

Navigating Racial Stress: How Black Mothers' and Fathers' Trauma Shapes Confidence in Talking About Racism

Journal of Black Psychology

2025, Vol. 0(0) 1–29








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DOI: 10.1177/00957984251385706

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Abstract

This study examined Black parents' reports of daily racism experiences on racial socialization competency (i.e., confidence in discussing race and racism) among Black mothers ($N = 385$, $M_{age} = 36.99$, 55% mothers) and fathers ($N = 296$, $M_{age} = 37.66$). The moderating role of racial trauma was also investigated. The results indicated that Black mothers who faced daily racism exhibited increased confidence in discussing race and racism with their children, while Black fathers who encountered daily racism and racial trauma also felt more

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confident. However, Black fathers who experienced low levels of both racism and racial trauma felt less confident. As the frequency of daily racist encounters increased, Black fathers experienced an increase in confidence in addressing racial topics with their children. These findings underscore the influence of racism and racial trauma on Black mothers and Black fathers' attitudes towards discussing racism.

Keywords

racism, parenting, racial socialization, parenting, racial trauma

Black parents in the United States (U.S.) contend with the challenge of managing their stress from adverse race-related events (Jones et al., 2020), while also trying to engage in conversations with their children about race and racism. These conversations involve deliberate racial socialization messages from parents to their children, aimed at helping them navigate race-related situations and experiences (Anderson et al., 2018; Smith-Bynum, 2023). Racial socialization refers to the verbal and nonverbal communication shared between parents and youth about racialized experiences (Dunbar et al., 2015; Lesane-Brown, 2006; Reynolds & Gonzales-Backen, 2017), including how to process and respond to racially discriminatory events (Anderson & Stevenson et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2021). Black parents utilize racial socialization as an adaptive and dynamic tool to help their children navigate the racial climate in the U.S. These messages are often tailored to address both specific race-related events and the broader sociopolitical climate (Anderson et al., 2019; Anyiwo et al., 2023; Murry et al., 2023). For example, the heightened visibility of anti-Black police violence against Black adolescents and young adults in recent years has significantly shaped the racial socialization processes within Black families (Anderson et al., 2022; Coates et al., 2024; Leath et al., 2020; Thomas & Blackmon, 2015; Threlfall, 2018).

To date, researchers have examined how Black parents understand and respond to racial discrimination (Dunbar et al., 2021), as well as how they socialize their children to respond (Bernard et al., 2024; Daniels et al., 2023). Yet, there remains a significant gap in understanding the connection between parents' personal experiences with racial discrimination and their efficacy in communicating race-related messages to their children. An underlying assumption in much of the early racial socialization literature is that Black parents will have similar levels of confidence and efficacy in providing race-related messages to their children, in part, due to their individual experiences as a Black person in the U.S. Yet, recent evidence suggests that it is

emotionally and mentally difficult for Black parents to decide if, when, and how they should talk to their children about racism (Anderson et al., 2019; Condon et al., 2022), and furthermore, that Black parents' sense of racial socialization efficacy directly informs the quality and content of the types of messages they offer to their children (Anderson et al., 2021; Cooper et al., 2020).

To fill this gap in existing research, this study employs the Racial Encounter Coping Appraisal and Socialization Theory (RECAST) to investigate the effectiveness of Black mothers and fathers in facilitating conversations about race and racism with their children. RECAST provides a framework that explains how Black parents' stress appraisals of racial discrimination influence their racial socialization practices (Anderson & Stevenson, 2019). Within this framework, racial socialization competency encompasses three dimensions: stress, skills, and confidence. The current study focuses on *confidence* to assess the extent to which Black parents feel capable of initiating and maintaining conversations about racism with their children, considering their own experiences of racial discrimination. Furthermore, racial trauma is examined as a moderator to understand how varying levels of racial trauma influence the relationship between Black parents' perceived racial discrimination and their confidence in discussing race and racism with their children.

Parenting through the Trauma of Racial Discrimination

The American Public Health Association (APHA) (2020) identified racial discrimination against Black Americans as a significant public health concern. *Racial discrimination* encompasses a diverse range of experiences, including being followed by a manager or associate in stores due to assumptions of criminality, being pulled over by the police due to racial profiling, and being stereotyped as less intelligent or less competent in educational or workplace settings, leading to assumptions of inferiority (Harrell, 2000). On average, approximately 75% of Black Americans face regular instances of racial discrimination (Cox, 2024). Racial discrimination has well-documented mental, physical, and emotional health consequences (Daniels et al., 2020; Kirkinis et al., 2021; Williams et al., 2019).

Black parents in the United States face unique stressors due to the pervasive nature of racial discrimination. For instance, Black parents may grapple with the challenge of raising their children to be aware of the realities of racism while not being defeated by them (Anderson et al., 2022; Bernard et al., 2024; Varner et al., 2018). Research suggests that the psychological distress experienced by Black parents due to racism can influence their perceptions and preparations for their children in anticipation of similar life events (Dunbar

et al., 2021). Parents often educate children about potential encounters with racism and discrimination in society to prepare them for bias (Anderson et al., 2022; Leath et al., 2022). For instance, in response to George Zimmerman murdering 17-year-old Trayvon Martin in 2012, Thomas and Blackmon (2015) found that Black parents communicated messages to their children about how the shooting incident reflected interpersonal racial bias and racial profiling. Parents discussed messages to children about handling racial profiling or police confrontations, prioritizing emotional processing of the racially traumatic incident that dominated national news for months.

Threlfall (2018) found that Black parents in St Louis and Ferguson, Missouri increased messages to their adolescents about racism after the 2014 police killing of Michael Brown. More specifically, parents sought to educate their children about the ongoing impact of racism in the St Louis region through the tragic death of Michael Brown. These messages were driven by a desire to safeguard their children, instill vigilance, and protect them from potential racial harm and violence. These separate but related high-profile incidents of racial discrimination and violence against Black youth highlight the need to examine how ongoing anti-Black racism influences Black parents' approaches to racial socialization. Currently, evidence suggests that parents respond with a range of culturally relevant parenting behaviors; usually, some combination of having discussions about how to act in public settings, monitoring, and curating a strong and safe community of family and friends to guide them (Murry et al., 2023; Smith et al., 2022). Scholars have increasingly emphasized the need for more evidence on how Black parents' racial socialization strategies address racialized stress (Anderson et al., 2019). This research holds significant importance in elucidating the intricate mechanisms through which parents' experiences of racism influence the messaging conveyed to their children.

Black Parents' Racial Socialization Competencies in Response to Racial Trauma

Racial trauma refers to the emotional distress resulting from being exposed to racism, discrimination, or racial stigma, which has a profound and enduring effect on both individuals and communities (Williams, Ching et al., 2018). Racial trauma shapes parenting practices and attitudes. For example, parents who have experienced racial trauma may be more likely to exhibit hypervigilance or overprotectiveness towards their children (see Comas-Diaz et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2022). Additionally, racial trauma can negatively impact mental health, leading to feelings of powerlessness or inadequacy in the parenting role (Hill, 2022; Jones et al., 2021).

Racially traumatic experiences can also negatively affect parenting and discussions about race and racism with children. Research indicates that parents who have experienced persistent racial discrimination may adopt protective parenting strategies, including heightened vigilance and increased protective measures (Brantley, 2023). Parents' reports of psychological distress from racial trauma may influence the relationship between racial discrimination and racial socialization competency (i.e., feeling confident in having discussions about race and racism).

Therefore, racial trauma is considered as a moderator in the current study. Racial trauma is important as a moderator because it can influence the way that Black mothers and fathers respond to their own experiences of racism, and, in turn, how confident they feel engaging in conversations about race and racism. Previous research has documented that racial trauma is associated with emotional distress such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Williams & Zare, 2022). Research also indicates that parental distress stemming from racism can influence their perceptions and preparations for their children's future experiences (Dunbar et al., 2021). Thus, racial trauma is examined as a moderator to understand the influence of the relationship between Black mothers and fathers' experiences with racial discrimination and their confidence levels in discussing race and racism.

Why Racial Socialization Competency Matters

Consistent with the Sociohistorical Integrative Model for the Study of Stress in Black Families (Murry et al., 2018), it is important to consider the culturally specific coping assets and family promotive processes that undergird Black mothers and fathers' parenting practices with their children. This study explores the experiences of Black mothers and fathers who perceive racial discrimination. It examines how this discrimination affects their messaging and the extent to which racial trauma influences these conversations. Yet, most of these studies focus on the frequency or content of parents' racial socialization patterns, and the linkages between Black parents' racial stress exposure and racial socialization competencies are a relatively understudied phenomenon.

Anderson et al.'s (2019) Racial Encounter Coping Appraisal and Socialization Theory (RECAST) is used to frame how Black parents' primary and secondary stress appraisals of racially discriminatory experiences play a role in their subsequent racial socialization practices with their children. Within the model, Anderson et al. (2019) draw attention to how Black parents' initial perceptions of racial stressors—as threats or challenges—then inform the extent to which parents may feel equipped to control or manage the racialized stressor. Anderson and colleagues (2019) term this process “racial

coping self-efficacy,” and they connect parents’ coping self-efficacy beliefs to the effectiveness with which they transmit adaptive information to their children about how to respond to and resolve racial encounters. The RECAST framework was used to develop the Racial Socialization Competency Scale (Anderson et al., 2020), which comprises three dimensions of competency (i.e., stress, skills, and confidence). In responding to the scale, parents report the extent to which they are *confident* (i.e., I believe I can) in talking to their child, *skilled* (I am/would be prepared to) in talking to their child, and finally, whether they feel *stressed* (I am/would be stressed to) in talking to their child about race-related encounters. Given the recent validation of this culturally relevant scale, only a few scholars have documented significant associations between Black parents’ confidence, skills, and stress efficacies in relation to their racial socialization messages or youth outcomes (e.g., Jones et al., 2024).

Consequently, there is a pressing need for further empirical evidence that elucidates the contextual factors that influence parents’ socialization competencies. This study examines the racial socialization competency of Black mothers and fathers, with a specific focus on confidence rather than skills or stress levels. Black mothers and fathers may possess the skills to communicate racial socialization messages, but without confidence in those abilities, they may hesitate to act or deliver them effectively. Confidence reflects self-efficacy, which influences motivation, persistence, and performance. Black mothers and fathers may also feel confident, even while under stress (e.g., racial trauma) and may still engage in racial socialization messaging. Therefore, racial trauma is a moderator as it may weaken or strengthen the association between racial discrimination and confidence. Overall, focusing on racial socialization competency confidence allows the understanding of not only whether Black mothers and fathers can engage in racial socialization messaging, but whether they believe they can—a belief that can be disrupted or enhanced by racial trauma and racial discrimination.

Racial Socialization in Context: Exploring Competency Among Black Mothers and Fathers

The current climate has sparked renewed interest in examining the role of Black parents in educating their children about race and racism (Holloway & Varner, 2021; Leath et al., 2020; Manning, 2021; Perry, 2025). Several studies support the view that racial socialization is a crucial parenting process for Black parents (Anderson et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2022; Thomas & Blackmon, 2015). Researchers have begun using RECAST theory to examine how parents teach their children about race and racism and interrupt the link

between discrimination and negative health outcomes (Anderson et al., 2022, 2023; Anderson & Stevenson, 2019; Smith et al., 2022).

Racial socialization is a crucial parenting practice for Black mothers, involving educating children about racism and coping strategies (Christophe et al., 2022; Turner, 2020). Research indicates diverse approaches to racial socialization, with mothers' competency (confidence, skills, and stress) influencing their practices (Anderson et al., 2022; Jones et al., 2021). Socialization messages often differ based on the child's gender, with specific concerns for sons' safety and daughters' self-image (Leath et al., 2020). Factors affecting racial socialization include parents' experiences, racial identity, and socioeconomic status (Jones et al., 2022; Lloyd, 2022). Also, while most Black parents engage in racial socialization, the quality and frequency of messages vary, with some mothers actively encouraging racial awareness and others discouraging it (Lloyd, 2022).

Recent research on racial socialization competency and Black fathers highlights the multifaceted nature of this parenting practice. Studies have identified various racial socialization profiles among African American fathers, ranging from infrequent to positive socializers (Cooper et al., 2014). Fathers engage in practices to prepare their sons for encounters with racism, emphasizing self-determination and resilience (Allen, 2016). Factors influencing racial socialization include fathers' own experiences with discrimination, their racial identity, and childhood socialization (Cooper et al., 2014; Williams, 2022). Racial socialization competency, which encompasses skills, confidence, and stress in transmitting racial messages, has emerged as a crucial construct to examine among Black mothers and fathers (Anderson et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2021). Therefore, comprehending these processes is paramount for cultivating culturally sensitive practices that foster the well-being of Black children.

Guiding Framework

The current study draws upon the *Sociohistorical Integrative Model for the Study of Stress in Black Families* (Murry et al., 2018, see Figure 1) to capture how racism informs the experiences, adaptation, and functioning of Black families in the United States. Racism is an organized and hierarchical social system based on racial superiority and inferiority (Williams & Mohammed, 2013), and it functions on multiple levels (e.g., internalized belief systems, interpersonal experiences, and structural or institutional policies and practices). Within the U.S., the historical vestiges of African enslavement and race-related disenfranchisement (e.g., Jim Crow Laws and Black Codes) continue to play a role in the economic and sociopolitical histories of Black Americans in the U.S. (Figure 1, Path A). It is because of these race-related, economic,

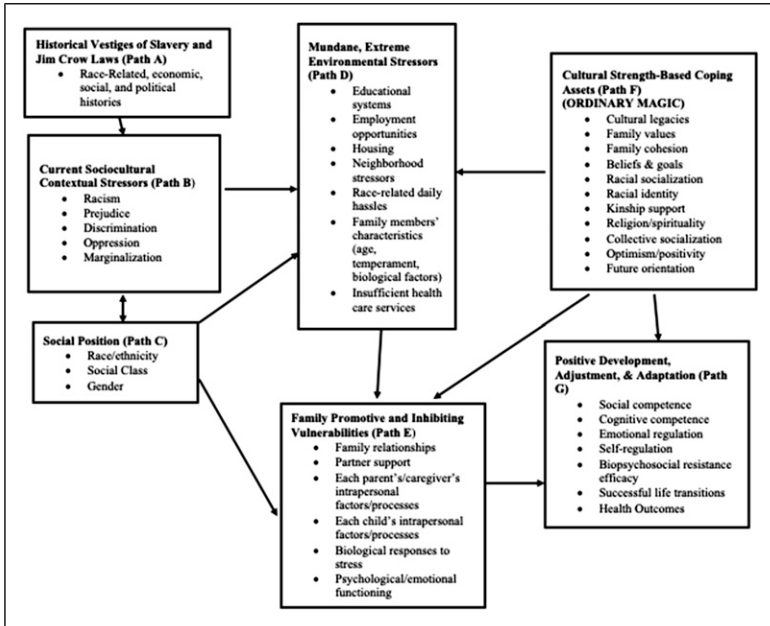


Figure 1. Sociohistorical integrative model for the study of stress in Black families.

social, and political histories that Black Americans encounter contemporary environmental stressors from racism, such as daily race-related hassles, housing and neighborhood inequities, constrained educational and occupational opportunities, and insufficient health care services (Figure 1, Paths B and D). Moreover, these environmental stressors are informed by the heterogenous identities and social positions of Black Americans (Figure 1, Path C), and they can shape intra- and interpersonal processes, such as children's development, family relationships, and community functioning (Figure 1, Path E).

The integrative model is useful in studying how Black families are impacted by racial discrimination and racial trauma. Black parents are active agents within their families and communities, shaping their environments even as they are shaped by them (Murry, 2021). Thus, while Black families may experience the effects of racial prejudice and discrimination, scholars have documented the myriad ways they resist and challenge the harmful consequences of racism (Jones et al., 2020; Smith-Bynum, 2023). For instance, Black parents use unique cultural processes and assets like racial socialization (Figure 1, Path F) to prepare their children for the realities of racism. Additionally, within the model is the importance of considering how

the promotive and inhibitive vulnerabilities that surround Black families inform positive development, adjustment, and adaptation (Figure 1, Path G). Although research has demonstrated that racial discrimination negatively impacts the health and well-being of Black parents (Jones et al., 2021; Murry et al., 2014), there is a gap in understanding the relationships between parents' race-related experiences and their confidence in addressing racial inequities with their children. Furthermore, it is unclear how racial trauma moderates these experiences. This empirical knowledge is important in thinking about how to enhance the psychosocial resources that Black parents have available to them to support and protect their children from the effects of racism (Anderson et al., 2019; Dunbar et al., 2021).

The Current Study

The current study examined the impact of Black parents' reports of daily experiences of racial discrimination on racial socialization competency (i.e., confidence). The moderational role of racial trauma was also explored. More specifically, the direct associations between racial discrimination and racial socialization competency were examined. Consistent with previous literatures, it was hypothesized that racial discrimination would be associated with higher levels of racial socialization competency (i.e., confidence). It was further hypothesized that racial trauma would moderate the association between racial discrimination and racial socialization competency (i.e., confidence), such that higher levels of racial trauma will exacerbate the relationship between racism and racial socialization competency. For instance, parents who are traumatized by racism and who report higher levels of racism will report higher racial socialization competency, as there may be heightened awareness and vigilance (Leath et al., 2022). However, reporting higher levels of racism and racial trauma can also be associated with lower racial socialization competency. This is because for some parents, dealing with such issues can be emotionally overwhelming (Anderson & Stevenson, 2019). Lastly, given the limited research differentiating the racial socialization competency of Black mothers and fathers, no a priori hypotheses are made regarding parent gender. Instead, the current study explores the potential differences as an initial step toward addressing the gap in the literature.

Method

The participants are enrolled in the ongoing National Science Foundation (NSF)-funded study. This study investigates the racial stressors that influence the parenting behaviors and adolescent outcomes of Black families residing in

Missouri, the Black Families and Racial Justice Project, conducted by authors lead Drs. Barnes, Leath, and Cheeks. The study is a community-based, three-year longitudinal study that commenced with the first wave of approximately 682 Black families in Missouri in 2022. The study stands out in several ways: It encompasses a substantial proportion of Black families from geographically diverse (i.e., rural and urban) regions within the state. The sample also exhibited socioeconomically diverse characteristics, encompassing a range of income levels and family education attainment.

Participants

The present study incorporated the initial data collection phase from the Black Families and Racial Justice Project. A total of 682 families participated in the first wave of the study. The final sample for the present study consisted of 681 parents. The sample comprised Black mothers ($N = 385$, $M_{age} = 36.99$) and Black fathers ($N = 296$, $M_{age} = 37.66$) who possessed complete data for all study variables in the first year. The percentage of missing data was 1%. Ninety-eight percent of parents identified as African American, 1.3% identified as African, and 1% identified as biracial or multiracial, while 1% had incomplete information. Black parents had, on average, completed an associate degree or some college education.

Procedures

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this study (study number: 202112032). The principal investigators (PIs) recruited parents over a six-month period. Fliers were distributed to various locations, including places of worship, school districts, family agencies and organizations, Black businesses (such as beauty salons, barber shops, and restaurants), National Pan-Hellenic Organizations (e.g., Divine 9), the city's housing authority, and local festivals (e.g., Juneteenth). Fliers were strategically placed in prominent locations within different communities to enhance visibility and maximize reach. Parents were directed to follow the link on the flier, provided their consent to participate, and completed the surveys online. The surveys encompassed demographic information, as well as assessments of parents' racialized experiences and parenting competencies. The surveys were designed to take approximately 45–60 minutes to complete, and participants were compensated \$20 for their participation.

Measures

Demographics. Caregivers were requested to provide a comprehensive range of socio-demographic information. They reported factors such as their age and gender, with all participants identifying as either male or female. Caregivers also specified their relationship to the child, selecting either mother/stepmother or father/stepfather. Furthermore, the number of children residing in the household was an open-ended item, and caregivers shared their educational attainment.

Race-Related Stressors

Direct Racism. The Racism and Life Experiences Scales (RaLES) was used to assess parent experiences with racial discrimination (Harrell et al., 1997). The scale taps into the *frequency* of racial discrimination and ranges from (0 = *never*) to (5 = *once or more a week*), with higher scores indicating higher racial discrimination experiences. There is a total of 18 racial hassles (e.g., in the past year, how often have you been... “ignored or overlooked,” or “treated suspiciously in a store”?). The reliability, construct validity, and criterion-related validity coefficients of the RaLES scales were examined, with Cronbach’s alpha values ranging from .72 to .94. Construct validity was assessed using correlations with social desirability, self-esteem, cultural mistrust, and racial identity. The correlational patterns indicate that the scales measure the intended constructs. Criterion validity was also evaluated through the correlational relationship with stress (e.g., perceived and urban life), positive well-being, psychological symptomatology, and trauma-related symptoms. Racism was associated with urban life stress, psychological symptoms, and trauma, supporting the assertion that the RaLES scale measures indices of mental health (see Harrell et al., 1997). In previous research (e.g., Butler-Barnes et al., 2019; Lavner et al., 2022; Richardson et al., 2015), the alpha values ranged from .85 to .90. The items were summed and averaged across the 18-items. Higher scores indicated greater experiences of interpersonal racism. The alpha coefficient for the current sample regarding the frequency of racial discrimination for Black mothers and fathers was .85 and .83, respectively.

Moderator

Racial Trauma. The Trauma Symptoms of Discrimination scale (Williams et al., 2019) was used to assess caregivers’ psychological and emotional distress reactions to racism. The scale is comprised of 22 items, such as, “Due to past

experiences of discrimination, I often cannot stop or control my worrying.” The responses ranged from (*1 = never*) to (*4 = often*), with higher scores being indicative of higher trauma from racial discrimination. The full scale was used, and the items were summed and averaged across the 22 items. Higher scores were indicative of more frequent or intense experiences of racial trauma. The Trauma Symptoms of Discrimination scale demonstrated construct, convergent, and concurrent validity based on multiple statistical indices and adequate reliability (Williams et al., 2022). Subsequent studies have supported its use with Black populations (Pieterse et al., 2023; Williams et al., 2022, 2023; Williams & Zare, 2022). Construct and criterion validity was assessed using correlations with trauma, PTSD, ethnic discrimination, and racial microaggressions. The correlational patterns indicate that the scales measure the intended constructs (Williams et al., 2022). For the current study, the scale showed good reliability for Black mothers and fathers, .80 and .73, respectively.

Parenting Socialization Outcomes

Racial Socialization Competency. The Racial Socialization Competency Scale (RaSCS) (Anderson et al., 2019) is a 28-item scale that is used to assess parents’ racial socialization competencies. There are three subscales: confidence, skills, and call to action. In this study, we used the confidence subscale. The items were summed and averaged across the 28 items. Parents were given the prompt for the *confidence* subscale: I believe I can... (e.g., “share my emotions about my experiences of negative racial encounters.”). The RaSCS demonstrated construct and predictive validity based on multiple statistical indices. It also exhibited adequate reliability (Anderson et al., 2020). Subsequent studies have supported its use with Black populations (Christophe et al., 2022; Jones et al., 2024; Kiang et al., 2023). Construct validity was assessed using correlations with general self-efficacy, common racial socialization questions, and life stress. Higher scores indicated higher communication of racial socialization competencies. Responses ranged from (*1 = I do not believe I can*) to (*5 = I greatly believe I can*), with higher scores being indicative of higher confidence in discussing race and racism. The alpha was .94 and .91, for Black mothers and fathers, respectively.

Data Analyses Plan

The study employed SPSS 29.0 for a bootstrapped hierarchical regression analysis, exploring how demographic factors such as age, education, and the number of children in the household, as well as primary predictor like daily racism were linked to racial socialization competency (i.e., confidence) among

Black mothers and fathers. Furthermore, the moderating influence of racial trauma was investigated.

Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations for the primary study variables are presented in Tables 1 and 2. Black mothers and fathers reported on average receiving an associate's degree or attending some college/university (4-year college or university). On average, parents had two children. Parents reported experiencing racial discrimination and racial trauma. In addition, parents expressed varying degrees of confidence in discussing issues related to race and racism (see Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1. Correlations (Mothers).

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Age	36.99	3.83					
2. Education	4.28	.689	-.10*				
3. Number of children	2.05	.801	.40**	-.27**			
4. Racial discrimination - F	3.58	.400	-.27**	.07	-.35**		
5. Racial trauma	2.92	.327	-.28**	.30**	-.46**	.28**	
6. Racial socialization - C	3.92	.482	-.30**	.32**	-.26**	.42**	.20**

Note. Education = Associate degree or some college, Number of Children = 2, F = Frequency and C = Confident.

$p < .05^*$, $p < .010^{**}$.

Table 2. Correlations (Fathers).

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Age	37.66	3.34					
2. Education	4.30	.713	-.02				
3. Number of children	2.15	.643	.15**	-.18**			
4. Racial discrimination - F	3.68	.367	-.12**	-.06	-.12**		
5. Racial trauma	2.89	.283	-.02	.32**	-.34**	.07	
6. Racial socialization - C	4.07	.393	-.08	.19**	-.14**	.31**	.32**

Note. Education = Associate degree or some college, Number of Children = 2, F = Frequency and C = Confident.

$p < .010^{**}$.

Correlations

Statistically significant correlations were observed between the independent, moderation, and outcome variable (see Tables 2 and 3). For Black mothers, perceiving a higher incidence of racial discrimination was associated with heightened levels of racial trauma and confidence to discuss race and racism. Similarly, for Black fathers, perceiving a higher prevalence of racial discrimination was correlated with increased confidence in addressing race and racism.

Table 3. Hierarchical Regression for Mothers, Racism, and Socialization Confidence.

	<i>B</i>	<i>Bootstrapped SE</i>	<i>BCa 95% CI</i>
Model 1			
Age	-.06	.01	[-.09, -.02]
Education	.41	.07	[.27, .57]
Number of children	-.13	.10	[-.30, .02]
Model 2			
Age	-.04	.01	[-.08, -.01]
Education	.43	.07	[.31, .56]
Number of children	.01	.12	[-.19, .18]
Racial discrimination (Frequency)	.37	.07	[.24, .53]
Model 3			
Age	-.04	.01	[-.08, -.01]
Education	.44	.07	[.30, .58]
Number of children	-.01	.11	[-.20, .16]
Racial discrimination (Frequency)	.38	.06	[.24, .54]
Trauma - discrimination	-.04	.07	[-.17, .14]
Model 4			
Age	-.03	.01	[-.07, -.01]
Education	.39	.06	[.26, .52]
Number of children	-.03	.08	[-.18, .06]
Racial discrimination (Frequency)	.43	.05	[.31, .56]
Trauma - discrimination	.05	.06	[-.05, .16]
Racial trauma × Racial discrimination	.18	.10	[-.05, .24]

Note. *B* = unstandardized regression coefficient. *SE* = bootstrapped standard error based on 1,000 resamples. *BCa CI* = bias-corrected and accelerated 95% confidence interval. Predictors were entered hierarchically: Step 1 included control variables (e.g., age, education, & number of children in household); step 2 added main predictor (e.g., racial discrimination); step 3 entered the moderator (e.g., racial trauma); step 4 added the interaction term (e.g., discrimination × trauma). Predictors are considered statistically significant if the 95% *BCa* confidence interval does not include zero.

Black Mothers' Racial Socialization Competency, Racism, & Racial Trauma

The outcome variable in the model was racial socialization competency. In block 1, age, education, and number of children was entered. In block 2, daily experiences of racism were entered. In block 3, racial trauma (moderator) was entered, and the interaction term was entered in block 4: racial trauma x daily experiences of racism. The variables were centered before being entered into regression models, as advised by Aiken et al. (1991), when testing interaction effects. Significant interaction effects were examined by plotting the slope of racial socialization competency—confidence regressed on racial trauma estimated at selected conditional values ($M + 1 SD$ and $M - 1 SD$) of daily experiences of racism (Cohen et al., 2003). Before regression analyses was performed, skewness and kurtosis were examined for racial discrimination experiences, racial trauma, and racial socialization competency. The values were skewed and kurtotic. More specifically, for racial discrimination, the skewness value was -1.078 ($SE = .124$) and kurtosis was 3.073 ($SE = .248$). For racial trauma, skewness was $-.888$ ($SE = .124$) and kurtosis was 3.929 ($SE = .248$), and racial socialization competency skewness was $-.925$ ($SE = .124$) and kurtosis was $.015$ ($SE = .248$). Thus, bootstrapping was performed.

Overall, a bootstrapped hierarchical linear regression (1,000 resamples) was conducted to examine the effects of racial discrimination and racial trauma on racial socialization competency among Black mothers. At the first step, demographic variables (age, education & number of children in the household) were entered explaining a significant portion of the variance in racial socialization competency, $R^2 = .17$, $F(2,382) = 39.89$, $p < .001$. Older Black mothers reported feeling less confident in discussing race and racism $B = -.06$, BCa 95% CI $[-.09, -.02]$, while those with higher education levels reported higher racial socialization competency $B = .41$, BCa 95% CI $[.27, .57]$. In the second step, daily experiences of racism were added to the model, which accounted for an additional 11% of the variance, $\Delta R^2 = .11$, $F(1,380) = 59.07$, $p < .001$. Racial discrimination was associated with higher levels of racial socialization confidence $B = .37$, BCa 95% CI $[.24, .53]$. In the third step, racial trauma was added to the model. The addition of racial trauma was not associated with higher levels of racial socialization confidence $B = -.04$, BCa 95% CI $[-.17, .14]$. The model did not continue to significantly predict racial socialization competency—confidence, accounting for an additional 1% of the variance, $\Delta R^2 = .01$ $F(1,379) = .636$, $p = .426$. In the final model, one interaction effect was included: racial trauma x daily experiences of racism interaction, but did not significantly improve the model, $\Delta R^2 = .03$, $F(1,378) = 18.69$, $p < .001$. The racial trauma x daily experiences interaction effect was

not significant, $B = .18$, BCa 95% $CI [-.05 .24]$, as the confidence interval included a zero (see [Table 3](#)). Overall, the final model was significant, $R^2 = .33$, $F(6,378) = 30.44$, $p < .001$, suggesting that the set of predictors meaningfully explained variation in racial socialization competency.

Black Fathers' Racial Socialization Competency, Racism, & Racial Trauma

The outcome variable in the model was racial socialization competency. In block 1, age, education, and number of children were entered. In block 2, daily experiences of racism were entered. In block 3, racial trauma (moderator) was entered, and the one interaction term was entered in block 4: racial trauma x daily experiences of racism. For Black fathers, the distribution of racial discrimination scores demonstrated acceptable normality, with a skewness value of $-.304$ ($SE = .142$) and a kurtosis value of 3.120 ($SE = .282$). For racial trauma, the skewness value was $.241$ ($SE = .142$) and the kurtosis value was $-.328$ ($SE = .282$). These values fall within the acceptable range for moderate sample sizes, indicating the data did not significantly deviate from normality (Kline, 2011; West et al., 1995). However, for the racial socialization competency, the skewness was -1.502 ($SE = .142$), and for kurtosis, the value was 3.210 ($SE = .282$). Therefore, bootstrapping was performed.

A bootstrapped hierarchical linear regression (1,000 resamples) was conducted to examine the effects of racial discrimination and racial trauma on racial socialization competency. At the first step, demographic variables (age, education, & number of children in the household) were entered explaining the variance in racial socialization competency, $R^2 = .05$, $F(3,292) = 5.675$, $p < .001$. Black fathers who reported higher education levels reported higher racial socialization competency $B = .21$, BCa 95% $CI [.04, .37]$. In the second step, daily experiences of racism were added to the model, which accounted for an additional 9% of the variance, $\Delta R^2 = .09$, $F(1,291) = 34.12$, $p < .001$. Racial discrimination was associated with higher levels of racial socialization confidence $B = .29$, BCa 95% $CI [.15, .43]$. In the third step, racial trauma was added to the model. The addition of racial trauma was associated with higher levels of racial socialization confidence $B = .24$, BCa 95% $CI [.09, .38]$. The model did continue to significantly predict racial socialization competency—confidence, accounting for an additional 5% of the variance, $\Delta R^2 = .05$ $F(1,290) = 19.44$, $p < .001$. In the final model, one interaction effect was included: racial trauma x daily experiences of racism interaction, and significantly improved the model, $\Delta R^2 = .04$, $F(1,289) = 15.37$, $p < .001$. The racial trauma x daily experiences interaction effect was significant, $B = -.34$, BCa 95% $CI [-.58 -.10]$ (see [Table 4](#) & [Figure 2](#)). The findings revealed that

Table 4. Hierarchical Regression for Fathers, Racism, and Socialization Confidence.

	<i>B</i>	<i>Bootstrapped SE</i>	<i>BCa 95% CI</i>
Model 1			
Age	-.01	.01	[-.05, .01]
Education	.21	.08	[.04, .37]
Number of children	-.13	.08	[-.29, .01]
Model 2			
Age	-.01	.01	[-.03, .02]
Education	.25	.09	[.07, .40]
Number of children	-.08	.07	[-.23, .06]
Racial discrimination (Frequency)	.29	.06	[.15, .43]
Model 3			
Age	-.01	.01	[-.04, .02]
Education	.16	.10	[-.03, .33]
Number of children	.01	.08	[-.13, .16]
Racial discrimination (Frequency)	.28	.06	[.13, .43]
Trauma - discrimination	.24	.07	[.09, .38]
Model 4			
Age	-.01	.01	[-.03, .02]
Education	.17	.09	[-.01, .33]
Number of children	-.01	.07	[-.15, .13]
Racial discrimination (Frequency)	.28	.06	[.14, .42]
Trauma - discrimination	.20	.06	[.07, .31]
Racial trauma x Racial discrimination	-.34	.10	[-.58, -.10]

Note. *B* = unstandardized regression coefficient. *SE* = bootstrapped standard error based on 1,000 resamples. *BCa CI* = bias-corrected and accelerated 95% confidence interval. Predictors were entered hierarchically: Step 1 included control variables (e.g., age, education, and number of children in household); step 2 added main predictor (e.g., racial discrimination); step 3 entered the moderator (e.g., racial trauma); step 4 added the interaction term (e.g., discrimination × trauma). Predictors are considered statistically significant if the 95% *BCa* confidence interval does not include zero.

for Black fathers, low levels of racial discrimination and low levels of racial trauma was associated with lower confidence in having discussions about race and racism (low slope; $b = .62$, $t = 6.33$, $p = .001$). However, as racial discrimination experiences increase, confidence in talking about race and racism increases. Overall, the final model was significant, $R^2 = .24$, $F(6,289) = 15.83$, $p < .001$, suggesting that the set of predictors meaningfully explained variation in racial socialization competency.

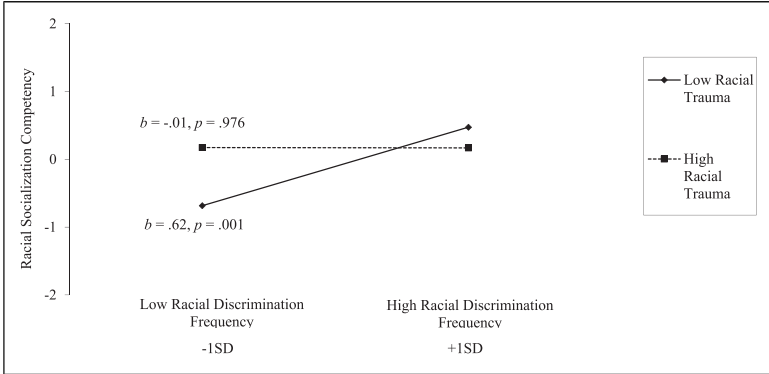


Figure 2. Fathers' Racial Discrimination (Frequency) x Racial Trauma Interaction Effect for Racial Socialization (Confident).

Discussion

The present study investigated the effect of daily encounters with racism on the confidence of Black parents in conveying messages regarding race and racism to their children. We also considered how racial trauma moderated the relationship between racial discrimination and racial socialization competency—confidence. The Sociohistorical Integrative Model for the Study of Stress in Black Families (Murry et al., 2018) was utilized as the guiding framework to highlight how mundane extreme environmental stress (e.g., daily experiences of racism) inform Black American’s parenting confidence. Consistent with prior research on the toll of racial discrimination (William et al., 2019), it was found that racial discrimination experiences inform Black mothers and fathers’ ability to have racism-related conversations with their children.

For Black mothers and fathers, higher levels of racial discrimination were linked to greater confidence in discussing race and racism. Additionally, for Black fathers, higher levels of racial trauma were associated with feeling more confident engaging in conversations about race and racism with their child. Additionally, for Black fathers, the interaction effect revealed that lower reports of daily racial discrimination and lower reports of racial trauma were linked to lower confidence in talking about race and racism. However, as racial discrimination experiences increased, Black fathers reported feeling more confident engaging in these conversations. These results corroborate previous literature on how racism influences parenting (Anderson & Stevenson, 2019), but also how racial

trauma matters for Black fathers and that the presence of racism leads to fathers feeling more confident to engage in conversations about race and racism, even if they report lower levels of racial trauma.

Parenting in the Context of Racism & Racial Trauma

Racism. The contribution to the literature involves expanding our understanding of parenting by building upon existing research and exploring how these experiences influence parents' conversations about race and racism with their child. To date, studies have found an association between racial discrimination and stress (Pieterse et al., 2012; Williams, 2018). A recent study examined the racial discrimination experiences of Black mothers and found a significant association between racial discrimination and increased parenting stress (Condon et al., 2022). In a study conducted by Wallace (2022), it was found that African American fathers' experiences with racism and race significantly influenced their parenting strategies and practices. In the current study, Black mothers and fathers who faced higher levels of racial discrimination were more likely to feel confident discussing race and racism. These findings suggest that experiencing racial discrimination firsthand might lead to a sense of urgency and purpose in preparing children for racism, corroborating previous literatures (Leath et al., 2020; Thomas & Blackmon, 2015; Threlfall, 2018). These findings also support the notion that parents often educate children about potential encounters with racism and discrimination in society to prepare them for bias (Anderson et al., 2022; Leath et al., 2022).

Racial Trauma. According to Williams, Ching, et al. (2018), racial trauma is the reaction to racial experiences such as acts of prejudice, discrimination or violence against a subordinate group because of the dominant group's attitudes of superiority. These symptoms may persist long after the initial traumatic event and can significantly impact an individual's overall well-being. Racial trauma can manifest in various ways, including symptoms of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). These symptoms may persist long after the initial traumatic event and can significantly impact an individual's overall well-being. Studies have shown that encounters with racism can contribute to the development of psychological trauma, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Williams, Ching, et al., 2018).

In our study, the main effect of racial trauma was associated with higher racial socialization confidence for Black fathers. For Black fathers, it was associated with increased confidence in discussing race and racism, while

racial trauma for Black mothers was not statistically significant. Black men often navigate stressors of stereotyping and racial profiling (Brooms & Perry, 2016). For instance, Brooms and Perry (2016) found that Black men shared their traumatic experiences of racism and provided strategies for resisting negative stereotyping. Furthermore, in response to police killings, Black men also recognized how their racialized masculinity posed a threat. Because of Black fathers' racialized and gendered experiences within the US, Black fathers experiencing racial trauma may become more committed to protecting their children, in other words, more confident, because of their trauma from racial discrimination experiences. These conversations about race and racism can also be viewed as a proactive strategy to equip their children with the tools to resist and challenge racism. Future research should examine if racial trauma increases father's vigilance or if it is enhancing their sense of purpose. Also, does confidence in discussing racism vary by child age and gender (for instance, do fathers tend to talk more with sons than daughters)? Additionally, it is crucial to consider the context. In particular, the Black families in this study were recruited in the aftermath of the deaths of Michael Brown and George Floyd. How would other contexts influence the discussion of racism?

Furthermore, Black fathers who reported lower levels of racial discrimination and lower levels of racial trauma exhibited a decreased likelihood of feeling comfortable engaging in discussions about race and racism. Conversely, as racial discrimination experiences escalated, confidence in having conversations about race and racism increased. It appears that higher levels of racial discrimination may lead to increased confidence in addressing the issue. This indicates that experiences of racial discrimination may motivate Black fathers to address racism head-on. Thus, understanding the interplay between these factors can help inform strategies for promoting conversations about race within families. In their scholarly work, Jones et al. (2021) examined the significant impact of racial socialization, emphasizing the importance of communication and its potential to foster resilience in the context of systematic racism. The specific dialogues parents are having regarding race and racism, the appropriate timing for families to engage in these discussions, and the methods to effectively address this crucial responsibility is important. Hence, it is crucial to understand that racial socialization competencies play an important role and to ascertain appropriate strategies for parents to manage it.

Limitations

An important aspect of this study is the investigation of racial discrimination experienced by Black mothers and fathers and the influence on their ability to

socialize their children about race and racism. We also investigated the role of racial trauma in moderating the effects of racial discrimination and racial socialization competency. Our findings reveal that Black mothers and fathers reported that their experiences of racial discrimination were associated with their ability to engage in conversations about racism with their children. Furthermore, we found that racial trauma was only associated with racial socialization competency for Black fathers. However, it is important to acknowledge limitations of the present study. Initially, while we were able to analyze how parents reacted to stressors linked to race and how it affected their parenting practices and abilities to socialize their children about race, it remained uncertain whether these signals varied based on the child's gender. Research literature indicates that parents' racial socialization messaging varies by gender, depending on whether the child is a boy or a girl (Butler-Barnes et al., 2019). For example, parents may be more likely to discuss experiences of racism with their sons compared to their daughters based on societal expectations and stereotypes surrounding race and gender. Caughy et al. (2011) found that parents of Black girls were more likely to discuss cultural socialization and instilling pride in comparison to boys where parents discussed preparation for bias and to be cautious. Also, it is crucial to go beyond the gender binary (e.g., boy, girl) and considering the expansion and fluidity of gender identity. Racial socialization competencies should not only include Black adolescents who identify as male or female but also encompass Black adolescents who identify as gender nonconforming and transgender individuals, as well as those who fall within the LGBTQIA+ spectrum.

Furthermore, our study did not include an analysis of vicarious racism. There is a growing body of work that has found vicarious racism to have negative effects on the health outcomes and well-being of Black Americans (Daniels et al., 2023). Therefore, due to the clear connection between vicarious racism and its impact on mental health and well-being, we suggest that future studies should investigate not only personal experiences of racism, but also the effects of various other forms of racial discrimination (such as cultural racism, institutional racism, or structural racism) and how this is associated with racial socialization competency. In summary, these findings indicate that the racial experiences of parents are significant, and by addressing the limitations, we can gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of Black parents. This understanding can help develop preventive interventions that prioritize Black mothers and fathers and consider how they have dealt with racism throughout their lives, as well as the impact it has on their racial socialization messaging.

Conclusion

Overall, the results of our study suggest that there is a direct association between Black mothers and Black fathers' own race-related experiences and communication to their child about race and racism. Race-related experiences matter and influences parenting racial socialization-competency. Conversations about racism are imperative as it helps parents educate their children and create a more inclusive society. Yet, Black parents must also navigate their own racialized experiences while contending with being Black in America and having to make sure that their children have the tools to navigate in society. Moving forward, utilizing culturally responsive frameworks and methods will assist in the understanding of the factors that shape the lives of Black caregivers. These stressors and traumas can have a profound impact on the mental health and well-being of Black parents, as they constantly face the challenge of balancing their own healing and self-care with the responsibility of preparing their children for a racially unjust world. Additionally, these findings highlight the need for society to address systemic racism and create a more equitable environment that supports Black parents in raising resilient and empowered children. This scholarship primarily focuses on how Black parents approach raising children in the racialized worlds that they live in (Manning, 2021). It is through racial socialization strategies that parents prepare their children for these experiences in hopes to buffer any negative effects. Racial trauma, in the context of the current study, repositions Black fathers as critical socializing agents of protection for their children. Furthering this scholarship will encourage the use of more gender-nuanced research that centers Black men's and Black women's parenting roles. Ultimately, this work speaks to the need for continued research, policy, and intervention efforts aimed at supporting Black families and promoting racial equity.

Acknowledgments

The research team thanks the families that participated in the project. The team also thanks Alex Devaux for her contribution to the Black Families, Racism, and Resilience (BFRR) Lab.

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Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This research was funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF), grant #: 2045937.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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