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## Racial Socialization: Its Influence On Outcomes Among Black American Children Exposed To Physical Discipline

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Racial Socialization: Its Influence on Outcomes Among Black American Children Exposed to  
Physical Discipline

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A Clinical Research Project submitted to the faculty of the Florida School of Professional Psychology at National Louis University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Psychology in Clinical Psychology.

Tampa, Florida  
December, 2019

The Doctorate Program in Clinical Psychology  
Florida School of Professional Psychology  
at National Louis University

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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Clinical Research Project

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This is to certify that the Clinical Research project of

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Has been approved by the  
CRP Committee on December 9, 2019  
as satisfactory for the CRP requirement  
for the Doctorate of Psychology degree  
with a major in Clinical Psychology

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## Abstract

The use of spanking as a form of discipline for children is a controversial issue. Even so, it is a practice that the majority of American parents have used to correct behavioral concerns within their children (Straus, 2010). Further, Black parents have been noted to use spanking more frequently than other ethnic groups (Berlin et al., 2009). Most research focuses on the negative implications of spanking on children's development and outcomes, but some research suggests that outcomes differ for children from different ethnic groups with Black children showing more favorable outcomes. Many variables, such as parental warmth exhibited in the parent-child relationship, parental endorsement of spanking, and cultural norms, have been researched to explain what moderates the outcomes. This review focuses on racial socialization as a moderating variable that helps explain the favorable outcomes among Black American youths to consider the use of spanking through the lens of an emic perspective that promotes cultural sensitivity and informs culturally appropriate and responsive therapeutic services.

**RACIAL SOCIALIZATION: ITS INFLUENCE ON OUTCOMES AMONG BLACK  
AMERICAN CHILDREN EXPOSED TO PHYSICAL DISCIPLINE**

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## **DEDICATION**

First and foremost, thank you, Lord, for allowing me to accomplish a dream, which encompasses the completion of this project. This project is dedicated to my family, who has supported me in many ways. Mom, Dad, Renee, Marie, and even my father, Mr. Nelson Love in his rest, I love you and appreciate all you have given me over the course of my life. To the nieces, nephews, aunts, uncles, cousins, and the kinship network of church family and family friends who have all provided a bit of the love, affection, protection, and guidance that has provided the necessary discipline to get me where I am now, with sincere love, I thank you!

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I also want to acknowledge Dr. Diane Koch, who has provided supervision and the opportunity for me to present this topic in a professional arena, which has allowed space for conversation to further develop my perspective.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract.....	i
Copyright Notice.....	ii
Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Outcomes of Spanking.....	2
Outcomes for Black American Children.....	6
Moderating Variables Examined in the Literature.....	8
Maternal warmth.....	8
Parental endorsement.....	9
Cultural normality.....	10
Racial Socialization in Black American Families.....	11
Research on Black American Parenting and Discipline.....	13
Black American positive parenting practices.....	15
The Impact of Racial Socialization on Black Americans.....	16
Protective qualities of racial socialization.....	18
Purpose of Study.....	20
CHAPTER II: METHODS OF RACIAL SOCIALIZATION IN BLACK AMERICAN FAMILIES.....	21
Racial Socialization Categories.....	21
Racial Socialization Dimensions.....	24

CHAPTER III: SPANKING AS A PROTECTIVE FACTOR FOR BLACK AMERICAN CHILDREN .....	26
The Protective Pathway of Racial Socialization .....	27
Protection of racial socialization within parenting style.....	27
CHAPTER IV: EXAMINING THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN SPANKING AND RACIAL SOCIALIZATION .....	30
The Role of Discipline in Socialization .....	32
Linking Spanking and the Racial Socialization Category Preparation for Bias ....	33
CHAPTER V: CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS .....	34
Limitations .....	35
Implications.....	37
Conclusion .....	41
References.....	43
Appendix.....	57

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Child behavior and discipline are often motives for families to seek mental health support services, but the misunderstanding of discipline practices by practitioners, due to lack of consideration of an ecological paradigm, may result in underutilization of such support in Black families. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA; 2015) estimated that only 8.6% of Black Americans utilized mental health services during the past year in a report of service utilization between 2008 and 2012. Further, The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI; 2018) reported that approximately one-quarter of Black Americans seek mental health services and attributed reluctance, not only to socioeconomic factors, but largely to distrust of mental health service providers and difficulty locating culturally appropriate services. This finding suggests a perception of a disconnect between dynamics, such as parenting practices, within Black communities and families, and the recommendations and services provided by mental health professionals.

The use of physical discipline, spanking, or corporal punishment, as forms of discipline for children, is a controversial and long-debated issue in the field. Further, there is often disagreement about various definitions of physical discipline, and the lines between what constitutes corporal punishment, spanking, or abuse, are not always well-delineated. Clarification has been offered with spanking often being defined as a strike “on the buttocks or extremities with an open hand without inflicting physical injury” (McLoyd, Kaplan, Hardaway, & Wood, 2007, p. 165), which was the definition used for the purposes of this investigation. However, note that some authors of the literature cited in this review have used the term corporal punishment as a broad term that encompasses spanking. Despite the debates about definitions and appropriateness of its use, spanking is a practice that many parents use to correct behavioral

concerns within their children. Reports from a national survey in America indicated that 76% of adult men and 65% of adult women believe that spanking is sometimes necessary for a child (Child Trends, 2015). Similarly, an investigation of the use of spanking across the globe by Straus (2010) reported that at least 90% of parents in America had spanked their child at least once. Additionally, in a literature review of 36 years of published work, Chiocca (2017) found that such trends, regarding American parents' beliefs and use of spanking, have been consistent and are indicative of current attitudes and practices.

Some research has focused on comparing the use of physical discipline between groups, including ethnic groups. Numerous studies investigating the use of physical discipline among different ethnic groups indicated that Black American parents have utilized this form of discipline more frequently than their White American, Latino American, and Asian American counterparts (Berlin et al., 2009; Pew Research Center, 2015; Wissow, 2001). Of additional note is the overrepresentation of Black American families in the child welfare system (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016). Some of the disproportionate representation may be attributed to an unfavorable view of physical discipline and a desire to change social norms regarding its use among a majority of professionals who provide parental guidance on childrearing (Taylor, Fleckman, & Lee, 2017).

### **Outcomes of Spanking**

The use of spanking has generally been associated with the authoritarian parenting style, as defined by Baumrind (1967). According to Baumrind, authoritative parenting consists of reasoning with a child while respecting autonomy and exerting control without overuse of restrictions. Alternatively, authoritarian parenting was described by Baumrind as favoring forceful techniques to control behavior that is in opposition to what the parent desires.

Authoritarian parenting has been noted to include the use of physical discipline (Kaufman et al., 2000; Pezzella, Thornberry, & Smith, 2016). Research on the authoritarian parenting style, particularly the use of spanking, generally underscores the negative impact. The American Academy of Pediatrics (1998) reported that spanking did not serve as a better deterrent to undesirable behavior and recommended that parents be encouraged to use other forms of discipline to eliminate undesirable behaviors. In 2002, Gershoff conducted a meta-analysis highlighting the association between corporal punishment and both short- and long-term internalizing and externalizing concerns. In a follow-up literature review, Gershoff (2013) urged that we have a moral obligation to terminate the use of spanking because it is a form of violence that violates basic human rights. Further, Gershoff remarked that the parenting practice is ineffective in preventing recurring behavior and that when used solely, it does not teach desirable behaviors. The author also reported, according to her analysis, spanking increases the likelihood of children using aggression to obtain what they want from others, and it contributes to the use of such behavior in the future and across generations.

Grogan-Kaylor (2004) utilized stronger statistical controls (i.e., fixed-effects models) than most previous research to examine the effects of corporal punishment on antisocial behavior and found that both low and high levels of the use of corporal punishment are associated with White, Hispanic, and Black children's engagement in antisocial behavior (Grogan-Kaylor, 2004). Additionally, Gershoff and Grogan-Kaylor's (2016) collaborative work on a meta-analysis of 75 studies assessing the impact of spanking analyzed 17 possible adverse child outcomes and found 13 of the outcomes to be statistically significant. Some outcomes included aggression, antisocial behavior, externalizing and internalizing behaviors, low self-esteem, and lower cognitive abilities. Effect sizes for the findings of the 13 outcomes ranged from .15 to .64, or small to

moderate. The meta-analysis also investigated whether the adverse outcomes found in previous research were a result of the inclusion of harsher or abusive forms of physical discipline. Results indicated that both mild and harsh physical discipline are correlated with negative outcomes, and the findings have been similar for both longitudinal and cross-sectional studies (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016).

Even though the pattern of negative implications has been well researched and endorsed in the literature, some literature refutes the findings. In a reevaluation of the controversy around the use of physical punishment and the parenting styles, Baumrind (1996) argued that physical discipline is often incorporated in authoritative parenting, but it is also accompanied by explanation and support. She concluded that punishment, accompanied by support, can be a necessary component of discipline. Baumrind argued, “it is not the specific disciplinary practice but how it is administered and in what cultural context that determine its efficacy and long-term effect” (Baumrind, 1996, p. 405). Likewise, Larzelere, Sather, Schneider, Larson, and Pike (1998) found that the use of explanation and reasoning with a child in response to misbehavior was most effective when paired with punishment in previous incidents.

In Ferguson’s (2013) meta-analysis, he highlighted concerns that the use of statistical procedures in previous reviews of the spanking debate resulted in inflated effect sizes. Ferguson’s meta-analytic review of longitudinal studies found a significant relationship between physical discipline and adverse outcomes, but he reported that the effect sizes were found to be small, accounting for less than 1% of the variance in the adverse outcomes. This was particularly revealed when control for potential preexisting moderator variables was employed. Ferguson concluded that many studies indicate significant findings that are actually “trivial” and

recommended discussions of research suggesting adverse outcomes not be overstated beyond what the results actually communicate.

Similarly, Baumrind, Larzelere, and Cowan (2002) also argued that Gershoff's (2002) research, which has supported work toward developing social policy and blanket statements against the use of spanking, included some errors that warrant careful consideration before complete adherence to suggestions to ban its use. The authors asserted that the assessment of corporal punishment was too broad and included harsh, and even abusive, forms of physical punishment. The results were generalized to mild and moderate physical discipline and combined effect sizes from all of the studies, which inflated the overall effect size reported in the meta-analysis. Moreover, Baumrind et al. contended Gershoff's research has steered many in the direction of assuming a causal relationship between the use of spanking and adverse outcomes even though causal relationships cannot be confirmed from cross-sectional designs or without establishing a temporal sequence of the variables under consideration. Baumrind et al. reported that 58% of the studies included in Gershoff's meta-analysis were cross-sectional.

Additionally, some of the studies had a shared method variance, in which independent raters to obtain information about parenting style and children's behaviors had not been used, thereby inflating effect sizes and distorting interpretations. Interestingly, the authors also reported that many of the studies included in the meta-analysis indicated more negative outcomes for young children who had experienced other forms of discipline, such as time-out. This could suggest that all forms of discipline are harmful to children, but consideration of other variables that may have contributed to the findings must also be considered for all of the studies. Finally, Baumrind et al. also noted the limitations of Gershoff's analysis to investigate distinctions, such as differences in outcomes by ethnicity, because many of the studies included

in the analysis did not investigate ethnic minorities alone or parcel out results based on ethnic identity.

### **Outcomes for Black American Children**

Different findings of child outcomes have often been researched broadly. However, some extant research indicated racial and ethnic differences in the outcomes of children who are spanked, questioning the role of physical discipline within the cultural context of the family and whether conclusions about outcomes are appropriate for populations other than White, middle-class Americans. Research by Deater-Deckard, Dodge, Bates, and Pettit (1996) conducted with children between the ages of 5 and 9, found that while physical discipline was utilized more with Black children, particularly those reared in low socioeconomic status (SES), single-mother homes, measures of externalizing behavior were not as high as those for White children. In contrast, physical discipline was associated with lower aggression and other externalizing behaviors in Black children based on parent, teacher, and peer nomination reports. Polaha, Larzelere, Shapiro, and Pettit (2004) also investigated differences in externalizing behavior between Black and White children exposed to spanking, but they also explored whether reports for parent and teacher differed and whether there were differences in behavior by the gender of the children. Results indicated that there were differences, with Black children rated as displaying less externalizing behavior by teachers; however, parent reports did not show the difference. Additionally, findings for the investigation of gender held only for Black boys. Each of these findings was stable when SES was controlled.

In 2004, Lansford, Deater-Deckard, Dodge, Bates, and Pettit sought to expand the findings of Deater-Deckard, Dodge, Bates, and Pettit (1996) utilizing the same sample but examining behavioral outcomes of the children when they were adolescents. The results of their

hierarchical regression analysis indicated, similar to other findings, Black mothers reported higher levels of physical discipline than White mothers did. Correlations showed statistically significant positive associations between physical discipline and adolescent problem behavior for White adolescents but nonsignificant or negative associations between physical discipline and problem behavior in Black adolescents. These findings were true for boys and girls and when factors such as SES, neighborhood safety, parental marital status, and child temperament were controlled. Lansford et al. suggested that different parenting styles may be adaptive for different ethnic groups and the parent's socialization goals, with Black parents possibly viewing spanking as an effective way of meeting their goals and Black children subsequently viewing spanking as a legitimate parenting practice. The authors proposed that Black children may attach a different meaning to spanking than their White counterparts. Lansford et al. suggested that White adolescents may have demonstrated more externalizing behavior because their parents reported less use of physical discipline. For the White adolescents, escalations in the use of externalizing behavior over time may have been in reaction to experiencing an unfamiliar spanking as the parent being out of control and rejecting. In an additional study by Gunnoe and Mariner (1997), the primary effects resulting from their analysis suggest that spanking deters fighting behavior in younger children and Black children but increases the likelihood of fighting behavior in older children and White children.

Many researchers have acknowledged that operationalizing corporal punishment has been problematic in findings explicating outcomes, and enough attention has not been given to different types or the severity of corporal punishment. Lapré and Marsee (2016) investigated youth outcomes depending on the severity of the corporal punishment used and found that severe forms of corporal punishment and the combination of both mild and severe forms (e.g., hitting or

hitting with an object combined with spanking) were positively correlated with delinquent behavior and the use of aggression for White American youths but not for Black American youths.

Last, although a considerable amount of research has investigated outcomes on children spanked when they are older (i.e., three years of age or older), fewer studies have examined effects on children who receive spankings when they are younger than two years of age. Slade and Wissow (2004) performed research with toddlers and found that White children who were spanked at a young age displayed more behavior problems requiring parent-teacher conferences when the child entered school than Black children who were spanked at a young age. Both groups of mothers rated their children as having more behavior problems on a behavior rating scale, but the results for Black children were not statistically significant.

### **Moderating Variables Examined in the Literature**

**Maternal warmth.** Disagreements regarding the outcomes of spanking, particularly among different ethnic groups, have stimulated interest in understanding variables that may moderate the differences. One such variable is the parental factor of maternal warmth. McLoyd and Smith's (2002) longitudinal investigation examined the relationships among spanking, behavior problems, and maternal warmth over six years for Black, White, and Hispanic mother and child dyads. Results indicated that children who were spanked from each ethnic group displayed increases in behavior problems over time; yet, Black children who were spanked displayed less of an increase in behavior problems but not at a statistically significant level. When the maternal support variable was entered into their analysis, the results indicated that for all children who experienced spanking, maternal emotional support moderated the impact of spanking with its use associated with very little increase in problem behavior over time. A

disadvantage of this study was the lack of multiple respondents to gather information regarding child behavior. Many other studies have used reports from parents, teachers, peers, and children themselves, but the account of behavior within this investigation was solely based on the mothers' reports.

**Parental endorsement.** Another parental factor investigated as a possible moderating variable is parental endorsement of the use of spanking, with different studies yielding disparate results. Coley, Kull, and Carrano (2014) found that maternal endorsement of spanking only resulted in short-term decreases in young children's internalizing problems, but over time, parental endorsement did not moderate internalizing or externalizing behaviors in a sample consisting of only Black American and Hispanic youths. However, it should be noted that the sample used by Coley et al. was only representative of low-income families.

Conversely, the findings of McLoyd et al., (2007) differed. The authors also investigated parental endorsement, but they placed emphasis on the cultural context by using a sample consisting of only Black American families, which was pooled from data of a nationally representative sample culminated for the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, to highlight within-group heterogeneity and assess the impact of parental attitude regarding spanking. McLoyd et al. speculated that African American parental endorsement of physical discipline would serve as a moderator of child outcomes. The assumption was that mothers who did not endorse spanking used it as a disciplinary strategy because of psychological distress, which impeded the ability to utilize a disciplinary strategy more reflective of their beliefs. The authors presumed that spanking from non-endorsing mothers would be more likely to involve an impulsive display of anger and hostility, which is perceived by the child in a manner rendering the child helpless and depressed, therefore, indicative of internalizing symptoms. Results indicated that maternal

psychological distress was related to the frequency of physical discipline, and the relationship was stronger for mothers who did not endorse the use of spanking.

The analysis also revealed that physical discipline was associated with depressive symptoms in children, with slightly higher levels found in girls and younger children in the sample. McLoyd et al. reported that this effect was stronger for children of parents who did not endorse the use of physical discipline but used it with their children. The authors concluded these results imply that the endorsement of physical discipline by Black mothers moderates child outcomes such that mothers who endorse its use may be more likely to engage in spanking accompanied with warmth and reasoning with the child (McLoyd et al., 2007), which is an assumption mirrored in the work of Lansford et al. (2004) as well as in Baumrind's (1996) reevaluation of discipline styles.

**Cultural normality.** Further investigation of variables that moderate the relationship between spanking and outcomes, that also considers the cultural context, has considered parenting practices in other countries. Gershoff (2002) acknowledged that socio-cultural context might play a moderating role in responses to physical discipline because when its use is accepted and expected, children come to view it as normative and beneficial. Lansford et al. (2005) investigated the moderating effect of culture, hypothesizing that parents from countries where spanking is perceived as the norm would engage in more spanking without adverse outcomes found in children. Findings revealed in all of the countries included in the sample, children who experienced frequent physical discipline had higher rates of anxiety, but the rates were lower for children in countries where spanking was perceived as the norm (Lansford et al., 2005). Lansford et al. suggested that children in these countries may be more likely to interpret a spanking as a controlled form of discipline that is expected, loving, and supportive. In

Baumrind's (1996) acknowledgment of the cultural context, she noted that differences in outcomes of children exposed to spanking often reflect "culturally-specific adaptive solutions" to reach childrearing goals in particular environments. As an example, Baumrind explained Chinese culture has some features comparable with the authoritarian parenting style; yet, when viewed from an emic perspective, the correlation with the style of parenting with high achievement in children can be seen and understood.

Moreover, paralleling the seminal contentions of Ogbu (1981), who proposed a cultural-ecological model for understanding parenting practices, Gunnoe and Mariner (1997) contended that findings from their analysis implicated the need to consider a developmental and contextual approach for understanding findings related to outcomes that are different for Black youths. A contextual approach takes into consideration the meanings children ascribe to the experience of spanking, which is often a function of cultural norms and may have a significant impact on later functioning. As such, the findings related to cultural normality suggest that there are factors that may be inherent within some cultures that are protective and influence how children respond to physical discipline. Within the cultural context of Black American families, more attention has been given to the task that parents, or other caregivers, have in protecting their children and rearing them in a manner that increases the likelihood of survival encompassed with physical and emotional health, a process also known as racial socialization (Stevenson, 1994a).

### **Racial Socialization in Black American Families**

Many definitions of racial socialization have been proposed. An early definition provided by Rotheram and Phinney (as cited in Stevenson, 1994a) explained the notion of ethnic socialization as "developmental processes by which children acquire the behaviors, perceptions, values, and attitudes of an ethnic group, and come to see themselves and others as members of

such groups” (p. 191). Stevenson (1998) offered a distinction between ethnic socialization and racial socialization by clarifying that the latter refers to communication about one’s physical appearance as a Black person in American society, which is often the direct source of prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory behaviors. Research conducted by Lesane-Brown, Brown, Tanner-Smith, and Bruce (2010) concluded that parents from racial minority groups in the United States are more likely to engage in racial socialization practices, which the authors attributed to the privileges experienced by the dominant White culture allowing for the removal of the necessity of the dominant culture to communicate how cultural factors impact their experiences. Furthermore, Caughy, O’Campo, Randolph, and Nickerson (2002) emphasized racial socialization as a routine practice in most Black American families. Lesane-Brown (2006) suggested the process assists Black American children with understanding their cultural heritage and their position as a “low-status racial group” in American society while preparing them for success despite bias and adversity. As such, another definition provided by Peters (as cited in Stevenson, 1994a) describes the racial socialization process as “the tasks Black parents share with all parents—providing for and raising children . . . but include the responsibility of raising physically and emotionally healthy children who are Black in a society in which being Black has negative connotations” (p. 191).

Stevenson (1994a) asserted that the common thread in the variety of definitions explains the actions taken by Black American families to instill pride in their culture and to protect their children from the impact of racism. Within Black American families, racial socialization has also been defined as:

the primary vehicle of cultural transmission for African American families, steeped in a tradition of resistance to oppression and embedded in conversations and *actions*

[emphasis added] that communicate to our children how to survive with dignity and pride in a racist world. (Rodriguez, McKay, & Bannon, 2008, p. 2)

This conceptualization of racial socialization was used for the purposes of this review, as it provided the best fit for the variable under examination.

### **Research on Black American Parenting and Discipline**

Gaskin (2015) summarized research on racial socialization and asserted that findings suggest it is a strength that contributes to psychological well-being and the ability of youths who receive such messages to have better outcomes than those who do not. The strength of racial socialization practices for Black Americans is a relatively new area of research, but in general, the history of the study of Black families in America has not always noted their strengths. The study of the Black American family can be traced back to the institution of slavery when most families were separated as members were auctioned and sold to other owners and plantations. As slaves lost touch with their families of origin, many found ways to restructure their social institutions, which included the use of the kin network who often took on responsibility regardless of the familial bloodline (Azevedo, 1993). The kin network, regarded with fondness and respect, is noted to have resembled West African notions regarding the importance of elders, extended family, and the responsibility of the collective community, to care for the young and old (Scannapieco & Jackson, 1996). Toward the end of slavery, many parents sought to regain ties and custody of taken children, which presented a great challenge and was often met with no success (Hill, 2001).

Most empirical research began in the 1930s; however, these investigations utilized comparative methodologies that insinuated deficits within the Black family and implied inadequate abilities of Black parents to rear children, which was determined based on White,

middle-class practices and values (Hill, 2001). Looking forward to the civil rights era of the 1960s, demand was on the American government and researchers to better understand the position of Black Americans, and as a result, the Black family became a major focus of modest bodies of research (Azevedo, 1993). The U.S. Department of Labor (1965) produced a landmark publication by sociologist Daniel Moynihan explaining why there was a breakdown in the Black American family. Blame was placed on single-parent, female-led households, and further research on how to improve the childrearing practices of Black American mothers with the development of programs and policies to support the improvement of the Black American family began (Peters, 2007).

Though many of the early investigations may have been well-intentioned and were often reflective of the zeitgeist at the time, some problems are worth noting. As has already been stated, the parenting practices under investigation were most often performed with low-income, single-parent families; yet, comparisons with White, middle-income families equated the differences with being lower in quality (McWayne, Mattis, Wright, Limlingan, & Harris, 2017). Additionally, Bradley (1998a) contended that much research on Black American families has supported a monolithic perspective in which generalizations liken all Black families as being the same.

Some recent studies on parenting practices in Black American families have portrayed a variety of trends. A recent investigation of the childrearing practices of Black American families from a diverse range of income levels showed that many disciplinary strategies were used, including spanking (Adkison-Bradley, Terpstra, & Dormitorio, 2014). The authors observed that strategies exist on a continuum, and the severity of parental disciplinary responses may be related to repeated behaviors by children with an increase in the firmness of the method with

recurring offenses. Trends also suggest the severity of the discipline method used is dependent on the age of the child and the circumstances of the misbehavior (Adkison-Bradley et al., 2014). Likewise, Bradley (1998a) also researched the disciplinary practices of Black American families from multiple, yet primarily middle-class, socioeconomic statuses and found a range of strategies to be used. Bradley reported that although the parenting practices of Black American parents have often been viewed as overly punitive, and even abusive, her research indicated nonphysical discipline forms were preferred, particularly for noncompliance deemed mild. Spanking was found to be used most often when authority was challenged, reflecting the importance of respecting kin and elders in Black culture and the importance of obeying authority in American society (Bradley, 1998a), which may be indicative of the role of racial socialization in the disciplinary practices of Black American families.

**Black American positive parenting practices.** To highlight the positive parenting practices within Black American families, McWayne et al. (2017) conducted interviews and focus groups to generate common themes associated with perceptions of positive parenting among low-income parents of young Black American children. Factor analyses were used to organize the information gathered and construct a meaningful measure, The Black Parenting Strengths in Context Scale (BPSC; McWayne et al., 2017). The authors generated a definition of positive parenting based on the participants' input as follows:

The use of a variety of behavioral strategies to ensure the development of children who are responsive, obedient, confident, and competent; who have a sense of enthusiasm and curiosity about the world; who are caring and appreciative of their connection and responsibility to others, and who have a sense of racial and cultural pride as well as an understanding of themselves as spiritual beings. (McWayne et al., 2017, p. 18)

Findings yielded a range of disciplinary practices as a part of positive parenting employed by Black American families from a low-income bracket, including physical punishment, among many others. Findings also identified five common factors that encompassed positive parenting: (a) fostering a connected and competent self, (b) Black cultural pride, (c) religious/spiritual practices and values, (d) involvement at school, and (e) behavioral guidance and responsiveness. These common factors highlight the importance of the use of specific discipline strategies and racial socialization among many Black American families.

### **The Impact of Racial Socialization on Black Americans**

Numerous scholars have indicated racial socialization as an essential and customary, positive parenting practice in Black American families (Brown, 2008; Hill, 2001; Hughes et al., 2006; Lesane-Brown, 2006; Peters, 2007; Pezzella et al., 2016; Stevenson, 1994a). Further, Neblett, Rivas-Drake, and Umaña-Taylor (2012) reviewed three racial/ethnic promotive and protective factors among ethnic minority youths and noted racial socialization among them. Racial socialization has been suggested to contribute to the positive development of Black American youths by contributing to confidence in one's worth and abilities, character building, a sense of connection with and caring for others, and the development of social, cognitive, vocational, and academic competence (Evans et al., 2012). With racial discrimination experienced by over half of the Black American population (National Public Radio, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, & Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health, 2017), such implications are of prime significance when considering the detrimental psychological and developmental outcomes of some Black American youths, which have been connected to being confronted with prejudicial racial attitudes and discriminatory experiences (Fisher & Shaw, 1999; Neblett, Philip, Cogburn, & Sellers, 2006; Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003). For

instance, Black American adolescents have been shown to demonstrate lower grades following experiences with racial discrimination (Neblett et al., 2006; Neblett, Chavous, Nguyễn, & Sellers, 2009). However, the general racial socialization behavior of Black American parents predicted the academic curiosity, persistence, and higher grade point average of adolescents who experienced discrimination (Neblett et al., 2006). The specific receipt of racial socialization messages from Black American parents has also been associated with academic ambition and better grades in adolescents (Neblett et al., 2009). While a large body of research has focused on the impact of racial socialization on teenagers, younger children have demonstrated positive academic outcomes. Racial socialization practices are found to be common among Black American parents of children as young as two years of age and are associated with increased academic abilities, including overall school readiness, better language skills, and behavioral competence (Caughy & Owen, 2015).

Preschool-aged children exposed to racial socialization have also demonstrated fewer behavioral problems (Caughy et al., 2002), and the impact on behavior can also be seen in adolescents. Rodriguez et al. (2008) assessed the impact of racial socialization practices, combined with other parenting practices, on behavior problems in school-age and adolescent children. Results indicated, when coupled with parents' self-reported disciplinary effectiveness, racial socialization practices, particularly spiritual/religious coping, were associated with fewer problematic behaviors. The authors also found that other parental racial socialization practices, such as cultural pride reinforcement, extended family caring, and racism awareness teaching, also impacted children's behaviors. Conversely, parents reporting the lowest engagement in racial socialization practices reported the highest levels of problematic behaviors in their children. Rodriguez et al. concluded that racial socialization practices, paired with general

parenting practices, contributed to a reduction of problematic behaviors in Black American children, and little or no racial socialization may contribute to an increase in negative consequences. Likewise, DeGruy, Kjellstrand, Briggs, and Brennan (2012) also obtained results suggesting both racial respect and racial socialization as buffers between Black male adolescents who witnessed violence and a propensity to engage in its use. The Black American youths included in the study who had witnessed high levels of violence demonstrated less ferocity when they possessed high levels of racial respect. Similar results, though not at a level of statistical significance, were attained for the racial socialization variable, which the authors attributed to a small sample size.

**Protective qualities of racial socialization.** The protective nature of racial socialization processes on the outcomes mentioned above is indicative of its impact on the general mental health and psychological adjustment of Black Americans. Stevenson (1994a) asserted that the processes are essential to the psychological health of Black Americans, and Lesane-Brown (2006) contended that many researchers have found racial socialization as a moderator between the experience of racial prejudice and discrimination among Black Americans and healthy psychological functioning. These findings are of critical importance since a vast majority of Black American youths indicate perceptions of being the target of racism and discriminatory experiences (Pachter, Bernstein, Szalacha, & García Coll, 2010). Nevertheless, in Black American adolescents, greater exposure to racial socialization messages was found to be associated with lower levels of depression, less perceived stress, and less engagement in problematic behaviors providing further evidence of its ability to serve as a buffer against discriminatory experiences (Neblett et al., 2008). Anderson, Jones, Anyiwo, McKenny, and Gaylord-Harden (2019) suggested that parental racial socialization with children as young as

eight years of age can enhance their use of an engagement style of coping with stressors, which is a style associated with lower internalizing psychological symptoms. Moreover, correlational data obtained from a sample of young adult Black Americans indicated that racial socialization experiences within the family moderate the relationship between perceiving experiences with racial discrimination and poor mental health outcomes (Fisher & Shaw, 1999).

The research demonstrating the positive impact of racial socialization on academic and behavioral competence and psychological adjustment reveals its ability to support resistance to negative outcomes; hence, the overall resilience in Black Americans. Some research has suggested a direct connection, with racial socialization being found to contribute to resilience as Black Americans develop into young adults. There is some indication that social support, coupled with exposure to cultural pride racial socialization, is associated with higher levels of resilience (Brown, 2008). In an additional examination of the impact of racial socialization on resilience in young adults, Brown and Tylka (2011) found within a sample of students at a midwestern university, those who endorsed more experiences with racial discrimination and indicated having received a higher number of racial socialization messages related to developing an appreciation of one's cultural legacy also received significantly higher resilience scores than those reporting a lower number of racial socialization messages. A more specific investigation of resilience details prospective mechanisms by which racial socialization serves as a process of stress reduction for Black American youths who have experienced racial discrimination, which may reduce the likelihood of substance use to cope with the associated feelings of inferiority, depression, and anxiety (Neblett, Terzian, & Harriott, 2010).

## **Purpose of Study**

In consideration of the profusion of literature accentuating the protective nature of racial socialization, Anderson and Stevenson (2019) proposed a theory in which racial socialization practices were suggested to be a mechanism that enhanced the racial literacy of Black Americans, enriching the ability to engage in racial coping by allowing one to competently decode, appraise, and efficaciously resolve discriminatory experiences, thereby, reducing the associated stress and long-term impact.

In sum, a large body of research on racial socialization provides support for its importance in the role of Black American parents preparing their children for life in American society and many other outcomes on youths. Stevenson, Davis, and Abdul-Kabir (2001) proposed that racial socialization practices are an essential component of discipline within Black American families. Therefore, it may be an important variable to consider as a factor that moderates the more positive outcomes found in Black American children who are spanked. There has been research investigating the role of racial socialization in youths who have experienced authoritarian parenting (Pezzella, 2010), but to this author's knowledge, none has specifically considered the use of spanking. In consideration of racial socialization and spanking, this present literature review was performed to answer three research questions that have been formulated: (a) What methods do Black American families utilize when implementing racial socialization with their children? (b) Does spanking serve as a protective factor for Black American children? (c) Is there an association between spanking and racial socialization?

## **CHAPTER II: METHODS OF RACIAL SOCIALIZATION IN BLACK AMERICAN FAMILIES**

The specific practices Black American parents utilize are varied, and ample inquiry has been employed to define how parents instill racial socialization in children. One of the earlier investigations into racial socialization described the “triple quandary” that Black American parents must grapple with in the rearing of their children. Boykin and Toms (as cited in Rodriguez et al., 2008) explained these three components: the perplexity of promoting cultural pride, adequately preparing children to thrive in mainstream society, while also assisting children with learning how to manage and cope with the racism and discrimination prevalent in that society.

### **Racial Socialization Categories**

Additional recent investigations have added more precise classifications of the patterns. Hughes and Chen (1997) named three practices that seemed to parallel the elements noted by Boykin and Toms and have consistently been referred to in the literature: cultural socialization, promotion of racial mistrust, and preparation for bias. Cultural socialization is defined as “parental practices that teach children about their racial or ethnic heritage and history; that promote cultural customs and traditions; and that promote children’s cultural, racial, and ethnic pride, either deliberately or implicitly” (Hughes et al., 2006, p. 749). Examples of cultural socialization practices include teaching children about cultural traditions and prominent historical figures who have impacted the culture, providing access to artifacts, music, and books, celebrating cultural holidays, and eating foods that are specific to the culture (Hughes et al., 2006; Lesane-Brown, 2006). Cultural socialization messages have been indicated as being prevalent among most Black American parents with children of all ages (Hughes & Chen, 1997).

Practices related to the promotion of racial mistrust suggest the need to be suspicious and cautious of encounters with other racial groups and to be informed about factors that may impede success (Hughes et al., 2006). Hughes et al. (2006) suggested parents rarely endorse this form of racial socialization, and research suggests its use is associated with negative outcomes, such as heightened anger expression, poor cognitive performance, higher rates of delinquency, and compromised self-efficacy (Caughy et al., 2002). Alternatively, the practices seem closely related to the concept *cultural paranoia*, which is characterized by suspicion and mistrust of the majority culture and is described as a healthy and adaptive mechanism used by many Black Americans, which aids in survival and protection against the psychological harm associated with racism and discrimination (Grier & Cobbs, as cited in Sue & Sue, 2016). While limited research has been performed to fully understand the promotion of racial mistrust as a racial socialization practice, there is research highlighting it as a vital factor in the psychological health of Black Americans that must be taken into consideration in the provision of psychological services (Whaley, 2001).

Similar to the promotion of racial mistrust is preparation for bias practices, which are those that prepare children for encounters with racial discrimination and prejudice and how to cope with it (Hughes et al., 2006; Lesane-Brown, 2006). Burt, Simons, and Gibbons (2012) explained:

preparation for bias reflects, at least in part, the translation of social experiences into proactive child socialization practices, a process that involves caregivers anticipating their children's exposure to analogous social situations and explicating strategies to enhance their children's capacity to interpret, respond, and cope with them. (p. 655)

Hughes et al. (2006) distinguished these practices from the promotion of mistrust by their inclusion of ways to cope with the harmful encounters. Hughes et al. indicated that a majority of ethnic minority parents engage in preparation for bias practices, and some studies (Hughes & Chen, 1997; Neblett et al., 2008) noted that this practice is generally used with older children who may be at a cognitive level rendering them more likely to understand issues related to racism and discrimination. However, Caughy and Owen (2015) suggested that future research further examine how all racial socialization strategies evolve across development and how they may vary between genders. Preparation for bias has also been observed to be often used reactively and in response to parental concern about child safety, which at times, is prompted by the child's experience of a discriminatory racial encounter (Anderson & Stevenson, 2019).

Additional inquiries into racial socialization practices have noted other categories that have initiated further research. Stevenson (1994b) added to the three predominantly studied components highlighted above with his development of the Scale of Racial Socialization for Adolescents (SORS-A; Stevenson, 1994b), a scale developed to measure the degree of racial socialization in teenagers. Factor analysis identified four factors of racial socialization, including, spiritual and religious coping, extended family caring, cultural pride reinforcement, and racism awareness teaching, which all may be other classifications of racial socialization practices to consider. Stevenson explained racism awareness teaching as straightforward practices that prepare children for the attitudes and behaviors they will likely face in American society to promote caution and effectual preparation for experiences with racism and discrimination.

Another racial socialization practice explained in the literature is egalitarianism, which refers to practices that communicate the importance of individual characteristics as well as an

appreciation for the commonalities that all people share opposed to focusing on minority status (Evans et al., 2012; Hughes et al., 2006). Such practices have been related to an additional racial socialization category, silence about race, which Hughes et al. (2006) stated is a factor not generally examined in the research, but its use provides communication to children about race and its impact in our society.

### **Racial Socialization Dimensions**

Each of the components of racial socialization reported above can be assessed on two dimensions (Lesane-Brown, 2006). The dimension of expression refers to either verbal or nonverbal communication of messages, whereas the dimension of intent distinguishes whether parents deliberately provide a racial socialization message with a particular purpose in mind or inadvertently provide the message through a passive or implicit means. Stevenson (1998) provided additional dimensions and explained how the content of racial socialization messages can be proactive or protective. Proactive content focuses on instilling cultural empowerment in Black American youths, whereas protective content focuses on having an awareness of the impact of external oppression and helping youths cope with it (Stevenson, 1998). Stevenson (1994b) explained that protective messages align with a reactive model of African American culture in which Black Americans view oppression as a source of motivation, and widespread opinions about being Black in American society are rejected. Stevenson's racial socialization factor, racism awareness teaching, is categorized as a form of protective messages. The racism awareness teaching factor aligns with the preparation for bias practices noted in the larger body of research. With this in mind, it seems that preparation for bias strategies may be a way for Black American parents to protect their children from the harm they may encounter in the broader American society. These strategies may help youths understand the barriers and

consequences they will encounter as a result of societal biases. As such, spanking may be a preparation for bias racial socialization strategy and a reactive response used by Black American parents to help their children understand that there are harsher reprimands and punishments they will receive for their choices based on the color of their skin. Spanking may be used as a protective, nonverbal mechanism with the explicit intent of accentuating the goal that Black American parents have in safeguarding their children from the negative experiences they will likely face because of their race in American society.

### **CHAPTER III: SPANKING AS A PROTECTIVE FACTOR FOR BLACK AMERICAN CHILDREN**

A qualitative investigation (Brodsky & DeVet, 2000) into the parenting objectives and strategies of poor, single, Black American mothers of adolescent females revealed goals that included protecting children from current harm and attempting to prevent future harm. Strategies used to reach these goals were varied, yet included spending quality time together, engaging in two-way communication with children, removal of privileges, grounding, threatening, and the use of spanking. In particular, spanking was used to correct current misbehavior as a means of protection and prevention. The following contention can sum the urgency of the mothers' desires to protect their children from the consequences of multiple risks (i.e., being Black, poor, reared in a single-parent home) by using discipline strategies such as threats and spanking:

Current risks, such as random violence, combined with future threats, such as involvement with negative peers, and pregnancy, kept these parents ever wary. In addition, there was the fear that the stress or distraction of either of these risks could keep their children from striving to reach their full potential in school and in life. Preventing current harm and protecting from future harm was as immediate and perhaps even more frightening than confronting current misbehavior for these parents. . . . the immediate stimulus may have been a current behavior, but this exceptional response was motivated by fear of the future. (Brodsky & DeVet, 2000, p. 175)

Brodsky and DeVet (2000) asserted that the multiple planned strategies used by the mothers included in the study were demonstrative of their resilience and recommended that future research move beyond simple inquiries about whether parents use spanking into

understanding the variety of strategies used and better clarification of the goals and motives behind the selection of strategies implemented.

### **The Protective Pathway of Racial Socialization**

Neblett et al. (2010) described a pathway detailing how different racial socialization approaches, which include preparation for bias practices, assist in the development of adaptive coping and reduce the likelihood of engagement in maladaptive behaviors to deal with the impacts of prejudice and discrimination. In accordance with strain theory (Cloward & Ohlin as cited in Unnever, Cullen, Mathers, McClure, & Allison, 2009) such experiences may lead Black American youths to feel a sense of despair and a greater proclivity to reject the expectations of mainstream society and engage in oppositional, delinquent behaviors as they age into adolescence (Unnever et al., 2009). In a specific investigation of the impact of racial discrimination and racial socialization on criminal behavior, Burt et al. (2012) explained the impact of racial discrimination on Black American adolescent males' involvement in delinquency and the potential of racial socialization practices to contribute to resilience to the criminogenic effects of discrimination. Results indicated that parental practices related to cultural socialization were effective but did not have as strong of a buffering effect as preparation for bias practices.

**Protection of racial socialization within parenting style.** There has been difficulty locating research explicitly related to the use of spanking as a protective factor, but research related to the authoritarian parenting style suggests this style of parenting is not protective. Pezzella et al. (2016) hypothesized that the authoritarian parenting style, which has historically included the use of spanking (Kaufman et al., 2000), serves as a protective racial socialization mechanism. The authors discussed the use of authoritarian parenting by Black American parents

as a means to protect their children from social contexts that place them at an elevated risk. In their investigation, the researchers used the Rochester Youth Development Study data to research three hypotheses related to high- and low-risk Black and White adolescent males' participation in delinquency dependent on authoritarian or authoritative parenting. Although the results indicated that authoritative parenting had a statistically significant negative correlation with delinquency for both White and Black youths, there was a more robust negative correlation for White youths. The results of their research did not show a negative correlation between authoritarian parenting and Black youths' participation in delinquency; therefore, the hypotheses were not supported, and authoritative parenting was associated with more favorable outcomes for each group.

One interesting note among findings from the Burt et al. (2012) investigation, noted above, found that preparation for bias was associated with increased hostile views of relationships, which is noted to be a result of racial discrimination and a mechanism that increases the likelihood of engagement in delinquency. Supplementary analyses performed indicated that increased hostility was more likely when there was a lack of warm, supportive parenting and when not accompanied by cultural socialization practices. The authors characterized warm, supportive parenting as authoritative, but no specifics were provided to precisely describe what the parenting looks like, specifically whether it includes physical discipline within experiences of parental warmth, which was noted by Baumrind (1996) as often included in the authoritative parenting style. Burt et al. commented that there are aspects of the parent-child relationship and parenting that have not been captured but may be a part of the preparation for bias practices, and they recommend future research stipulates specific practices and conditions. With consideration of this note, preparation for bias practices, which may

include the use of spanking, may serve as a protective racial socialization mechanism for Black American youths.

Of additional note, even though research detailing spanking as a protective factor was ambiguously identified, remarks by Stevenson (1998) should be taken into consideration. If spanking is a part of the preparation for bias component of racial socialization, which seems to be further described by Stevenson as racism awareness teaching, he explained that such tactics alone, which are protective, may not be linked to better outcomes because of society's tendency to deny the intolerance of differences. Therefore, a perspective that acknowledges the reality of the experience of oppression and bias and the need to be cautious and distrustful seems irrelevant and even pathological rather than healthy and protective.

## **CHAPTER IV: EXAMINING THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN SPANKING AND RACIAL SOCIALIZATION**

Although the authoritative parenting style has historically been noted as the more effective parenting typology (Baumrind, 1967), some research suggests authoritarian parenting as an effective racial socialization strategy among ethnic minorities in America (Baumrind, 1972; Chao, 1994; Lin & Fu, 1990). Lin and Fu's (1990) examination of parenting within Chinese culture found that both native Chinese and Chinese immigrant parents scored higher on both parental control and emphasizing academic achievement than their White American counterparts. The authors postulated that such differences reflect traditional Chinese values based on Confucian principles that stress the importance of obedience to parents, strict discipline, and educational achievement. Within American society, such parenting strategies may instill in children personal advancement and respect that can assist in overcoming discrimination.

Chao (1994) suggested that Baumrind's (1967) parenting styles are ethnocentric and may not be relevant to parenting within Asian cultures. Results from Chao's analysis indicated that Chinese American mothers scored higher not only on measures of authoritarian parenting than White American mothers, but they also scored higher on concepts related to Chinese childrearing principles, which have positive meanings and emphasize the importance of training and governing over a child with caring, concern, and involvement. Chao explained that these notions are not a part of the conceptualization of the authoritarian parenting style, which is most relevant to the historical, sociocultural values of White Americans. Rather, the Chinese childrearing principles make important contributions to school success, a primary parenting goal in Chinese culture that aligns with the Confucian principles that have impacted the culture.

Additionally, Baumrind (1972) was able to acknowledge that the authoritarian style of parenting, which emphasizes adherence to set standards of conduct through the use of power-assertive strategies derived from a parent-centered viewpoint, and is often attributed to Black American parents and seen as problematic and requiring correction, had been surmised from White, middle-class perspectives. However, when the cultural context and socialization goals of Black parents were taken into consideration, it was found that Black preschool girls demonstrated favorable behavior, which Baumrind described as “instrumentally competent” (p. 266). As noted earlier, it is also important to consider that Baumrind (1996) reexamined the parenting styles and acknowledged that the authoritative parenting style can include the use of spanking. Correspondingly, in an initial description of the parenting styles, authoritative parenting was likened to the demeanor of a Montessori-style teacher “who is controlled and is ready to assume an authoritarian role if it is necessary” (Rambusch as cited in Baumrind, 1966, p. 891). This remark underscores the interchangeable nature of parenting strategies based on the needs presented by the context and the goals of the parent. Baumrind (1966) also asserted that the negative consequences of an authoritarian style of parenting are not equated with mild forms of punishment, such as spanking, which actually may be beneficial to the child and helpful in accomplishing parenting goals when administered by a parent who is warm and loved by the child. Finally, Walker-Barnes and Mason (2001) highlighted the effectiveness of features of the authoritarian style of parenting in decreasing involvement in gangs and participation in gang delinquency with Black American youths and concluded that ethnic differences in parenting style must be taken into consideration to have a copious understanding of the impact. Baumrind (1966) also concluded that the impact of parenting behaviors must be understood based on the characteristics of the subgroup for which they are being analyzed.

## **The Role of Discipline in Socialization**

Adkison-Bradley (2011) contended the role of parents is to socialize their children, which includes providing guidance about how to behave acceptably in society, for which discipline is a vehicle. Thomas and Dettlaff's (2011) review highlighted literature that also alludes to the use of discipline within Black American families as an imperative socialization practice that assists Black parents in preparing their children for the life they will face in a country saturated with institutional racism. Furthermore, Ispa and Halgunseth's (2004) qualitative research, performed with a group of low-income Black American mothers, indicated that from an ecological perspective, the influence of issues such as culture and racism may require the use of a stricter form of discipline to correct misbehavior immediately when it occurs. Accordingly, Ispa and Halgunseth explained that the use of spanking by the participants in their study displayed a vigilant, child-centered approach to discipline where worry and concern about the future implications of not gaining control of behavior could have detrimental consequences. Current application of such assertions could relate to concerns about future involvement in delinquent activity or being placed in situations in which the bias against Black Americans, which has become more readily witnessed and reported, may be enacted. Therefore, spanking can be interpreted as Black American parents' attempts to socialize and prepare children for societal bias and ensure survival and success by adhering to obedience.

Bradley's (1998b) remarks shed light on the dearth of research on the use of spanking in Black American families. Bradley commented on the difficulty of locating empirical research that included the work of African American scholars related to child discipline, which she asserted has left the voice of experts on discipline in Black American families unheard and has resulted in the comparative studies that have equated the discipline in Black families as being

less desirable. In Bradley's review of empirical investigations of discipline within Black families, performed exclusively by Black American scholars, she included Boyd-Franklin (as cited in Bradley, 1998b) who explained that strict discipline practices, such as the use of spanking, have a role in protecting children from minimal tolerance for any margin of error for Black youths in American society.

### **Linking Spanking and the Racial Socialization Category Preparation for Bias**

Last, in a qualitative study performed by Denby and Alford (1996), in-depth interviews and face-to-face interactions with Black families yielded findings demonstrating different types of discipline strategies, including spanking, and different goals for the use of discipline strategies. Denby and Alford reported the primary goals the parents had were to teach children to respect authority, to follow rules, not be defiant, and accept consequences. The authors described these goals as parents' attempts to protect and socialize their children to function in a mainstream society where discrimination and bias are prevalent.

Both Denby and Alford's findings and Bradley's summary seem to align with Stevenson's (1998) classification of racism awareness teaching as a protective belief that helps Black American youths understand the racial hostility in our society, to be cautious in the ways they navigate life, and to push toward success despite biases against them. Findings from all the research seemed to demonstrate a link between spanking and racial socialization, particularly preparation for bias.

## **CHAPTER V: CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

While there has been an abundance of research seeking to explain the most advantageous characteristics of parenting, and many findings suggest negative consequences of the authoritarian parenting style and spanking, which has most often been attributed to Black American parents (Baumrind, 1972; Deater-Deckard, Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 1996), this review fills a gap in the literature in terms of considering the use of spanking as a racial socialization strategy used by Black American parents to protect Black American children.

To date, there is no known established theory of racial socialization that both thoroughly explains its components and elucidates the precise mechanisms of its processes. Nonetheless, existing literature illustrates its protective nature and its moderating effects on many variables related to the experiences of Black Americans and outcomes. The three racial socialization practices (i.e., cultural socialization, promotion of racial mistrust, and preparation for bias) identified in most of the literature each seem to contribute to resilience in Black Americans.

For many Black American families, the use of racial socialization strategies is a vital component of raising children to be proud, successful, and safe in an environment that often operates counter to these goals. Racial socialization practices can take many forms and can be a part of the discipline practices that teach children expectations and guide behavior in the desired direction. Spanking as a form of discipline within Black American families may be used as a preparation for bias strategy. While some research has suggested that preparation for bias strategies can be related to more hostile views, which can prompt externalizing behaviors (Burt et al., 2012), consideration must also be given to the possibility that such reactions may be in response to the reality of clearly understanding the position in American society. The resulting distress can prompt an angry response when faced with a lack of access to resources and in

response to consistent experience with bias, which can feel impossible to overcome. Some research suggests that experiences with racial discrimination and bias can even disrupt hypothalamic pituitary-adrenal axis functions, which can result in an exaggerated fight or flight response and dysregulate mood and emotions as well as bodily control responses to stress (Hope, Hoggard, & Thomas, 2015). The impact of racial trauma can also be internalized and later manifest in angry outbursts that society and the child do not understand. However, the researchers also allude to the potential of parental support to buffer these harmful effects. The support provided by parents may include racial socialization, including disciplinary practices that are adaptive and contribute to a healthy perspective on how to navigate life as a Black American in American society. Racial socialization helps children understand that the responsibility of racial hostility does not lie within themselves and that they do not have to be subject to the negative psychological consequences, which allows them to define their racial selves (Stevenson et al., 2001).

### **Limitations**

The literature included in this review has been used to support the proposed premise, but many limitations have been noted as the studies have been examined. Each of these limitations should be considered an avenue to explore for future research. One of the first limitations noted has been the issue of defining what is meant by a spanking. This author chose a definition from the literature that best captured the act of discipline intended to be examined for the purposes of this review. However, many of the studies used did not always focus solely on spanking as defined. In her review of literature on the use of physical punishment, Hicks-Pass (2009) also recognized that definitions are too broad, making it challenging to discern outcomes for milder forms of physical discipline from harsher forms of child maltreatment. This debate can be

difficult to disentangle, as many professionals consider any form of corporal punishment to be maltreatment while others note benefits, but conclusions are difficult to discern when a clear definition is not identified. The cultural component of how spanking is defined is also an issue worth exploring further. For many Black American families, spanking is a necessary component of childrearing clearly delineated from abuse (Mosby, Rawls, Meehan, Mays, & Pettinari, 1999). Ispa and Halgunseth (2004) underscored differences in the vocabulary used by Black American parents to describe the act of spanking. Such variations in terminology can lead to misinterpretations of the severity of discipline by professionals, which can have devastating consequences such as unwarranted child welfare referrals and increased risk of child removal from the home at worst.

Most of the literature incorporated within this review had a focus on low-income families, but more consideration must be given to families from other socioeconomic classes. Tamis-LeMonda, Briggs, McClowry, and Snow (2008) also highlighted this limitation along with several other methodological errors that present challenges to studying Black American families and present a hindrance to understanding outcomes. The authors noted that other family constellations must also be included in future research (e.g., two-parent families, families headed by grandparents, consideration of support for childrearing by extended family and nonrelatives). Additionally, research could also better examine how racial socialization practices and outcomes may differ between SES. Moreover, a large majority of the literature focuses on the childrearing practices of single-parent Black mothers and the implications on Black males. Very little literature was found exploring the disciplinary practices of Black fathers and the implications for Black female children. It would also be worth further exploring how patterns of racial

socialization practices may differ between mothers and fathers who are unmarried or who are couples, along with the impact on male and female children.

Another variable that has often been missing from the literature is the voice of children themselves. Consideration must also be given to the interpretation children ascribe to the receipt of spankings. Regarding racial socialization, Anderson and Stevenson (2019) indicated that we must understand the reciprocal nature of the process. Not only do parents provide behaviors and communication, but children ascribe meaning to them. The same is more than likely true with disciplinary practices. Cross-culturally, children's receipt of physical discipline has been associated with inadequate psychological adjustment, predominantly when the discipline is coupled with a perception of parental rejection (Rohner, Bourique, & Elordi, 1996). Deater-Deckard, Dodge, and Sorbring (2005) suggested that cultural differences in childrearing beliefs and practices influence children's perceptions of the parent's emotions and beliefs about the appropriateness of discipline received. Future research should more thoroughly assess each of these components to strengthen our understanding of the processes. Last, future research may also explore parents' perceptions of the child experiencing discrimination and the association with the use of physical discipline to help better clarify its use as a mechanism of preparation for bias racial socialization.

### **Implications**

In light of the literature reviewed in this document, many implications can be drawn. In the context of working with Black American families, specific implications include the necessity of addressing parents' discriminatory experiences and how those impact the racial socialization messages and overall parenting practices with their children (Anderson & Stevenson, 2019). Research has suggested that parents' personal experiences with racism and discrimination are a

primary reason for including racial socialization practices in their parenting (Coard, Wallace, Stevenson, & Brotman, 2004). We must be willing to engage in working with Black American families in modes that help understand the goals and values reflected in their discipline strategies, which are often a direct link to their own experiences and desires to develop the competencies within their children that will allow them to be successful in American society (Ogbu, 1981; Thomas, 2017). A portion of the understanding may be to first recognize racial socialization as a vital disciplinary strategy within the Black American community. Our understanding must also encompass acquiring a personal awareness of what racial socialization looks like across the span of development and how it contributes to the advancement of a healthy racial identity and resiliency of Black Americans across the life span, which supports more positive outcomes (Sellers, Copeland-Linder, Martin, & Lewis, 2006). Professionals must also be willing to understand parental goals, specifically related to the use of spanking. Clinical work may include better assessment of why certain parenting practices are chosen and what racial socialization looks like in individual families by asking precise questions because parents may not disclose some parenting practices, such as spanking, unless specifically asked. Although racial socialization commonly occurs (Caughy et al., 2002), many Black American parents may not engage in the practices with deliberate awareness of the concept. Enhancing our professional understanding of discipline with a cultural lens that views the use of spanking as a protective racial socialization strategy can strengthen our assessment conversations and be helpful to families. In understanding the parenting values and discipline goals, if there is a desire to ban the use of spanking, which is now a consideration of the American Psychological Association (2019) in collaboration with the American Academy of Pediatrics' most recent policy statement encouraging the use of effective, positive discipline (Sege, Siegel, Council of Child Abuse and

Neglect, & Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, 2018), professionals must be willing to assist with incorporating noncoercive alternatives that parents already use, and other alternatives that may assist in reaching parental goals but are also in line with cultural values and experiences.

It is recommended that practitioners assist Black American parents with incorporating the strategies used for racial socialization, such as those that promote pride, empowerment, egalitarianism, and prepare children for and help cope with the inevitabilities of bias into parenting practices. The literature suggests such practices may support the healthy, positive outcomes we seek in Black American youths (Coard et al., 2004). While many parent-training programs have been developed and have been noted to support parenting practices that contribute to positive outcomes in children, many have been developed and assessed with the middle-class, White American population (Coard et al., 2004). Gilbert, Harvey, and Belgrave (2009) suggested infusing an Afrocentric paradigm, which focuses on the history, traditions, experiences, and cultural values of people of African descent, into interventions with Black Americans to bolster healthy development. A promising model, based on the proposed racial encounter coping appraisal and socialization theory (RECAST) by Anderson and Stevenson (2019), explains how the racial socialization processes serve as protective mechanisms through parents' ability to help their children appraise and cope with discriminatory experiences. The RECAST model has also contributed to the development of the engaging, managing, and bonding through race (EMBRace) intervention model (Anderson, McKenny, & Stevenson, 2019). The program was designed to help parents understand the impact of their own racial trauma, which may be retriggered by fears of real or anticipated discriminatory experiences of their children and can have an impact on parenting. The overall goal of EMBRace is to help

families engage in healthy racial socialization and coping with the use of clinical interventions that may reduce the fear of outcomes of discriminatory racial experiences. Both the proposed theory and the suggested intervention are innovative and recommended means of integrating healthy racial socialization processes in a therapeutic format.

While the EMBRace intervention was designed specifically to assist parents with helping their adolescent children cope with discriminatory experiences, other interventions can be used more broadly, and with younger children, but also integrate racial socialization into the practices. One such program is the Black Parenting Strengths and Strategies Program (BPSS; Coard, Foy-Watson, Zimmer, & Wallace, 2007). The program was developed from the already established Parenting the Strong-Willed Child (PSWC; Forehand & Long, 2002) parent-training program; yet, it was modified to be culturally relevant for Black American families by incorporating sessions to help parents understand the social/emotional and racial awareness and identity development of Black children in American society, to promote positive self-image, to facilitate discussions about race with young Black children, and to promote problem-solving skills. A randomized controlled trial of the BPSS parenting program demonstrated that incorporating Africentric principles into an existing parent-training model supported attendance and retention of Black families, parental satisfaction, increases in the use of racial socialization, and improvements in child behavior (Coard et al., 2007).

A final consideration is reformulating our understanding of Baumrind's (1967) parenting styles. Since the development of the original parenting styles, additional styles have been added and suggested (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Neblett et al. (2008) acknowledged the synergistic nature of the racial socialization process within Black American families. This process includes convergence of different types of racial socialization practices and incorporates the various

dimensions and categories of racial socialization, including preparation for bias practices, which may include the use of spanking. As such, a more culturally-specific parenting style, *the synergistic style*, is proposed (see Appendix for a comparative model). This style not only incorporates the various components of different types of racial socialization practices but may also assimilate features of other parenting styles, such as the authoritative style.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, although the use of spanking is a controversial topic, with the contentions included in this review in mind, we must be willing to fully acknowledge the experiences of Black Americans in this country and the need for parents of Black children to properly prepare their children for an existence that, unfortunately, is not always admired. As stipulated by Grier and Cobbs (as cited in Sue & Sue, 2016), we must be willing to acknowledge the reality of healthy cultural paranoia that may prompt many Black American parents to racially socialize their children toward preparation for bias and racism awareness and realize that, early on, part of the protection may encompass the use of spanking as an act of discipline, direction, and love. The protective act of spanking may be a contributing factor to the more positive outcomes that some research highlights within Black American children who receive this form of discipline. It may be difficult to transform our perspectives about this issue to view it as a strength that has contributed to the survival of Black Americans in the nation, but a shift in thinking may be necessary to help us become the culturally competent practitioners the profession demands of us and that we, hopefully, desire on a personal level.

The premise presented in this review is not to advocate the use of spanking or convince anyone that to spank or not to spank is right or wrong. Neither is it proposed to ignore parenting practices that keen clinical assessments prove to be harmful and dysfunctional. Rather, it is to

assist in recognizing that there are cultural differences in the values in childrearing beliefs that shape the views of discipline, and seemingly, in the effects that we must be willing to take into consideration when we are providing treatment and recommendations regarding optimal parenting practices. The objective is to take us a step further toward examining internal components of culture to better understand the functioning and to assist in respecting cultural practices, which ultimately benefits us all. A thorough examination may guide us to a willingness to ask ourselves our personal views of the culture and how we feel about spanking as a disciplinary practice on a personal level. How might widespread stereotypes about Black American culture and parents fuel our responses to parenting and disciplinary choices, which then impact the therapeutic relationship and, ultimately, the outcomes of the family? As practitioners, we must also be careful not to overgeneralize the positions presented in this review. Instead, we must further research and assess for whom the different types of racial socialization practices are most beneficial and use clinical judgment to guide how and when to integrate them into treatment best. Though we might not agree, the disciplinary practices of Black Americans have often been noted as strengths. We must stop pinpointing practices within the Black American community as abnormal or deviant and begin to truly acknowledge the social realities that are faced collectively and how practices, including parenting, racial socialization, and discipline contribute to the resilience that has helped sustain within this country over decades.

Taking these prospects into account may assist practitioners in developing an emic perspective that recognizes the social realities of the families served and help incorporate the values and goals of Black American parents into services, which can enhance mental health service utilization by the Black American population due to the inclusion of a culturally relevant perspective that feels comfortable, familiar, and respected.

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Appendix

<b>Parenting Dimensions</b>	<b>Authoritarian Parenting</b>	<b>Authoritative Parenting</b>	<b>Permissive Parenting</b>	<b><i>Proposed Synergistic Parenting</i></b>
<b>Demandingness</b>	High expectations for achievement	High expectations for achievement and maturity; encourage independence	Minimal expectations	High expectations for achievement
	Rules are not generally explained	Set clear rules with an explanation of expectations	Few rules or boundaries	Set clear rules with substantial guidance and direction
	Use of stern discipline	Enforce boundaries in a democratic fashion	Lenient with limited guidance or direction	High parental control; use of stern discipline and enforcement of limits to encourage competent independence and success in American society
<b>Responsiveness</b>	Unresponsive to needs	Warm and responsive	Warm and indulgent	Warm and responsive
	Lack of nurturance and affection	Affectionate and supportive	Affection and concern with indiscriminate support to avoid disappointing children	Affectionate, nurturing, and supportive with high involvement
	Lack of reasoning or understanding of a child's perspective	Open discussion with reasoning	Communication, but limited direction	Communicate the importance of compliance and possible implications of noncompliance with affection; reasoning is variable