism, prejudice, discrimination and oppression) that influence African American child development informed the racial socialization process. I propose changing it to a two-way arrow to reflect that mother-child racial socialization involves a bidirectional process. In this study, African American child racial socialization involves a bidirectional process that is not routinely accounted for in racial socialization research.

### **Skin Tone Politics in Maternal Racial Socialization**

Slavery activated skin color stratification among African Americans because slave masters placed greater value on and gave preferential treatment to lighter skin slaves of White ancestry over darker skin slaves (Keith & Herring, 1991). African Americans have internalized the skin color preferences of slave masters and developed preferences for bodily features that resemble those of Caucasian people. Colorism is a practice of inequality within African American communities where skin tone, hair texture and facial features that resemble those of Caucasian people are preferred over those bodily features that do not (Wilder & Cain, 2011). For instance, when African American babies are born, families are eager to see the child's skin color with most family members hoping for a light skin baby (Russell-Cole, Wilson, & Hall, 2013). In this study, one of the mothers teased a very light skin family member for possessing physical characteristics that are closer to those of Caucasian people when other family members did not possess them. Preferences for darker skin tones infrequently occur among African American families (Russell-Cole et al., 2013). Bond and Cash (1992) noted that the importance placed on darker skin tone or lighter skin tone varies depending on the interactions particular to each family. The teasing of light skin family members is still based in colorism because it reflects an awareness of and resistance to preferences for light skin.

Colorism did not influence the maternal racial socialization process in this study as expected. In this study, African American children were exposed to conversations about colorism but were not engaged in those conversations; therefore, a link between colorism and maternal racial socialization messages could not be established. Perhaps, mothers should have been

probed more to illuminate those conversations or colorism does not impact the racial socialization of African American children until they are older. African American families are a source of information about skin color (Wilder & Cain, 2011), so African Americans learn about colorism at some point but further research is needed to determine the age at which African Americans begin to learn about or experience colorism as part of the racial socialization process.

Colorism did, however, play a role in African American family interactions and study children were occasionally exposed to those colorism-based conversations. This study highlighted how colorism within African American communities has created a polarization of lighter skin and darker skin African Americans that has been maintained, in part, through family dynamics. The teasing of darker skin family members for being too dark and lighter skin family members for being too light by the mothers in this study are demonstrations of colorism. This teasing occurred in a gendered context. Although all of the mothers in this study reported that they emphasized egalitarian socialization messages of racial equality to their children, some of them perpetuated skin color hierarchies within the African American community that marginalized and devalued other African American women. Collins (2000) and Freire (2000) argued that marginalized people sometimes become participants in their own oppression by adopting and maintaining the oppressive structures that they struggle against. The adoption and maintenance of colorism-based beliefs highlighted how the mothers in this study have become participants in upholding oppressive skin color stratification among African Americans that was initiated by slave masters generations ago.

The implications of gendered colorism for the development of African American girls are an area of future research that should be addressed by child development scholars. African American women, more so than African American men, have been negatively influenced by the effects of colorism (Collins, 2000; M. E. Hill, 2002). M. E. Hill (2002) used data from the National Survey of Black Americans and found that African American men and women held staunch preferences for lighter skin African American women as more physically attractive than darker skin African American women. The findings of M.E. Hill coupled with the findings in this study of the gendered colorism practices of African American mothers supported the assertion that some African American women have become participants in their own racialized and gendered oppression. In terms of African American child development, the results of this study suggested that some African American mothers have adopted a sense of racial equality for

intergroup relationships and practiced instilling egalitarian views into their children; however, they continued to have beliefs of intragroup racial inequality as evidenced through their practices of gendered colorism.

### **Defining African American Motherhood**

Defining African American motherhood is the last major theme of this study and has the following synthesized subcategories: significance of othermothering, interrelated lives of women and children, and voices of African American mothers. African American mothers play central roles in African American communities (Collins, 1987). Motherhood is embraced by women who are biological mothers and those who are not to provide care for all children (Collins, 1987; 2000). The mothers in this study reaffirmed the centrality of mothers in African American communities as bloodmothers and othermothers helped to racially socialize preschool children. Bloodmothers are biological mothers and othermothers are other women involved with African American families who provide supplemental mothering to African American children (Collins, 2000). The influence of othermothers on the racial socialization of African American preschool children in this study supported Collins (2000) assertion that othermothers have a history of helping African American communities confront race-related issues. The mothers in this study held positive views about African American motherhood by feeling proud to be African American mother, viewing motherhood as the most important aspect of their lives, willingly accepting the many roles that are associated with being a mother and welcoming the mothering offered by othermothers. While African American mothers held positive feelings about motherhood, negative stereotypes about African American mothers and children were a pervasive thread that connected many of the mothers' explanations of motherhood. African American motherhood is characterized by both positive experiences and daily struggles against racism which make raising African American children to develop a healthy racial identity and thrive in a society where African Americans are marginalized an inherently complex task.

### **Significance of Othermothering**

Several women working together to raise children challenged traditional notions of the family as a single, nuclear unit with children as the private property of the parents (Collins, 2000). Collins argued that some African American women may try to conform to mainstream society's view of motherhood as the sole responsibility of only the mother and may be less open to the care offered by othermothers; however, the mothers in this study resisted mainstream

society's ideals that devalue collective mothering by accepting the cultural socialization efforts of othermothers. Collins postulated that the availability of othermothers to help rear African American children may be waning due to class stratification among African American families and those families choosing to adopt middle-class standards of the family as an exclusive, private entity, thereby, erasing the need for and accessibility to othermothers. The mothers in this study challenged Collins argument about the impending absence of othermothers as mothers of different social classes discussed the significance of the involvement of othermothers in the racial socialization of their children. Based on the findings of this study, cultural socialization forms of maternal racial socialization of African American preschool children included the collective mothering activities of bloodmothers and othermothers.

### **Interrelated lives of Women and Children**

African American mothers' understanding of stereotypes about themselves and their children highlighted how African American women's lives are often linked to the lives of their children and, thereby, provided support for Miller's (2006) argument that feminist and child development theories should be integrated in research on women. This study expanded previous discussions about stereotypes about African American women such as mammies and matriarchs (Collins, 2000) and Diva, Gold Digger, Freak, Dyke, Gangster Bitch, Sister Savior, Earth Mother, and Baby Mama (Stephens & Few, 2007) and revealed African American mothers' beliefs about the prevalence of societal stereotypes such as angry mother, promiscuous mother and welfare mother that are specific to African American mothers and their children that influence their mothering. In this study, African American mothers' commitment to eradicating negative stereotypes about their children and themselves is a form of Black Feminist praxis. As discussed in Chapter Two, the suppression of negative stereotypes and images of African American women is a tenet of Black feminism (Collins, 2000).

### **Voice of African American Mothers**

Four of the mothers shared what the experience of participating in this study meant to them. Since these mothers thought critically about their participation in this study, it is important to discuss how this research experience impacted them. Stacey shared:

I've just enjoyed the experience because I don't think a lot of people really care these days about certain things or... like this is my first time ever hearing about this, even though this is me being a first time parent. But, as far as I never heard anybody say well I

went on an interview to hear our perspective on raising our child or you know as women. So, this is like a really great experience cause you know I have something to learn from and just questions a lot of people don't ever ask or whatever and don't really take into consideration. So, I really enjoyed it.

For Diane, participating in this study made her critically aware of things she had never considered before. She explained:

It made me think about things that I hadn't consciously thought of. Like, I've never asked myself some of the questions that you asked me that I had answers for so obviously I felt some kinda way about'em. I just didn't know I did yet maybe? Or, I hadn't, it hadn't been brought to the surface.

When asked to tell more, she clarified:

It made me think about things and talk about things I hadn't talked about before because apparently I've been thinking about them and feeling about them. It just makes me wonder what she really...like what is influencing this three-year-old to feel any kinda way about the color of people's skin? You know what am I doing and not being aware of? What is she seeing or hearing, observing, you know?

For Diane and Stacey, this study prompted them to think beyond the racial socialization of their children to more introspective thoughts about themselves.

Two of the mothers in this study, Dawn and Pamela, discussed that participating in this study allowed society to learn about African American mothering directly from African American mothers. For Dawn, this study provided African American women with an opportunity to challenge negative stereotypes about African American mothers. She explained why she wanted to participate in this study:

I just thought it would be interesting for people to see... instead of looking at us from the outside thinking what they see on tv or what they might think is going on in the household because, you know, you're a Black woman and you have...you might be a single mother and people have this idea of what they think you feel or react towards your children and they have no idea what it's like actually.

Pamela was not aware that researchers were interested in learning about how African American women raise their children. She explained:

Well, uh, I liked the heading of it African American mothers raising or being an African

American mother, you know? You don't too fast seeing someone out here trying to get research on how African Americans raise their children, you know. Um, so that's what made me interested in it.

African American family studies scholars have worked to challenge the use of a deficit-lens to examine African American families (e.g., McAdoo & McAdoo, 1985; Stack, 1974; Staples, 1971) more specifically, they have challenged the rhetoric about African American families espoused by Patrick Moynihan (1965) in his report on the state of the African American family. In 1965, Patrick Moynihan used a deficit lens and wrote the infamous Moynihan Report in which he described African American families as being underdeveloped because they were headed primarily by single African American mothers who emasculated and disempowered African American men. Black Feminist scholars have been committed to eradicating negative stereotypes and images about African American motherhood by making African American motherhood the focus of feminist conceptualizations about motherhood (Collins, 2000). While scholars in the family studies and feminist studies disciplines have worked to challenge Moynihan's assertion to provide a more balanced and accurate view of African American motherhood, child development scholars have not been as eager to do the same. I allowed my participants to define which images of African American mothers that were most salient to them instead of recapitulating existing stereotypes that would have served only to further oppress and marginalize them. This study was an empowering experience for some of the mothers as they were given the opportunity to use their own words to describe their experiences in raising preschool-age children. In this study, I gave voice to African American mothers and placed their experiences with mothering African American children at the center of analysis in child development research.

### **Negative Cases**

Diane and her three year old daughter are a negative case because the child identified herself as a Black child on the MCDT (Jordan & Hernandez-Reif, 2009) and, generally, stereotypes do not influence the personal identity of African American children until the middle childhood years (Swanson et al., 2009). After watching the video of her child's racial preferences, Diane exclaimed: "Who told her she's Black? I never told her she's Black." More research is needed to determine if racial identity development progresses at a faster rate for children based on their sociocultural experiences and influences from external forces. In this

study, more probes and test questions were needed to accurately determine the underlying causes of African American children's racial preferences and attitudes.

Angela discussed that her five year old daughter has already experienced the "acting white" phenomenon where, in African American communities, doing well academically is linked to being Caucasian and is undesirable (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). The acting white phenomenon generally emerges in elementary school and continues throughout high school (Fordham & Ogbu); however, Angela's daughter has experienced it prior to starting kindergarten. Angela explained:

Well she doesn't know what racism means but thinking about it my father and my two younger brothers they tease her a lot, a whole lot. And, by her being around a lot of White kids, she talks, it's kinda proper. And my brothers tease her talking about you talk like a White girl, you sound like a White girl.

More research is needed to determine if the acting white phenomenon emerges within African American families earlier than during the elementary years and how it influences the racial socialization of young children.

### **Limitations**

While this study has made several contributions to the literature on African American child development and Black feminist theory, there were several limitations to this research. First, African American mothers were asked to provide retrospective accounts of their racial socialization experiences with their young children. Retrospective accounts can be a limitation because mothers' memories of racial socialization experiences may have become distorted or become flawed over time (Docan-Morgan, 2010; Dolbin-McNab, Rodgers, Traylor, 2009); furthermore, mothers may have modified their stories to make their experiences more socially acceptable (Dolbin-McNab et al., 2009). Another limitation is that, due to the small sample size for this qualitative study, a social desirability scale was not given to mothers to determine if they were answering questions truthfully or responding in ways that they believed would be socially acceptable. Giving a social desirability scale may have contributed to greater insight about the data and the genuineness of mothers' responses. A third limitation is the interviewees' mental and emotional states, preconceptions, political opinions, and lack of attentiveness may have influenced interview data as well as their reactions to the interviewer (Patton, 2002). A fourth limitation is that the African American mothers in this sample were all from South Carolina and

the majority were single parents who had either a high school diploma or GED. Mothers from different sociopolitical and socioeconomic backgrounds may have demonstrated different ways of thinking about racially socializing young children.

### **Directions for Future Research**

This study provided the foundation for several future research projects on the racial socialization of African American children. In this study, I argued that conscientization and critical reflection (Freire, 2000) played an integral role in the formulation of maternal racial socialization strategies and messages. Further examination is needed to examine more specifically how those concepts inform maternal racial socialization strategies and messages. Studies that examine the role of scaffolding during the racial socialization process may lend deeper insight into determining with greater specificity how conscientization and critical reflection influence the creation of maternal racial socialization strategies and messages by actually observing mothers and children engage in the racial socialization process. In scaffolding, someone with more experience guides a less experienced partner in learning something new by structuring learning activities (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). Scaffolding which involves the use of verbal communication and action may be particularly useful in examining child social socialization (Gauvain, 2005) including how conscientization and critical reflection inform maternal racial socialization strategies and messages.

The negative cases in this study came from African American mothers who were college educated including one mother who was married and from a middle-class household. Again, I suspect that married and middle-class mothers may contribute to a more thorough within-group analysis of African American mothers and a different perspective on the racial socialization of African American children. Following up on the negative cases may yield insight into how environmental and sociocultural factors influences the racial preferences of young African American children and expand the literature on the acting white phenomenon (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986) among African American children and adolescents.

African American mothers in this study reported that extended family members, more specifically grandmothers and aunts who acted as othermothers, were external forces that influenced the racial socialization of their young children. Within African American culture, grandmothers, in particular, are sources of support and stabilization for families (Collins, 2000). Studies that examine how grandmothers and aunts engage preschool-age children in the racial

socialization process may illuminate in greater detail how othermothers either support or contradict the racial socialization practices of African American bloodmothers.

Given that the preschool-age children in this study were exposed to parental conversations with their older siblings about skin tone, future studies should examine colorism as it relates to the racial socialization of older African American children. According to the data in this study, family members are sources of conversations about skin tone for children; therefore, collecting more family data may lead to results that support the influence of colorism on child racial socialization in African American families. Since African American women's lives have been influenced by skin color more so than African American men (Collins, 2000; M. E. Hill, 2002), more studies on the influences of colorism on the racial socialization of African American girls are needed.

Half of the children in this study attended a Head Start center. All of the mothers of Head Start children discussed the structured cultural socialization activities that their children participated in as part of a Head Start program. Head Start, which has a diverse population of racial and ethnic minority children, has implemented programs and teacher training to address the cultural diversity of its attendees. Additionally, Head Start has targeted improving the social-emotional development of all of its attendees to better foster child school readiness. For example, the Head Start Research Based, Developmentally Informed (REDI) program, which has social-emotional development as one of its targets, has shown improvements in children's emotional understanding and social problem-solving skills (Bierman et al., 2008). Future research projects should examine how the structured cultural socialization activities implemented by Head Start influence the racial socialization and social-emotional development of young African American children.

Lastly, this study focused on African American mothers; however, research shows that child racial socialization experiences vary by parent gender (Thornton et al., 1990). Previous research shows that fathers are involved in the racial socialization of their children whether they live in the child's household or not (Crouter, Baril, Davis, & McHale, 2008); therefore, examining the impact that fathers have on the racial socialization of young children may tap into yet another dimension of the racial socialization of young African American children. Using grounded theory methodologies may lend insight into features of paternal racial socialization and its impact on African American child development. Additionally, given that the mothers in this

study believed that African American boys experience more racism than and are less likely to be accepted by society than African American girls, exploring the paternal racial socialization of African American preschool-age boys may be particularly insightful into the early development of African American boys. Future studies that follow these directions to examine the racial socialization of African American children may contribute to a deeper and more accurate understanding of the parenting, familial and sociocultural experiences that impact the development of African American children.

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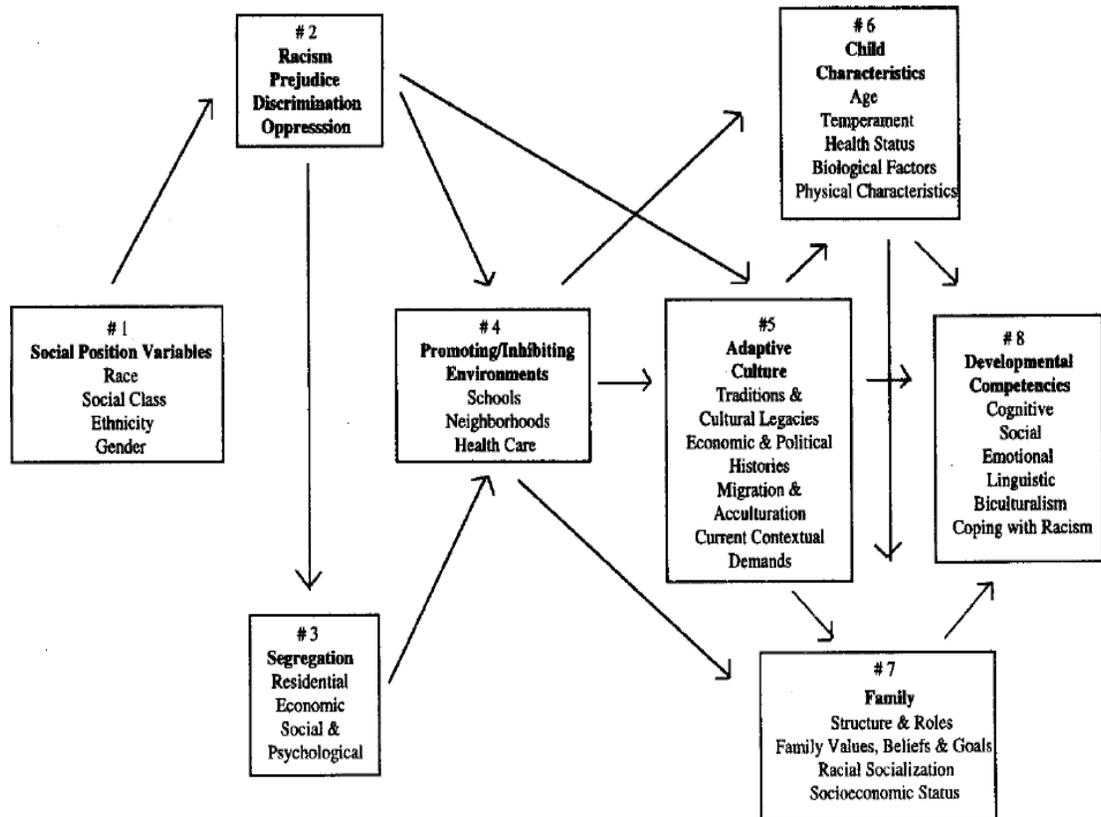
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## Appendix A

### The Integrative Model for the Study of Developmental Competencies in Minority Children



*Figure 2.* The integrative model for the study of developmental competencies in minority children. From “An integrative model for the Study of Developmental Competencies in Minority Children,” by C. Garcia Coll, K. Crnic, G. Lamberty, B. H. Wasik, R Jenkins., H. Vazquez Garcia, & H. Pipes McAdoo, 1996, *Child Development*, 67, 1891-1914. Copyright 2008 by John Wiley and Sons. Reprinted with permission.

## Appendix B

### Flow Chart of Theoretical Model and Research Questions

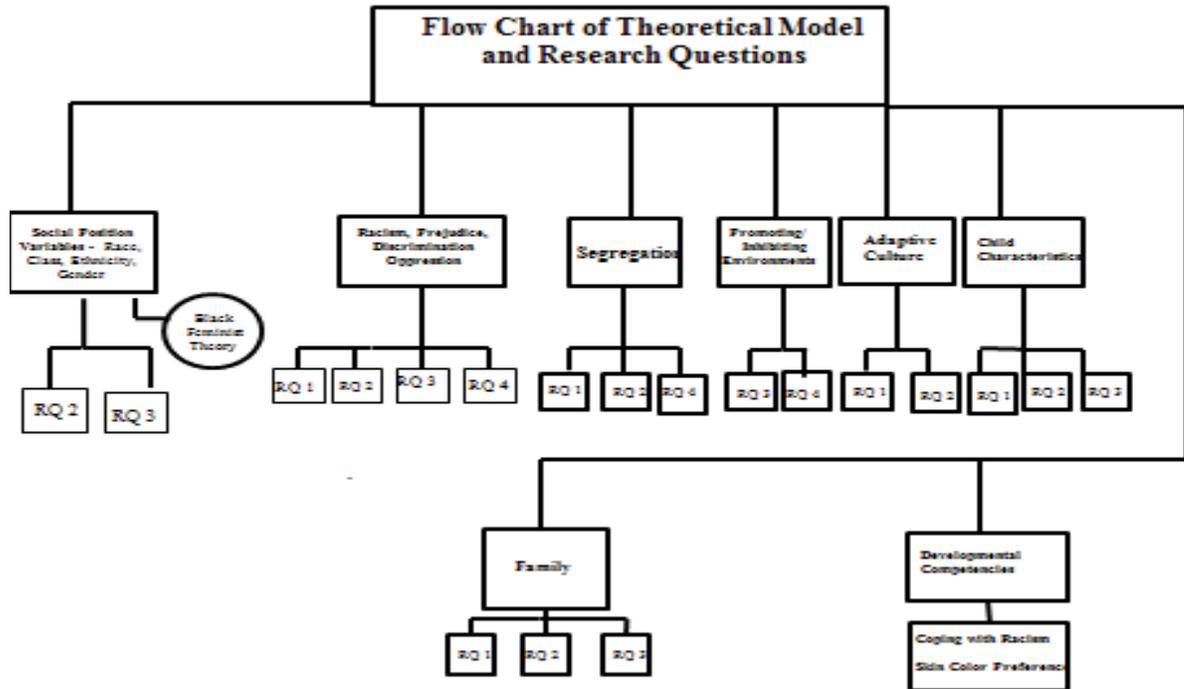


Figure 3. Flow chart of theoretical model and research questions. Adapted from “An integrative model for the Study of Developmental Competencies in Minority Children,” by C. Garcia Coll, K. Crnic, G. Lamberty, B. H. Wasik, R Jenkins., H. Vazquez Garcia, & H. Pipes McAdoo, 1996, *Child Development*, 67, 1891-1914. Copyright 2008 by John Wiley and Sons. Adapted from and reprinted with permission.

## Appendix C

### Modified Semi-structured Interview Protocol

*Script: Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability. Your answers are confidential and will not be shared with anyone outside of the project. I am not here to judge you as a parent. I'm here to collect data for my study. I have a protocol that I am following but I may ask you additional questions to go a little more in-depth with some of your responses.*

#### Part One

**Warm-Up Questions** (These are maternal mind-mindedness questions but will be coded for child characteristics only in the modified study).

1. Can you describe [child's name] for me? (Meins & Fernyhough, 2010, p. 14).
2. What is the best thing about [child's name]? (Meins & Fernyhough, 2010, p. 14).
3. What do you try to teach [child's name]? (Meins & Fernyhough, 2010, p. 14).
4. Is there anything else you would like me to know about [child]?
5. Why did you want to participate in this research project?

**To Address Research Questions 1: What are the maternal racial socialization strategies that African American mothers use with their preschool-age children?**

6. What does it mean to you to be a mother?  
**Probe:** Why do you think this way?
7. What does it mean to you to be an African American mother?  
**Probe:** Why do you feel this way?  
**Probe:** Can you give me an example?
8. Is parenting an African American child different than parenting other children?  
**Probe:** [If yes] How so? Can you give me an example?  
**Probe:** [If no] How so? Can you give me an example?
9. Have you and your child ever talk about race?  
**Probe:** [If yes] Can you tell me a story when you and [child] talked about race?  
**Probe:** [If no] When do you think mothers should talk to their children about race?  
**Probe:** [If no] If you were to talk about race, how would you do it?  
**Probe:** [If no] What strategies would you use?
10. Is it important for your child to socialize with children of other races?

**Probe:** Why?

**Probe:** [If important] How do you make that happen?

A. Where does it take place?

B. Does your child have friends of other races?

**Probe:** [If not important] Why isn't it?

A. Does your child have friends of other races?

B. How did [child's name] make those friends?

**To Address Research Question 2: What is the content of maternal racial socialization messages? These could also be strategies.**

11. Do your child's books have African American characters in it?

**Probe:** [If yes] How did that happen?

**Probe:** [If no] Why is that so?

12. Does your child have any African American dolls or action figures?

**Probe:** [If yes] How did that happen?

A. How important is it that your child has African American dolls or figures?

B. What are the skin tones of the dolls or figures?

**Probe:** [If no]: Why is that so?

13. What television shows does [child's name] watch?

**Probe:** How important is that [child's name] watch television shows with African American characters on it?

14. Does your child have any computer games with African American characters on them?

**Probe:** How did he/she get those games?

15. Do you talk about other ethnic groups in front of your child?

**Probe:** [If yes] Can you tell me about one of the conversations?

**Probe:** [If yes] How did [child's name] react to hearing that conversation?

**Probe:** [If no] Is that something you make a point not to do?

16. How do you think being African American influences your child's life?

**Probe:** Have you ever talked with [child's name] about racism?

**Probe:** [If yes] Can you tell me a story about that?

A. Have you ever talked with your other children about racism?

B. Can you tell me a story about when you talked to them about it?

**Probe:** [If no influence] When, if ever, do you think being African American will influence your child's life? What will you say or do at that time?

**A.** Have you ever talked with your other children about racism?

**B.** Can you tell me a story about when you talked to them about it?

17. Do you think African American boys and girls experience racism differently?

**Probe:** Why do you think so?

18. Does anyone else in [child's life] talk to [him/her] about racial issues?

**Probe:** [If yes] Who? What do they say to [child's name]?

**A.** Do you think it's a good idea for [child's name] to hear about racial issues from [person(s) mother identified]? Why or Why not?

**B.** So your child is getting these other messages, how do you react to those messages that other people are giving [him/her]?

19. How do you describe racism?

**To Address Research Question 3: How do mothers' perceptions of colorism influence the content of maternal racial socialization messages?**

20. Has your child noticed differences in people based on skin tone?

**Probe:** [If yes] Tell me about a situation when [child's name] noticed a difference.

**Probe:** [If no] Why do you think your child doesn't notice difference based on skin tone?

21. What are your views about skin tone?

**Probe:** Why do you think like that?

**Probe:** How does skin tone affect your child's life?

**Probe:** [If doesn't affect] When, if ever, do you think that skin tone may affect your child?

**A.** What would you say to your child at that time?

**Probe:** In what ways is skin tone discussed in your household?

**A.** On what occasions do these discussions happen?

**i.** Is [child's name] present for any of those discussions? If so, how does [child's name] react?

**ii.** Can you tell me a story about one of those occasions?

**B.** [If no] Why do you think that is?

**Probe:** Was skin tone discussed in your family when you were growing up?

A. Tell me a story about one of those times.

**To Address Research Question 4: What are mothers' perception of external forces that influence their children's racial socialization experiences? \*This research question will also be addressed in the Part Two of the interview.**

22. This is what your child is going to do in the developmentally-appropriate activity.. Your child will be shown images of child cartoon characters of different skin colors. Your child will be asked questions like "Who looks nice?" Who do you want to be your friend? How do you think [child's name]'s is going to react?

**Probe:** Why do you think so?

23. At this point, is there anything else you would like for me to know?

*Script: We're going to take a break from the interview and I'm going to show you which cartoon characters [child] chose.*

## Part Two

24. How did you feel about [child's name]'s choices?

**Probe:** Tell me why you felt that way.

25. In what ways do [child's name]'s choices match with what you try to teach [him/her]?

26. In what ways do [child's name]'s choices not match with what you try to teach [him/her]?

27. Why do you think your [child's name] made those selections?

**Probe:** What other things are teaching your child about race?

28. If you were the researcher, what questions would you ask mothers about their children's choices?

**Probe:** Why do you think those questions are important to ask?

29. This is the end of our study. Please take a minute to reflect on this whole experience. Is there anything else that you would like to me know?

*Script: I want to remind you that this research is not about what kind of mother you are. We are not going to discuss what kind of a mother you are. We are researching to find out about how mothers socialize their children. I want to remind you also that all of your identifying information is removed.*

## Appendix D

### Recruitment Letter

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to request your help with a research study on racial socialization in African American families with preschool-age children. This study will explore the process of how African American mothers in South Carolina prepare their young children for life as members of a racial minority group in the United States.

In this study, I will be interviewing mothers about their experiences with the racial socialization process. Each mother's oldest preschool-age child will participate in a brief developmentally-appropriate activity with cartoon images of children with skin tones varying from light to dark. For the purposes of this study, I am looking for African American mothers (age 18 and older) with biological children ages three to five years old living in the Greenville-Spartanburg-Anderson area, Cherokee County, and York County. The two – part interview will last from 60 to 90 minutes. During the interview, I will ask mothers to share their thoughts and experiences on racial socialization. The interview and activity will take place at location agreed upon by each mother and me. Each mother will be compensated for her time with \$20.00 worth of gift cards to Wal-Mart. Each child will receive a children's book for his or her time.

This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects (IRB) at Virginia Tech. The approval number is 12-256.

If you would be interested in participating in this study, or know someone else who would, or would like more information, please contact me, Adrienne L. Edwards, at [edwardal@vt.edu](mailto:edwardal@vt.edu) or (XXX) XXX-XXXX or via Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/RacialSocialization?ref=hl>.

Sincerely,

Adrienne L. Edwards, M.Ed.

Doctoral Candidate, Department of Human Development  
Virginia Tech

Appendix E  
Recruitment Flyer

## **RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS NEEDED**

I am a doctoral candidate at Virginia Tech and looking for African American mothers and their children for a study about parenting. By participating in this study, you and your child will contribute to knowledge about African American child development.

I am looking for African American women who meet the following criteria:

- Age 18 or older
- Parenting at least one biological child between the ages of three- and five-years-old
- Living in the Greenville-Spartanburg-Anderson area, Cherokee County, or York County
- Willing to participate in a two-part interview lasting at least 60 to 90 minutes
- Willing to allow your child to participate in a brief developmentally-appropriate activity

Each adult participant will receive \$20.00 worth of gift cards to Wal-Mart for giving their time.

Child participants will receive a children's book for their time.

For more information about this study please contact:

Adrienne L. Edwards, M.Ed.

Doctoral Candidate, Department of Human Development  
Virginia Tech

edwardal@vt.edu

or

Via Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/RacialSocialization?ref=hl>.

This research has been approved by Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects (IRB) at Virginia Tech. The approval number is 12-256.

## Appendix F

### Craigslist Advertisement

Title: African American Mothers of Preschool Children Needed for Research Study  
(Greenville/Spartanburg/Anderson/Cherokee Counties)

I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Human Development at Virginia Tech and looking for African American mothers and their children for a study about parenting. By participating in this study, you and your child will contribute to knowledge about African American child development.

I am looking for African American women who meet the following criteria:

- Age 18 years or older
- Parenting at least one biological child between the ages of three- and five-years-old
- Living in the Greenville-Spartanburg-Anderson area and Cherokee County
- Willing to participate in a two-part interview lasting from 60 to 90 minutes
- Willing to allow your child to participate in a brief developmentally-appropriate activity

Adult participants will be compensated with \$20.00 worth of gift cards to Wal-Mart for giving their time to the study. Child participants will receive a book for their time. This study is approved by Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects (IRB) at Virginia Tech. The IRB approval number is 12-256.

For more information about this study please email Adrienne L. Edwards at [edwardal@vt.edu](mailto:edwardal@vt.edu) or via Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/RacialSocialization?ref=hl>.

## Appendix G

### Craigslist Advertisement

Title: African American Mothers of Preschool Children Needed for Research Study (York County)

I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Human Development at Virginia Tech and looking for African American mothers and their children for a study about parenting. By participating in this study, you and your child will contribute to knowledge about African American child development.

I am looking for African American women who meet the following criteria:

- Age 18 years or older
- Parenting at least one biological child between the ages of three- and five-years-old
- Living in York County
- Willing to participate in two-part interview lasting from 60 to 90 minutes
- Willing to allow your child to participate in a brief developmentally-appropriate activity

Adult participants will be compensated with \$20.00 worth of gift cards to Wal-Mart for giving their time to the study. Child participants will receive a book for their time. This study is approved by Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects (IRB) at Virginia Tech. The approval number is 12-256.

For more information about this study please email Adrienne L. Edwards at [edwardal@vt.edu](mailto:edwardal@vt.edu) or via Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/RacialSocialization?ref=hl>.

## Appendix H

### Eligibility Questionnaire

Script: *I want to ask you some questions to find out if you are eligible to participate in the study. By responding to these questions, you give your consent to participate. You may choose to answer only some of these questions. You may stop responding to questions at any time. If you are eligible to participate, I will ask you some additional questions to get some background information about you. After you respond to these additional questions, I will schedule a time with you for you to participate in the actual study.*

1. How many children do you have?
  - What are their ages?
  - How many of your children live with you?
2. What is the gender of your child that is between the ages of three and five?
3. What county do you live in?

#### **These questions are about your racial background:**

1. Do you identify yourself as African American?
2. Were your parents born in the U.S.?
3. Were your mothers' parents born in the U.S.?
4. Were your fathers' parents born in the U.S.?

#### **These questions are about the racial background of your oldest child's father and his family:**

1. Was your oldest child's father born in the U.S.?
2. Were both of his parents born in the U.S.?
3. Were the grandparents on his mother's side of the family born in the U.S.?
4. Were the grandparents on his father's side of the family born in the U.S.?

Are you willing to participate in an hour – hour and a half long interview during the day including weekends?

#### **Demographic Information:**

1. What type of work do you do?
2. What is the highest level of education you have accomplished?
3. Do you have any certifications or specialized training? If so, in what area(s)?

4. What is your salary?
5. What is your combined household income?
6. Who lives in your household?
7. What is your marital status?
8. How old are you?

## Appendix I

### Adult Informed Consent

**Participant ID:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Project Title:** The Maternal Racial Socialization of Young Children

**Purpose of this study:** The purpose of this study is to understand how African American mothers racially socialize their young children. This consent form is to help you make an informed decision about whether or not to participate in this study. Your participation is completely voluntary. You may ask questions at any time during this interview. You may end the interview at any time if you begin to feel uncomfortable or change your mind about participating in the study.

**Procedures:** You will participate in a two-part interview lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes. The interview will be audio-recorded.

**Benefits:** You will be helping by contributing to knowledge about how African American child development.

**Risks:** During the interview, you will be asked questions about racism and skin color. Sometimes talking about those topics makes people uncomfortable or upset. Please know that you may end the interview at any time and skip any questions that you are not comfortable about answering.

**Compensation:** You will receive two \$10.00 gift cards (for a total of \$20.00) to Wal-Mart for completing the entire study. You will receive a \$10.00 gift to Wal-Mart if you do not complete the study. You will receive the gift card(s) at the end of the study. You will be asked to sign a receipt confirming that you received the gift card(s).

**Confidentiality:** All materials related to your participation in the study (e.g., signed consent form, audio-tape of the interviews, notes written during the interview, and gift card receipt) will be kept in a locked file cabinet. The transcript (i.e., the written version of the interview) will be encrypted and stored on a password protected computer. You will be assigned a subject identification number and will be identified by that number in the study. Your real name and identifying information will never be used in the study or in any publications or presentations based on the study. Only the dissertation advisor, research assistants, and I will have access to your information. The only instances where confidentiality cannot be maintained is if you

communicate intent to harm yourself or someone else or in instances where you talk about current child or elder abuse. Also, you may request that I stop audio recording you at any point during the study. You may also request that any audio recordings be destroyed.

**Approval of Research:** This research has been approved by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects (IRB) at Virginia Tech. The approval number is

**If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact:**

Adrienne L. Edwards (Principal Investigator)

(864) 314-9845

edwardal@vt.edu

Dr. David Moore, IRB Chair

(540) 231-4991

moored@vt.edu

Dr. April L. Few-Demo (Advisor)

(540) 231-2664

alfew@vt.edu

**Participant's Permission:**

I have read and understand this document. By signing this consent form, I agree to participate in the study.

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix J  
Parent Permission Form

**Participant ID:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Project Title:** The Maternal Racial Socialization of Young Children

**Purpose of this study:** The purpose of this study is to understand how African American mothers racially socialize their young children. This consent form is to help you make an informed decision about whether or not to allow your child to participate in the study. Your child's participation is completely voluntary. You or your child may ask questions at any time during this interview. You or your child may end the developmentally-appropriate activity at any time if either of you begin to feel uncomfortable or change your mind about participating in the study.

**Procedures:** Your child will participate in a brief activity with cartoon images of children with skin tones varying from light to dark. A research assistant or I will ask your child a series of questions about the cartoon images. Here is an example: "Who looks nice?" Your child will be videotaped as he or she participates in this activity.

**Benefits:** Your child will help by contributing to knowledge about how racial socialization influences racial preferences in young, African American children.

**Risks:** There are no known risks for your child associated with this research. I do not expect that your child's participation will pose any risk to her or him.

**Compensation:** Your child will receive a children's book for her or his participation. Your child will receive the book even if he or she chooses not to complete the entire study. You will be asked to sign a receipt confirming that your child received the book.

**Confidentiality:** All materials related to your participation in the study (e.g., signed consent form, gift card receipt) will be kept in a locked file cabinet. Your child's responses to the measure will be encrypted and stored on a password protected computer. Your child will be assigned a subject identification number and will be identified by that number in the study. Your child's real name and identifying information will never be used in the study or in any publications or presentations based on the study. Only the dissertation advisor, research assistants, and I will have access to your child's information. Examples of when confidentiality cannot be maintained is if your child communicates intent to harm himself or someone else or

discloses current cases of child or elder abuse are disclosed. Video recording of your child participating in the exercise may be shown during presentations of this research at conferences and other scholarly events. The video recording of your child will not include the name of you or your child or where you live. You may consent to participate in the study but decline to have the video recording shown to others outside of the research project. You or your child may request that I stop video recording at any time. Also, you may request that the videotape be destroyed.

**Approval of Research:** This research has been approved by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects (IRB) at Virginia Tech. The approval number is

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact:

Adrienne L. Edwards (Principal Investigator)  
(864) 314-9845  
edwardal@vt.edu

Dr. April L. Few-Demo (Advisor)  
(540) 231-2664  
alfew@vt.edu

Dr. David Moore, IRB Chair  
(540) 231-4991  
moored@vt.edu

**Participant's Permission:**

I have read and understand this document. By signing this consent form, I agree to allow my child to participate in the study.

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parents' Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I agree to allow the video recording of my child to be shown to others outside of this project during conference presentations and other scholarly events.

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I choose NOT to allow the video recording of my child to be shown to others outside of this project during conference presentations and other scholarly events.

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix K  
Script for Child Assent

*Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ . I'm doing a project on how children think about things. I would like your help with my project. I'd like to show you some cartoon characters and ask you some questions about them. I'm going to videotape us while I ask you the questions about the cartoons, so that I can remember what you say. Your mommy said it is okay for me to ask you these questions but you get to decide too. You don't have to answer the questions if you don't want to and you can stop answering questions whenever you want. You can also tell me if you want me to turn the video camera off and I will do it. You won't get in trouble if you stop answering the questions. Would you like to help me with my project?*

## Appendix L

### Modified Version of the Clark Doll Test

Script: *Here are the cartoon images that I told you about. I'm going to ask you some questions about them. There is no right or wrong answer.*

Who (1) “would you like to play with”, (2) “looks nice,” (3) “looks bad,” (4) “looks like a White child,” (5) “looks like an African American child, ” (6) “looks like a Black child,” and (7) “looks like you” (Clark & Clark, 1947, p. 169).

(8) Who do you want to be your friend (Jordan & Hernandez-Reif, 2009, p. 394).

(9) Who is the prettiest?

## Appendix M

### Receipt for \$10.00 Gift Card and Book

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I \_\_\_\_\_ (mother's name) acknowledge that I received a gift card to Wal-Mart worth \$10.00 and my child \_\_\_\_\_ (child's name) received a book for our participation in the study *The Maternal Racial Socialization of Young Children*; IRB Approval # \_\_\_\_\_.

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### Receipt for \$20.00 Gift Cards and Book

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I \_\_\_\_\_ (mother's name) acknowledge that I received two gift cards to Wal-Mart worth a total of \$20.00 and my child \_\_\_\_\_ (child's name) received a book for our participation in the study *The Maternal Racial Socialization of Young Children*; IRB Approval # \_\_\_\_\_.

## Appendix N

### Final Coding Scheme

- I. Motherwork as Conscientization
  - A. Types of racial socialization strategies and messages
    - a. Cultural socialization strategies and messages
    - b. Egalitarian socialization strategies and messages
    - c. Gendered cultural socialization strategies and messages
  - B. Sense of Social Stratification Mechanisms
    - a. Racism
    - b. Awareness of subtle racism
    - c. Nigger
    - d. Discrimination
  - C. Guidelines for External Forces
    - a. Good intentions
    - b. Reinforce colorblindness
    - c. Feelings of Helplessness
  - D. Fear of External Forces' Influences
    - a. Negative outcomes
    - b. Pressures from society
  - E. Practice of Active Intervention Against External Forces
    - a. Talk with adult
    - b. Talk with teacher
    - c. Talk with biological child
  - F. Reflective Thinking
    - a. Result of the modified Clark Doll Test
    - b. Predictions for child's racial preferences
      - i. Choose everybody
      - ii. Don't know
      - iii. Be good at it
      - iv. Choose own skin color
      - v. Choose Caucasian cartoon character
    - c. Reactions to and understanding of child's racial preferences
    - d. Maternal beliefs about child's racial preferences
- II. Bidirectional Process in Maternal Racial Socialization
  - A. Time of Readiness
    - a. Child's developmental level
    - b. Catalysts for conversations about race
      - i. Child notices differences in skin color
      - ii. Situation arises
      - iii. Child initiates
  - B. Child Characteristics and Behaviors
    - a. Mental, behavioral, physical, and general (Meins, Fernyhough, Russell, & Clark-Carter, 1998)
    - b. Child repeats everything

### III. Skin Tone Politics in Maternal Racial Socialization

- A. Skin Tone Socialization
  - a. Skin tone language
  - b. Sun exposure
- B. Teasing
  - a. Preference for lighter skin
  - b. Family interaction

### IV. Defining African American Motherhood

- A. Meanings of Motherhood
  - a. “It Means Everything”
  - b. Commonalities and variations in parenting
    - i. Biological connections
    - ii. Varies among mothers
  - c. Stereotypes about African American Mothers
    - i. Angry mother
    - ii. Welfare mother
    - iii. Promiscuous mother
- B. Raising African American Boys
  - a. Contradictions
  - b. Disproportionately experience racism
  - c. Lack of acceptance by society
- C. Marginalization
  - a. Work harder to prove yourself
  - b. Discrimination in the workplace
- D. Roles
  - a. Teacher
    - i. Lessons to learn
  - b. Model
  - c. Nurturers
  - d. Supporter
  - e. Provider
- E. Othermothering
  - a. Sources of cultural socialization

## Appendix O

### Annotated List of Figures

Figure 1. Samples of Cartoons Used for the Rankings Study (page 29)

This figure shows the cartoon characters used for the Modified Clark Doll Test (Jordan & Hernandez-Reif, 2009). From “Reexamination of young children’s racial attitudes and skin tone preferences,” by P. Jordan & M. Hernandez-Reif, 2009, *Journal of Black Psychology*, 35, 393. Copyright 2009 by Association of Black Psychologists. Reprinted with permission.

Figure 2. The Integrative Model for the Study of Developmental Competencies of Minority Children (page 90)

This figure shows the constructs of the child development theory used in this research. From “An integrative model for the Study of Developmental Competencies in Minority Children,” by C. Garcia Coll, K. Crnic, G. Lamberty, B. H. Wasik, R Jenkins., H. Vazquez Garcia, & H. Pipes McAdoo, 1996, *Child Development*, 67, 1891-1914. Copyright 2008 by John Wiley and Sons. Reprinted with permission.

Figure 3. Flow Chart of Theoretical Model and Research Questions (page 91)

This figure shows how the theoretical model used in this study addresses the research questions that guided this research. Each construct of the theoretical model is linked to a research question. Adapted from “An integrative model for the Study of Developmental Competencies in Minority Children,” by C. Garcia Coll, K. Crnic, G. Lamberty, B. H. Wasik, R Jenkins., H. Vazquez Garcia, & H. Pipes McAdoo, 1996, *Child Development*, 67, 1891-1914. Copyright 2008 by John Wiley and Sons. Adapted from and reprinted with permission.