
Racial Respect and Racial Socialization as Protective Factors for African American Male Youth

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Abstract

African American adolescents must negotiate the transition to adulthood in a society that makes the achievement of positive cultural identity and self-respect difficult. Frequently, young men turn to violence in an attempt to achieve respect in their communities. This article explores factors that predict the use of violence among African American male youth. Adolescents from 14 through 18 years of age who completed a written survey in group settings in Oregon included 100 youth who were detained in the juvenile justice system and 100 who were members of a community youth development program. A history of witnessing violence strongly predicted the intensity of violent behavior of study youth; however, endorsing positive attitudes toward racial respect significantly moderated the effects of chronic exposure to violence. Additionally, racial socialization was negatively correlated to violence intensity and was marginally significant in moderating the effects of witnessing violence. Implications for practice with male African American youth are highlighted.

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The study of protective factors that can reduce the use of violence by young African American men in 21st century America is both timely and necessary. The alarming levels of violence in the lives of Black youth, and their disproportionate arrest and incarceration (Briggs & McBeath, in press), justify the exploration of pathways to build the resilience of Black American youth and lessen the impact of the risk factors leading to aggressive behavior. African American young people are more likely to report that they are involved in violent behavior than Caucasian or Latino youth, with over 40% engaging in at least one physical fight during the past year (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009; see also Nichols, Graber, Brooks-Gunn, & Botvin, 2006), and much more likely to be incarcerated for violent crimes (Cox, 2010; West, 2010). The leading cause of death for Black males in the United States in 2007 was homicide, with a staggering rate of 85.3 per 100,000 males aged 15 to 24 years compared with 22.1 per 100,000 for all males of that age-group (National Center for Health Statistics, 2010).

Because of the prevalence of violence among African American male youth and its consequences for their health, safety, and developmental outcomes, it is important to explore culturally relevant protective factors that may lessen the effects of the risk factors for violent behavior (Graves, Kaslow, & Frabutt, 2010). The current study addresses two possible protective factors rooted in the experience, culture, and codes of Black people in the United States: racial respect and racial socialization. For African American youth, *racial respect* can be defined as a prosocial attitude that arises from the recognition of one's inherent self-worth, the honoring of one's racial origins by the self, peers, and others in society, and an appreciation of the contributions made by oneself, one's family, and African Americans as a group (DeGruy Leary, 2001; DeGruy Leary, Brennan, & Briggs, 2005). When young people report higher levels of racial respect, we contend that they will be less likely to engage in the destructive process of using violence to obtain respect. Built on the work of Stevenson (1994a, 1994b, 1998), *racial socialization* is defined as "the process of transmitting rules, regulations, skills, values, history, and knowledge about culture and race relations from one generation to another" (Wilson, Foster, Anderson, & Mance, 2009, p. 104). Young African American males who have higher levels of racial socialization that inoculate them against prejudice and discrimination are expected to use violence less often, even in the face of disrespect.

Violence and Disrespect

The need to preserve one's dignity, self-worth, and respect is magnified among African American young men during times of economic crises when disparities in poverty and unemployment worsen (Cox, 2010). As Black males, they struggle to achieve their niche in a society that is prone to bias and has a long history of marginalizing them (Wilson, 2009a, 2009b). Instead, they may be characterized as dangerous and undesirable. Additionally, they attempt to live the same dream that White youth seek to achieve with one major difference. For White youth, the goal is often achievable; for African Americans although they are exposed to media images and bombarded with messages that unequivocally state that "you are what you have," they often do not have access to the same privileges and resources that White youth appreciate. The perceived need to amass material things is complicated by issues of relative deprivation based in layers of institutional and systemic forms of racial discrimination (Chambers, 2006; Washington, 2005).

When young people feel that they are not respected for what they possess, and are discriminated against as people, they may turn to crime and violence to earn respect. The rationale here is that respect is earned through force and aggression that leads to an experience of power (Mattaini, Twyman, Chin, & Lee, 1996). For African American youth, to accumulate material possessions through theft or intimidation, or even through violence, reinforces the message used by some Black youth to justify their criminal behaviors. They learn early that through aggression comes money and power, the power to eliminate personal poverty and the shame of being without, and that violence provides a venue to achieve "respect" by others (Hemmings, 2002).

Many African American youth, as reported by Centers and Weist (1998), have reframed being arrested as a badge of honor that is certain to lead to the achievement of high respect by peers. In this context, respect then refers to the inherent value of self pride and dignity, but in this case that respect is gained from peers and is tied to antisocial actions. The consequences of African American youth violence are high rates of homicide, loss of civil and human liberties through corrections involvement, lack of access to employment, and the depletion of Black communities through incarceration (Bell, 1997; Cole, 1999; Mauer, 2002; Mauer & Huling, 1995; Roberts, 2004; Snyder & Sickmund, 1999).

The Current Study

Unfortunately, the link between disrespect and violence, and the protective factors needed to decrease overt aggression by African American youth, has

received very little attention in the prevention research literature. It is critical for those working with this vulnerable group to acquire an understanding of the nature and value of racial respect (DeGruy Leary, 2001; DeGruy Leary et al., 2005) and racial socialization (Stevenson, 1994b, 1998) among African American youth. The purpose of the current study is to determine whether racial respect and racial socialization serve as protective factors for African American youth who are at risk of carrying out violent acts.

Our article first considers three risk factors that are stressors in the lives of African American youth: witnessing violent acts, being victims of violence, and experiencing daily urban hassles. We argue that these factors lead to increased use of violence by Black adolescents. Next, we discuss two possible protective factors in the lives of African American male youth, racial socialization and racial respect, which may decrease the effects of these risks. Finally, we discuss our study, which explores factors that predict African American youth participation in violence and also examines racial socialization and racial respect as possible moderators that diminish violence.

Risk Factors for Violent Behavior

Baker and Bell (1999) define violent behavior as participating in either (1) collective violence, which involves three subtypes, (a) mob, (b) collective, systematized violence (war, gangs), or (c) hate crime violence (terrorism), or (2) individual violence, which involves six subtypes, (a) multicide, involving more than one person, (b) mass murder, involving three or more people, (c) serial murder (three or more people killed over a period of time), (d) predatory violence (robbery), (e) interpersonal altercation violence, and (f) other violence, which includes acts of violence by people with mental illness or those possessing organic brain damage. A prior history of encountering violence in any of its forms is a key factor predicting violent behavior on the part of African Americans (Bell, 2000; Brizer, 1989).

Violence witnessing and violence victimization. Carl Bell (2000) has stated that “an important aspect of gathering a history of violence is determining the triggers that set the violence off” (p. 249). Many youth have had extensive exposure to violence through *witnessing violence* in their homes, schools, or neighborhoods (Fitzpatrick & Boldizar, 1993; Paxton, Robinson, Shah, & Schoeny, 2004). Given the constant exposure to violence in the lives of other people, African American youth may develop aggression as a means to survive and buttress themselves against the threatening environment surrounding them (Johnson, Frattaroli, Wright, Pearson-Fields, & Cheng, 2004; McGee et al., 2001). For many youth, they themselves have experienced

violence victimization. Being the victim of violence produces anger and fear that may result in an individual retaliating against the perpetrator or others. Striking back with violence is often perceived as a suitable response to being victimized by others (Bell & Jenkins, 1991; Johnson et al., 2004).

Urban hassles. The stress of being a vulnerable and marginalized African American in dangerous and unforgiving urban settings is certain to take its toll. Young people have an increased risk of becoming violent when they become angry, frightened, or threatened as a result of daily *urban hassles*, such as encountering drug dealers, hearing gunfire, or being pressured to join gangs (Miller, 1999; Miller, Webster, & MacIntosh, 2002). Indeed, the nature and sum total of these daily stressors may result in poor decision making and choices by African American youth, adversely affect their social development, and lead to subsequent violence (Bennett & Miller, 2006; Copeland-Linder, Lambert, Chen, & Jalongo, 2011; Finn, 1994; McGee et al., 2001).

Protective Factors Reducing Violence

Over time, there has been growing disagreement with the belief that protective mechanisms and coping identities are culturally universal (see Chestang, 1972; Hawkins & Catalano, 1992; Pecora, 2006). However, there is far less agreement on the presence of culturally specific factors that explain antisocial behavior and the onset of risky behavioral practices, including violence (Briggs, Bank, Fixsen, Newell, & Hood, 2009). Emerging from current prevention literature are two pathways through which African American youth may avoid violent behavior: racial socialization and racial respect.

Racial socialization. One of the key ways in which African American youth are prepared to cope with the obstacles associated with being born Black is through racial socialization (Berkel et al., 2009; Brown, 2008; Hughes et al., 2006; Neblett, Terzian, & Harriott, 2010; Stevenson, 1994a). Through the guidance of family members and support from the community, Black children learn that despite social barriers they are able to excel and prosper (Scott, 2003; Stevenson, 1994b; Thomas, Coard, Stevenson, Bentley, & Zamel, 2009). Cultural socialization occurs as families provide children with a historical and cultural map of the African American experience that describes how they have survived many adverse conditions beginning with slavery. They learn how religious beliefs and extended family have served to strengthen and insulate them from the negative effects of racism and discrimination (Hughes, 2003; Hughes et al., 2006; Scott, 2003).

Research on the key buffers reducing violence among African American youth includes a connection to a formal kinship network, spirituality, and

combined Africentric support (Jones, 2007). Bolland, Lian, and Formichella (2005) report that youngsters' prosocial connections to their community, the presence of a nurturing mother figure, religious beliefs, and cultural activities were associated with decreases in their experiences of hopelessness (p. 302). Recent research by Drummond, Bolland, and Harris (2011) linked increased hopelessness to the adoption of a "street code" of behavior (Anderson, 2008) and subsequently higher levels of enacted violence.

Racial socialization may serve to deter young people from the use of overt aggression, by providing grounding in Africentric values. Corneille, Ashcraft, and Belgrave (2005) define Africentric values "as having an orientation towards spirituality, interpersonal relationships, communalism, expressive communication and rhythm" (p. 40). Nichols (1976) and DeGruy Leary et al. (2005) assert that the *relationship*, as an indicator of connectedness, is the highest value for Africans and African Americans. Other noted scholars, such as Akbar (1991), Nobles (1991), and Belgrave, Townsend, Cherry, and Cunningham (1997) have operationalized these values through a number of key protective attributes, including (a) positive sense of self, (b) strong racial identity, (c) prosocial group norms and behaviors, (d) health-conscious and health-seeking practices, (e) achievement orientation, and (f) using adaptive strategies for coping (p. 40). Since racial socialization aims at inculcating these positive values, young people who have engaged as learners in the process of racial socialization may be less prone to destructive behavior and violence (Berkel et al., 2009).

Racial respect. With strong support from their families and communities, African American youth become more hopeful regarding their future and believe in their own inherent worth. In this article, *inherent worth* is defined as an individual natural right that entitles persons to be treated in a dignified manner (in life and death); all individuals regardless of race, class, religion, politics, or citizenship by virtue of their status as a human being are deserving of it, and its associated attribution of respect.

Following cultural values, African Americans recognize their inherent worth in the context of relationships formed at multiple levels: with their family, with their peer group, and within the society as a whole. Given the importance of these three agencies of influence (family, peers, and society), the issue of respect among contemporary African American male youth is a critical factor to understand in order to build resilience (DeGruy Leary et al., 2005). The level of respect these youth feel is directly linked to their sense of psychological safety as well as their social and racial identities. Being respected is reflected in feelings of security, appreciation, and approval by family, peers, and society (Huo & Binning, 2008). The African American

Adolescent Respect Scale was developed to measure the extent to which youth endorse prosocial attitudes toward respect in the context of race in three key areas: family, peer, and social respect (DeGruy Leary et al., 2005).

In the absence of a positive sense of self-worth and strong racial respect, Gilligan (1996) advances the belief that “Without feelings of love, the self feels numb, empty, and dead . . . the absence or deficiency of self love is shame; its opposite is pride, by which I mean a healthy sense of self-esteem, self-respect, and self-love” (p. 47). Experiences of shame and disrespect may be considered by some African American youth as an assault to their sense of self, which they may classify as a threat to their overall security. Gilligan (1996) describes an important context that triggers the commission of violence among African Americans:

. . . the presence of overwhelming shame . . . the shame stimulates rage, and violent impulses, toward the person in whose eyes one feels ashamed, and the feelings that would normally inhibit the expression of those feelings and the acting out of those impulses, such as love and/or guilt, are absent. (pp. 113-114)

Given the dynamic described by Gilligan (1996), the shame and failure felt by African American youth are reflections of their attribution of disrespect to the person in whose eyes the young people are made to feel unworthy or small. In this context, then for African American male youth, the experience of shame operates as a trigger for feelings that they have been disrespected by others; these feelings lead to the commission of violence. Feelings of disrespect may also be linked to the extent to which youth experience hopelessness or failure, both of which are positively associated with exposure to and participation in violence (Bolland et al., 2005; Drummond et al., 2011). If failure is considered an inevitability in the lives of these youth, they are more likely to engage in risky behavioral practices, including substance use, unprotected sex, and violent behavior.

For ethnic, racial, and other vulnerable groups subjected to racism, trauma, and oppression, these experiences of disrespect can produce feelings of uncontrollable aggression and hypersensitivity about one’s self-worth (Bryant, 2011; Danieli, 1998). According to Gilligan (1996), as a consequence of such assaults to their sense of self and as a tool to bolster self-worth, violence becomes the weapon used to achieve respect. In this sense, respect becomes an issue of power that must be seized aggressively to preserve dignity and save face. Aggression can be viewed as the currency and means of securing mutual respect within African American relationships.

In contrast, those youth that have attained high levels of racial respect believe in their own “integrity, ego, power, position, status, control, value, and worth” (DeGruy Leary et al., 2005, p. 463) in the face of biased and hostile realities. These youth may have less need to prove their worth through violence, since they already feel respected.

Study Hypotheses

Our study of African American adolescent males explores the relationships among intensity of violence use, racial respect, racial socialization, violence witnessing, violence victimization, and urban hassles. The current study also examines whether racial respect and racial socialization moderate the relationships between stress-related variables and violence. It is hypothesized that as levels of racial respect or racial socialization increase, the strength of the relationships between (1) witnessing violence and subsequent youth violence, (2) violence victimization and subsequent youth violence, and (3) daily hassles and subsequent youth violence will all lessen.

Method

Participants

A convenience sample of 200 African American males between the ages of 14 and 18 years who resided in Oregon was used in the study. Participants were recruited from one of four settings, including a community-based residential program, two juvenile justice correctional facilities, and an African American community-based youth development program, with a goal of 50% justice-detained youth. High-risk adolescents (those detained in the juvenile justice system) were oversampled to maximize participant variance in exposure to violence and commission of violent acts. Invitations to participate were delivered by staff to youth served in their programs. The final sample included 100 youth who were detained in the juvenile justice system, and 100 youth from the urban community. For the detained youth, formal written consent was obtained from the administrators who were considered legal guardians of the youth. Parental consent was obtained for the remaining youth.

Surveys were administered during the school year in group settings by the first author, who is an African American researcher. The researcher first explained informed consent procedures to the youth, and after they signed consent forms, she distributed the survey booklets to the participants. The

young men were instructed to complete the survey one section at a time. Participants' names were not connected with individual surveys so that responses were made anonymously.

The average age of the African American youth in the study was 16.1 years ($SD = 1.3$). Of the 200 youth, 171 (85%) were presently attending a school program, whether in the community or in the correctional facilities, and their average highest grade of school completed was between freshman and sophomore year of high school ($M = 9.5$; $SD = 1.2$). The detained youth (DY) and nondetained youth (ND) were demographically similar: they attended school at the same rates (DY = 90.3%; ND = 90.0%), completed around the same amount of school on average (DY = 9.7 years, $SD = 1.4$ years; ND = 9.4 years, $SD = 1.1$ years), had similar levels of parental home ownership and employment, and predominantly came from the same five urban zip codes. The detained youth ($M = 16.4$ years, $SD = 1.3$ years) were older than the nondetained youth ($M = 15.8$ years, $SD = 1.2$ years; $t(198) = 3.56$, $p < .001$). There was also a significant difference between the two groups of youth in terms of family composition, with a greater percentage of nondetained youth having their mothers in their homes, 95.7%; $\chi^2(1, n = 200) = 14.97$, $p < .001$, or living with both parents, 36.0%; $\chi^2(1, n = 200) = 11.41$, $p < .001$, compared with those youth who were detained (75.8% with mothers in their homes and 20.0% with both parents in their homes).

Instruments

The youth completed the written Survey of African American Male Youth Experience and Behavior, which was compiled for the current study. The survey included seven sections: (1) demographic measures developed for the study, (2) urban hassles (Miller, 1999), (3) violence witnessing (Richters, 1990), (4) violence victimization (Richters, 1990), (5) racial socialization (Stevenson, 1993, 1994a), (6) racial respect (DeGruy Leary et al., 2005), and (7) use of violence (DuRant, Cadenhead, Pendergrast, Slavens, & Linder, 1994). All the standardized items were at least moderately reliable for the participants in this study, with Cronbach's alphas ranging from .64 to .86. The following are the specific instruments used in the study.

Urban hassles. The stress of living in an urban environment was measured through the 12-item Urban Hassles Scale–Short Version (UHS; Miller, 1999; Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$). Participants rated how often over the past year (from 0 = *never*, to 3 = *very often*) they experienced specific unpleasant experiences (e.g., asked for money by drug addicts, pressured to join a gang, worried about safety). The final score was the summed response from the 12 items,

with higher scores indicating a higher level of urban hassles; Cronbach's $\alpha = .76$ for the current participants. A psychometric study conducted by Miller et al. (2002) with African American adolescents established construct and concurrent validity and revealed that the UHS was positively correlated ($r = .20$, $p < .03$), with the Adolescent Perceived Events Scale (Compas, Davis, Forsythe, & Wagner, 1987), which also measures daily stresses and was inversely related to the adolescents' grade point averages ($r = -.36$, $p < .000$). More recently, Shin, Morgan, Buhin, Truitt, and Vera (2010) reported that UHS was significantly and negatively related to neighborhood satisfaction of urban youth of color.

Violence witnessing and violence victimization. The extent to which each youth had ever witnessed or been victimized by violence was measured through items included in the Survey of Exposure to Community Violence—Self-Report Version (Richters, 1990). Following the instrumentation employed by Fitzpatrick and Boldizar (1993), the current study used subsets of the Richters witnessing and victimization items. For their sample of African American youth Fitzpatrick and Boldizar found the witnessing scale to be acceptably reliable (Cronbach's $\alpha = .65$), and the victimization scale to be modestly reliable (Cronbach's $\alpha = .55$); however they used a dichotomous scale with responses 0 = *false*, and 1 = *true*. The current study, which achieved higher reliability, employed a 4-point rating scale ranging from 0 = *never* to 3 = *very often*. To measure violence witnessing (Cronbach's $\alpha = .86$), participants rated to what extent they had ever witnessed 11 types of violent acts (e.g., being attacked, sexually assaulted, shot at). To measure violence victimization (Cronbach's $\alpha = .77$), participants rated to what extent they had ever been victimized by violence (e.g., beaten, attacked with a knife, shot at). The final score for each scale was the summed total response from that scale. Higher scores indicated higher levels of violence witnessing and victimization. Fitzpatrick and Boldizar (1993) found that levels of witnessing violence and of violence victimization significantly and independently predicted symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder.

Racial socialization. The participants' degree of acceptance of racial socialization attitudes and beliefs within their family and larger society was measured using the full 45-item Scale of Racial Socialization—Adolescent Version (SORS-A) developed by Stevenson (1993, 1994a) for use with Black youth. Participants were asked to what extent they agreed (0 = *disagree a lot* to 4 = *agree a lot*) with statements focusing on areas found to be important to African American family functioning, including education, family, spirituality, racism, child rearing, and African American heritage. The final score was a

mean response from the 45 questions, with higher scores reflecting higher acceptance of racial socialization beliefs. In the validation sample of African American youth, Stevenson (1994a) found the scale to be acceptably reliable (Cronbach's $\alpha = .74$). Additionally, Stevenson (1993) reported that a pilot version of the SORS-A was significantly correlated ($r = .34, p < .001$) with a modified version of the African Self-Consciousness Scale (Baldwin & Bell, 1985), establishing criterion validity of the SORS-A. While Stevenson (1994a) established that the instrument is composed of four subscales (spiritual/religious coping, cultural pride reinforcement, extended family caring, and racism awareness teaching), the total scale score was used in this study because of the lower reliability of the racism awareness subscale for the study's sample. Because of this, the interpretation of the results may be less detailed than it would have been had the set of four subscales been used in the analysis. The SORS-A as a whole had Cronbach's $\alpha = .64$ for the current sample.

Racial respect. The 20-item African American Respect Scale, developed for the present study, was used to measure the extent to which the youth felt respected (both individually and, more generally, as an African American) by family, peers, and society (see DeGruy Leary et al., 2005; Cronbach's $\alpha = .77$). Participants reported to what extent they agreed (0 = *disagree a lot* to 4 = *agree a lot*) with such statements as: "I admire my family," "If someone curses at a member of my family, I might hurt them," and "It is difficult to get appreciation as a Black man." The final score was a mean response for the 20 items where higher scores reflected more prosocial attitudes toward racial respect, and negatively worded items were reverse coded.

Use of violence. Finally, the respondents' own use of violence was measured by a composite 7-item Use of Violence Scale developed by DuRant et al. (1994). DuRant et al. administered the scale to Black adolescents living in urban housing projects and found the scale to be internally consistent (Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$) and with an acceptable test-retest reliability coefficient of .86. Construct validity of the scale was supported by significant positive correlations of the Use of Violence Scale with levels of family conflict and previous corporal punishment and negative correlation with the youth's expectancy of being alive at 25 years of age. Participants rated how often (0 = *never* to 3 = *very often*) they have ever been violent toward others (attacked someone they lived with, been involved in a gang fight, attacked someone with a weapon). The final score was a summed response from the seven items with higher scores reflecting a higher use of violence; ratings of intensity of violence use were highly reliable for this group (Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$).

Table 1. Correlations Between Intensity of Violence Use and Key Predictor Variables for African American Adolescent Males ($N = 200$)

Scale	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Intensity of Violence Use	—	.63***	.73***	.53***	-.20**	-.47***
2. Violence Witnessing		—	.66***	.64***	-.11	-.32***
3. Violence Victimization			—	.60***	-.14	-.43***
4. Urban Hassles				—	-.01	-.45***
5. Racial Socialization					—	.23**
6. Racial Respect						—

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Results

Although youth in both groups reported committing violent acts, detained youth reported significantly higher levels of intensity of violence use ($M = 7.08$, $SD = 4.86$) than nondetained youth ($M = 2.17$, $SD = 3.13$), $t(163.40) = 8.39$, $p < .001$. Correlations reported in Table 1 were computed for the outcome variable (intensity of use of violence) and the predictor variables (violence witnessing, violence victimization, urban hassles, racial socialization, and racial respect). All the correlations obtained were in expected directions, with the intensity of use of violence being inversely related to the prosocial variables: racial respect ($r = -.47$, $p < .001$) and racial socialization ($r = -.20$, $p < .01$), and directly related to the youth's witnessing of violence ($r = .63$, $p < .001$), violence victimization ($r = .73$, $p < .001$), and exposure to daily urban hassles ($r = .53$, $p < .001$). As expected, the racial respect scale had a moderate direct relationship to racial socialization ($r = .23$, $p < .01$). The three stress-related predictors, violence witnessing ($r = -.32$, $p < .001$), violence victimization ($r = -.43$, $p < .001$), and urban hassles ($r = -.45$, $p < .001$), showed strong inverse relationships with the racial respect scale.

Hierarchical regression analyses were used to first examine the main effects of the predictor variables, and then, as a second step, the two-way interactions as can be seen in Table 2. The scores on all the predictor variables were mean centered to avoid issues of multicollinearity as well as to make the coefficients more interpretable (Jaccard & Turrisi, 2003). Interaction terms were then calculated by multiplying the centered predictor variables for each participant. For each regression, the centered predictor variables were entered in the first step to test for main effects. Two-way interactions were entered in the second step.

Table 2. Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses Predicting Violence Intensity for African American Adolescent Males ($N = 200$)

Variables	B	SE B	β	ΔR^2
Witnessing \times Respect				
Step 1				
Violence Witnessing	0.38	0.04	0.54***	0.48***
Racial Respect	-0.18	0.03	-0.30***	
Step 2				
Violence Witnessing	0.38	0.04	0.54***	0.02**
Racial Respect	-0.17	0.03	-0.28***	
Witness \times Respect	-0.01	0.00	-0.15**	
Total R^2				0.51***
Witnessing \times Socialization				
Step 1				
Violence Witnessing	0.42	0.04	0.60***	0.39***
Racial Socialization	-0.04	0.02	-0.12*	
Step 2				
Violence Witnessing	0.43	0.04	0.61***	0.01
Racial Socialization	-0.04	0.02	-0.12*	
Witness \times Socialization	-0.01	0.00	-0.11	
Total R^2				0.40***
Victimization \times Witnessing				
Step 1				
Violence Victimization	0.74	0.06	0.67***	0.60***
Racial Respect	-0.11	0.03	-0.18***	
Step 2				
Violence Victimization	0.72	0.06	0.66***	0.00
Racial Respect	-0.11	0.03	-0.18***	
Witness \times Respect	-0.00	0.01	-0.04	
Total R^2				0.60***
Victimization \times Socialization				
Step 1				
Violence Victimization	0.76	0.06	0.70***	0.52***
Racial Socialization	-0.03	0.02	-0.09	
Step 2				
Violence Victimization	0.76	0.06	0.70***	0.00

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

Variables	B	SE B	β	ΔR^2
Racial Socialization	-0.03	0.02	-0.09	
Witness \times Socialization	-0.00	0.00	-0.02	
Total R^2				0.52***
Hassles \times Respect				
Step 1				
Daily Hassles	0.34	0.06	0.41***	0.36***
Racial Respect	-0.17	0.04	-0.29***	
Step 2				
Daily Hassles	0.32	0.06	0.38***	0.01
Racial Respect	-0.17	0.04	-0.29***	
Hassles \times Respect	-0.01	0.01	-0.09	
Total R^2				0.37***
Hassles \times Socialization				
Step 1				
Daily Hassles	0.43	0.05	0.52***	0.30***
Racial Socialization	-0.06	0.02	-0.19**	
Step 2				
Daily Hassles	0.43	0.05	0.52***	0.00
Racial Socialization	-0.06	0.02	-0.19**	
Hassles \times Socialization	0.00	0.00	-0.01	
Total R^2				0.30***

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Significant interactions (at the .05 level), as identified in the regression analyses, were further examined using simple slope analyses and plots (Aiken & West, 1991). Each plot indicated three levels of racial respect and racial socialization: high level, which is one standard deviation above the mean for the moderator; medium, which equals the mean level; and low, which is one standard deviation below the mean (Aiken & West, 1991, Cohen & Cohen, 1983).

The findings suggest that racial respect has a noticeable buffering effect between witnessing violence and subsequent youth violence. There was also some support for the buffering effect of racial socialization between witnessing violence and youth's reported intensity of use of violence.

Both witnessing violence and racial respect significantly predicted subsequent youth violence. When the interaction term, witness \times respect, was

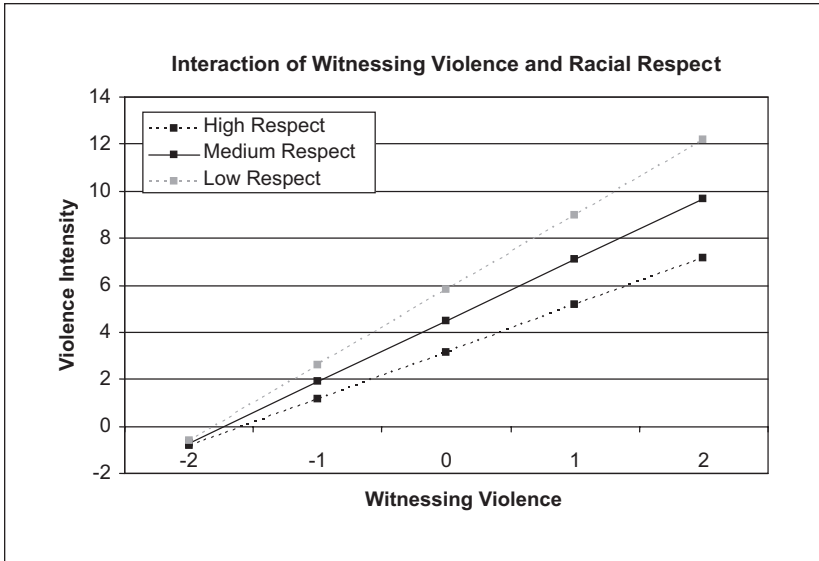


Figure 1. The moderating effect of racial respect on the relationship between witnessing violence and violence intensity

added, the R^2 change of .023 was statistically significant ($p = .004$), suggesting the presence of an interaction effect. Simple slope analyses were conducted for the interaction and revealed that the interaction was significant at higher levels of respect, $t(196) = 11.66, p < .001$, as well as at lower levels of respect, $t(196) = 11.94, p < .001$. As racial respect increased, the relationship between witnessing violence and youth violence was significantly weakened.

Additionally, a trend was found for the buffering effect that racial socialization has on the relationship between witnessing violence and youth violence. When the interaction term, witnessing \times racial socialization, was added, there was an R^2 change of .011 ($p = .067$). Although not statistically significant at the .05 level, this result indicates that this relationship possibly warrants more investigation with a larger sample. The negative value of the interaction coefficient ($-.006$) indicates that as racial socialization increased, the relationship between witnessing violence and youth violence was weakened.

As displayed in each plot (see Figures 1 and 2), the slope of the regression line between witnessing violence and intensity of youth violence decreased



Figure 2. The moderating effect of racial socialization on the relationship between witnessing violence and violence intensity

as racial respect and racial socialization increased, thus indicating a weakening of the relationship between these two variables of interest.

Discussion

This research suggests the significance of racial respect as a harm reduction moderator (or buffer) for African American youth who witness violence as a typical neighborhood experience. Study results revealed a significant interaction between witnessing violence and racial respect on the outcome of violence intensity. For those with high exposure to violence, high levels of respect were associated with lower use of violence. Considering African American youths' capacity for resiliency, Nicholas et al. (2008) put it best when they stated,

... for black youths, strengths lie in their abilities to analyze situations for race-related power imbalances and to negotiate the related challenges or barriers to optimal functioning from a position of pride in oneself, self-esteem, and affirmative self-agency (i.e., a belief that one can make a positive difference) throughout their development. (p. 265)

Alternatively, those youth who witnessed more violence and had poor racial respect were more likely to commit violence. Though an unworkable adaptive response, the commission of violence can be a normative consequence. Violence is an adaptive reaction by African American male youth to threats to their masculinity and sense of respect and perceived by them as a protective mechanism, guaranteeing their survival in deteriorating neighborhoods plagued with chronic occurrences of violence (Drummond et al., 2011; Gilligan, 1996). To avoid disrespecting male African American youth, one should know street codes of survival in inner-city communities (Anderson, 2008; Rich, 2005). To dishonor their family, peers, or the African American male youth personally may mean that a line has been crossed and a street rule has been violated, and consequences have to be meted out for those seen as guilty of disrespect. Defense of one's masculinity, anger, and preserving one's self-respect can be linked to a much more significant culturally specific context for male African American youth. In this context, acting tough and rough and noticeably expressing anger guarantees instant respect from others. It also acts as a trigger to combat issues of fear by African American youth (Hall, Cassidy, & Stevenson, 2008).

Considering the protective nature of prosocial racial respect found in the current study, the interrelationship among disrespect, poverty, and violence as effects of institutional racism is one area to investigate through future research and will be an avenue for knowledge development for practical use. The degree of racial respect the youth feel and the extent of their exposure to chronic neighborhood risk factors, such as high crime, poverty, violence, and drug use, which were associated with levels of violence in this study, might be included in assessments by direct service providers in child welfare and juvenile justice settings working with African American male youth.

Often, these youth face adversity and engage in unworkable codes of conduct that are possible outcomes, given the realities they encounter. To transform youth who are most likely to engage in violence, programs will need to include their families and the communities in which they live as players in deciding how to teach them to endorse healthier problem-solving choices. Any prevention or intervention strategy designed for working with at-risk African American male adolescents will need to be "culturally specific" and informed by a familiarity with the behaviors, attitudes, values, beliefs, and customs that are particular to these youth (Gilbert, Harvey, & Belgrave, 2009).

Practitioners working with African American youth need to investigate ways to help them deconstruct the survival realities that come with adaptation to a depreciated and vulnerable identity (Briggs et al., 2009). To replace self-destructive tendencies that result in violent acts, practitioners will need to help youth attain genuine self-respect, including respect for the African American

community which will buffer the effects of difficult life experiences (Huo & Binning, 2008; Huo, Binning, Molina, & Funge, 2010). Youth development programs need to present alternative prosocial models of dealing with disrespect while supporting the young people through strong and consistent relationships and providing unique achievement opportunities. Work toward healthy self-respect needs to begin in early childhood, to continue as racial and gender identity develop, and to be characterized by consistency and longevity.

As this study demonstrates, racial socialization delivered within the African American community has potential as a protective factor for adolescent males. The current study found that racial socialization was marginally significant in buffering the effects of exposure to violence and was related to lower levels of violence use. These findings are consistent with Jones (2007), who reported that identification with, and allegiance to, Africentric values of spirituality and key kinship relationships served as stress modification mechanisms alleviating the tendency by African American youth chronically exposed to violence to commit violence. Allegiance to Africentric cultural values is also a predictor of positive mental health for adolescent African American girls (Constantine, Alleyne, Wallace, & Franklin-Jackson, 2006).

Stevenson (1994b, 1998) has concluded that racism is an integral part of the fabric of American society that cannot be ignored and that racial socialization by parents can act as a protective factor for their children. When one's group has been stigmatized by the majority culture's negative appraisals, it is helpful for African American youth to be told by members of their own group that the assessment of the dominant culture is fueled by inaccuracies and bias, and to be cautioned not to internalize this perception. Within the group, youth are given reassurance through acknowledgement of the strengths and accomplishments of their culture. Previous research has established that African American adolescents who endorse the positive messages of racial socialization are more likely to have better academic outcomes, greater resilience, and more adaptive behaviors (Brown, 2008; Brown & Krishnakumar, 2007; Constantine & Blackmon, 2002). Interventions that promote racial socialization of youth by family members or by natural mentors in the community, such as youth ministers and coaches (Hurd & Zimmerman, 2010), may be effective in inoculating young people against the racism and risks that they are bound to experience (Miller, Gil-Kashiwabara, Briggs, & Hatcher, 2010).

In contrast with the preponderance of evidence that has established beneficial effects of racial socialization, a recent study by Wilson et al. (2009) found that higher levels of racial socialization were actually directly related to elevated externalizing behavior, including aggression, for Midwestern youth

who lived in low-income areas. It is clear that when interventions are used to promote racial socialization for African American youth, they should be informed by the realities of the community environment. The complex pattern of findings underscores the importance of rigorous program evaluations, and of building a nuanced evidence base for more effective work with these youth (Gilbert et al., 2009).

The present study had several important limitations. The results may not be generalizable to other urban populations of African American youth, given the unique demographic characteristics and experiences of African Americans who live in Oregon, which is predominantly European American (U. S. Census Bureau, 2010). The study also relied exclusively on self-report measures; future research should include other sources of data to clarify and strengthen the results.

Conclusion

This research suggests the potential importance of racial respect as a buffer for the effects of exposure to violence and indicates the development of pro-social attitudes toward respect as a possible road to prevention of violence by African American youth. Our findings add to the evidence base that can be used for planning prevention efforts, assessment models, intervention programs, and treatment of African American male youth. Participants in this study who felt respected were also likely to report more extensive racial socialization. On the other hand, violent youth who had witnessed violence were less likely to feel respected by key significant others or society at large. Our results suggest that the trauma experiences of witnessing violence are often accompanied by negative perceptions and feelings of not being respected by family, peers, recognized authorities and institutions, and society as a whole.

Some of these youths' informal and formal support systems are characterized by a climate of despair, nonsupport, and having to depend on oneself to survive, cope, and adapt. In working with violent African American youth, practitioners need to examine whether the youth are using aggression and violence to cope or problem solve or as a way to keep "face" in the family as a respected and contributing member. It would also behoove practitioners to understand what conditions lend themselves to peaceful and reasonable resolution of conflicts within the African American community, and how respect is given and gained. Knowing this, practitioners can serve as teachers and guides for those they serve.

Any serious effort aimed at helping these particular at-risk youth to improve their coping responses will need to provide paths to help these young

people make the transition to adulthood, including more effective racial socialization and opportunities to acquire racial respect. As policy makers and practitioners develop clinical services and positive youth development programs for African American young people, they should consider including these adaptive processes, which are based on empirically supported and ecologically sound cultural knowledge. Ultimately, aiding youth also means that practitioners must work with the affected communities in which they reside by assisting them through advocacy and ongoing policy change efforts leading to social justice.

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