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Observed Racial Socialization and Maternal Positive Emotions in African American Mother-Adolescent Dyadic Discussions about Racial Discrimination

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Abstract

This study examined patterns of: (1) racial socialization messages in dyadic discussions between 111 African American mothers and adolescents (M age = 15.50) and (2) mothers' positive emotions displayed during the discussion. Mothers gave more total racial socialization responses to a hypothetical dilemma involving potential mistreatment by a White teacher than a dilemma involving rude treatment by a White salesperson. Mothers displayed more advocacy on behalf of their adolescents in response to the teacher dilemma than to the salesperson dilemma. Mothers displayed consistent emotional support of adolescents' problem solving across both dilemmas but lower warmth in response to the salesperson dilemma. The role of adolescent gender in mothers' observed racial socialization responses is also discussed.

Key words: racial socialization, parent-adolescent communication, adolescence, parenting

Racial Socialization and Maternal Positive Emotion in African American Mothers:**An Observational Study of Family Processes**

Racial socialization is a critical aspect of parenting African American children (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Hughes, Rodriguez, et al., 2006; Peters & Massey, 1983; Stevenson, Cameron, Herrero-Taylor, & Davis, 2002; Thornton, Chatters, Taylor, & Allen, 1990). Extensive theoretical advancement that articulated the dimensions of racial socialization have occurred over the past 30 years. Moreover, several instruments have been developed that assess the degree to which parents convey messages about racial issues to children as outlined by existing theoretical frameworks. The research presented in this article adopts a process-oriented approach to racial socialization in an effort to extend current theory about racial socialization to consider more explicitly the relational context in which messages about race occur.

Existing measurement and theory have been effective at capturing the various dimensions of racial socialization as described by major theorists in this area (Hughes, Rodriguez, et al., 2006; Lesane-Brown, 2005; Sanders Thompson, 1994; Stevenson et al., 2002) or what Hughes and Chen (1999) describe as “the substantive content of racial socialization” (p. 473). This includes areas such as cultural socialization, preparation for racial bias, cultural mistrust, egalitarianism and silence about racial issues. However, existing research has made less progress in capturing the process of the racial socialization. The research described in this article blends theory from communication studies with existing racial socialization theory to flesh out the ways content about race gets communicated to children, more about the role of children in those experiences, and information about the emotional and ecological context of communication about race.

Racial Socialization as a Process: A Relational Communication Approach

Hughes and Chen (1999) stated that racial socialization is not only dyadic (bi-directional), it consists of intentional and spontaneous communication by parents to children. This is because parents often have specific ideas or messages they wish to communicate regarding this topic. Children also raise questions about race with their families based on events they observe and experiences they have. Observing conversations about racial issues between parents and children can shed light on the ways the relationship between parents and children serve as a context for racial socialization (Coard, Foy-Watson, Zimmer, & Wallace, 2007; Cooper & McLoyd, 2011; Frabutt, Walker, & MacKinnon-Lewis, 2002; Johnson, 2005).

We use elements of Relational Communication Theory (RCT) to frame racial socialization as a family process (Rogers, 2006). RCT is a family communication theory that argues that communication between family members is a dynamic process co-created by family members. RCT acknowledges that family communication consists of the (1) explicit content of the communication and (2) the relational context of the communication. The relational history can imbue the content with meaning in specific ways that vary across families. Moreover, RCT also acknowledges that family members can have different perspectives on the same communication content. Specifically, there is the intended message and the received message between family members, both of which comprise the relational meaning of the communication according to RCT. Moreover, the bidirectional exchange between family members represents the mutual creation of the meaning of communication among family members (Rogers, 2006), which meshes well with theoretical assertions that racial socialization is bidirectional.

Relying upon Hughes et al., (2006) theory of racial-ethnic socialization and Relational Communication Theory (2006), we propose a process-based model to explain family

communication processes involved in content about racial issues. In Figure 1, we provide a conceptual model of parent-adolescent communication about coping with racial discrimination. The model considers the quality of relationship and the quality of communication between adolescents and their parents as the context for racial socialization. Communication about racial issues consists of the actual content of the message, the parents' intended message, and the message received by the adolescent. The nonverbal behaviors that accompany a message and the emotional tone of a discussion about racial issues (e.g., warm, conflictual) can affect whether and how adolescents receive the message content. Generational differences between the adolescent's and the parent's life experiences regarding race (Brown & Lesane-Brown, 2006) can also affect the content of the discussion. Moreover, contemporaneous events in the lives of African American families that have overt or covert racial undertones can trigger discussions between parents and children (Juang & Soyed, 2014).

Current racial socialization research focuses primarily on content and less on process (Frabutt et al., 2002; Hughes, Bachman, Ruble, & Fuligni, 2006). However, a process perspective can be helpful in unpacking family communication about race because of the different perspectives and lived experiences that parents and children have regarding racial issues. Successful racial socialization is potentially more complex today and demands more nuanced execution by parents. Contemporary racial discrimination is subtler than in the past (Murphy, Richeson, Shelton, Rheinschmidt, & Bergsieker, 2012). It is arguably more difficult to describe to children who are coming of age after the end of modern civil rights era and more difficult for children to understand. Moreover, teaching about the realities of racial bias requires addressing it in a way that avoids demoralizing or embittering children (Bynum, Burton, & Best, 2007; Coard, Wallace, Stevenson, & Brotman, 2004). Communication about sensitive topics is

done most effectively in the context of positive parent-child relationships (Jaccard, Dodge, & Dittus, 2002). Only a few studies have jointly examined these aspects of African American parent-child relationships (Cooper & McLoyd, 2011; Frabutt et al., 2002; McHale et al., 2006; Smalls, 2009). This study attempts to extend those efforts further.

Family communication about race occurs in a cultural context that is shaped by history of the group and connection to African American culture, identity, & experience (Boykin & Toms, 1985; Brown & Lesane-Brown, 2006). Communication researchers argue that communication is culture. Therefore, the dyadic and family level processes that occur when parents and children discuss issues of race is a process of teaching children about the meaning of race and how race gets expressed and addressed in different corners of our society in implicit and explicit manners. And as our country continues to evolve in its treatment of race, so do these discussions. Parents are coming to the discussions with life experiences around race that are formed by historic events and the current-day events that they experience as parents. Meanwhile, children are growing up in a different time than their parents and are forming their own ideas about race in a different time cohort (Brown & Lesane-Brown, 2006). These distinctions in life experiences and perspectives result in families co-creating the racial socialization process from different perspectives.

Parents' Responses to Children's Experiences with Racial Discrimination

In their classic early piece on racial socialization in African American families, Peters and Massey (1983) stated "...Black Americans' lives are encumbered by the constant threat and actual periodic occurrences of intimidation, discrimination, or denial because of race" (p. 196). Today's racial discrimination dilemmas are often ambiguous and are cognitively and emotionally taxing for families to parse (Murphy et al., 2012). When disclosed to parents, these experiences

can trigger a discussion, activating the racial socialization family process (Hughes, Bachman, et al., 2006; Hughes, Rodriguez, et al., 2006; Peters & Massey, 1983). A family's discussion of stressful racial experiences can be construed as a coping process (Johnson, 2001; McCubbin & Patterson, 1983; Peters & Massey, 1983). The family's discussion consists of both parents' and adolescents' message content and the respective emotional tone and nonverbal behaviors that accompany those discussions (Hughes, Rodriguez, et al., 2006; Figure 1). The components of such a discussion also consist of children's receipt and understanding of those messages as well as their own solutions to such dilemmas.

The parents' strategies used to convey that content in response to specific incidents has received less attention by researchers and is the focus of the current paper (Lesane-Brown, 2006). In this article, we describe three types of parental communication strategies that we observed with respect to how African American parents cope with their children's racial dilemmas. These are parent suggestions for coping with racial dilemmas, parental advocacy on behalf of their children, and parent emotional supportiveness of children who are responding to racial dilemmas.

Parental suggestions to children for coping with discrimination. We define parental suggestions as any statements parents make to children designed to help children cope with racial discrimination experiences. Most existing studies focus more on the content that parents share. Parental suggestions on how to cope include but are not limited to messages teaching children about black history, the importance of getting an education, the importance of racial pride, confirmation of the existence of racial bias in society, embracement of mainstream values, or teaching children not to trust other racial-ethnic groups (Stevenson et al., 2002). Parental suggestions encompass behavioral strategies (e.g., problem-focused coping) like those

emphasized in previous studies and emotion-focused coping strategies that parents suggest in response to a racially stressful information (e.g., staying in control of one's emotions; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Previous research has shown that parents vary in the content of their racial socialization messages (e.g., parental suggestions) shared with children, but it has generally not examined in detail whether there is variation in response to specific racially stressful situations to which their children are exposed. Some racially stressful situations may trigger more parental suggestions from parents where as other situations may elicit comparably fewer responses.

Parental advocacy in response to children's discriminatory experiences. Parental advocacy is defined as statements parents make about how they would address racially stressful dilemmas their children face as parents. There is an extensive literature addressing research and policy regarding parents' advocacy on behalf of children with disabilities, giftedness, and in special education (Duquette, Orders, Fullarton, & Robertson-Grewal, 2011; Saaltink & Ouellette-Kuntz, 2014; Trainor, 2010). Only a few studies address parental advocacy in response to potential racial discrimination. One qualitative study focused on the experiences of parents of gifted African American youth revealed that in advocating for appropriate educational accommodations for their children often meant addressing individual incidents of racial discrimination from teachers and a general institutional resistance to acknowledging their children's academic talents (Huff, Houskamp, Stanton, & Tavegia, 2005). Holman's (2012) recent interview-based qualitative study of 22 middle-class African American mothers noted that mothers often implemented advocacy on their children's behalf in responses to racial discriminatory incidents their children shared with them. Incidents described often included school settings and incidents with the police. Mothers advocated on their children's behalf via

requests for meetings with teachers and school administrators and also, changing the child's school if the original school was deemed racially hostile for their child.

As these studies reveal, it is plausible to assume that a substantial number of African American parents engage in some form of advocacy in response to children's experience with racial discrimination. To date, the concept has not emerged as a racial socialization strategy in the literature to date. Further research is needed to articulate the degree to which parents use parental advocacy in response to children's experiences with discrimination and how advocacy varies by the types of incidents children experience. Though the evidence is limited, it is likely that parents vary in the degree to which they express an intention to engage in advocacy, the extensiveness of the advocacy, and in the application of the advocacy across situations.

Parental Warmth and Supportiveness in the Context of Racial Socialization

Similar to racial socialization as a process, the role of parental emotion has received limited attention in the racial socialization research literature to date. However, previous research has indicated that parental emotion does matter in disentangling the impact of specific racial socialization messages. Consistent with the notion of racial socialization as relational communication (Rogers, 2006), studies show that racial socialization messages have a more positive impact on children when mothers are rated as warm or when children perceive their relationship with their parents in a positive way. Frabutt and colleagues (2002) indicated that parents who were observed as higher in warmth also reported more racial socialization in general. Smalls' (2010) profile analysis approach of racial socialization messages and general parenting variables revealed that parents seem to emphasize racial socialization messages and general parenting strategies to varying degrees. One group of parents emphasized racial socialization messages over general ones (e.g., emotional quality, child-centered parenting), a

second group emphasized general parenting over racial socialization, and a third group combining both strategies in a somewhat equitable manner.

Cooper and McLoyd (2011) found that parental warmth, measured by parent-adolescent relationship quality, moderated the relationship between racial barrier socialization and psychosocial adjustment among African American youth. In the context of high relationship quality, messages about racial barriers are associated with lower self-esteem and higher depressive symptoms among girls. Conversely, in the context of low relationship quality, more frequent messages were linked to high self-esteem and lower depressive symptoms. No such moderational linkages were detected for boys. They noted that the reasons for the gender differences are unclear, they posited that girls may be more sensitive to the quality of the emotional relationship with their mothers when compared to boys.

Similarly, in a study of a low-income African American parents of early adolescents, Elmore and Gaylord-Harden (2012) found an interaction between parents' racial pride messages and their supportiveness, measured by parents' perceptions of their involvement and positive parenting. Specifically, high levels of supportiveness and moderate levels of racial pride messages were associated with fewer externalizing behaviors. The interaction between supportiveness and racial bias messages was not significant. Collectively, previous research suggests that the relationship context matters for understanding the impact of specific racial socialization messages on African American youth. Still, room remains for investigators to continue to articulate how the maternal emotion and racial socialization strategies covary with one another.

Our study is distinct from previous investigations considering parental emotion because we consider both global maternal warmth and parental supportiveness in response to children's

efforts to cope with racial dilemmas specifically. Our conceptualization of parental supportiveness is distinct from parental warmth in that warmth is more global and reflective of the general relationships context. Parental supportiveness is defined as the degree of supportive verbal and nonverbal behaviors that parents exhibit in response to their children's efforts to address experiences with racial discrimination. Parental supportiveness emanates from a generally positive relationship between parents and their children. It can serve to support children's efforts to cope with racial discrimination. We predicted that greater maternal supportiveness of adolescents' problem solving efforts will be associated with greater maternal warmth. We also predict that maternal supportiveness will also be positively associated with more mothers' observed racial socialization communication (e.g., suggestions, advocacy). Based on previous research, it is expected that mothers observed higher in maternal warmth will also exhibit more observed racial socialization behaviors in the form of more strategies and more advocacy.

Racial socialization and adolescent gender

To date, research investigating gender differences in racial socialization patterns has been mixed, with a small number of studies detecting gender differences in content delivered and in relationships to developmental outcomes (Brown, Linver, Evans, & DeGennaro, 2009; Smalls & Cooper, 2012; Varner & Mandara, 2013). In studies that have detected gender differences, research has demonstrated that African American boys receive more messages about preparation for bias and about the realities of racial barriers in society than girls (McHale et al., 2006; Thomas & Speight, 1999). It has also been reported that girls receive more messages related to cultural socialization or in regards to promoting racial/cultural pride (Caughy, Nettles, & Lima, 2011; Lesane-Brown, Brown, Tanner-Smith, & Bruce, 2010; McHale et al., 2006).

In light of the small number of studies that have examined gender differences in racial socialization processes specifically, we offer some speculations about linkages between maternal suggestions and advocacy and child gender. It is possible that mothers display varying degrees of parental advocacy and suggestions to sons and daughters. African American boys are targeted by specific forms of racial discrimination more often (Greene, Way, & Pahl, 2006; Smith-Bynum, Lambert, English, & Ialongo, 2014). As a result, mothers of sons may give more suggestions for coping with racial dilemmas than mothers of daughters. Similarly, they may give more advocacy statements because they believe sons need more parental intervention in addressing the racial dilemmas than mothers of daughters. Alternatively, the gender intensification hypotheses posits that mothers may exhibit more advocacy and suggestions to daughters than to sons as a reflection of efforts to promote more independence and autonomy in sons (Hill & Lynch, 1983; Holmbeck, Paikoff, & Brooks-Gunn, 1995).

The Present Study

Given that racial socialization is bi-directional and at times, spontaneous, (Hughes, Rodriguez, et al., 2006), we believed observing mothers and adolescents engaged in the active process of racial coping would yield useful information about: (a) how parents actually convey these messages to children and (b) how they model problem-solving in the context of these hypothetical dilemmas. Moreover, it would simultaneously capture information about the relationship context of parent-adolescent communication about race in a process-oriented manner. To that end, we pursued 3 questions: (1) Are mothers' observed racial socialization behaviors and positive emotions stable across the two discussions about hypothetical situations involving potential racial bias?; (2) How do mothers' total and specific racial socialization

behaviors vary across hypothetical situation and adolescent gender?; and (3) How do mothers' observed positive emotions vary across hypothetical situation?

Method

Sample

Data were collected from 111 African American mother-adolescent dyads residing in the Washington, DC metropolitan area between 2010 and 2011. Mothers ranged in age from 29 to 64 (M age = 44.18). The sample's median education level is associate's degree. The median household income is \$60,000 to \$69,000. Annual household income ranged from less than \$5,000 to \$100,000 or greater per year. Approximately one-third (28%) of the sample had incomes of \$100,000 or greater. Approximately 95% of the sample identified as African American, followed by 3% for Afro-Caribbean, 1.5% for Biracial/Multiracial. Married mothers comprised 38% of the sample, followed by 31% who had not married, 22% who were divorced, 4.5% separated, and 3% who were widowed. Two mothers did not report their marital status. Of those mothers who were not married, 6 reported cohabiting with a romantic partner.

A total of 94% of the female caregivers in our studies were the biological mothers of the participating adolescents. Four adoptive mothers (3%), two stepmothers (1.5%) and 1 aunt (1%) participated in the study. Most mothers (78%) were employed. Adolescents ranged in age from 14 to 17 (M age = 15.50). Girls comprised 55% of the sample. One adolescent did not report a gender. Ninety percent of the sample was African American, 3% was Afro-Caribbean, 4.5% was Biracial/Multiracial, and 1 (.7) endorsed Black South American.

Three cases had to be eliminated from the analyses. One family was eliminated because the child did not meet the age criterion. One interview was terminated before it was completed due to concerns about respondents' understanding the informed consent. A third case was removed as the family repeated the study twice. Only their initial data were used in the present study.

Measures

Observed racial socialization communication. The observational task to be used in the present study was developed to assess the dynamic aspects of the racial socialization process between parents and adolescents (Hughes & Chen, 1999; Hughes, Rodriguez, et al., 2006). The measure consists of presenting parents and adolescents with a set of audiotaped vignettes that describe an adolescent coping with a hypothetical incident that might involve interpersonal racial discrimination followed by instructions to parents and adolescents to discuss how they would respond to the scenario. As such, the task focuses more on preparation for bias as described by Hughes and Chen (1999) with specific emphasis on how to reason through and respond to perceived racial bias in interpersonal situations. The conversations about coping with racial discrimination attempts to approximate actual conversations between parents and adolescents about potential racial discrimination. Three categories of parent responses to the hypothetical incidents emerged: (1) parent responses to hypothetical incidents of racial discrimination; (2) parent suggestions/directions to adolescents for addressing the dilemma; and (3) parent as advocate; parent supportiveness of the adolescent's efforts to solve the problem.

The Racial Socialization Observational Task and Coding System (author citation 1; author citation 2) was used to assess conversations between mothers and adolescents about

potential racial discrimination. Designed to elicit processes embedded in racial socialization as outlined by Hughes and Chen (1999), the task involves two 5-minute discussions between parents and children about how to address dilemmas presented in two vignettes each family listened to on a digital device. At the end of the discussion, mothers and adolescents were given the following instruction: “Pretend as if the situation happened to you and your family. How would you respond if the situation happened to you and your family?”

Two of the vignettes with White adults involved events occurring in school and one in a shopping mall. The vignettes were intended to elicit discussion about how African American parents and adolescents would interpret and respond to racial dilemmas common to African Americans youth (Spencer, 1985). The first vignette, entitled *The Teacher*, involved a talented student receiving an unfair grade on an assignment from a White teacher (Johnson, 2001). The second vignette, entitled *The Mall*, involved an African American adolescent experiencing rude treatment from a White salesperson (Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000). Both vignettes were also matched on gender with that of the adolescent participant. The vignettes were presented in a counterbalanced order and each 5-minute discussion was videotaped. A full description of the development of the measure is available from the first author.

Maternal suggestions/directions for coping with the situation. This behavior addressed mothers’ suggestions or directions to the adolescent about how to handle the situation. Parents made suggestions that included behaviors adolescents should execute (author citation 1, author citation 2, Johnson, 2001) to address the situation (e.g., “Call me on your cell phone”; “Ask the teacher to explain the grade to you.”) and suggestions for managing emotions (e.g., “Try to stay calm.”). Raters counted the number of suggestions mothers made within each 30-second interval

across the full length of each vignette discussion. This number constituted the frequency in which mothers made suggestions in regard to each vignette. The frequency of suggestions from both vignette discussions were summed for the analyses.

Mother as advocate. This behavioral code consisted of strategies in which mothers described the ways they take an active role in helping the adolescent cope with the situations described in the vignette, both of which involve the adolescent's interaction with a White adult. Raters counted the number of individual ways a parent discussed serving as an advocate for the adolescent for each 30-second interval. Examples of advocacy in this context include but are not limited to the parent requesting a meeting with the White adult involved in the vignette, the parent asking to speak with a manager or school principal, or the parent contacting the media to report an incident of racial discrimination. The distinctive feature of this behavior is the *parent's behavior* in response to the situation on behalf of their child. The statements about parental advocacy were counted within each 30-second interval. The number of comments across all of the 30-second intervals were added together to index the extent of parental advocacy within each discussion. The coding generated a sum score for both *The Teacher* and *The Mall* vignettes.

Maternal supportiveness of adolescent coping. It is a measure of maternal emotion measured by the Racial Socialization Observational Task and Coding System (author citation 1, author citation 2). It is defined as the extent to which the parent expresses direct support of the adolescent's ideas or makes statements designed to elicit the adolescent's ideas about how to cope with the situation in each vignette (e.g., "That's a great idea! I never would have thought of that"). Mothers might also nod or give other nonverbal indicators of support or agreement with the adolescent's efforts to solve the problem (e.g., smiling, enthusiasm, interest, pleasant facial

expression). Mothers rated as unsupportive disparaged the adolescents and/or their ideas (e.g., “That [idea] is just stupid.”). They might also disagree with or put down the adolescent’s strategy *in absence* of an effort to teach or expand upon the adolescent’s original strategy or solution. Nonverbal indicators of a lack of support or active contempt for the adolescent’s ideas were also considered unsupportive. Examples of nonverbal indicators included frowns, scowls, rolling eyes, folded arms, and defensive body posture. Raters also attended to parents’ tone of voice and facial expressions (e.g., aggressive or condescending tone, sarcasm). Mothers were rated on a 5-point scale from “1” for *Very Unsupportive* to “5” for *Very Supportive* for each 30-second interval across each vignette. The mean score across all intervals was calculated for each vignette to index the average degree of maternal supportiveness for each.

Maternal warmth. Maternal warmth was measured by the warmth code in the African American Families Macro-coding Manual (Smetana & Abernathy, 1998), a coding system of behavioral interaction in families that was adapted for use with African American families. African American coders were instructed to rate mothers on the degree of verbal and nonverbal expressions of warmth. Verbal expressions include a family member’s statements of love, care, consideration for the other family member. It also included family members’ expression of interest in another member. Nonverbal expressions of warmth consisted of a family members’ eye contact, mutual laughter, nodding, smiling, leaning towards the family member, gazing, sitting close to another member. It also consisted of “touching” a family member “affectionately, playfully, or nurturantly” (p. 10). Raters scored mothers’ warmth within each 30-second interval of both vignette discussions on a 5-point scale with higher scores indicating higher warmth (1 = *Absence of Warmth*, 2 = *Low Warmth*, 3 = *Somewhat Warm*, 4 = *Fairly Warm*, and 5 = *Very Warm*). The ratings for each interval were averaged separately for each vignette.

The response options for scores 1 and 2 reflect modifications to the original 5-point scale. Smetana and Abernathy (1998) originally labeled 1 as “Very Cold” and 2 as “Fairly Cold.” During the calibration phase, raters observed that a cold emotional tone did not seem to reflect the emotional tone of the families interviewed for the study who were low on warmth. Raters often observed that when less warmth was present, negative emotion was also present (e.g., anger, hostility) in order to avoid contaminating the focus warmth with other emotions present. Thus, a score of “2” was changed from representing “Cold” to “Low Warmth.” We also added the phrase, “or rather, expresses it [warmth] infrequently” to the description of Low Warmth. A score of “1” was changed from “Very Cold” to “Absence of Warmth.” The words “moderate degree” were added to the description for a rating of “3,” characterized as “Somewhat Warm.” These revisions enhanced the clarity of the codes. This procedure has demonstrated reliability with inter-rater reliability scores of .80 to .95 in a sample of middle-class African American families (Smetana, Abernathy, & Harris, 2000).

Procedure

Data collection. Research staff placed advertisements in a free daily newspaper and other free monthly publications aimed specifically at parents that are widely available throughout the metropolitan area. The advertisements were constructed in a way to appeal to African American mothers and other female caregivers. This included the use of an attractive photograph of an African American family as well as a project logo. In most cases, the advertisements also alerted potential participants about a Facebook page for the project that contained a Frequently Asked Questions page and information about the research team and the author. Potential participants were then instructed to call or email the project office for a formal telephone screening and also, to schedule a time for the interview. During the initial telephone contact, a research staff person

explained the details of the informed consent process as well as provided specific details about items on the study questionnaire deemed sensitive (e.g., drug use, truancy, stealing, sexual behavior) to reduce the potential for discomfort on the part of the family and potential coercion of the adolescent to enroll in the study.

Data were collected by trained research team comprised primarily of African American undergraduates (86%). Two interviewers collected data in each family's homes and each team had at least 1 African American member. After greeting the family, the interviewers completed the informed process. One interviewer reviewed the informed consent process with mothers. To reduce the potential for coercion, a second interviewer reviewed the informed assent process with the adolescent in a room separate from the mother.

After informed consent and assent were obtained, the interviewer assigned to the mother administered a battery of self-report questionnaires on an array of topics (e.g., parenting, parent-child relationship quality, racial socialization, discrimination experiences, racial identity, psychological functioning). The second interviewer administered self-report measures to adolescents on similar topics. One interviewer explained the Racial Socialization Observational Task to the mother-adolescent dyads while the second interviewer managed the equipment involved in the task. Both interviewers stepped outside the room while the two discussions about the vignettes occurred. The presentation of the questionnaire portion and the observational task were counterbalanced. Moreover, the interviewers also counterbalanced the presentation of each of the vignettes in the observational task. After the data were collected, the interviewers paid family received \$50.00 for participating. The entire process, which included informed consent,

equipment set-up, task execution, questionnaire completion, payment, and debriefing took approximately 2 hours.

Data coding. A team of 4 African American coders completed extensive training in coding the video segments. They each spent approximately 15 hours a week over a 4-month period. During the first month, the team calibrated the ratings for each variable. When disagreements occurred, the team viewed the video clips as a group and discussed the discrepancies. The first clarified the codes for the team by explaining how concepts in the codebook should be applied. As noted, raters raised concerns about some aspects of the warmth behavioral code. The team identified an initial group of specific videos of families with warmth levels were somewhere below the midpoint and viewed the tapes as a group. Discussions about the videos yielded a consensus that the original labels assigned to lower levels of warmth did not adequately capture the emotions being displayed by the families. The team identified new labels

Each family was instructed to discuss each vignette for 5 minutes each. Coders were instructed to code each behavior in 30-second intervals. As noted, emotion codes (warmth, parental supportiveness) were coded on a 5-point Likert-type scale within each interval. Coders counted the number of racial socialization comments (parental advocacy, parental suggestions) within each interval.

Forty percent of the videos of discussions about The Teacher vignette received a rating by a second coder. Intra-class correlations (ICC) were used to assess reliability between two raters' coding of variables assessed within the teacher vignette: parent suggestions, support, advocacy, and warmth, and teen warmth. Using SPSS, a two-way mixed effect model with absolute agreement was used for all ICC analyses (Field, 2009; Shieh, 2012; Shrout & Fleiss,

1979). The ICC was high for parental suggestions, $ICC = .84, p < .001, 95\% CI [.65, .92]$, parental advocacy $ICC = .92, p < .001, 95\% CI [.83, .96]$, parental supportiveness $ICC = .97, p < .001, 95\% CI [.94, .99]$. ICC was adequate for parental warmth $ICC = .70, p < .01, 95\% CI [.36, .86]$.

Results

Univariate and bivariate statistics were performed on all variables. Means and standard deviations for study variables are presented in Table 1. As can be seen in Table 1, mothers' averaged about 3 comments about their own parental advocacy across the two vignettes. On average, mothers made 7 suggestions to their adolescents about how to cope with the situations in the vignettes. Out of a potential range of 1 to 5, mothers were slightly below the midpoint in terms of warmth for both vignettes. Table 2 presents correlations for study variables within each vignette. Maternal suggestions to adolescents for coping with the dilemmas in the vignette were positively correlated with maternal supportiveness for *The Teacher* ($r = .31, p \leq .001$) and *The Mall* ($r = .38, p \leq .01$). Maternal suggestions were positively correlated with maternal warmth on for *The Mall* vignette but not for *The Teacher*. Within *The Teacher*, maternal supportiveness was strongly correlated with maternal warmth ($r = .78, p \leq .01$). A similar pattern was detected between these variables for *The Mall* ($r = .81, p \leq .001$).

Stability of mothers' behaviors and emotions. To answer the first research question regarding the stability of mothers' observed behaviors and emotions stable across the two discussions, we conducted correlations with the study variables across vignettes. Positive correlations were detected in observed racial socialization behaviors and emotions across vignettes. The number of suggestions offered during *The Teacher* was positively correlated with

the number suggestions offered during *The Mall* ($r = .36, p \leq .001$). However, mothers' advocacy behaviors were not correlated across the discussions about the vignettes. In terms of emotions displayed, maternal supportiveness ($r = .74, p \leq .0$) and maternal warmth ($r = .73, p \leq .001$) were both strongly and positively correlated across both vignettes.

Some behaviors also yielded significant correlations with other variables across vignettes. Mothers' supportiveness during *The Teacher* showed a small positive correlation to their suggestions to their children during *The Mall* discussion ($r = .30, p \leq .01$). Mothers' warmth during *The Teacher* was also moderately positively correlated with their supportiveness during discussions about *The Mall* ($r = .63, p \leq .01$). It was also positively correlated with the number of suggestions they made to their children albeit to a smaller degree ($r = .22, p \leq .05$).

Model 1: Mothers' racial socialization behaviors by vignette and gender. Next, we examined how mothers responded to the hypothetical scenarios involving potential racial bias. We conducted a repeated measures ANOVA to answer the second research question. The second question examined whether mothers exhibited differing racial socialization behaviors in response to *The Teacher* and *The Mall*. The within-group factors in each analytic model consisted of racial socialization behavior and vignette content. Adolescent gender was included as a between-group factor.

In Model 1, The Mauchly's W test for nonequivalences of variance was significant. Therefore, F values from the Greenhouse-Geisser test are provided. The results indicated that there were main effects for racial socialization behavior, $F(1, 105) = 11.42, p < .001, \eta = .10$ and vignette content, $F(1, 105) = 24.61, p < .001, \eta = .19$. Mothers gave more racial socialization statements in response to *The Teacher* vignette ($M = 3.76$) than to *The Mall* vignette ($M = 2.54$).

Also, mothers made more suggestions ($M = 3.74$) than statements about how they would advocate on behalf of their child ($M = 2.59$). There was no main effect for gender, however.

Results from Model 1 also yielded 2 interactions. First, we detected a vignette X racial socialization measure interaction, $F(1, 105) = 39.11, p < .0001, \eta = .27$. The interaction indicated that mothers provided a similar number of suggestions across the two vignettes. However, they discussed fewer actions related to advocating on behalf of their children in response to the dilemma presented in *The Mall* vignette as compared to *The Teacher* vignette (See Figure 2a). This pattern suggests that parents observed less need to intervene in *The Mall* as compared to *The Teacher*. The second interaction occurred between racial socialization behavior and adolescent gender, $F(1, 105) = 4.84, p < .001$. The results indicated that mothers delivered more messages about advocacy to girls as compared to boys. In contrast, mothers gave suggestions about how to cope to boys than to girls. The effect size for this pattern was quite small, $\eta = .04$. These results are displayed graphically in Figure 2b.

Model 2: Mothers' positive emotions by vignette. The third research question addressed how mothers' emotions varied across the 2 vignettes and whether gender served as a moderator of mothers' responses. A repeated measures ANOVA examined the impact of mothers' observed positive emotions during the discussions (warmth, supportiveness) in combination with vignette type and adolescent gender. As with Model 1, the Mauchly's W test for nonequivalences of variance was significant. As a result, F values for the Greenhouse-Geisser test are provided here as well. The results yielded a main effect for maternal positive emotions, $F(1, 105) = 54.72, p < .0001, \eta = .34$, and vignette, $F(1, 105) = 7.19, p < .01, \eta = .06$. Of the two indicators of maternal positive emotions observed, post-hoc analyses indicated that mothers displayed higher levels of supportiveness of adolescents' efforts to address the dilemma relative to general warmth. A main

effect for vignette indicated that *The Teacher* vignette ($M = 3.04$) elicited a slightly stronger emotional response from mothers overall than *The Mall* vignette ($M = 2.96$). A small maternal emotion X vignette interaction also emerged, $F(1, 105) = 9.15, p \leq .01, \eta = .08$. The interaction revealed that maternal supportiveness in response to adolescents' efforts to solve the problem was consistent across vignettes. However, general warmth was lower in discussions about *The Mall* than in *The Teacher*.

Discussion

We sought to capture the processes by which African American mothers execute racial socialization behaviors and the positive emotions expressed in discussions about racial bias using observational methods. For this study, we focused on the frequency of two types of statements that African American mothers made in response to potential racial bias from White American adults: suggestions about how to handle racial dilemmas and statements about their advocacy with White adults on behalf of their adolescent children. Our results indicated that mothers exhibit some stability in their racial socialization behaviors and high levels of consistency in positive emotions displayed across discussions about 2 hypothetical racial dilemmas. They also revealed that African American mothers delivered more racial socialization statements in response to *The Teacher* than to *The Mall*. Mothers also varied in the degree to which they exhibited advocacy and observed warmth expressed across the 2 dilemmas. Lastly, a small interaction of racial socialization message type by adolescent gender difference indicated mothers of sons and mothers of daughters responded differently with respect to the number of suggestions to their children about how to cope with the dilemmas as compared to the number of advocacy efforts mothers described in their discussions.

We found that mothers displayed a small degree of stability in some of their racial socialization behaviors for the number of suggestions for coping with potential racial bias across 2 hypothetical scenarios and no relationship between mothers' advocacy across the situations in *The Teacher* and *The Mall*. Mothers' positive emotions (supportiveness, warmth) were highly stable across both vignettes. Results indicated that mothers generated a higher number of suggestions regarding how to cope with the situations in the vignettes than statements describing their parental advocacy in response to the two scenarios (*The Teacher*, *The Mall*). Moreover, mothers responded with statements about advocacy at a higher rate on average in response to *The Teacher* vignette in comparison to *The Mall*. These findings suggest that mothers may adjust the frequency of their communication content in response to their children's different racial dilemmas.

These findings reveal mothers' complex tapestry of responses to the two hypothetical dilemmas presented in this study. They may suggest that mothers deploy different types of racial socialization messages that are customized to particular racial dilemmas. Mothers' positive emotions exhibited towards their adolescents may also reflect the nature of the events in the vignettes. Though mothers in our study were consistently supportive of youth's efforts to solve the dilemmas in both vignettes, mothers' general warmth dropped off slightly during discussions about *The Mall*. The reasons for the difference in levels of maternal warmth are unclear. While no racial epithets were included in *The Mall* vignette, the treatment by the salesperson was designed to be overtly negative. Anecdotally, we observed that mothers may have displayed lower levels of warmth because they also were managing their own negative emotional reactions to the potential racial bias described in *The Mall*. Mothers' negative emotions was beyond the

scope of present study, but we plan to consider the management and expression of positive and negative emotions by families coping with racial dilemmas in future research.

The teacher's behavior towards the protagonist in *The Teacher* was more ambiguous. This ambiguity may have elicited more elaborated and nuanced racial socialization responses from mothers due to their concerns about long-term interactions with a teacher who may be racially biased (Holman, 2012). These more elaborated responses may reflect mothers' efforts maximize chances for fair treatment by the teacher. However, even though mothers may have been disturbed by the events in *The Mall*, they may have responded less intensively with advocacy responses if they believed the situation could be resolved by simply instructing their child to exit the situation. We did not count how often mothers instructed their adolescents to exit the situation in this study, but this was a suggestion provided by some of the mothers in the sample.

This study is among a small but growing number of studies that have addressed how African American mothers exhibit both general and culturally salient aspects of parenting (e.g., racial socialization) with observational methods (Cooper & McLoyd, 2011; Frabutt et al., 2002; Smalls, 2009). It is among the first studies using a process-oriented perspective to African American mothers' communication of racial socialization content across two hypothetical racial dilemmas with observational methods. Mothers' different responses to their children's racial dilemmas underscore the notion that racial socialization is best considered within the context of the events in families' lives and in the context of the parent-child relationship (Rogers, 2006). This research is consistent with the theoretical tenets of the Hughes et al. (2006) and Rogers (2006). These findings suggest that African American mothers tailor their responses to the

features of the racial dilemmas their adolescents face in terms of volume of content aimed at addressing the dilemma and expression of positive emotion during dyadic discussions.

Our study results also yielded one small gender difference in mothers' statements referencing suggestions for coping with potential racial bias and their advocacy for their children in situations. Specifically, mothers of sons made more statements consisting of suggestions for coping across both situations than they did about advocacy. The reverse was true for mothers of daughters. The findings demonstrated limited evidence of the gender intensification hypotheses but in a slightly different way than expected (Hill & Lynch, 1983; Holmbeck, Paikoff, & Brooks-Gunn, 1995). Mothers of sons delivered more suggestions and fewer advocacy statements than mothers of daughters. This suggests that mothers of sons promote more autonomy in addressing some racial dilemmas than mothers of daughters, but only to a small degree.

Methods may also explain the small effect detected here. For instance, instructions to the families did not request that the dyads address the adolescent's gender in their discussions. It is possible that gender dynamics may have been more pronounced if the instructions had asked the dyads to address adolescent gender specifically. We also tested only 2 hypothetical scenarios. It is possible that mothers' responses may be more or less pronounced in different situations. Moreover, we only examined mothers in the present study. Fathers might engage suggestions and advocacy in different ways in response to their adolescents' racial dilemmas.

Limitations

In addition to the limitations already noted about gender, other study limitations must be acknowledged. The sample size in this study is somewhat small. Researchers should note that the variation in the effect sizes and place more weight on the larger effect sizes detected. These

results should be replicated with a larger sample and in other parts of the U.S. We also tested only 2 types of hypothetical scenarios that might involve racial discrimination. Other scenarios involving racial discrimination might elicit a different combination of maternal responses.

Conclusions and Directions for Future Research

A process-oriented to racial socialization revealed that African American mothers' implementation of racial socialization strategies to race-based dilemmas can vary based on the situational features. Thus, an exclusive focus on content of the messages may miss part of the complexity in the ways parents deploy racial socialization. Furthermore, some of the mixed findings regarding the impact of racial socialization on children's development may be explained by the type of race-based dilemma and the way families handle them. Future research should use longitudinal methods as well as examination of the impact of these patterns on children's capacity to absorb and implement the strategies, and also their psychosocial development.

African American mothers' variation in displays of warmth across racial dilemmas may also reveal the stressful impact of certain dilemmas on the parent-child relationship as well as their ability to withstand such stress (Peters & Massey, 1983). Future research should examine the impact positive emotions (e.g., warmth, supportiveness) during discussions of racial dilemmas on adolescents' psychosocial outcomes and incorporate negative emotions (e.g., conflict) into such studies as well. Finally, more research should examine the ways adolescents respond to parents' racial socialization communication because part of its impact and effectiveness as a buffer is based on (1) whether and how they receive that communication and (2) how they implement the suggestions that parents provide (Hughes, Bachman et al., 2006; Hughes, Hagelskamp, Way, & Foust, 2009).

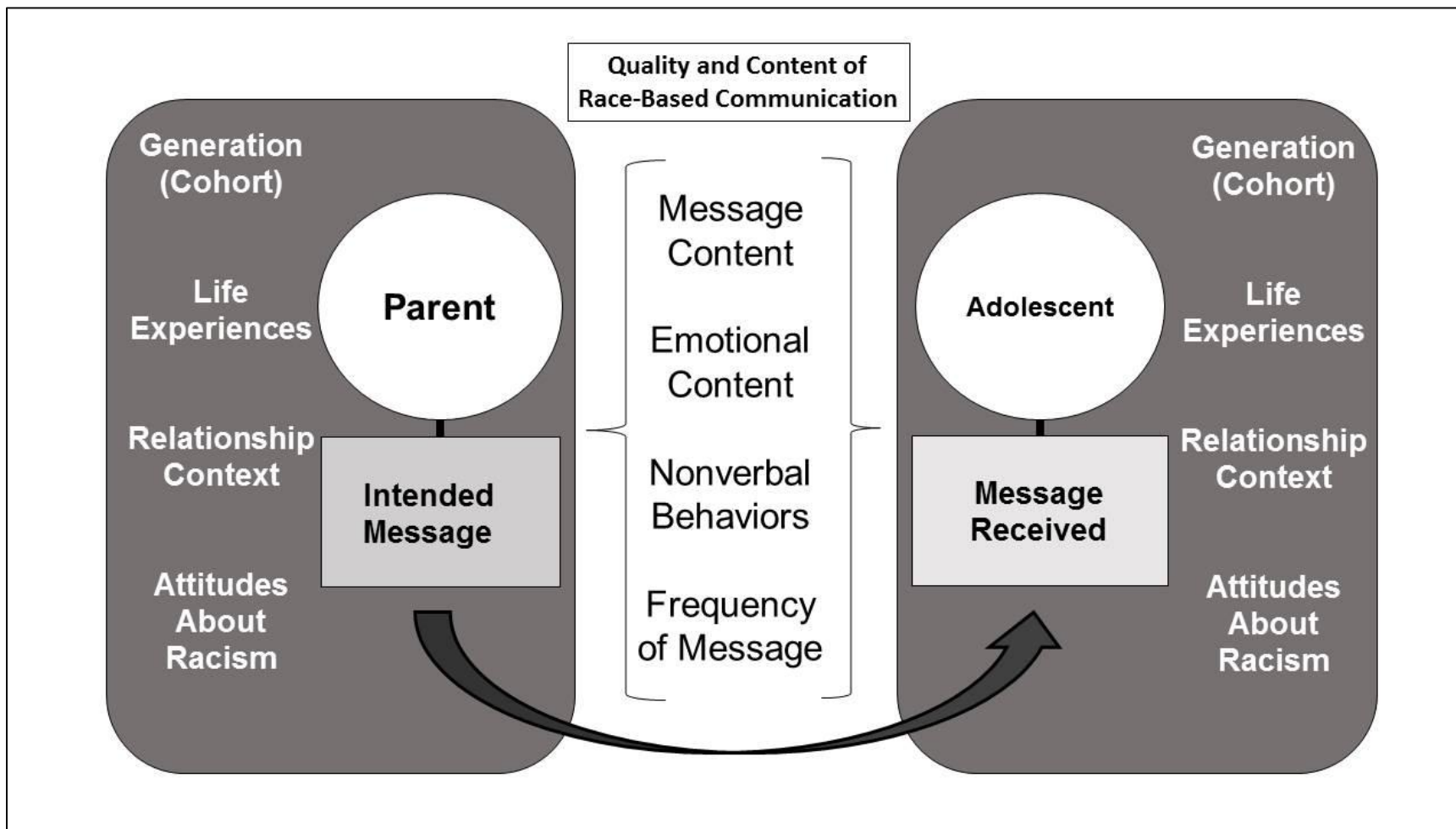


Figure 1. *Racial socialization as a process: A conceptual model.*

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables by Vignette Content

	The Teacher		The Mall	
	Mean (SD)	Range	Mean (SD)	Range
Maternal Advocacy	4.06 (3.11)	0 – 14	1.23	0-8
Maternal Suggestions	3.45 (3.47)	0-18	3.93 (3.30)	0-16
Maternal Supportiveness	3.18 (.24)	2.66-4.00	3.17 (.21)	2.43-3.78
Maternal Warmth	2.90 (.59)	1.10-5.00	2.89 (.59)	1.10-5.00

Note. Maternal Advocacy = Mothers as Advocate. Maternal Suggestions = Mothers suggestions for coping. Maternal Supportiveness = Mothers' supportiveness of adolescent coping.

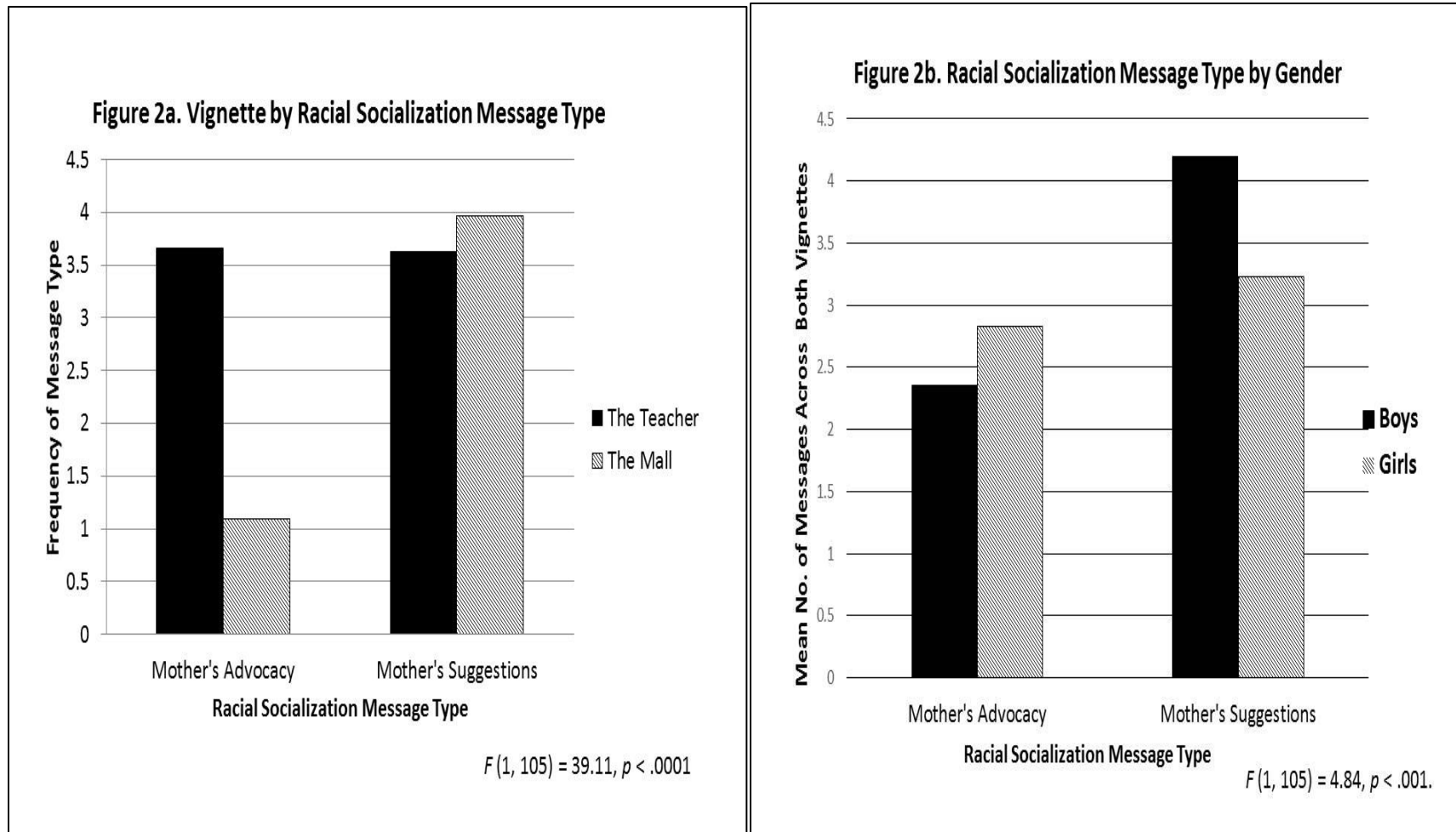


Figure 2. Graphic depiction of interactions from Model 1. Figure 2a displays the interaction of Vignette X Racial Socialization Message Type. Figure 2b displays the interaction of Racial Socialization Message Type X Gender.

Note. Mother's Advocacy = Mother's as advocate. Mother's Suggestions = Mother's Suggestion for coping.

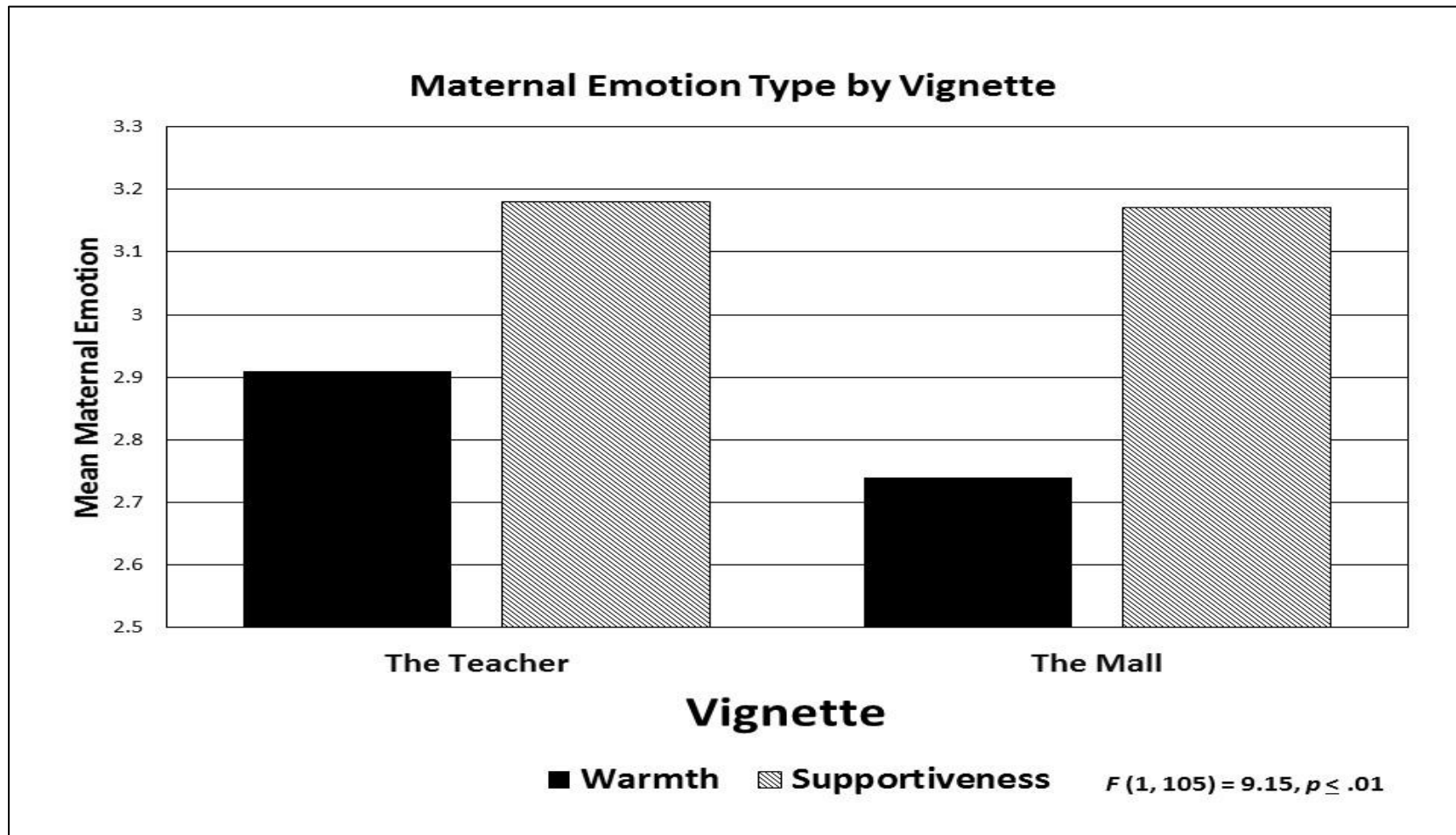


Figure 3. Graphic depiction of interaction of maternal positive emotions by vignette content.

Note. Warmth = Mother's warmth. Supportiveness = Mother's supportiveness of adolescent coping.

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