

## ABSTRACT

DAVIS, CARMEN PYLES. Growing up African-American and Female: The Relationship Between Racial Socialization and Self-esteem of African-American Female Adolescents. (Under the direction of Dr. Stanley B. Baker.)

Dominant discourse in American society has posed a problem for minority populations because social and identity constructs, such as race, gender, and class, have created a society that has not been fair for less dominant groups. Growing up in the United States as an African-American female adolescent poses particular challenges because these girls contend with typical pre-adolescent and adolescent developmental tasks along with how to negotiate their multiple identities (i.e., being Black and female). For these reasons, developmental issues for African-American adolescent girls are best understood using a multiple-lens paradigm inclusive of gender, race, ethnicity, and social class. Across disciplines, most empirical studies of African-American adolescent girls have emphasized at-risk themes, frequently neglecting normative developmental concerns. The present study explored African-American female adolescents across three socioeconomic (SES) groups to learn how girls from different backgrounds respond to racial socialization as it relates to self-esteem. Ninety-five African-American girls completed questionnaires related to SES, racial socialization experiences, and self-esteem. Correlational (Pearson product-moment) and comparison (ANOVA) statistics indicated no significant relationships between racial socialization and self-esteem, racial socialization and SES, or self-esteem and SES. A significant difference was found in racial socialization frequency scores for the middle SES group compared to the high SES group. Significant differences were also found in racial socialization agreement where the high SES group had lower scores than the low and middle

SES group. The finding that more than 85% of the participants in all three SES groups had higher than average self-esteem scores supports those of prior studies that African-American girls do not experience the same declines in self-esteem during adolescence as do girls from other racial/cultural groups. This research adds to existing literature about this population and may assist counseling professionals and others in understanding the normative development of African-American female adolescents and how race, gender, and socioeconomics play a part in this development.

Growing up African-American and Female: The Relationship Between  
Racial Socialization and Self-esteem of African-American Female Adolescents

by  
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## DEDICATION

First, I want to acknowledge my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for keeping me faithful and focused through this process. My dissertation is dedicated to my family. First, I would like to thank my husband, Ali for always encouraging me to finish when I thought I would never see the end of this journey. He has been my support and *reality therapist* during this journey. To my children who did their best to understand when mommy could not play with them because of school. AJ and Jordan, thank you for being my shining stars! I would like to thank my mother, Doris Greenlee who always told me that I could do anything and who has always been a proud mother. Ali, AJ, Jordan and mom- this is for you!

## BIOGRAPHY

Carmen Davis was born September, 1972 in Huntington, WVA. She is the eldest of three children. Carmen grew up moving around due to her step-father being in the US Air Force. Her family finally settled down in the town of Winston-Salem, NC when she was in high school. Carmen graduated from Appalachian State University with a BA in psychology. Instead of going to work after graduation in 1995, she went to graduate school at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and obtained her MS and EdS degrees in Counselor Education and Marriage & Family Therapy in 1997. During her time in her master's program, Carmen served as secretary for the Counselor Education GSA and was inducted into Chi Sigma Iota. After graduation, Carmen obtained a job position at Family Services of the Piedmont in Greensboro, NC where she worked as a domestic violence counselor. After getting married to her husband who is an officer in the U.S. Army, Carmen moved to Fayetteville, NC in 1999 where her husband was stationed. Carmen began working at Caring Family Network, a non-profit foster care agency as a program manager and later site director. In 2002, she began her doctoral program at North Carolina State University in the Counselor Education Program. Carmen continued to work full-time, and raise her young family while working on her PhD. In 2006, her family relocated to Dublin, CA due to her husband's military commitment. Carmen is now working as a lecturer at California State University East Bay where she teaches in the human development and women's studies department.

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## CHAPTER ONE:

### INTRODUCTION

#### Statement of the Problem

All individuals have multiple identities imposed by society. Identities are socially constructed in society by way of discourse. Discourse addresses the ways in which people act on the world and the ways in which the world acts on individuals. Discourse positions people in power relationships with one another. “They are a set of ideas and structuring statements that underlie and give meaning to social practices” (Robinson, 1999, p. 74). Social and identity constructs, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, and class, have created a society that promotes violence against women, engages in hate crimes, condones narrow images of beauty based on European standards, and provides unequal employment and career opportunities (Robinson, 1999).

For several decades, scholars have described adolescence as a period in girls’ development when many begin to lose their identity, due, in part, to these social and identity constructs. This silencing of adolescent girls takes the form of devaluing their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions. In a society (e.g., American culture) where positive self-identity is not easily attained, African-American adolescent girls are doubly challenged because they are both African American and female—a double minority. Social constructs developed over hundreds of years have created adverse impacts on groups, such as the African-American race, who are defined as inferior by the dominant, privileged group (Myers et al., 1991).

According to Erikson (1968), identity development is a time when adolescents consolidate a sense of identity that is based, in part, on one’s ethnicity, race, and gender.

Therefore, for African-American girls to develop an identity that integrates a healthy sense of one's Blackness and femaleness must be demanding (Shorter-Gooden & Washington, 1996) and to develop positive self-identity in relation to race and gender is one of the most important tasks of adolescent development (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). However, these tasks are challenging because of phenomena including dominant discourse and the historical uniqueness of this group.

According to Robinson (1999), dominant discourse helps to structure the hierarchy and status that an identity does or does not have in society. Social constructs, such as race, gender, and sexual orientation (some visible, some not), have a rank. Gender is an example. Being male is the dominant sex discourse in the United States and being female is ranked lower, consequently sexism exists and contributes to harassment, violence, and self-esteem issues for females (Robinson, 1999).

As the example above illustrates, it is unfortunate for individuals who represent the non-dominant discourse because they could be perceived as unequal, less intelligent, and less important. Visible and invisible identities, such as being Black, Hispanic, Asian, homosexual, poor, or female, often result from these constructed societal views. When individuals belong to more than one of these minority groups, they can feel overwhelmed and even debilitated if they do not accept their multiple identities (Robinson & Watt, 2001).

African-American females are among the groups possessing multiple identities within the context of dominant discourse. The context in which African-American females in the United States develop an identity is a racist and sexist one. Historically, African-American

women have the distinction of being the only group that was enslaved and brought to the United States “to work, to produce and to reproduce” (Almquist, 1995, p. 577).

The legacy of racism and sexism from slavery continues today. African-Americans’ experiences in the United States differ slightly from members of other ethnic groups. Although many other ethnic groups have experienced discrimination and oppression in the United States, the forms of discrimination and oppression faced by African-Americans are unique. While the worthiness of other ethnic groups has often been questioned upon their arrival in American society, no other groups’ humanity was denied them by the United States Constitution. In fact, African-Americans were defined legally as property by the U.S. for almost a century (Sellars, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998).

The continued oppression of African-American females from racism, sexism, and socioeconomic status (SES) has been discussed by social scientists. Since African-American females are disproportionately represented in the lower socioeconomic classes, they are subject to three sources of oppression, race, gender, and SES. The income of Black women in the U.S. lags far behind the income of White men, Black men, and White women, even after controlling for differences in education (Shorter-Gooden & Washington, 1996).

The oppression of African-American women is evident in the economic arena, and they are socially devalued to the point of being invisible to society (hooks, 1991). American society devalues all women to an extent, yet among women, White women are idealized and Black women are assigned a subordinate status. For example, Black women represent the

opposite of what is considered American female beauty (Shorter-Gooden & Washington, 1996).

Thus, growing up in the United States as an African-American female adolescent poses particular challenges. These girls contend with typical pre-adolescent and adolescent developmental tasks along with negotiating how their multiple identities (i.e., being Black and female) tie into these tasks (Shorter-Gooden & Washington, 1996). For these reasons, developmental issues for African-American adolescent girls are best understood using a multiple-lens paradigm inclusive of gender, race, ethnicity, and social class (Lipford-Sanders & Bradley, 2005; Stevens, 1997).

#### Why Study African-American Female Adolescents?

Historically, developmental research of women underscored gender as a key component for obtaining information about women and understanding their development (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). Later, data from an emic perspective suggested that to understand normal developmental issues for children of color more deeply, race and ethnicity should be included in the analysis. Thus, the development of children of color is best understood using a multidimensional focus inclusive of gender, race, ethnicity and social class (Lipford-Sanders & Bradley, 2005; Stevens, 1997).

Investigating the psychosocial development of African-American female adolescents through multiple paradigms will expand the current empirical database about these adolescents. Historically, across academic disciplines, most of the empirical studies of African-American adolescent girls have reflected an emphasis on at-risk themes, such as low



SES, teen pregnancy, low academic achievement, violence, and substance abuse (Lipford-Sanders & Bradley, 2005; Stevens, 1997). The literature has frequently neglected normative developmental concerns, such as friendship, identity, dating, parent–child relationship, sexual orientation, and body image, voiced by African-American adolescents. Although addressing at-risk behaviors among this population is important, especially because a proportion of them are at risk for teen pregnancy, school failure, and sexually transmitted diseases, this view of African-American female adolescents is unfairly one dimensional and perpetuates the negative stereotypes about them. Such a one dimensional view leads society to identify with African-American girls and women only in a discriminatory way (Robinson & Ward, 1991).

Myers (1988) pointed out that Black female adolescents are often ignored or invisible. Both their strengths and their problems receive little attention. Interestingly, despite the societal barriers raised by race, gender, and SES, the African-American community may serve as a buffer to shield African-American female adolescents from much of the impact of racism and sexism. More research of African-American female adolescents is needed to learn more about their unique development and how racism and sexism effect them in negative and positive ways.

### Pilot Study

The investigator conducted a qualitative pilot study in the spring of 2005 designed to discover more about the psychosocial identity development and self-esteem of adolescent African-American girls. Research methods included interviews with a sample population of adolescent African-American girls and their mothers on matters of racism and sexism (Davis

& Baker, 2005). Five African-American mothers and 6 daughters (ages 10-17) were recruited to participate. The investigators hoped that the phenomenological discovery process might offer insights to generate research questions for future empirical research and begin the process of addressing some of the aforementioned gaps in the professional literature.

Three prevalent themes emerged from these interviews. The first theme was the importance of mothers instilling cultural pride (part of racial socialization) in their daughters. The second theme was the importance of helping girls feel good about themselves (self-esteem) and where they come from (e.g., racially, socioeconomically, physically) in order to be successful Black women. Finally, the theme of being a strong Black woman resonated throughout the interviews. Interestingly, when the participants were asked about sexism and gender roles, all of the responses were prefaced with comments about being a *Black* woman, not just a woman. This finding indicated that race more than gender may be of greater concern to mothers in relation to their daughters' identity development process. The daughters all scored above average in self-esteem, and their mothers estimated that the daughters had high self-esteem despite the challenges of race and gender identity, which all of them discussed in the interviews (Davis & Baker, 2005). The findings of this pilot study heavily influenced the researcher's decision to continue investigating African-American female adolescents and identity.

#### Purpose of the Present Study

Racial socialization practice is one important facet of an African-American girl's upbringing. Research findings indicate that providing African-American children with racial

socialization messages serves as a resiliency strategy to protect them from racism or sexism, including African-American females (Buckley & Carter, 2005; Helms, 1990; Lipford-Sanders & Bradley, 2005). The purpose of the present study was to expand the existing literature about the influence of racial socialization on the self-esteem of African-American female adolescents. A secondary goal of the present study was to find out if the influence of racial socialization on self-esteem differs in African-American girls across various socioeconomic statuses. In the spirit of viewing a cross section of African-American female adolescents, it was important to have a representative socioeconomic sample of African-American female adolescents. The findings from this research should have high value to professionals and caretakers of African-American girls.

The findings from the pilot study influenced the research goals for the present study. The relationship between racial socialization and the self-esteem of African-American female adolescents seemed to merit further investigation. In addition, the small sample of mothers and daughters used in the pilot study was representative of similar SESs; thus, diversifying SES might provide important information. The following constructs were investigated further in the present study: racial socialization and self-esteem. The participants in the present study were members of varied socioeconomic groups in order to obtain a representative sample of African-American female adolescents.

#### Racial Socialization of African-American Female Adolescents

The term *racial socialization* refers to the race and ethnicity-related messages that parents communicate to their children. All children experience this type of socialization

regardless of their race, ethnicity, or gender. However, the types of racial socialization messages depend on the children's backgrounds (Cole, Cole, & Lightfoot, 2005). For example, in the African-American community, racial socialization represents a set of communications, interactions, and behaviors between African-American youth and the important people in their lives, including parents and others in the community, regarding racial identity, cultural pride, and sociocultural interactions. Racial socialization also provides coping strategies for experiences of racism or racial ambivalence (Stevenson & Bentley, 2006).

Racial socialization has also been defined as the tasks Black parents have in common with all parents. These tasks include providing for and raising children. Black parents have the further responsibility of raising physically and emotionally healthy children who are Black in a society in which being Black has negative connotations (Peters, 1985). Stevenson, a scholar in the area of racial socialization suggest that it (racial socialization) is associated with the survival abilities of African-American children and that children who are taught more directly about racist situations are better prepared for a racially hostile world. Teaching these skills may also combat psychological maladjustments, such as depression and low self-esteem (Davis & Stevenson, 2006; Stevenson, 2002).

The role of racial socialization processes in the explication and intervention of Black family functioning has increased over the past twenty years (Caughy, Nettles, O'Campo, & Lohrfink, 2005; Chavous, Bernat, Schmeelt-Cone, Caldwell, Hohn-Wood, Zimmerman, 2003; Coard, Wallace, Stevenson, & Brotman, 2004; Constantine & Blackmon, 2002; Davis

& Stevenson, 2006; Hughs, Bachman, Ruble, & Fuligni, 2006; Hughs & Chen, 1997; Hughs, Johnson, Rodriguez, Smith, , Stevenson, & Spicer, 2006; Stevenson & Davis, 2004; Stevenson, Davis, & Abdul-Kabir, 2001; Stevenson, 1994a, 1994b, 2002). This body of literature shows that African-American parents and grandparents used to communicate with their children about racial barriers, cultural socialization, promotion of mistrust, egalitarianism, ethnic pride, and similar issues.

The increasing number of studies about racial socialization has led to a call for more empirical studies. This topic is very complex and can be studied in a variety of ways. Most of the studies the present investigator reviewed on the topic of racial socialization paid little attention to African-American female adolescents and how they respond to racial socialization. The literature has generally focused on all African-American adolescents regardless of gender and demographic background. Racial socialization has also been defined in a variety of ways depending on the scholar's point of view (Cokley, 2007).

Despite researchers' differing views on racial socialization in recent studies, all agree to some extent that parenting Black children involves the usual parental tasks of providing for the child's basic needs and supplying nurture and guidance. In addition, Black parents are almost always involved in socializing their girls and boys to cope with the reality of racism, and they are often engaged in educating their girls about the dynamics of sexism. Racial socialization of their children is a central focus for many Black parents, particularly if they are raising children in predominantly non-Black locales (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003).

A recent study of racial socialization indicates that Black girls and boys respond differently to racial socialization (Stevenson, 2002). For example, Black girls tend to internalize messages related to racial and cultural pride, whereas Black boys pay attention to messages about discrimination and racism. Further exploration of how Black adolescent girls receive and respond to these messages is essential to understanding their normative identity development experience.

#### *Operational Definition for Racial Socialization*

For the present study, a more specific definition of racial socialization is needed because of the complex nature of the topic, the various definitions proposed, and the diverse points of view expressed in the literature. Stevenson, Cameron, Herrero-Taylor, and Davis (2002) have been in the forefront in developing measurable concepts of racial socialization of Black adolescent youth. Thus far, two major themes of racial socialization have emerged: cultural socialization and preparation for bias or racism. Cultural socialization provides messages that promote both cultural pride and empowerment and that celebrate the uniqueness of the African-American experience. Preparation for bias or protective socialization offers advice on navigating racial hostility and the oppressive nature of American society toward Blacks. Although these are two integral components of racial socialization, there is evidence that racial socialization needs to be defined by multiple structural and content dimensions.

For the present study, the definition of racial socialization was based on Stevenson and Bentley's (2006) Cultural and Racial Experiences of Socialization (CARES) measure.

CARES is a comprehensive revision and unification of previous measures of racial socialization by Stevenson (1994b, 2002) that includes conceptual advances in the field and accounts for multiple processes that represent the magnitude and dimensionality of racial socialization.

Racial socialization is defined as a set of communications, interactions, and behaviors between African-American youth and the important people in their lives, including parents and others in the community, that focus on racial identity, cultural pride, and sociocultural interactions. Racial socialization also provides coping strategies for experiences of racism or racial ambivalence.

#### Self-esteem of African-American Female Adolescents

Marcia (1983) defined adolescence as a stage in which individuals are attempting to formulate an adult identity that will guide their perceptions of self and their view of the world. Self-esteem is a positive or negative orientation toward oneself and can be defined as either an overall evaluation of one's worth or as a perception of oneself (Rosenberg, 1989; Townsend, 2002). Research findings indicate that White adolescent girls experience a significant decrease (up to 30% in some studies; e.g., American Association of University Women [AAUW], 1991) in self-esteem from prepubescence to early adolescence. The self-esteem of Black girls, however, remains relatively constant during the same period (AAUW, 1991).

Researchers have found that adolescent girls receive powerful messages from adults and from the broad culture that undermine their self-confidence, suppress their self-identity,

and compel them to conform to limiting gender roles (e.g., Basow, 1999; Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, Lyons, & Hanmer, 1990). The effect of these messages has been described as the *silencing* of adolescent girls, and much of this research refers to the experiences of white middle-class girls. Research of African-American girls indicates that their gender roles may be less limiting and restrictive and that their self-esteem remains fairly constant during adolescence (Cary, 1991; Grant, 1994; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Taylor, Gilligan & Sullivan, 1995; Ward, 1996).

Several hypotheses have been linked to the self-esteem of adolescent girls. Gilligan et al. (1990) described adolescence as a time when girls are in danger figuratively of drowning and disappearing. One of the first signs of danger is that girls are more likely to develop psychological difficulties and respond negatively to stressful events in early adolescence. They may also experience increased episodes of depression and reveal more disturbances in self-esteem. The gender-role hypothesis suggests that gender-specific socialization practices can lead to negative outcomes, such as low self-esteem in girls (Salimen, 1994). The racial-identity hypothesis asserts that positive feelings about one's own racial group are related to high self-esteem (Munford, 1994, Pyant & Yanico, 1991). According to Nobels (1991), people of African descent place a different emphasis on the self than do people of European descent and may derive their sense of self by identifying with African and African-American culture. An African-American's sense of self is closely related to ethnic/racial identity. The more African-Americans intimately identify with and have pride in belonging to their racial



group, the more positive is their sense of self (Aboud & Doyle, 1993; Nobels, 1991; Townsend, 2002).

Black racial socialization literature suggests that parents who provide their children with messages about racial barriers, egalitarianism, ethnic pride, and how to handle racism in society buffer their children from forming a negative attitude about being a Black person. The process prepares Black children to handle the pressures of being Black in a racist society. This type of socialization leads Black children to feel good about their racial group and therefore themselves (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Boykin & Toms, 1985; Hughes, Johnson, Smith, Rodriguez, Stevenson & Spicer, 2006; Stevenson & Davis, 2004).

Self-esteem is a positive or negative orientation toward oneself, an overall evaluation of one's worth or value. People are motivated to have high self-esteem, and having it indicates positive self-regard, not egotism. Self-esteem is only one component of identity, which is defined as the totality of individuals' thoughts and feelings with reference to themselves as an object. In this study, only self-esteem was tested (Rosenberg, 1989).

#### Operational Definition of Socioeconomic Status

The investigator followed Entwisle and Astone's (1994) guidelines of assessing SES. The investigator chose these guidelines because they were specifically designed to help researchers in child and adolescent development appropriately assign study participants to ethnic or SES groups. In preparing these guidelines, Entwisle and Antone considered current practice at the Census Bureau. The recommendation of these researchers was to incorporate parental household income, occupation, and parental education level to come up with SES

for each participant. Because the guidelines are general, the investigator was able to adapt Entwisle and Antone's guidelines to the present study.

Variables that were used to assess SES for the participants in the present study were total family income, parental education level completed, current parental occupation, and household makeup (who lived in the participant's house). Questions about the participants' academic performance (GPA), extracurricular activities, and future career goals were also included. For inclusion in the study, each potential participant had to self-identify as a Black or African-American female and be between the ages of 13-18. A questionnaire was developed by the investigator that included the afore-mentioned variables. The investigator divided the participants into low, medium, and high SES levels based on their collective answers to these variables on the demographic sheet.

#### Research Questions

Four research questions were the product of the present study's goals. The questions were for the data from the sample of African-American female adolescent participants.

1. What is the relationship between racial socialization and self-esteem?
2. What is the relationship between socioeconomic status and racial socialization?
3. What is the relationship between socioeconomic status and self-esteem?
4. Is there a difference in racial socialization and self-esteem across socioeconomic status levels?

## CHAPTER TWO:

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Introduction

“To understand the complexity of African-American girlhood we need more work that documents reality in all its variations and diversity. . . . [T]here is no one story of African-American girlhood” (hooks, 1996, p. 13). The body of literature on multicultural counseling and development is growing, but the experiences of African-Americans in general are oftentimes viewed through the lens of the dominant culture, resulting in a consistent misdiagnosis or distorted interpretation of the Black experience (Lipford-Sanders & Bradley, 2005). For example, there is limited discussion of the normative development and resiliency strategies of African-American people that are specifically taught to African-American girls (Lipford-Sanders & Bradley, 2005). Contemporary researchers (Greene, 1994; Harris, Blue & Griffith, 1995; Hill-Collins, 1990; Lipford-Sanders & Bradley, 2005; Shorter-Gooden & Washington, 1996; Stevens, 1997) have noted the void in the literature on the normative experience and voice for African-American girls and have provided insight through their individual research.

Although studies of African-American adolescent female development have included discussions and investigations of race and culture, the studies have focused almost exclusively on the attributes of the economic and socially disadvantaged African-American youth who are a subgroup of the African-American adolescent female population (Stevens, 1997), which sends the message that the behavior and cognitions demonstrated in at-risk

African-American young women are descriptive of the developmental experiences of all African-American adolescent girls. This theme has the same implications as the perception of African-American family life (e.g., single parent, low income, teen mothers, no father, and troubled youth) that is often portrayed in the social science literature and mainstream media. That is, it highlights researchers' preoccupation with the external forces that act on African-Americans (e.g., poverty and unemployment) as opposed to the internal forces (e.g., racial socialization and spirituality) that allow African-Americans, in general, and African-American girls, in particular, to transcend their life circumstances (Stevens, 1997).

Although there are many similarities in how White and Black girls develop, there are some significant differences that must be noted to understand the full picture of Black girls' unique developmental experience. One such difference is the socialization of African-American girls, which is described as less stereotypic than that of White middle- and upper-middle class girls because it places less emphasis on cultivating the qualities of idealized femininity, such as restraint from displays of assertiveness or anger (Binion, 1990). Like most girls, African-American girls are raised to assume the traditional female role of nurturing and child care, yet they are also encouraged to be strong and self-sufficient and to expect to work outside the home as have generations of Black women before them (Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995).

Child-rearing practices have traditionally encouraged African-American girls to stand up for themselves and fight back, essential survival skills when the social construct of racism is a daily reality. Sociologist Grant (1994) identified this dynamic among younger girls,

finding that, although Black girls in first grade “rarely instigated physical and verbal aggression,” they “fought back verbally or physically against more than half the aggression they encountered” (p. 58). This sense of strength, combined with a positive sense of racial identity, is an important contributor to healthy development.

On the other hand, the training Black girls receive from their parents about being strong and fighting back can hinder their development because the girls do not allow others to get close to them for fear of being emotionally hurt. Thus, African-American girls may develop a disinterest in the attitudes of others toward them as both a means of protection and an attempt to control all situations (Taylor et al., 1995). The Black girl’s desire for control over herself and others is beneficial when fighting against racism and sexism. Her desire for power, however, may also reflect the message Black girls receive that they can deny pain by the experience of power (hooks, 1993).

The African-American girl feels as if she has to stand alone against everyone and everything. She feels like an alien on another planet, especially when away from her family and friends. She keeps her feelings and fears to herself because, to her, they are signs of weakness. Being tough, strong, or outspoken are common survival strategies in a culture where racism and sexism are historical realities and where rumors and gossip pose daily threats to female relationships. The African-American girl isolates herself and loses her voice for the sake of being strong to protect herself from racism and sexism (Taylor et al., 1995). The African-American girl takes a different developmental path than her White counterpart. In resisting the debilitating effects of racism, hooks (1993) explains that, “over time, the

ability to mask, hide, and contain feelings came to be viewed by many Black people as a sign of strong character. To show one's emotions was seen as foolish" (p. 133).

Cary (1991), in describing her own experience as an adolescent in a prestigious, primarily White New England preparatory school, reported that she learned this convention of strong womanhood early on:

I'd be afraid to admit, even to my mother, how much I'd wanted to lie down somewhere and hide. Black women, tall and strong as cypress trees, didn't pull that. Pain and shame and cowardice and fear had to be kept a secret. (p. 191)

In the remainder of this chapter, the investigator reviewed theoretical and research literature related to the research questions presented in Chapter One. Specifically, the investigator reviewed Black racial identity development theory and racial socialization. Next, the construct of self-esteem as related to African-American adolescent female development was explored more in depth in regards to theoretical framework and related research.

#### Cross's Model of Psychological Nigrescence: A Theoretical Framework

Theorists have used various terminologies to discuss and define racial identity development. Racial identity has often been defined simply as a person's racial categorization based on physical characteristics (e.g., Black versus White) (Casas, 1984). However, to take it a step further, racial identity actually refers to a sense of group or collective identity based on one's perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group. What people believe, feel, and think about distinguishable racial groups can have significant implications for individuals' intrapersonal as well as

interpersonal functioning. Therefore, racial identity development theory is more than biological; it is about the psychological implications of racial-group membership and the belief system that evolves in reaction to perceived differential racial-group membership. Specifically, Black racial identity theory attempts to explain the numerous ways in which Blacks can identify, or not identify, with other Blacks and adopt or abandon identities resulting from racial victimization (Helms, 1990).

The nigrescence paradigm is a process in which there is “transformation of a preexisting identity (a non-Afrocentric identity) into one that is Afrocentric” (Cross, 1995, p. 97). The word *nigrescence* is derived from the French word *negritude*, which means the state of being Black (Howard-Hamilton, 1997).

The nigrescence model describes five stages, originally four stages, of racial identity development that African-Americans experience as they develop a psychologically healthy Black identity (Sellars, Shelton, Cooke, Chavous, Rowley & Smith 1998). Of note, Cross recently revised the model and broadened each stage to include more diverse experiences of Black Americans.

The first stage of Cross’s model is the preencounter stage. In this stage, individuals do not believe that race is an important component of their identity. This stage may include an idealization of the dominant White society or simply more emphasis on another identity component, such as gender or religion (Cross, 1991). The dominant White world view in the United States considers Whiteness and White culture as superior to Blackness and Black culture. Therefore, Black Americans who identify with the preencounter perspective must

find some way to separate themselves from the devalued (Black) reference group. The reference group is the group with which an individual most identifies despite his or her biological race. Typically, this disassociation occurs by artificially inflating one's personal identity, abandoning Blacks as a reference group while accepting Whites as such and denying one's Black identity (Cross, 1971; Helms, 1990).

Next, individuals in the encounter stage are faced with a profound experience or a collection of events directly linked to their race. Their experience or collection of experiences forces individuals to reevaluate their thinking about their current identity and find or further develop their Black identity. This experience can be positive or negative (Sellars et al., 1998). Thus, it becomes impossible to deny the reality that they cannot become an accepted part of the "White world." The encounter or encounters make salient the contradiction that no matter how well they conform to White standards, most Whites will always perceive them as Black and therefore inferior. The conscious awareness that the White world is not viable for them and that they must find another identity constitutes the first phase of encounter. As individuals in this stage struggle to discover a new identity, they fluctuate between the recently abandoned preencounter identity and an as yet unformed Black identity. The struggle that follows makes up the second phase of encounter and is comprised of a mixture of feelings including hopelessness, confusion, anxiety, depression, and eventually anger and euphoria (Helms, 1990). McClain (1983) described the struggle as follows:

[In] one day my mind has sped from the naïve thought that everything would be alright in the world if people would just intermarry, to the naïve thought that we



should establish a black homeland where we would never have to see a White face again. (p. C1)

The encounter event or events that trigger transition into this phase are unique to each individual. Thus, one should not assume that a similar event would affect individuals the same way. Instead, what links people in this stage is the psychological experience of confronting an identity-awakening event. Next, the awareness that a Black identity must be developed rather than found triggers entrance into the immersion/emersion stage (Cross, 1971; Parham & Helms, 1986).

The immersion/emersion stage can be described as being extremely pro-Black and anti-White. On the outside, individuals are concerned with identifying with Black culture, but inside they have not made the commitment to endorse all the values and traditions connected with being Black (Sellars et al., 1998). In the first part of this stage, immersion, individuals psychologically and physically, if possible, withdraw into Blackness and a Black world. They think, feel, and act in ways they believe are authentic Black ways. Furthermore, individuals in this phase judge other Blacks on how Black they are based on these Black standards. Anger is one affect typically associated with the immersion phase (Cross, 1971; Parham & Helms, 1986).

Cross (1971, 1991) offered emersion, the second part of this stage, as a possible escape from immersion. Transition into emersion gives individuals opportunities to withdraw into a supportive Black community environment. In this phase, individuals often engage in intellectual, political conversations with others in the Black community, exploring Black and

African culture and hanging out with other Blacks in a spirit of kinship. These positive, Black experiences allow individuals to develop a positive, non-stereotypical African-American perspective of the world. Finally, total acceptance of Blackness as defined by others is no longer necessary for individuals to feel a sense of self-worth. As they become stronger and more confident, individuals then move on to the fourth stage, internalization (Helms, 1990).

The internalization stage is characterized by a sense of inner security and satisfaction about being Black. In this stage, individuals typically have done away with any idealized views regarding the meaning of race. They can see clearly both the positive and negative aspects about being Black and being White. Individuals are able to integrate their personal identity (their unique selves) with their self-identification as Black. Additionally, in this stage, Black becomes the primary reference group to which individuals belong.

Finally, the fifth stage, internalization-commitment, gives individuals an opportunity to “translate their personal sense of Blackness into a plan of action or general sense of commitment” (Cross, 1995, p. 121). For example, Martin Luther King Jr.’s focus on the economy and the Vietnam War during the latter years of the civil rights movement of the 1960s seems to illustrate the internalization-commitment stage.

Cross’s model of psychological nigrescence clearly and straightforwardly defines what individuals will experience emotionally and behaviorally in each stage. Cross describes how individuals perceive what is happening to them as they move through each stage and how they react to it (Miller, 1989). The model has been tested empirically in various studies

dealing with Black students' academic and vocational success, for example. The model has been operationalized, the RIAS (Parham & Helms, 1986). This model is widely known and used in the research world of racial identity development.

The psychological nigrescence model is the cornerstone of subsequent racial identity models developed for all other minority and majority races (Helms, 1990). This model has supplied future researchers and theorists with a starting place to give minority groups across the country a voice (Myers, 1988, Ossana, Helms, & Leonard, 1992; Phinney, 1989, Parham & Helms, 1986,). For example, recent revisions of the model (Carter, 1995; Helms, 1990; Helms & Piper, 1994) have shifted from stage oppression focused development to sequential ego identity statuses and personality integration. Thus, stages have been replaced by statuses, and oppression as the central feature has been replaced by ego differentiation and personality development.

Of interest would be to investigate how Black Americans today respond emotionally and behaviorally to the stages as compared to Black Americans who were coming of age in the late 1960s and 1970s. The investigator's observation is that despite societal changes over the past fifty or so years (i.e., more opportunities for Blacks in education and the workplace), the process of becoming Black may not have changed because the dominant discourse still exists.

A limitation to this model is that it addresses Black racial identity in general and, therefore, does consider how individuals with more than one minority identity (i.e., being Black and a woman) may react as opposed to someone with one minority status. How does

being a double minority affect the way individuals transition from one stage to another? If anything, Cross's model provides a framework to begin exploring this question. This model also provides a framework for researchers who are examining how racial socialization relates to Black children and their racial identity development (Bowman & Howard, 1985, Stevenson & Bentley, 2006).

### Racial Socialization

In the present investigation, racial socialization was viewed only through the lens of how African-American children, specifically African-American female adolescents, might experience it, although all children experience racial socialization (Cole et al., 2005, Crain, 2005). Racial socialization can be described as the practice of communicating messages about race to Black children who live in a society in which being black has negative connotations. Racial socialization differs depending on parents' values and can emphasize achievement, morality, racial equality, and self-esteem, or it may focus on the minority experience or Black culture, including awareness of discrimination (Stevenson, 1994a).

Racial socialization represents different processes whereby families prepare youth to survive in a world hostile to race. Cultural and racial socialization are necessary buffers to protect African-American youth from the onslaught of subtle and blatant racial violence. These forces are systemic and operate apart from any identifiable institutional support. Without this protection, Black youth are assumed to be at risk for psychological maladjustment. Racial and cultural socialization by parents is necessary because the young may be unaware of the dangers in society (Stevenson, 2002).

Few studies address the phenomenological interpretations of racial socialization. Therefore, the discussion of racial socialization in this dissertation begins with a societal view of racism and its possible effects on Black youth. A discussion of these two issues explains the need for the development of a racial socialization agenda in the Black community.

### *Perceived Racism and Mental Health*

The body of research about the psychological impact of racism on African-Americans' mental health is growing. Current research identifies the effect as a health risk of major proportion (Stevenson, McNeil, Herrero-Taylor, & Davis, 2005). In a study in which Black adolescents and their parents were asked to self-report their experiences and reactions to racism, Nyborg and Curry (2003) found several internalizing and externalizing psychological symptoms, including lower self-esteem and hopelessness, associated with teenagers and perceived racism.

Nyborg and Curry's (2003) study is just one example of how experiences with race and racism significantly influence Black youths' emotional development. Studies of racism's effects on urban Black youths' mental health have found that psychological distress, depression, and anger are natural responses to racially hostile environments. However, despite the downside of the effects of racism, some young people demonstrate academic achievement as a response to racism (Sanders, 1997; Stevenson & Davis, 2004; Stevenson, McNeil, Herrero-Taylor & Davis, 2005). Still, the experience of racism as it interacts with diverse contextual living environments (i.e., SES, parental support and presence) and with

racial socialization styles of Black families is an untapped area of psychological interest (Stevenson et al., 2005).

*Prevalence of Racial Socialization in African-American Families*

Most Black parents are likely to transmit racial socialization messages to their children. For example, 68% of adolescent respondents in a nationally representative sample reported that their parents communicated racial socialization messages (Bowman & Howard, 1985). Sanders Thompson (1994) reported that 79% of Black adults while growing up discussed racial issues with their parents and 85% discussed issues with another family member.

Black parents differ in how they transmit messages to their children. For example, Thornton, Chatters, Taylor, and Allen (1990) examined how sociodemographic and environmental factors, including income, marital status, geographic region, gender, education, age, and neighborhood, relate to the likelihood of parents socializing their children about race. Respondents consisted of a randomly selected sample of 2,107 Black Americans. The authors found that married parents are more likely than single parents and mothers are more likely than fathers to socialize their children about race. Adults living in the Northeast, especially males, are more likely to socialize their children regarding race than adults living in other regions. Older parents are more likely to teach their kids about race than younger parents. More highly educated parents are more likely than less educated parents to engage in racial socialization.

Thornton et al. (1990) offered several reasons why parents may not racially socialize their children. Parents' acceptance of negative images that society perpetuates about Blacks, or fear of causing their children to become bitter, angry, resentful, or prejudiced may deter some parents from transmitting racial socialization messages. Parents may also feel that racism is less of a problem now and that discussions of race relations are no longer needed. Parents may feel that their primary goal is to teach life skills independent of racial status. Parents' feelings about their own racial identity may influence whether they teach their children about race and its effects (Cross, 1991).

#### *Content and Frequency of Parents' Racial Socialization*

To date, studies have varied considerably in how racial socialization is conceived and measured, limiting researchers' ability to integrate findings across studies. Some studies have focused solely on the transmission of cultural values, knowledge, and practices (cultural socialization), others on preparing youth for discrimination (preparation for bias), still others on parenting practices that emphasize the need for wariness and distrust in interracial interactions (promotions of mistrust), and, finally, some on how parents are silent about race and thus focus on mainstream socialization (egalitarianism and silence about race) (Hughes, Johnson, Rodriguez, Smith, Stevenson & Spicer, 2006).

*Cultural socialization.* Cultural socialization refers to several parental strategies for raising Black children, including (a) practices that teach children about their racial or ethnic heritage and history; (b) practices that promote cultural customs and traditions; and (c) practices that promote children's cultural, racial, and ethnic pride, either deliberately or by

chance. Examples of these practices are (a) talking about important historical or cultural figures; (b) exposing children to culturally relevant books, artifacts, music, and stories; (c) celebrating cultural holidays; (d) eating ethnic foods; and (e) encouraging children to use their family's native language. Cultural socialization has been central to researchers' ideas regarding parental influences on children's ethnic and racial identity formation (Hughes, Bachman, Ruble & Fuligni, 2006).

*Preparation for bias.* Parents' efforts to promote their children's awareness of discrimination and to prepare them to cope with it have also been emphasized as an important component of racial socialization (Hughes, Johnson, Rodriguez, Smith, Stevenson & Spicer, 2006). Overall, studies suggest that few parents, in response to open-ended questions about socialization, spontaneously mention discussing discrimination with their children. Unclear is whether this phenomenon occurs because preparation for bias is less salient to parents than are other racial socialization themes, or because discrimination and racial bias are too painful or uncomfortable to discuss in the context of interviews with relative strangers.

For example, in response to questions about what parents taught about being Black, one study found that 8% of parents and 13% of children mentioned messages about racial barriers (Bowman & Howard, 1985). Similarly, Marshall's (1995) study found that 14% of African-American parents and 3% of African-American children mentioned racial barriers in response to open-ended questions. Contrarily, Sanders Thompson (1994) found that 48% to 58% of African-American adults who were asked to recount race-related discussions during



their youth recalled parental messages about racial barriers. This finding may result from discrimination being more likely a topic of discussion than is participation in activities that parents use to promote ethnic pride and knowledge in their children. Despite the ambiguous results in this area of racial socialization, preparation for bias is an important topic of discussion between Black parents and their children, especially in regards to sharing knowledge about historical experiences of oppression (i.e., slavery, Jim Crow) (Ward, 1991).

*Promotion of mistrust.* Mistrust may be communicated in parents' warnings to children about other racial groups or in their cautions about barriers to success. Promotion of mistrust differs from preparation of bias. Promotion of mistrust contains no advice for coping with or managing discrimination (Hughes & Chen, 1997). Similar to preparation for bias, themes related to mistrust rarely emerge in response to open-ended questions, and parents rarely endorse items assessing promotion of mistrust in survey-based studies. For example, in a study by Thornton et al. (1990), fewer than 3% of Black parents mentioned instructing their children to maintain social distance from Whites as a strategy for racial socialization. The percentages of parents who have reported ever conveying cautions or warnings about other groups in survey-based studies are similarly low, ranging from 6% to 18% (Hughes & Chen, 1997). Only one study, (Caughy et al, 2005) found that a majority of parents (65%) reported promotion of mistrust. However, the wording of items, which focused on discrimination rather than cautions and warnings, might account for the high level of endorsement in the study.

Despite general patterns suggesting that promotion of mistrust is not prevalent, themes related to mistrust have emerged in several qualitative studies, suggesting that a subset of parents do transmit these messages to their children. In a study involving interviews with Black parents, about one third of the respondents reported teaching their children defensive racial protocols, mistrust of other groups, and the importance of keeping social distance (Coard, Wallace, Stevenson, & Brotman, 2004). In focus groups with Black parents, Hughs and Dumont (1993) reported that discussions about both encouraging children's vigilance in interactions with White peers and the need to maintain social distance and skepticism in relationships with them occurred in every group.

*Egalitarianism and silence.* Boykins and Toms (1985) coined the term *mainstream socialization* to refer to parental strategies that encourage children to value individual qualities over racial group membership. In mainstream socialization, parents typically avoid any discussion about race with their children. Studies indicate that egalitarianism is of great consequence to parents and is prevalent in the African-American community. In focus groups, many African-American parents have said that emphasizing hard work, virtue, self-acceptance, and equality is their primary racial socialization strategy (Hughes & Dumont, 1993; Marshall, 1995; Thornton et al., 1990).

Silence about race has not typically been examined as an explicit dimension of racial socialization, although failure to mention racial issues also communicates race-related values and perspectives to children. When parents are asked open-ended questions about their strategies to racially socialize their children, a substantial minority report doing nothing, with

estimates ranging from 20% to 50% (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Parham & Williams, 1993; Sanders Thompson, 1994; Thornton et al., 1990).

### *Impact of Racial Socialization Teachings*

Recent investigations of parental teaching of racial coping strategies and adolescent internalization of family racial coping across studies have shown important and positive effects on child adjustment (Boykin & Toms, 1985; Hale, 1991; Hughes & Chen, 1997; Johnson, 1988; Marshall, 1995; H. P. McAdoo, 1985; J. L. McAdoo, 1988; J. L. McAdoo 1999 found that kinship ties (real and fictive) served as a stress absorber for African-American adolescents and adults and protected them against outside stress arising from racism, discrimination and other sociocultural environmental issues (Murray, Stokes, & Peacock, 1985; Powell-Hopson & Hopson, 1992; Spencer, 1983, 1984; Stevenson, 1994a; Thornton et al., 1990). Other researchers have taken a different view, focusing on adolescent reports of racial socialization experiences and the beliefs their parents have expressed (Constantine & Blackmon, 2002; Fischer & Shaw, 1999; Stevenson, 1994, 1995, 1997, 1998; Stevenson, Cameron, et al., 2002; Stevenson, Reed, & Bodison, 1996; Stevenson, Reed, Bodison, & Bishop, 1997).

Understanding the behavioral, interpersonal, and ecological factors that influence the delivery and reception of these strategies is still an untapped area in racial socialization research. Taking the adolescent's perspective of racial socialization events may validate the impact of racial socialization on youth adjustment. This technique may also be used to link socialization and identity processes in Black youth (Stevenson, 1995). Recent advances in

understanding the multidimensional aspects of racial identity development point to the important role of racial socialization processes (Cross, 1995; Sellers, 2002; Sellers, et al., 1998). Racial centrality, a natural result of intense racial socialization, for example, has been identified as a buffer to the negative mental health outcomes related to racial discrimination (Sellers, Chavous, & Cooke, 1998) and school engagement (Oyserman, Harrison, & Bybee, 2001).

#### *Gender Dynamics in Adolescent Racial Socialization Experiences*

Whether parents deliver specific racial socialization messages to youth based on gender has not been well examined. Of studies that have examined this issue, the results are mixed (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Caughy, Nettles, O'Campo, & Lohrfink, 2005; Frabutt, Walker, & MacKinnon-Lewis, 2002; McNeil, 1999; Scott, 2003; Stevenson, Reed, et al., 1997; Thomas & Speight, 1999). Some studies have failed to identify gender differences in racial socialization practices (Caughy et al., 2005; Frabutt et al., 2002; Hughes & Chen, 1997; Phinney & Chavira, 1995; Scott, 2003; Stevenson, Reed, et al., 1997). Conversely, Sanders Thompson (1994) reported that men are exposed to a greater number of race discussions than are women. The type of message transmitted to males and females may differ. In a study by Bowman and Howard (1985), African-American teenage males reported receiving socialization messages related to racial barriers and egalitarianism, whereas teenage females received socialization messages on racial pride. Thomas and Speight (1999) found similar gender differences in their study, such that African-American boys received more messages about negative stereotypes whereas girls received more messages related to

the importance of achievement and racial pride. Expanding the work of Bowman and Howard (1985), McNeil (1999) also found gender differences in racial socialization as reported by a sample of African-American college students. McNeil distinguished ethnic (intragroup) from racial (intergroup) socialization. Ethnic socialization was defined as group-specific themes that included messages directed at valuing group identity and group membership. Racial socialization was defined as messages that focused on intergroup strategies and ecological constraints. When gender was examined, differences were found in the concentration of ethnic socialization but not racial socialization messages given to females and these differences were in the perceived emphasis (saturation) on ethnic socialization messages. Both African-American males and females received messages to support in-group identity, but females reported a higher concentration of those messages. Stevenson, Reed, et al. (2002) found that boys reported significantly greater racial socialization around alertness to discrimination than did girls.

Gender differences have been found for mental health correlates of racial socialization beliefs. Stevenson, Reed, et al. (1997) found cultural pride messages were related to lower aggressive and situational anger expression and higher depression scores for boys. For girls, depression scores were lower and anger expression scores higher when proactive (less oppression-focused beliefs) and protective (more oppression-focused beliefs) racial socialization beliefs were endorsed. Despite these findings of gender differences, there remains a paucity of research that explores either how larger macrofactors (social and environmental) affect the racial socialization practices of parents or teenager perspectives of

those parental practices. Both parents and the broader environmental context are believed to play important roles in the racial socialization process (Stevenson, 1998; Thornton et al., 1990).

*Role of Truth Telling in the Socialization of African-American Girls*

The role of truth telling during the racial socialization process is very important to African-American parents because many Black parents agree it is important to instill a healthy dose of psychological resistance in their children to help them cope with racism rather than run away from it (Ward, 1996). Ward's qualitative study (1996) examined the role of truth-telling in the African-American mother and daughter relationship and how it could help or hinder the daughter's psychosocial development. The following Black mother's story, offered in response to questions about raising Black children, illustrates how Black mothers directly and indirectly incorporate the powerful lessons of resistance into the daily routine of parenting:

When my daughter Patsy was four, I would sit her down between my legs and every morning as I combed and braided her hair I would have her reach up and run her hands through it. Look at how pretty your hair is. Feel how tight and curly it feels. Look how pretty it can be when you style it up with ribbons, beads and bows or when you just let it be. Look at how different it is from your little white friends and how special that is. (Ward, 1996, p. 85)

Similar to other African-American mothers before her, this mother weaves a unique psychological script for parenting that is shaped by the socialization experiences African-

Americans have endured as marginalized members of American society. This mother and others like her had the foreknowledge of what their daughters would soon encounter—attacks upon their self-esteem by those who measure their beauty against a White standard and devalue their blackness and self-worth. In teaching Patsy to play with and cherish her naturally kinky hair, her mother believes she will arm her young daughter with the tools necessary to resist the relentless assault of American beauty myths on the Black woman's sense of self.

Black families play an important role in orienting their children to the existing social environment and in teaching them what they need to know about the world. According to Ward (1996), the parenting of Black children is a political act. The psychological survival of Black children depends largely on the Black family's ability to endure racial and economic discrimination and to negotiate conflicting and multiple role demands. This task is a huge but necessary undertaking in the Black family.

Other themes emerged from Ward's (1996) study of intergenerational transfer of race-related resistance strategies passed down from Black parents to adolescent children. For example, Black parents talked about how misrepresentation and distortion serve to undermine the efforts of Blacks to gain self-determination and achieve personal and racial affirmations. Most parents agreed it was important not to sugarcoat to their children how race would affect their lives. One parent said, "If you want your children to be able to survive in this society, they'd better understand what reality is, you know, and you can never forget who you are" (Ward, 1996, p. 86).

To bring home this point, Ward (1996) found a common theme among the parents of sharing the pain. Parents believed it was important to share their own personal experiences with prejudice and institutional racism. This phenomenon of sharing the pain was described by Ward as a psychological sense of oneness. Overall, the adolescents in her study stated they appreciated their parents' candor and straightforwardness in speaking the truth about and the effects of race relations. Although this truth telling may seem harsh to some, Black parents who successfully instill healthy psychological resistance in their children help them cope with racism rather than run away from it. Despite a general appreciation of the helpfulness of their parents' truth telling, this communication method can also serve to discourage Black adolescents if the parent does not handle the truth telling in a straightforward but loving manner.

Ward (1996) found that many mother–daughter relationships were characterized by some dissension and conflict because the mothers approached this truth telling as a means of protecting their daughters. The mothers would explain the realities of life to their daughters but with anger and irritation and without any explanation. Rather than instilling strength, this communication style risks provoking psychological distress in the child. This harsh criticism of the child for wanting to fit into White society could have a demoralizing instead of protective effect.

Ward (1996; Robinson & Ward, 1991) posited that Black adolescent females adopt either a resistance for survival orientation or a resistance for liberation orientation. Resistance for survival orientation can be counterproductive to healthy self-esteem and racial identity.



Resistance for liberation can serve to empower African-American females through confirmation of positive self-esteem.

#### A Theoretical Framework for Self-esteem: Gilligan's Lost Voice Theory

For the past century, scholars have described adolescence as a period in girls' development when many begin to devalue their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions and consequently risk becoming repressed (Buckley & Carter, 2005). Gilligan has established herself as a leader in the field of female development by investigating how girls lose their authentic selves as they enter adolescence and become at risk for low self-esteem (Gilligan et al., 1990). Through her extensive work with girls, Gilligan created a developmental model to address how girls lose their voice and their authentic selves in this male-dominated society.

Gilligan's research at two private schools (Emma Willard School and The Laurel School) indicated that adolescence creates a crisis for girls that involves a conflict between the expression of individual beliefs and opinions and keeping quiet for the sake of pleasing others (Muuss, 1996). This crisis forces a showdown between what a girl knows to be true about relationships and the demands to grow up and assert her independence by disconnecting and separating from others (Gilligan et al., 1990). According to Gilligan, adolescence is a time when girls are in danger, figuratively, of drowning and disappearing. Girls are more likely to first develop psychological difficulties and respond negatively to stressful events in early adolescence. Additionally, episodes of depression increase for girls at this time and more disturbances in self-esteem are revealed (Gilligan et al, 1990).

Gilligan and her colleagues proposed that girls go through three developmental stages regarding how they communicate and connect with others. Stage One occurs in young girls between the ages of 7 and 10 and is characterized by the display of a confident world view. During this stage, girls tend to be forthright in their observations, claim their authority without hesitation, and describe their world without inhibitions (Muuss, 1996).

By the time girls approach age 11 they enter Stage Two. Gilligan referred to girls in this stage as “Whistle Blowers.” At 11, girls become careful observers and outspoken critics of where and when women speak and when they are silent. At this stage, girls resist male authority and spend time observing the interaction between males and females. They pay close attention to adult women’s compliance. Girls at this stage do not agree with obedience to male authority and feel compelled to “blow the whistle” when they witness adult women acquiescing with seemingly unfair decisions of their male counterparts. Instead, at this age girls applaud women’s assertiveness (Muuss, 1996).

A female teacher from the Willard school shared an example with Gilligan. The teacher was working with a male teacher in the classroom. The male teacher made a new rule that he announced to the students without the female teacher’s knowledge or consent. Although the students voiced their opinions about the rule’s unfairness and they resisted it, the female teacher felt obligated to go along with the rule at first. One day, when it was clear that the rule was senseless, the teacher excused the girls from obeying the rule. The girls told the teacher how proud they were of her. The female students had accurately observed everything and were proud of the female teacher for voicing her opinion and standing up for

what she truly believed (Gilligan et al., 1990). Girls at this age are sometimes called “bossy.” A sixth-grade teacher reported that whenever she paraphrased a girl’s statement incorrectly, the girl was likely to respond, “That is not what I mean.” Teachers may find it difficult to deal with the outspokenness of girls this age. In summary, “Eleven year-olds are not for sale” (p. 12).

Girls at the age of 12 or 13 experience a transition as they approach adolescence. Gilligan determined that, in part, it is girls’ fears of being exposed to attention and anger that triggers the onset of uncertainty. Girls at this age become more aware of physical violence and psychological violence against women in this society and begin to fear other people’s anger (Muuss, 1996).

Stage Three is characterized by personal confusion and occurs during a girl’s adolescent years. Adolescent girls learn to understand the human social world, but they distance themselves from their knowledge by regularly prefacing their statements with “I don’t know” (Gilligan et al., 1990, p. 12). Fifteen and 16-year-old girls bury their knowledge and parts of themselves in an intricate, repressed underworld. During adolescence, girls are in danger of losing their voice and thus their connection with others. Their voices express ambivalence, confusion and denial (Gilligan et al., 1990).

Gilligan facilitated groundbreaking research of the psychology of the girl, investigating a group in which there has been little interest. Gilligan found that a girl’s growing-up experience is different from a boy’s and that society’s expectations are largely responsible for the crisis they undergo. Gilligan captured what it means to be a girl.

By getting to know these girls over a period of years, Gilligan and her team confirmed that the root of a girl's development is the need for connection with others. The crisis occurs when a girl feels she has to be silent in order to please others. Society must realize the negative effect that this societal expectation is having on girls and implement policies to help girls keep their true voice (Gilligan et al., 1990). Gilligan's developmental theory provides a guide for future research in this area, especially as it relates to self-esteem, achievement, and gender differences. Gilligan herself has continued to research the difference in voice concept between girls and boys.

The theoretical stage model of girls' development in relation to society is very useful in understanding not only girls themselves but also how we as a society relate to them. Males and females are different, and it is important to study both equally to truly understand how each gender handles developmental changes triggered by environmental and biological factors. Gilligan believed that studying girls is a must because of society's frequent victimization of girls and women through violence and oppression. Understanding how the developmental experiences of girls and boys differ may ensure that parents, teachers, and other responsible adults are cognizant of how their comments and expectations can cause girls to lose their voice. Girls' losing their voice is the crisis Gilligan wrote about in her model, and it is important to stand up and take notice so that girls' development is not compromised (Gilligan et al., 1990).

### *Limitations*

Some important limitations in Gilligan's lost voice concept studies may pose problems for generalizing results to other races and cultures of girls. First, Gilligan chose subjects from two exclusive private schools, the Emma Willard School and the Laurel School), thus most of the girls were from a homogeneous population comprised of white, upper-middle-class individuals. Second, the sample size was fairly small in both studies, consisting of 50 girls or fewer. The lack of diversity in Gilligan's samples makes it difficult to determine whether the lost voice experience is the same for all girls, particularly African-American girls because they experience a very different socialization process (Binion, 1990).

Important to note is that Gilligan and her colleagues did conduct two follow-up studies in which they examined and interviewed girls considered urban. According to Gilligan, the girls in these two studies confirmed many of the findings from the prior studies with the students from the Emma Willard School and the Laurel School. While these findings are suggestive, further validity and reliability testing on additional sample groups is needed to clarify whether this theory is applicable to all girls. A final criticism of Gilligan's research is that she did not include males in any of her studies to validate her assumption that boys and girls speak in different voices (Binion, 1990).

Gilligan's theory of the lost voice of the adolescent girl has a great deal of relevance to present-day society. Girls are still being socialized and taught to be that ideal good girl, which results in many of them losing a part of themselves to please others and maintain the relationships they so desperately want and need. Gilligan's groundbreaking research has

uncovered this secret world of the girl and has brought it to the forefront so it can be addressed as a society. Living in this unauthentic voice can result in a loss of self-esteem (Gilligan et al., 1990).

### Self-esteem and African-American Girls

Self-esteem is associated with a number of important psychological phenomena, both positive and negative. High self-esteem has been associated with productive coping strategies, enhanced motivation, and a positive emotional state. Individuals with high self-esteem experience an incremental improvement in their quality of life. Low self-esteem, on the other hand, places individuals at greater risk for many emotional and behavioral disorders, such as anxiety, lack of motivation, suicidal behavior, eating disorders, delinquency, conduct disorders, and depression (Quatman & Watson, 2001).

Gilligan and her colleagues (1990) were instrumental in uncovering issues about girl psychology and how growing up in a male-dominated society can have negative effects on girls' psychosocial development. Adolescent girls are at risk for losing their authentic selves, and, as a result, may develop mental health issues, have low academic achievement, and have low self-esteem (Gilligan et al., 1990; AAUW, 1991). A growing body of literature now focuses on the special challenges adolescent girls face in developing and maintaining their sense of self-esteem. However, as has been previously established in the present study, African-American female adolescent development may differ from that of their White counterparts or other ethnic groups because of their unique history in America (Almquist, 1995; Sellars et al., 1998).

### *Gender Differences in Youths' Self-esteem*

Findings on gender differences in self-esteem are rather inconsistent. Some studies have indicated no significant gender differences in reported levels of self-esteem (Mullis & Mullis, 1997; Phinney, Cantu, & Kurtz, 1997), whereas other studies have found male adolescents have significantly higher levels of self-esteem than do female adolescents (Gordon & Caltabiano, 1996; Martinez & Dukes, 1991; Phinney et al., 1997; Zimmerman, Copeland, Shope & Dielman, 1997).

One consistent piece of the adolescent self-esteem puzzle is that boys outscore girls on global measures of self-esteem. The relationship between gender and self-esteem in adolescence, while modest, has been well established (Gordon & Caltabiano, 1996; Martinez & Dukes, 1991; Phinney et al., 1997; Zimmerman et al., 1997). In a meta-analysis of 80 studies of adolescent self-esteem, O'Brien et al. (1996) reported that boys have slightly higher global self-esteem levels than girls by an average difference of one fifth of a standard deviation ( $d$  value = .20). This small yet statistically significant difference becomes more compelling when one considers its power to persist into adulthood, at which time men continue to have the same slightly higher self-esteem than do their female peers (Quatman & Watson, 2001).

Researchers have also begun to explore the differential influence of family relationships and support on adolescent girls' and boys' self-esteem. Brage and Meredith (1994) found that, relative to the other factors in their study, family strengths (the extent to which families can cope with problems and conflicts) had the strongest total effect on self-

esteem. Demo, Small, and Savin-Williams (1987) demonstrated that an adolescent's self-esteem was positively influenced by perceptions of parental support, participation, and communication. Avison and McAlpine (1992) found that adolescents' perceptions of both parents as caring were positively associated with feelings of mastery and high self-esteem, for girls more so than for boys, and that perceptions of parental overprotectiveness were associated with depression in girls but not in boys.

#### *Ethnic Differences in Female Adolescents' Self-esteem*

Self-esteem research tends to be rather consistent in finding that African-American adolescents either do not differ from (Wade, 1991; Zimmerman, et al., 1997) or score higher than Caucasian adolescents (Maton et al., 1996; Phinney et al., 1997). African-American adolescents who hold positive attitudes about their minority identity may be partially protected against negative stereotypes and may be better prepared to withstand internal and external pressures (McCreary, Slavin, & Berry, 1996). Gender-role orientation also serves as protector against low-self esteem in African-American female adolescents.

In a study of gender roles, racial identity, and self-esteem (Buckley & Carter, 2005), the majority of Black adolescent girls who endorsed an androgynous gender role had higher self-esteem than those who endorsed more traditional feminine roles. This finding was consistent with earlier research of Black men's and women's gender roles. Individuals develop their attitudes and beliefs about gender in response to reinforcement and modeling from members of their racial and cultural group. Models of womanhood and their cultural teachings for Black girls have included displays of independence, self-confidence, and self-



reliance (i.e., characteristics more common to males). This finding is opposite from that in Gilligan et al.'s (1990) landmark study of girls. Instead of being ridiculed for and discouraged from displaying these attitudes, as are White middle- and upper-class girls, Black girls are often praised for displaying both masculine and feminine characteristics because they fit into the gender role expectations of their cultural group. Such behavior leads Black girls who display these characteristics to experience high perceived self-esteem (Buckley & Carter, 2005).

Displaying masculine attributes is not the only pathway to high self-esteem for Black girls. The manner in which girls identify with Blacks and being Black (reference group) is also critical for self-esteem and a healthy racial identity. Helms (1990), who has conducted extensive racial identity research, reported that the more positive Black individuals feel about being Black and being associated with the Black race, the better their self-esteem.

Interestingly, despite the evidence that Black girls and women face the prospect of being devalued by both Black and White society in general in favor of White women, Black females have been able to maintain a positive sense of self against what appear to be overwhelming odds (Duke, 2002). African-American women are socialized to appear strong, tough, resilient, and self-sufficient (Shorter-Gooden & Jackson, 2000). African-American women are viewed, even by themselves, as impervious to the difficulties of life (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003).

*Self-esteem and Racial Socialization Practices*

There is a growing body of literature on the relationship between racial socialization and self-esteem. Constantine and Blackmon (2002) explored the relationship between parental racial socialization messages and area-specific self-esteem (i.e., home, school, and peer self-esteem) among Black American adolescents. The authors found positive associations between parental racial socialization messages reflecting pride and knowledge about African American culture and Black youths' peer self-esteem. Moreover, racial socialization messages about the relative importance of majority culture (i.e., White) institutions and the values and benefits associated with being involved with these institutions were negatively associated with school self-esteem in Black adolescents.

Constantine, Alleyne, Wallace, and Franklin-Jackson (2006) tested a path model to explore the relationships among Africentric cultural values, self-esteem, perceived social support satisfaction, and life satisfaction in a sample of 147 African American adolescent girls. The researchers also examined possible mediating effects of self-esteem and perceived social support satisfaction in the relationship between adherence to Africentric cultural values and life satisfaction in this sample. Although no significant mediating effects were found, results indicated that greater adherence to Africentric cultural values among African-American adolescent girls was predictive of both higher self-esteem and perceived social support satisfaction. Higher self-esteem was then significantly predictive of greater life satisfaction. However, perceived social support satisfaction was not significantly predictive of life satisfaction in this sample of girls.

*African-American Female Adolescent Self-esteem and SES*

Results from studies of the effects of SES on self-esteem in children and adults have been inconclusive and, in one case, conflicting (Goodman, Adler, Kawachi, Frazier, Huang, & Colditz, 2001). Rosenberg and Pearlin (1978) examined social class and self-esteem among children and adults, suggesting that age was a critical factor in teasing apart the relationship between self-esteem and SES. They found virtually no association between social class of parents (measured by the Hollingshead Index of Social Position) and self-esteem among younger children, a modest association among adolescents, and a moderate association among adults based on their own social class.

Since the work by Rosenberg and Pearlin (1978), others have explored the relationship of self-esteem to SES, especially among adolescents. With some exceptions, Rosenberg and Pearlin's results have been replicated. Filsinger and Anderson (1982) found no relationship between an adolescent's own SES (Duncan SES Index) and self-esteem (Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale) but a significant relationship between the SES of the person's best friend and self-esteem. They attribute this finding to a heightened sense of self-efficacy among those who interact with friends of a higher social status than themselves, as it may be the social status of significant others from which adolescents derive their own sense of social status.

Demo and Savin-Williams (1983) replicated and extended Rosenberg and Pearlin's (1978) findings. They found that the relationship between SES (father's occupation) and self-esteem was greater among eighth-graders than among fifth-graders.

Richman, Clark, and Brown (1985) found a main effect for the relationship between self-esteem and SES among adolescents but demonstrated complicated interactions of gender, race, and social class. White females (including high SES individuals) were significantly lower in general self-esteem than were white males, black males, and black females.

Using both traditional and non-traditional measures of social class, including father's unemployment status, neighborhood unemployment, family welfare status, and neighborhood evaluation, Wiltfang and Scarbecz (1990) found fathers' education had a small positive relationship with adolescents' self-esteem, while non-traditional measures had moderate to strong (neighborhood unemployment) associations with self-esteem, all in the expected direction. They also found, however, that adolescent achievement variables (school grades, group leadership, report of many close friends) contributed significantly more to self-esteem than did parental social class variables.

Finally, in a study of seven hundred and eleven 16-year-olds in England, Francis and Jones (1995) found that the relationship of SES and self-esteem varied with the measure of self-esteem utilized. A significant relationship was found between SES and the Coopersmith Self-esteem Inventory (Coopersmith, 1987) and a moderate relationship with the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale.

### Summary

Cross (1991) and Gilligan et al. (1990) provide developmental theories to help explain the racial identity process for African-Americans and the psychological development

of girls. Although these theories do not fully explain African-American female adolescent development, they serve as a cornerstone to the understanding of these girls' normative developmental processes. Both theories answer a piece of this developmental puzzle and provide insight as to how identity is formed in relation to race and gender.

Because African-American girls have to integrate the identities of being Black and female in a society where these identities are not as valued (dominant discourse), it is important to study this group to determine within the context of dominant discourse how being Black and female may affect their development in positive and negative ways (Robinson, 1999).

To understand normal developmental tasks and issues for children of color, race and ethnicity should be focal points of research about them. Unfortunately, this *multiple-lens* perspective is often not considered. The development of African-American girls has historically been viewed as one dimensional. Thus, research has focused on the at-risk population without considering the many dimensions of African-American girls' lives. Studying African-American girls across SES backgrounds may show African-American girls' development in more than one dimension and reveal that there is no one story in African-American girlhood (hooks, 1996).

Research (AAUW, 1991) has shown that African-American girls' self-esteem scores are often higher than their White counterparts. What has not been answered clearly is why. Does racial socialization have something to do with this? What role do parents have in ensuring their daughters are prepared for a world in which individuals look at color and

gender first before the person inside? Current research suggests that Black parents deliberately engage their children in talks about being Black and for girls being a Black female and what that means.

The practice of racial socialization is one protective factor that aids in the development of positive racial identity in African-American adolescents (Stevenson & Bentley, 2006). Having positive racial identity has been linked to positive self-esteem in African-Americans (Cross, 1991, Helms, 1990). In reference to gender identity, females who adopt a more masculine or androgynous view of gender roles tend to have higher self-esteem than females who adopt a more traditional female gender role (Buckley & Carter, 2005).

However, more research of racial socialization, gender identity, SES and self-esteem as a collective entity is needed to more fully understand how the influence of these two identities, Black and female, on normal development in African-American female adolescents across SES groups. The present research was dedicated to furthering the research for this population. The next chapter provides a description of the procedures used to investigate African-American female adolescents in the present study.

## CHAPTER THREE:

### METHOD

#### Introduction

Racial socialization is an important process for African-American female adolescent development. Prior research suggests this process is related to positive self-esteem during the turbulent adolescent years for African-American girls. The present study investigated these constructs with African-American girls across SES backgrounds.

#### Participants

The researcher recruited African-American adolescent girls ages 12-19 to participate in the study. To recruit participants for the study, the researcher contacted leaders of organizations, such as the YMCA, churches, youth groups, high schools, and colleges. The goal was to collect data from as many different sources as possible to have a sample large enough and diverse enough to place participants in high, medium, and low SES groups. A total of 95 female adolescents participated in this study. The participants were recruited from local middle schools, high schools, and colleges in the states of North Carolina, Michigan and Virginia. Participants and their guardian (for participants under 18 years-old) were required to read and sign an informed consent form prior to participating in this study (see appendix A).

The determination of an adequate sample size was calculated using a formula recommended by Tabachnick and Fidell (2001). This formula was used because of its appropriateness for regression models, which was the analytic method used in this study):

$$\text{Sample Size} = 104 + m,$$

where  $m$  equals the number of independent variables. Given that formula, the sample size for this study was estimated at between 110-120 participants. To obtain an even sample size for each SES group, the researcher increased the sample size so the three SES groups were divided by even numbers. A total of 34 questionnaire packets were eliminated because of incomplete packets or participants having randomly filled out the questionnaires. As a result, the sample size was reduced to 95. Therefore, there was a total of three groups, with high comprised by 32 participants, middle by 32, and low by 31.

### Instrumentation

#### *Demographic Survey*

A demographic survey was employed in the present study. The questionnaire sought information about participants' race/ethnicity, household make-up (who lives in the participant's house), age, grade level, GPA, income, and future career goals (see Appendix B).

Data from the demographic survey were analyzed in order to determine the *socioeconomic status (SES)* of the participants. Variation in SES is a fact of life in our society as well as in other cultures. Individuals and families vary in their access to jobs, earnings, assets, and power, and they differ according to the status of their families of origin. Researchers have often argued the importance of social stratification in understanding various social phenomena. Stratification experts have sought to develop reliable and valid measures of SES (Mueller & Parcel, 1981). While socioeconomic status is one of the most



frequently measured variables in research and is considered a viable indicator of economic and social status, researchers disagree over how to define or reliably measure SES. To improve explained variance when measuring SES, the use of multiple indicators, such as occupational status, income, and education combined, provides the researcher the best chance of capturing a true picture of their subjects' SES background. Although these indicators are distinct measurements, they are correlated (Miller & Salkind, 2002).

To ensure a more accurate assessment of SES, the researcher combined annual family income, parental occupation, and parental education in the present study. The investigator followed the guidelines of assessing SES as outlined by Entwisle and Astone (1994) who considered U.S. Census Bureau practices. Entwisle and Astone (1994) suggested assessing occupation classification by using Nam Power (2000 census) socioeconomic status scores. Parental education, employment, and household income were assessed by using a multiple-choice scale where participants could select the category that best described their current status.

The employment levels used in the present study to assess occupational status from the lowest to highest were unemployed, less skilled laborer, college student, more skilled laborer, graduate or medical student, homemaker, less skilled office worker, more skilled office worker, or professional. The employment levels of both the participant's mother and father were assessed. The education levels of both the participant's mother and father was assessed by the following categories: middle school, high school, vocational/technical school, community college/associates degree, college/bachelor's degree, advanced degree

(e.g., MD, MA, PhD). The participant's total household income was assessed by the following ranges: \$0–\$15K; \$15,001–\$25K; \$25,001–\$50K; \$50,001–\$75K; \$75,001–\$100K; \$100,001–\$125K; \$125,001–\$200K; \$200,001–above.

All three SES indicators were assessed and combined to place participants in low, medium, and high SES categories. There were five SES measures (mother's education, father's education, mother's occupation, father's occupation, and total household income). All five measures of SES were transformed into  $z$  scores to create an aggregated estimate of SES for each participant to place her in a SES category.

*Racial Socialization Measure: CARES*

The Youth–Cultural and Racial Experiences of Socialization Scale (CARES), developed by Stevenson and Bentley (2006), is a comprehensive revision and unification of previous measures of racial socialization by Stevenson (Stevenson, 1994b; Stevenson et al., 2002) that includes conceptual advances in the field. It accounts for multiple processes that represent the breadth and dimensionality of racial socialization. The CARES instrument asks Black parents and youth about their experiences with racial socialization, including components of frequency, time of occurrence, importance, and source. The instrument also asks about the presence and quality of strengths, such as relationships with extended family, beliefs about religion and spirituality, and metaphorical parenting (i.e., the use of proverbs, stories, or sayings to teach children about life lessons).

The CARES measure is comprised of two instruments: the Parent–CARES that targets parents or caregivers and the Youth–CARES that focuses on the experiences of

adolescents and college students. In this study, only the Youth–CARES was administered. The Youth–CARES is designed for dissemination to a broad range of African-American young people from adolescents to college students (ages 12-22). This measure seeks youths' perceptions of the racial socialization messages they have received throughout their lifetime. Previous findings from Stevenson's racial socialization measures have shown that the messages received differ according to gender and that these differences may have implications on coping responses to racism (Stevenson & Bentley, 2006).

The Youth–CARES is unique in that it not only measures the frequency and agreement with each message but also includes the expanded option of message sources beyond parents. The identification and measurement of additional sources, including siblings, extended family, peers, teachers, and the media, enables connections between the sources and specific types of messages that affect emotional and academic outcomes. Multi-layered racial background information is another factor for consideration that explores the prevalence and context of racial socialization messages in biracial/multiracial households. The source, agreement, and frequency of racial socialization messages provide great insight into these specific households, particularly when the primary caregiver is of a different race than the child (Stevenson & Bentley, 2006).

The Youth–CARES consists of seven subscales, each representing a component of racial socialization that parents and caregivers teach their youth. The subscales are alertness to racism, coping with antagonism, religious coping with antagonism, cultural legacy, cultural pride, internalized racism, and mainstream/bicultural coping.

The alertness to racism subscale contains statements about the importance of an awareness of racism against African-Americans and the necessity to learn to navigate in a racially hostile society (e.g., preparation for bias). For example, parents teach their children directly or indirectly that racism is real and that it must be understood or they could get hurt.

The coping with antagonism subscale contains statements about the importance of struggling successfully through racial hostilities. For example, parents encourage their children directly or indirectly to speak up when someone says something racist.

The religious coping with antagonism subscale contains statements about the importance of struggling successfully through racial hostilities and the role of spirituality and religion in coping with racial hostilities. For example, parents teach their children directly or indirectly that God can protect them from racial hatred.

The cultural legacy subscale contains statements about the cultural heritage of and historical issues related to African Americans. For example, parents teach their children directly or indirectly the importance of knowing about Black slavery.

The cultural pride reinforcement subscale contains statements that endorse the teaching of pride and knowledge of African-American culture. For example, parents teach their children directly or indirectly to be proud of who they are and never be ashamed of their color.

The internalized racism subscale contains statements that endorse negative stereotypes about African-Americans. Although agreement with these statements may not necessarily be a reflection of self-hatred, it may result from prolonged marginalization and

inappropriate education. For example, parents teach their children directly or indirectly that poor Black people are always looking for a handout or that Black children will learn more if they go to a White school.

The mainstream/bicultural coping subscale contains statements regarding strategies for dealing with mainstream culture, such as codeswitching/biculturalism (Shorter-Gooden & Washington, 1996) as well as an acknowledgement of White privilege and having a White frame of reference. An example of this phenomenon occurs when parents pass on the belief that sometimes you have to look and act more like White people to get ahead in America or that you can learn a lot about life from being around important White people.

The Youth-CARES is a 74-item revision of previous racial socialization measures (Stevenson, 1994; Stevenson et al., 2002) that gauges the frequency, agreement, and source of messages. After each message, the respondents are asked the frequency of receiving the message (*Not at All, Sometimes, All of the Time*) and the extent to which they agree with the message (*Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree*). The participants are then asked to cite all the sources for each message (*Mother, Father, Grandparent, Teacher/Professor, Sibling, Other Adult, Peers, Media, No one told me this*). Using the guidelines for good use of reliability (Helms, Henze, Sass, & Mifsud, 2006), composite reliability for Youth-CARES is very high for both the frequency ( $r = .93$ ) and agreement ( $r = .84$ ) measures based on the trial studies already conducted by Stevenson and Bentley (2006).

To determine the extent of socialization for each subscale, the scores for each of the corresponding items were added together to create one total score. For instance, to compute

the frequency score for the coping with antagonism subscale, the researcher added items number 18, 28, 38, 47 and 55 together. The higher the score, the higher the degree of endorsement of racial socialization around African-American racial and cultural issues. The range of scores is from 12 to 133, with high scores indicating more exposure to racial socialization (see Appendix C).

*Standardized Self-Esteem Measure: Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)*

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (1989) was administered to the participants to gather information on how they rated their self-esteem. The RSES, perhaps the most widely used self-esteem measure in social science research, defines self-esteem as having a positive or negative orientation toward oneself and an overall evaluation of one's worth or value. Much of Rosenberg's work examined how social structural positions, such as racial or ethnic statuses, and institutional contexts, such as schools or families, relate to self-esteem. The RSES was originally used with adolescents and has been shown as reliable when used with this population. The latter is the reason this scale was chosen over other self-esteem scales for the present study. This scale has generally high reliability: test-retest correlations are typically in the range of .82 and .88. This scale is easy to administer and take. The RSES is a 10-question Likert-type instrument that asks the participant to strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with statements. The participant's raw score is summed. The highest possible score that a participant can receive is 40. The higher the score, the higher the self-esteem (see Appendix D).

## Procedure

### *Data Collection*

Once IRB approval was obtained by North Carolina State University, the researcher selected the 95 participants for the study. The researcher arranged for them to meet in designated locations to complete the items in the survey packet. The survey packet was administered on six separate occasions in a group setting, with the size of groups ranging from as small as six people to as large as 45 people. One participant was administered the questions alone because of her location. Two trained individuals assisted the principal investigator with administering the instruments. The researcher met with these individuals prior to administering the surveys in order to teach them how to administer the survey packet. The researcher discussed with the trainees the purpose of the research, who the participants would be, and how to fill out each instrument. Confidentiality was also discussed. The researcher stressed the importance of keeping the participants' paperwork secure as well as not discussing the participants' answers with anyone. The training session lasted approximately 20 minutes.

The survey packets included: (a) informed consent forms for parents of participants under the age of 18; (b) informed consent forms for participants 18 and over; (c) SES and demographic surveys; (d) the Cultural and Racial Experiences Scale (CARES); and (e) the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSES). The instruments were presented in random order to each participant to avoid order of completion bias resulting from participant fatigue.

### *Data Analyses*

Data analyses were conducted to answer the following research questions and associated hypotheses. The corresponding types of statistical analyses are indicated.

Research Question One: What is the relationship between racial socialization and self-esteem?

H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant positive relationship between racial socialization and self-esteem. (correlation)

Research Question Two: What is the relationship between socioeconomic status and self-esteem?

H<sub>2a</sub>: There is a significant negative relationship between lower socioeconomic status and self-esteem. (correlation)

H<sub>2b</sub>: There is a significant positive relationship between middle socioeconomic status and self-esteem. (correlation)

H<sub>2c</sub>: There is a significant positive relationship between upper socioeconomic status and self-esteem. (correlation)

Research Question Three: What is the relationship between socioeconomic status and racial socialization?

H<sub>3a</sub>: There is a significant negative relationship between lower socioeconomic status and racial socialization. (correlation)

H<sub>3b</sub>: There is a significant positive relationship between middle socioeconomic status and racial socialization. (correlation)



H<sub>3c</sub>: There is a significant positive relationship between upper socioeconomic status and racial socialization. (correlation)

Research Question Four: Is there a difference in levels of racial socialization and self-esteem across socioeconomic status levels?

H<sub>4a</sub>: There is a significant difference in self-esteem across levels of socioeconomic status. (ANOVA; SES levels = independent variable; self-esteem = dependent variable)

H<sub>4b</sub>: There is a significant difference in racial socialization across levels of socioeconomic status. (ANOVA; SES levels = independent variable; racial socialization = dependent variable)

To determine the strength of correlational relationship statistics, the resultant statistics were squared to account for all the variance in the sample. In the analyses of variance, significant *F* statistics lead to appropriate follow-up tests to determine where the differences occurred when there is more than two independent variables in the analysis.

## CHAPTER FOUR:

### RESULTS

The purpose of the present study was to expand the existing literature about the influence of racial socialization on the self-esteem of African-American female adolescents. A secondary goal was to find out if differences in the influence of racial socialization on self-esteem exist in African-American girls across different socioeconomic status. A total of 95 female adolescents participated in this study.

Table 1 displays the frequency counts for selected variables. For racial/ethnic background, the most frequent descriptor was Black/African American. Specifically, this descriptor was used by 90.5% of the females to describe themselves and to describe their mother (85.3%) and their father (85.3%). All (100.0%) of the respondents were female and the majority had completed high school (65.3%). Most of the females (86.3%) lived in North Carolina. Household annual income ranged from \$0 to \$15,000 to more than \$200,000, with a median annual income of \$62,500. For parent's occupation, the median category for their mother was "more skilled office worker" and for their fathers, the median category was "less skilled office worker." The median category for grade point average (GPA) was "3.00 to 3.24." More than half the respondents (56.8%) aspired for an advanced degree, with another 34.7% reporting they aspired to earn a bachelor's degree (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Frequency Counts for Selected Variables (N = 95)*

Variables and categories	<i>n</i>	%
Describe self		
Black/African American	86	90.5
Black/African	1	1.1
Black/Caribbean	3	3.2
Black/Hispanic	2	2.1
Multiracial	2	2.1
Other/Don't Know	1	1.1
Describe mother		
Black/African American	81	85.3
Black/African	5	5.3
Black/Caribbean	4	4.2
Black/Hispanic	2	2.1
Multiracial	3	3.2
Variables and categories	<i>n</i>	%
Describe father		
Black/African American	81	85.3

*Table 1 (continued)*

Black/African	4	4.2
Black/Caribbean	3	3.2
Black/Hispanic	2	2.1
Multiracial	1	1.1
White	1	1.1
Hispanic	2	2.1
Other/don't know	1	1.1
Gender		
Female	95	100.0
School level		
Middle school	15	15.8
High school	62	65.3
College	18	18.9
Location		
Michigan	12	12.6
North Carolina	82	86.3
Virginia	1	1.1
Variables and categories	n	%
Income		
\$0 to \$15,000	5	5.3

*Table 1 (continued)*

\$15 to \$25,000	11	11.6
\$25 to \$50,000	25	26.3
\$50 to \$75,000	14	14.7
\$75 to \$100,000	11	11.6
\$100 to \$125,000	3	3.2
\$125 to \$200,000	17	17.9
Over \$200,000	9	9.5
Mother's occupation		
Less skilled laborer	10	10.5
More skilled laborer	19	20.0
Less skilled office worker	12	12.6
More skilled office worker	27	28.4
Professional	27	28.4
<hr/>		
Variables and categories	<i>n</i>	%
<hr/>		
Father's occupation		
Less skilled laborer	11	11.6
More skilled laborer	32	33.7
Less skilled office worker	16	16.8

*Table 1 (continued)*

More skilled office worker	13	13.7
Professional	23	24.2
GPA		
Lower than 2.50	12	12.7
2.50 to 2.74	5	5.3
2.75 to 2.99	14	14.7
3.00 to 3.24	20	21.1
3.25 to 3.49	11	11.6
3.50 to 3.74	14	14.7
3.75 to 3.99	11	11.6
4.00 or higher	8	8.4
Educational aspiration		
Less than BA/BS degree	8	8.4
BA/BS degree	33	34.7
Advanced degree	54	56.8

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Table 2 displays the descriptive statistics for selected variables. Variables included age ( $M = 16.36$ ), total people in home ( $M = 4.34$ ), number of children ( $M = 2.37$ ), number of adults ( $M = 2.01$ ) and number of income earning adults ( $M = 1.67$ ) (see Table 2).

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics for Selected Variables (N = 95)*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Low	High
Age in years	16.36	1.96	12	19
Total people in home	4.34	1.81	2	10
Number of children in home	2.37	1.61	0	7
Number of adults in home	2.01	0.75	1	4
Income-earning adults in the home	1.67	0.71	0	4

*Note.* *N* = 95.

### Psychometric Characteristics of the Scales

Table 3 displays the psychometric characteristics for the summated scales. For the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale, the Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient was  $r = .81$ , which suggested that the scale possessed adequate internal reliability.

Table 3

*Psychometric Characteristics for Summated Scales (N = 95)*

Scale	Items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Low	High	$\alpha$
Rosenberg self-esteem	10	24.86	4.51	12.00	30.00	.81
Incorrect racial socialization frequency	74	2.05	0.39	1.03	3.00	.96
Corrected racial socialization frequency	74	2.80	0.28	1.93	3.41	.84
Incorrect racial socialization agreement	74	2.72	0.49	1.04	3.77	.96
Corrected racial socialization agreement	74	2.13	0.21	1.62	2.66	.85

*Note.*  $N = 95$ . “Incorrect” scores were created by simply averaging the responses, while the “corrected” scores were generated based on scoring recommendations by Stevenson & Bentley, 2006), which included reverse scoring 22 items.

The frequency scores (see Table 3) were based on the responses given to 74 statements using a 3-point metric (1 = *Never*, 2 = *A few times*, 3 = *Lots of times*). Using the scoring formula provided by Stevenson & Bentley (2006), 22 items were reverse-scored (3 = *Never*, 2 = *A few times*, 1 = *Lots of times*). Using Stevenson and Bentley’s (2006) scoring formula (the “corrected” scoring method), the resulting Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient was  $r = .84$ . However, the corrected item-total correlation coefficients provided by the SPSS (ver. 6, 2008) reliability printout found all 22 reverse-scored items had negative correlations



with the corrected total score, suggesting that the “corrected” scoring system was not applicable to this dataset.

In contrast, when all 74 frequency items were simply averaged together without reverse scoring any of the items (the “incorrect” scoring method), the resulting Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient was  $r = .96$ . The related corrected item-total correlations found all correlation coefficients to be positive and only 3 of 74 coefficients had item-total correlations of less than  $r = .30$ . The combination of the high reliability coefficient plus the high item-total correlations would suggest that the simple but “incorrect” scoring approach would yield the most accurate summarization of the dataset.

A similar pattern of findings was noted for the socialization agreement scores (see Table 3). The agreement score was based on the responses given to 74 statements using a 4-point metric (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 2 = *Disagree*, 3 = *Agree*, 4 = *Strongly Agree*). Using the same scoring formula provided by Stevenson & Bentley (2006), 22 items were reverse-scored (4 = *Strongly Disagree*, 3 = *Disagree*, 2 = *Agree*, 1 = *Strongly Agree*). Using Stevenson and Bentley’s (2006) scoring formula (the “corrected” scoring method), the resulting Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient was  $r = .85$ . However, the corrected item-total correlation coefficients provided by the SPSS (ver. 6, 2008) reliability printout found all 22 reverse-scored items had either negative correlations with the corrected total score or positive correlations of less than  $r = .10$ . This finding again suggested that the “corrected” scoring system was not applicable to this dataset.

In contrast, when all 74 items were simply averaged together without reverse scoring any of the items (the “incorrect” scoring method), the resulting Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient was  $r = .96$ . Inspection of the related corrected item-total correlations found all correlation coefficients to be positive, only 6 of 74 coefficients to have item-total correlations for less than  $r = .30$ , and only one coefficient was negatively correlated with the total score. The combination of the high reliability coefficient plus the high item-total correlations would suggest that the simple but “incorrect” scoring approach would yield the most accurate summarization of the dataset.

In conclusion, higher reliability coefficients were generated when the items were simply averaged instead of using the reverse-scoring formula provided by the Stevenson and Bentley (2006). Fundamentally, a Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient provides an index of the degree to which all the items are rated similarly. Given that fact, the researcher would conclude that the items did measure the same construct. However, some of the items, from an intuitive standpoint, at least should be reverse-scored. Examples of this are Item 1, “You should be proud to be Black,” and Item 69, “Black men just want sex.” Given the high reliability of the simple scoring approach, the researcher concluded that many of the adolescents used a fixed response set to answering statements rather than considering each answer, calling into question the validity of the answers provided by the respondents. Therefore, all hypotheses were tested using both the “corrected” scoring formula provided by Stevenson and Bentley, (2006) and the simple “incorrect” scoring approach of merely averaging the answers to each of the 74 statements.

To further address potential validity issues, the Rosenberg scale was transformed by dividing the respondent's score by 10 (number of items in the scale) to obtain an average response score (see Table 4) and provide a method of interpretation by matching up the respondent's average response with the scale's underlying metric (0 = *Strongly Disagree*, 1 = *Disagree*, 2 = *Agree*, 3 = *Strongly Agree*). Of the 95 participants, 21.1% rated themselves as having "perfect" self-esteem ( $M = 3.00$ ), indicated by giving the most favorable answer for all 10 items. The highest percentage of females (38.9%), with average response scores between  $M = 2.50$  to  $M = 2.99$ , gave either the most favorable response (3-point answer) or the next most favorable response (2-point answer) for most or all of the 10 items. Only 14 females (15.8%) had an average response score under  $M = 2.00$ . One possible explanation for this response style could be that these respondents gave socially desirable answers rather than revealing how they truly felt about themselves. If this explanation were true, then that would call into question the validity and accuracy of the self-esteem estimates used in this study.

Table 4

*Distribution of Rosenberg Self-esteem Scores*

Average Response Score <sup>a</sup>	<i>n</i>	%
Under 2.00 points	14	15.8
2.00 to 2.49 points	23	24.2
2.50 to 2.99 points	37	38.9
3.00 points	20	21.1

*Note.*  $N = 95$ . Scoring metric: 0 = *Strongly Disagree*, 1 = *Disagree*, 2 = *Agree*, 3 = *Strongly Agree*.

<sup>a</sup>Average response score was calculated by dividing the original total self-esteem score by 10 (total number of items):  $M = 2.49$ ,  $SD = 0.45$ .

## Research Question One

Research Question One asked, “What is the relationship between racial socialization and self-esteem?” Hypothesis One suggested “there is a significant positive relationship between racial socialization and self-esteem.” To address this question and hypothesis, Table 5 displays the Pearson product-moment correlations for self-esteem with the four measures of racial socialization (frequency and agreement using both “corrected” and “incorrect” scoring methods). The self-esteem score was negatively correlated to all four socialization subscales.

Specifically, self-esteem was negatively correlated with (a) incorrect racial socialization frequency ( $r = -.28, p = .006$ ); (b) corrected racial socialization frequency ( $r = -.12, p = .23$ ); (c) incorrect racial socialization agreement ( $r = -.26, p = .01$ ); and (d) corrected racial socialization agreement ( $r = -.02, p = .88$ ) (see Table 5). These findings provided no support for Hypothesis One.

#### Research Question Two

Research Question Two asked, “What is the relationship between socioeconomic status and self-esteem?” Hypothesis Two (a) suggested “there is a significant negative relationship between low socioeconomic status and self-esteem and a significant positive relationship between middle and high socioeconomic status and self-esteem (hypothesis two (b) and (c).” Results for this question using Pearson product-moment correlations are shown in Table 5. Aggregated SES was created by averaging the  $z$  score transformations from five related metrics: mother’s and father’s education, household income plus mother’s and father’s occupation level. Six measures of SES were correlated with the respondent’s level of self-esteem (aggregated SES, mother’s and father’s education, household income plus mother’s and father’s occupation level). None of the six correlations were statistically significant at  $p = .05$  (see Table 5), thus providing no support for Hypothesis Two (a), (b) or (c).

#### Research Question Three

Research Question Three asked, “What is the relationship between socioeconomic status and racial socialization? Hypothesis Three (a) suggested “there is a significant negative

relationship between low socioeconomic status and racial socialization and a significant positive relationship between middle and high socioeconomic status and racial socialization (hypothesis three (b) and (c).” Results for this question and hypothesis using Pearson product-moment correlations for aggregated socioeconomic status (SES) with the four measures of racial socialization (frequency and agreement using both “corrected” and “incorrect” scoring methods) are reported in Table 5. The aggregated SES score had no significant correlations with any of the four socialization measures. Therefore no significant relationships were found for hypothesis (a), (b) or (c). Specifically, the correlations for aggregated SES were (a) incorrect racial socialization frequency ( $r = .00, p = .98$ ); (b) corrected racial socialization frequency ( $r = -.10, p = .31$ ); (c) incorrect racial socialization agreement ( $r = -.03, p = .75$ ); and (d) corrected racial socialization agreement ( $r = -.18, p = .08$ ) (Table 5).

Table 5 also displays the Pearson product-moment correlations for these five individual SES metrics with the four measures of racial socialization. Four of the 20 resulting correlations were statistically significant. Specifically, corrected racial socialization frequency was negatively related to the father’s occupational level ( $r = -.21, p = .05$ ). The incorrect racial socialization agreement score was positively related to the mother’s education level ( $r = .21, p = .04$ ). In addition, the corrected racial socialization agreement score was negatively related to the father’s education level ( $r = -.24, p = .02$ ) and the family’s household income ( $r = -.20, p = .05$ ) (see Table 5).

In Table 5, five other correlations were statistically significant. Specifically, age was negatively correlated with corrected racial socialization frequency ( $r = -.22, p = .04$ ) and corrected racial socialization agreement ( $r = -.34, p = .001$ ). The respondent's self-esteem score was positively correlated with GPA ( $r = .22, p = .03$ ) and educational aspiration level ( $r = .20, p = .05$ ). In addition, educational aspiration level was positively correlated with the respondent's corrected racial socialization agreement score ( $r = .20, p = .05$ ) (see Table 5). Although aggregated socioeconomic status for low, medium or high groups were not statistically significant to racial socialization in either direction; when analyzing each SES metric individually with the four separate racial socialization measures, some significant relationships were found between several different variables.

Table 5

*Pearson Product-Moment Correlations for Self-esteem and Socialization Scores*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale	1.00				
2. Incorrect Racial Socialization Frequency	-.28	1.00			
3. Corrected Racial Socialization Frequency	-.12	.79	1.00		
4. Incorrect Racial Socialization Agreement	-.26	.64	.50	1.00	
5. Corrected Racial Socialization Agreement	-.02	.43	.62	.65	1.00
Age	.07	-.15	-.21	-.13	-.34
Mother's education	-.18	.14	.14	.21	.13
Father's education	-.19	-.07	-.15	-.10	-.24
Parents married <sup>a</sup>	.03	.03	.00	.05	-.02
Income	.11	.08	-.01	.01	-.20
Mother's occupation	.08	-.08	-.10	-.12	-.08
Father's occupation	.04	-.06	-.20	-.11	-.19



*Table 5 (continued)*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
Number of adults	-.04	-.01	.01	-.11	-.06
Income earning adults	.19	-.01	-.02	-.07	-.07
Grade point average	.22	.02	.04	-.03	.10
Educational aspiration level	.20	-.19	.03	-.08	.20
Aggregated SES score	-.05	.00	-.10	-.03	-.18

*Note.*  $N = 95$ . “Incorrect” scores were created by simply averaging the responses, while the

“corrected” scores were generated based on scoring recommendation

ns by Stevenson & Bentley (2006), which included reverse scoring 22 items. Significance

levels for absolute correlations:  $r = .20$  ( $p < .05$ );  $r = .26$  ( $p < .01$ );  $r = .28$  ( $p < .005$ ); and  $r =$

$.33$  ( $p < .001$ ).

<sup>a</sup>Coding: 0 = *No*, 1 = *Yes*

### Research Question Four

Research Question Four asked, “Is there a difference in racial socialization and self-esteem across socioeconomic status levels?” Hypothesis Four suggested “there are significant differences in racial socialization and self-esteem across the three socioeconomic levels.” To address this research question and related hypothesis, Table 6 displays the results of the one-way ANOVA test comparing the self-esteem score of the respondents with the SES category. The categories were created by dividing the aggregated SES score into three equal groups of respondents (lowest, middle, highest). The one-way ANOVA test was not significant ( $p = .90$ ). The accompanying  $\eta$  coefficient (the correlation between the nominal level SES category and the respondent’s self-esteem score) was weak ( $\eta = .05$ ) (see Table 6).

Table 6

#### *One-Way ANOVA Based on Socioeconomic Category*

Test and Score Category	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\eta$	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale				.05	0.11	.90
1. Lowest	32	25.00	3.80			
2. Middle	32	25.03	4.76			
3. Highest	31	24.55	5.01			
Total	95	24.86	4.51			

*Table 6 (continued)*

Incorrect racial socialization frequency				.16	1.28	.28
1. Lowest	32	2.00	0.36			
2. Middle	32	2.14	0.42			
3. Highest	31	2.01	0.39			
Total	95	2.05	0.39			
Corrected racial socialization frequency				.27	3.54	.03
1. Lowest	32	2.13	0.19			
2. Middle	32	2.20	0.22			
3. Highest	31	2.06	0.18			
Total	95	2.13	0.21			
Test and Score Category	n	M	SD	$\eta$	F	p
Incorrect racial socialization agreement				.14	0.92	.40
1. Lowest	32	2.71	0.35			
2. Middle	32	2.80	0.56			
3. Highest	31	2.64	0.53			
Total	95	2.72	0.49			

*Table 6 (continued)*

Corrected racial socialization agreement				.25	3.15	.05
1. Lowest	32	2.85	0.24			
2. Middle	32	2.85	0.30			
3. Highest	31	2.70	0.28			
Total	95	2.80	0.28			

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*Note.*  $N = 95$ . “Incorrect” scores were created by simply averaging the responses while the “corrected” scores were generated based on scoring recommendations by Stevenson & Bentley (2006) which included reverse scoring 22 items. Scheffe post hoc tests found no significant differences between the three groups at  $p < .10$ .

Using those same three SES categories, Table 6 displays the one-way ANOVA tests for the respondents’ four racial socialization scores. No significant differences were noted among the three SES categories for the incorrect racial socialization frequency score ( $p = .28$ ,  $\eta = .16$ ) and the incorrect racial socialization agreement score ( $p = .40$ ,  $\eta = .14$ ). Significant group differences were noted for the corrected racial socialization frequency score ( $p = .03$ ,  $\eta = .27$ ). The subsequent Scheffe post hoc test found the score for the middle SES group ( $M = 2.20$ ) to be significantly higher ( $p = .03$ ) than the mean score for the upper SES group ( $M = 2.06$ ). Significant differences ( $p = .05$ ) were also noted between the three SES categories for the corrected racial socialization agreement score. The score for the highest SES group ( $M = 2.70$ ) was significantly lower than the score for the lowest SES group ( $M = 2.85$ ,  $p = .10$ ) and

the middle SES group ( $M = 2.85, p = .10$ ) (Table 6). These findings provided some support for Hypothesis Four because the results indicate that the middle SES group received racial socialization more frequently than the high SES group. Also, the high SES group agreed less with racial socialization messages than the low and middle SES groups.

## CHAPTER FIVE:

### DISCUSSION

#### Overview

In this study, the psychosocial development of African-American female adolescents was investigated through a multiple-lens paradigm as a means to expand the existing empirical database about this group. Racial socialization practices are important facets of African-American girls' psychosocial development and were the focus of the present study. A secondary goal was to find out if differences in the influence of racial socialization on self-esteem existed in African-American girls across different socioeconomic statuses. Specifically, the researcher wanted to explore the relationship between racial socialization and self-esteem in African-American female adolescents, while examining how SES affected these variables.

Four research questions and hypotheses were tested. The results indicated no significant relationships between racial socialization and socioeconomic status or between self-esteem and socioeconomic status. A significant finding was that the higher the participants' self-esteem scores, the less frequently they reported hearing racial socialization statements and the less they agreed with those statements. In regard to differences across socioeconomic status, the middle SES group had significantly higher racial socialization frequency scores than did the upper SES group. Finally, the high SES group had significantly lower racial socialization agreement scores than did the middle or low SES groups.

Some secondary findings were noteworthy. Across SES's, participants' GPA and educational aspiration levels were positively correlated with their self-esteem score. Additionally, educational aspiration level was positively correlated with respondents' corrected racial socialization agreement score. Finally, most of the participants had average (24%) to above average (38.9%) self-esteem scores, and 21% scored the highest self-esteem score possible. This finding is consistent with previous studies (AAUW, 1991; Buckley & Carter, 2005; Duke, 2002; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Maton et. al, 1996; Mc Creary, Slavin, & Berry, 1996; Phinney et. al., 1997; Shorter-Gooden & Jackson, 2000) that found African-American girls do not experience the same declines in self-esteem as girls from other ethnic/cultural groups.

#### Discussion by Research Question

##### *Relationship Between Racial Socialization and Self-esteem (Research Question One)*

The investigator was surprised that no significant relationship was found between racial socialization and self-esteem among African-American female adolescents. The participants did not relate their self-esteem to the adoption (agreement) of racial socialization messages at all. In fact, the less frequently the girls reported hearing racial socialization messages and agreeing with them, the higher their self-esteem scores. Moreover, the data suggest that other external factors, such as GPA score and aspirations for the future, had more to do with the participants' high self-esteem scores. In fact, 21% of the respondents had a perfect score on the self-esteem measure. This finding corresponds to Buckley and Carter's (2005) finding in a study of within-group differences and self-esteem among African-

American females that Black racial identity was not related to total self-esteem. However, the present study contradicts Buckley and Carter's finding that participants who had internally defined racial identity attitudes (internalization) reported higher self-esteem. The present study indicated a negative relationship between racial socialization agreement and self-esteem. In other words; the higher racial socialization, the lower the self-esteem.

In the present study a majority of the participants scored high on self-esteem. Despite having high self-esteem scores, the participants had low racial socialization scores, suggesting they have not internalized (agreed with) the racial socialization messages they have received. Again, this finding contradicts the present study's hypothesis that self-esteem is positively correlated to racial socialization. Contrarily, Constantine and Blackmon (2002) found an association between parental racial socialization messages that reflected pride and knowledge about African-American culture and positive self-esteem in African-American girls.

Overall, the participants reported a low occurrence of hearing and agreeing with racial socialization messages (frequency) in all seven sub-categories of the CARES instrument. Across all three SES categories (low, medium, high), the participants generally reported hearing racial socialization messages just a few times and agreeing with the messages they heard less than half the time. This finding contradicts four of the studies reviewed. For example, Bowman and Howard (1985) found that 68% of black parents are likely to transmit racial socialization messages to their kids. Sanders Thompson (1994) found similar results. Females in particular received more messages about racial pride than did their



male counterparts and less about racial barriers (Thomas & Speight, 1999). Finally, Ward (1996) found that the African-American girls in her study who received messages in a loving matter about race relations from their parents stated that they appreciated their parents' candor. Participants also attributed their steady self-esteem during adolescence to the adoption of these ideas. Ward called this a resistance for liberation orientation.

Some studies however, have indicated that parents typically avoid discussions about race altogether. Instead, parents focused on promoting hard work, virtue, self-acceptance, and equality as a means of promoting self-esteem in their children. Boykins and Toms (1985) described this as mainstream socialization which does not stress the importance of racial group membership as a means to positive self-esteem. Studies in egalitarianism and silence in regards to racial socialization suggest that this practice in the African-American community brings with it negative consequences to parents and their children because the parents are avoiding the issues surrounding race as it relates to self-esteem and overall identity development. Although being silent about race to one's children does not appear to be a type of racial socialization; failure to communicate the impact of race on self-esteem is just as impactful as discussing it (Hughes & Dumont, 1993; Marshall, 1995; Parham & Williams, 1993; Thorton et.al, 1990).

The aforementioned body of research could be a viable explanation as to why the participants' racial socialization scores both in frequency and agreement were so low. Perhaps the participants' parents simply did not discuss race on a consistent basis or never with their daughters and chose to focus on other aspects to bolster their daughter's self-

esteem. Therefore the aforementioned research supports the present study's findings while contradicting the researcher's initial hypotheses.

Furthermore, it may be that this generation of African-American girls may simply not think about race as have their parents and do not view race as important either to their psychosocial development or how they feel about themselves as much as have past generations. McAdoo, (1988, 1999) found that kinship ties (real and fictive) served as a stress absorber for African-American adolescents and adults and protected them against outside stress arising from racism, discrimination and other sociocultural environmental issues. The support network in African-American families is so powerful that it essentially blocks out stressors that could result in low self-esteem and achievement. Perhaps strong family ties are a stronger indicator of high self-esteem than are racial socialization messages, but this assertion is hard to confirm because of the many contradictions in studies of racial socialization practices in African-American families and how adolescents respond.

Another possible explanation as to why the present study yielded no statistical relationship between racial socialization and self-esteem could be because each of the racial socialization studies reviewed in the present study's literature review covered only specific aspects of racial socialization. Hughs, Johnson, Rodriguez, Smith, Stevenson and Spicer (2006), who conducted a review of the research on parental racial and ethnic processes found that studies have not been consistent in explaining how racial socialization is conceived and measured. This limits the investigator's ability to integrate findings across studies. Some studies have focused solely on the transmission of cultural values, knowledge, and practices

(cultural socialization), others on preparing youth for discrimination (preparation for bias), still others on parenting practices that emphasize the need for wariness and distrust in interracial interactions (promotions of mistrust), and, finally, some on how parents are silent about race and thus focus on mainstream socialization (egalitarianism and silence about race).

The investigator was interested in incorporating these aspects of racial socialization described in the research review by Hughs, et al., (2006). Stevenson and Bentley (2006), who developed the CARES instrument had this interest in mind when they developed the instrument to cover seven areas of racial socialization to include *alertness to racism, coping with antagonism, religious coping with antagonism, cultural legacy, cultural pride reinforcement, internalized racism, and mainstream bicultural coping* (for full definition of these subscales, see chapter 3). Stevenson and Bentley's (2006) CARES instrument was used in the present study because it encompassed all of these aspects of racial socialization and focused not only on the frequency of racial socialization messages but also on how much the adolescent endorsed the messages. Stevenson (1994a, 1994b, 1995, 1997, & 1999) found it more revealing to focus on adolescent reports of racial socialization experiences and beliefs instead of just interviewing the parents. By obtaining the adolescent's opinions on how they are receiving and internalizing racial socialization messages in the various categories; a more realistic picture of what the teens are actually learning is depicted. The problem that the investigator found with this approach to measuring racial socialization was that the questionnaire may have covered too much information all at once and the participants

became overloaded. This example illustrates how the various methods of studying racial socialization in children in general yield different results and may partially explain why the adolescents in the present study reported such low frequency and agreement in racial socialization and why it does not appear to relate to self-esteem.

*Relationship Between Racial Socialization and Self-esteem Across SES Groups*  
*(Research Questions Two and Three)*

As previously stated, no significant correlations were found Research Question Two or Three. Neither overall racial socialization scores (incorrect or correct) nor self-esteem were correlated to the aggregated SES. These findings suggest that socioeconomic status has nothing to do with high or low racial socialization scores or high or low self-esteem. More confounding were the significant negative correlations between corrected racial socialization frequency to father's occupation level and corrected racial socialization agreement and father's education level and family household income. These findings, although only modestly significant, indicate that some facets of low SES may have a direct relationship with being more racially socialized. Another explanation for this modestly significant finding may be that the adolescents heard more negative than positive racial socialization messages, and Ward (1996) found that negative racial socialization can bring about poorer life outlooks and outcomes which she coined the idea of resistance for survival.

Regarding racial socialization and SES, Thornton et al. (1990) found that higher educated parents engaged in more racial socialization with their children as compared to

lower educated parents and that married couples provided more racial socialization than did single parents. Such was not the case in the present study.

In reference to self-esteem and SES, Rosenberg and Pearlin (1978) reported a modest relationship between the two constructs and other researchers have replicated their study, suggesting that despite being complicated by interactions of race, gender and social class; SES level is related to self-esteem (Demo & Savin-Williams, 1983; Richmond, Clark, & Brown, 1985; Wiltfang & Scarbecz, 1990). In the present study, the investigator studied African-American female adolescents in different SES categories because the majority of research with this group has involved socioeconomically disadvantaged youths. Given the lack of significant findings for these two constructs in the present study, despite the study's multidimensional focus, the investigator is concerned that the sample in this study did not give their best during administration of the questionnaires, perhaps because of fatigue, which might have affected the dataset results.

*Differences in Racial Socialization and Self-esteem Across SES Groups (Research Question Four)*

No significant differences were found in the low, middle, or high SES groups in regard to self-esteem scores. The participants all seemed to have high self-esteem, despite the SES group to which they were assigned. Some significant findings were found across the groups in regard to corrected racial socialization frequency and agreement scores. When the total racial socialization score across groups was analyzed, no differences were found. However, when the two subscales were analyzed separately, the middle SES group reported

hearing more racial socialization messages (frequency) than did the upper SES group. Also, the higher SES group agreed less with the racial socialization statements than did the middle and lower SES groups. These findings were also somewhat surprising because the investigator expected the middle and high SES groups to have heard more racial socialization statements and to agree more frequently with them than did the lower SES groups because of having more frequent racial socialization, as Thornton et al. (1990) reported.

Studies that examined SES as a factor in racial socialization reported that less educated black families engage less in racial socialization than do higher educated parents because less educated parents are more accepting of the negative stereotypes of African-Americans, have fear of causing bitterness in their children, or are not comfortable with their own racial selves (Stevenson, 1994a; Stevenson et al., 1996; Stevenson et al., 2001; Thornton et al., 1990). The present study did not find support for SES as a racial socialization factor, but that result may have been skewed by problems that the sample encountered during data collection. One problem was that the participants randomly answering the questions on the racial socialization instrument which resulted in their answers not being representative of their true experiences with racial socialization. For example several of the participants circled 1's all the way down the page on the questionnaire. This indicated to the investigator that the participants did not read the question and answer based on their experiences.

On the other hand, perhaps SES does not have much to do with the adoption of racial socialization attitudes. Recent revisions to Cross's psychological nigrescence model have suggested the importance of ego and personality development in racial identity development

(Helms, 1990; Helms & Piper, 1994). Gilligan's model also emphasized these two factors as important for positive gender development in girls and boys (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan et al., 1990). A speculation can be made that ego and personality development, which has a direct effect on ethnic identity and self-esteem, happens because of maturation (biological) and the effect that one's personal social interactions have on him or her more than SES alone (Crain, 2005).

Overall, the present study's significant findings were minimal and somewhat surprising. Few significant correlations or differences were found among the constructs, and those that were significant were either negatively correlated or revealed unexpected differences among the SES groups.

Given the limited number of empirical studies of African-American adolescent females and racial socialization in general, it is difficult to say where this present study's findings fit in. Findings from existing research in this area are often contradictory at times, and the research methods used in each of the studies are varied or still being tested (Hughes, et. al., 2006). For example, the CARES instrument used in this study is still being tested by Stevenson and Bentley (2006). Nonetheless, the value of studying this population is high, especially in light of the multicultural world in which we live. The need to portray a truer profile of African-American females than has existed heretofore is important because of lingering oppression of this group since slavery (Sellars et al., 1998; Shorter-Gooden & Washington, 1996).

A final observation about racial socialization is that, as individuals of all cultures and ethnic background, make strides to bridge the gap of dominant discourse, it could be that today's adolescents, including African-American girls, do not think of race the same way as their parents, grandparents, and ancestors did. Could the gap of dominant discourse be closing so much that racial socialization is less a factor in relation to development or self-esteem? This question warrants further investigation.

#### Limitations of the Present Study

Several limitations of the present study should be considered when interpreting the results. First, as mentioned previously, there may have been a dataset problem. The researcher first noticed a potential problem with the respondents' answers when the raw data were being entered into the computer program for analysis. Several racial socialization questionnaires appeared to have been randomly completed. For example, one participant answered all 74 of the items with a "1." Perhaps, some participants simply filled out the surveys without considering the questions so as to complete them quicker. The researcher was able to use only 73.6% of the original sample because of blatant random answers and incomplete surveys.

In hindsight, the CARES instrument was very long, and the print may have been too small to read well, especially for the study's younger adolescent participants (13 and 14 years old). The CARES scale (Stevenson & Bentley, 2006) had 74 items, and each question had three parts. Although the demographic survey and Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (1989) were fairly short, when paired with the CARES, participants may have been overwhelmed or felt



fatigued. The questionnaires were placed in random order in the packets, which may have exacerbated any fatigue but likely not enough to explain the results.

The researcher surmises that some participants may have filled out items on the surveys randomly to appear more socially desirable. This possibility was evident on the self-esteem scale, where more than 20% of the participants answered the survey with a perfect self-esteem score. The researcher expected high self-esteem scores based on prior findings from research of African-American girls and self-esteem (AAUW, 1991; Bentley & Carter, 2005), but not as high as was found. Another reason for such high self-esteem scores may be that adolescents try to appear confident because of their desire to fit in (Cole, 2005; Crain, 2005).

Another limitation to the present study was how the survey packets were administered. The packets were administered to large groups of participants all at once. Despite having a proctor oversee survey administration, it was difficult to assess how well the participants understood the directions, could read on the level needed to complete the surveys, or were just distracted by the length of the surveys or by activities going on around them. For example, in one group, several girls chatted while completing their surveys and then turned in the surveys as a group in just 10 minutes. The investigator expected participants would need on average about 30 minutes to complete.

#### Implications of the Present Study

Dataset problems meant that even the significant findings were very modest and failed to reveal any key relationships (Research Questions 1-3) or differences (Research

Question 4). Despite the limitations and subsequent nonsignificant, even surprising findings, several important implications to the present study exist. First, this research is important because the investigator attempted to find relationships between two variables that have been shown in previous research as important in the normal development of African-American girls (racial socialization and self-esteem). In the past, these two variables have been studied separately or with the general adolescent population, not taking into account how the process may differ for African-American female adolescents. This study brought out the importance of how these two variables may affect each other in the development of Black adolescent females.

Next, the investigator needed to have a representative sample of African-American girls to reveal any within-group differences among African-American girls because prior research has focused on the economically challenged African-American population. The present study supports hooks' (1991) assertion that there is no one story of African-American girls. However, more research in a controlled environment is needed to yield optimal results.

The investigator did use a newer racial identity instrument and the study served as part of its testing process. Limitations of previous studies are that the racial identity instruments have not kept pace with the evolving complexities of the theory and questions have been raised about the validity of certain instruments, such as the RIAS-L by Parham and Helms (1981). Although the CARES instrument is still in the testing stages, this version is the first comprehensive racial socialization instrument that has attempted to capture as many aspects of measurable racial socialization concepts as possible. The problem with prior

studies of racial socialization was that they focused on only one aspect of this complex construct (i.e., cultural pride). Moreover, existing published research in this area is mostly qualitative and researchers have called for more quantitative studies (Lipford-Sanders & Bradley, 2005).

Despite possible skewed results on the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale in the present study, the results did compare to those from the pilot study (Davis & Baker, 2005) where the participants also scored above average on the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1989) and their mothers also rated them above average. These findings concur with major studies of African-American girls and self-esteem (AAUW, 1991; Buckley & Carter, 2005; Maton et al., 1996; Phinney et al., 1997; Wade, 1991; Zimmerman et al., 1997) that found African-American girls' self-esteem either stayed the same or slightly increased from prepubescence to adolescence and was higher than their Caucasian counterparts.

Finally, this subject is likely to attract more researchers as the concern grows for information about minority adolescents and how their cultural and gender experiences shape who they are in regard to ego and personality development. Counselor educators should especially be concerned about African-American girls. These girls are coming to the forefront as future leaders, and it is our duty in a society still plagued by dominant discourse to help these girls reach their full potential and have opportunities that adolescents from the majority culture typically take for granted.

### Recommendations for Future Research

Several angles on this topic could potentially be explored further. First, replicating the present study and being careful to control for external factors, such as participant fatigue and social desirability, might yield different results. Also helpful would be a study that compares two or more female minority groups to determine differences, if any, in their racial socialization experiences and how these affect self-esteem. Another study might examine African-American girls who attend private versus public schools to discover differences, if any, in self-esteem and racial socialization.

Because self-esteem was not related to racial socialization in the present study, it might be helpful to test the importance of race and race-related issues to today's teens (females and males). Is the older generation emphasizing this construct too much? Is dominant discourse still a problem in the United States, or has it just changed focus from African-Americans to perhaps other minority groups? These questions and others would be interesting to explore.

A better operationalized definition of black racial socialization across the board is needed to integrate prior findings about this construct. Perhaps, the Stevenson and Bentley (2006) CARES instrument is one step closer to completing this task.

A future study might examine parental racial socialization styles more fully to discover which parenting style reveals the highest self-esteem across African-American boys and girls. Such a study might explore whether single parent homes versus dual parent homes make a difference in racial socialization and self-esteem in this population. The investigator

is also interested in replicating the pilot study that sparked this research to more fully explore the mother-daughter relationship in African-American families.

Despite the lack of significant findings in racial socialization and self-esteem across SES, this topic is important because SES affects how individuals perceive their environment and what resources they need to advance in their life psychologically and financially. Adolescents are especially sensitive to their SES when comparing themselves to others (Filsinger & Anderson, 1982), and this surely must have some effect on their self-esteem and perhaps racial socialization agreement as the present study attempted to address.

#### Recommendation for the Counseling Profession

An important facet of a counselor's job is to view students and clients from various cultural and ethnic backgrounds through a multiple lense framework (Stevens, 1997). In recent years, multicultural counseling and social justice issues have become crucial for counselors. Unfortunately, not all counselors have had the training, exposure, or encouragement to explore these facets of their professional responsibilities.

The research presented in this dissertation has several implications for counselors to consider. For example, school and mental health counselors who work with African-American adolescent girls have the responsibility to be aware that these girls are the same as other teenage girls in some areas but not in others. Failure to understand the duality of race and gender may lead counselors to make incorrect diagnoses or limit their ability to help these girls reach their potential in the school and community.

For example, the present study found that African-American girls' self-esteem remains high despite the challenges of race and gender. GPA and high aspirations for the future tend to relate to high self-esteem as well. Counselors who are armed with this information can help African-American adolescents reach their potential by steering them in the direction of doing well academically and exploring their future career and personal goals.

While African-American girls experience the same ups and downs and developmental milestones and have many similarities to their Caucasian counterparts, counselors must understand that African-American adolescents have differences that should not be minimized. Counselors must be careful not to pigeon-hole these girls into the stereotypical ideals that continue to plague the African-American population as a whole. As a counselor, one might be surprised at how resilient this group is or how they view life with determination and poise. As noted previously, self-esteem is also more stable in this group, a tool that counselors can use to motivate and encourage African-American girls into trying new tasks and taking on challenges.

Counseling professionals might have to try their best to understand how important family is to their African-American students or clients and that what mothers think for example is even more important than what they want to do with their life. This interdependence that still exists in the African-American culture is strong and needs to be considered by counselors when providing treatment or consultation to this population. Finally, racial socialization is an important part of development for African-American girls and, although it may be changing in regards to importance or delivery due to strides that have

been made in regards to eliminating racism and discrimination, it is still a factor that counselors need to be aware of when working with this population.

### Methodological Enhancements

If the present study could be done again, the investigator would make some adjustments to enhance the study and perhaps yield more credible findings. First, the investigator could narrow the participants to college students only and do a retrospective study of how racial socialization has affected self-esteem. This change would help in two ways. First, college students would not tire so easily during the survey and, second, they would be more likely to understand the questions better and reflect more on the racial socialization messages they have received over the years because of their higher maturity level.

Although the investigator endorses the use of the CARES (Stevenson & Bentley, 2006) instrument because of its comprehensive approach to racial socialization, had parts of the survey that were not important to the present study (i.e. eliminate the “who told you this” category) been eliminated, participant fatigue may not have been a factor. The investigator would also have used larger print for the surveys or even considered using online surveys to appeal to this computer literate cohort. Using smaller groups during the data collection portion would have been advantageous because the proctor could have better assessed what was happening to the participants during the surveys and even answered any clarifying questions. This latter step alone could have helped improve the response rate and accuracy of the completed surveys.

## Conclusion

Dominant discourse in American society has posed a problem for minority populations. Social and identity constructs, such as race, gender and class, have created a society that has not been fair for less dominant populations. Thus, growing up in the United States as an African-American female adolescent poses particular challenges, because these girls contend with typical pre-adolescent and adolescent developmental tasks along with how to negotiate their multiple identities (i.e., being Black and female). Thus, developmental issues for African-American adolescent girls are best understood using a multiple-lens paradigm inclusive of gender, race, ethnicity, and social class.

Across academic disciplines, most of the empirical studies of African-American adolescent girls have emphasized at-risk themes and frequently neglected normative developmental concerns, such as self-esteem and racial socialization, which were the focus of the present study. The present study was designed to address gaps in existing literature on African-American adolescent females by using a multiple-lens paradigm to examine relationships between racial socialization and self-esteem among African-American adolescent females. The study was also designed to learn how socioeconomic status affects the adoption of racial socialization messages and how self-esteem is affected across low, medium, and high socioeconomic status groups.

The findings from the 95 African-American girls in this study produced no significant relationships between racial socialization and self-esteem, racial socialization and SES, or self-esteem and SES. A significant difference was found in racial socialization frequency



scores for the middle SES group compared to the high SES group. A significant difference was also found in racial socialization agreement, where the high SES group scored lower than did the low and middle SES groups. More than 85% of the participants in all the SES groups had higher than average self-esteem scores which supports the findings from prior studies that African-American girls do not experience the same declines in self-esteem during adolescence as do girls from other racial/cultural groups. These findings will add to existing knowledge about this population and assist counseling professionals and others in understanding the normative development of African-American female adolescents and the role of race, gender, socioeconomics, and other factors play in their development.

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