Black Girl Blues: The Roles of Racial Socialization, Gendered Racial Socialization, and Racial Identity on Depressive Symptoms among Black Girls

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Abstract

Racial socialization is an important predictor of wellbeing among Black youth. Scholars have theorized that Black girls could benefit from gendered racial socialization or messages about being Black girls. However, this has not been examined empirically. The current study investigates the role of general and gendered racial socialization and racial identity attitudes on depressive symptoms among 287 Black girls between the ages of 13–17 ($M_{age} = 15.4$) in the U.S. Path analysis results demonstrated that general and gendered racial socialization about pride were directly associated with positive feelings about being Black which were negatively associated with depressive symptoms. Oppressive messages about Black women were related to negative feelings about being Black and more depressive symptoms. The implications of general and gendered racial socialization on the psychological wellbeing of Black girls are discussed.

Keywords Adolescence · Black girls · Depression · Gender · Racial identity · Racial socialization

Introduction

National data suggest that nearly half of all Black adolescent girls in the United States report experiencing severe and persistent feelings of sadness and hopelessness, which are consistent with symptoms of depression (Kann et al. 2018). Black girls were also the most likely to report attempting suicide in 2017 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2017). Consequently, there is an urgent need for research that examines mechanisms that can reduce the risk of psychological distress among Black girls during the critical developmental period of adolescence. Racial socialization, or the ways in which Black parents teach their children about their race, is one strategy that has been used to promote wellbeing among adolescents (Umaña-Taylor

and Hill 2020). Racial socialization that is gendered may be even more beneficial for Black girls as it targets their intersecting identities, but this has not yet been examined. This study begins to address this gap by comparing the impact of general and gendered racial socialization on two psychosocial outcomes among Black girls—racial identity (i.e., the importance and meaning of race to a person's self-concept) and depressive symptoms (see Fig. 1).

The Sociohistorical Integrative Model and Intersectionality Theory

The Sociohistorical Integrative Model for the Study of Stress in Black Families (Murry et al. 2018) provides a framework for understanding the potential risk and protective factors associated with depressive symptoms among Black girls. The model assumes that members of Black families in the U.S. are exposed to sociocultural stressors (i.e., racism, discrimination, oppression) which place them in marginalized social positions that increase their likelihood of experiencing environmental stressors including general and race-related hassles. The model further suggests that sociocultural and ecological stressors contribute to disparate psychological health outcomes in Black youth. This is consistent with a robust line of research that links
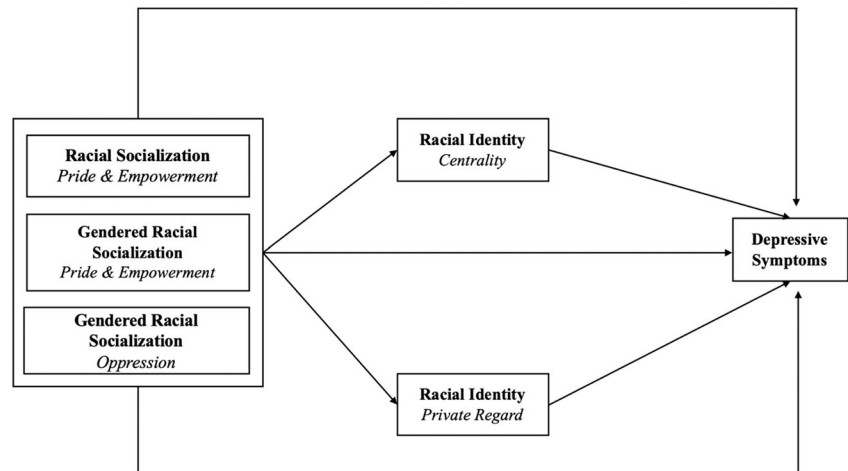
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Fig. 1 Hypothesized model of potential pathways to depressive symptoms among Black girls

multiple forms of racial discrimination and race-related stress with maladaptive outcomes, like suicidal ideation, among racially marginalized youth (Assari et al. 2017). Similarly, meta-analytic findings from 214 studies of 91,338 adolescents demonstrated that racial discrimination is related to more depressive and internalizing symptoms, more psychological distress, lower self-esteem, lower academic achievement, and more externalizing and risky behaviors (Benner et al. 2018). Consequently, Murry et al. (2018) theorize that Black families rely on culturally specific strength-based coping assets, like racial socialization and racial identity, to mitigate risks of sociocultural and environmental stressors that have been associated with positive developmental and psychological outcomes. The current study adopts this framework to examine how racial socialization and racial identity may function as culturally specific coping assets to Black girls.

The Sociohistorical Integrative Model helps researchers understand the importance of racial communication within Black families, but it does not account for the particularities of gender in socialization processes. Consequently, this study employs an intersectional theoretical lens to understand the advantages of gendered racial socialization for Black adolescent girls. Grounded in Black feminism, Crenshaw (1989) coined the term *intersectionality* to describe the erasure of Black women in antidiscrimination law and discourses of resistance like feminism and antiracist movements. Scholars in the social sciences have since applied intersectionality theory to better comprehend how the experiences and wellbeing of Black women are impacted by their intersecting racial and gender identities (Carbado and Roithmayr 2014). Much of this work has focused on the interlocking forms of oppression that Black women and girls experience due to their "double minority" status as both Black and woman (Jones and Guy-Sheftall 2015). Black adolescent girls, for example, report experiencing discrimination based on their race (Burt and Simons

2015), gender (Grollman 2012), and the intersections of their race and gender (i.e., gendered racism; Joseph et al. 2016). Recent scholarship in this area has championed the use of intersectionality theory for examining depression among adult Black women (Walton and Oyewuwo-Gassikia 2017). Unfortunately, there is a dearth of research that examines the gendered nature of race-based protective factors like racial socialization.

A small body of research has begun to examine the gendered nature of racial socialization, but this scholarship has primarily focused on whether parents deliver different types of racial socialization messages to their daughters and sons. One study, for instance, found that Black mothers spoke to their daughters more about racial advocacy and to their sons more about how to cope with racial discrimination (Smith-Bynum et al. 2016). This comparative work has undoubtedly informed the field's contextual understanding of racial socialization, but less is known about the intersectional nature of the process or the ways that Black parents talk to their Black daughters about being Black girls or how to cope with gendered racial discrimination. From an intersectionality perspective, this is troubling because the concurrent experience of racism and sexism is "greater than the sum of its parts" (Lewis et al. 2017). Consequently, gendered racial socialization may more impactful than general racial socialization because it addresses the intersections of Black girls' experiences rather than one part of them, but this has not yet been examined.

Placing the Sociohistorical Integrative Model for the Study of Stress in Black Families in conversation with Intersectionality Theory provides an opportunity to unearth the racialized and gendered effects of coping assets that exist simultaneously for Black girls. More specifically, this study adopts the model's theoretical assumption that racial socialization functions as a culturally specific coping asset for Black youth by promoting positive attitudes about one's racial group (e.g., racial identity) which promotes adaptive

development. The study further assumes that gendered racial socialization is an additional asset for Black girls' that may be more effective in shaping the way they feel about themselves racially and their wellbeing given the tenants of Intersectionality Theory (Crenshaw 1989). Therefore, Intersectionality Theory was integrated with Sociohistorical Integrative Model to examine the relationships between racial socialization, gendered racial socialization, racial identity, and depressive symptoms in the current study.

Reducing Risk via Racial Identity

Racial identity is a multidimensional construct that has been defined as "the importance of race to an individual's self-concept and the meaning that they attach to it" (Sellers et al. 1998, p. 23). Two dimensions of racial identity, centrality and private regard, have consistently been linked with the psychological wellbeing of Black people (Rivas-Drake et al. 2014a). Racial centrality is the degree to which an individual emphasizes that being Black is a key aspect of their self-concept, and private regard is the positive or negative attitudes that a person holds about being Black and other Black people (Sellers et al. 1998). Black youth who report higher racial centrality and private regard generally experience less stress and fewer depressive symptoms than Black youth with less race-central attitudes or those who feel negatively about Black people (Sellers et al. 2006; Neblett et al. 2012; Rivas-Drake et al. 2014b).

Rooted in social identity scholarship, researchers have attributed the positive effects of centrality and private regard among Black adolescents to the likelihood that they will evaluate themselves and their Blackness more positively, which results in a higher self-regard (Verkuyten 2016). A higher self-regard likely decreases the risk of psychological distress among adolescents (Saint-Georges and Vaillancourt 2020). Black people who hold positive attitudes about being Black and other Black people are also be more likely to reject negative stereotypes from other groups (Hughes and Demo 1989). Thus, both may be crucial for Black youth during adolescence as they develop the cognitive ability to comprehend social injustice (Tatum 2017) and experience more instances of racial and gendered racial discrimination than they did during their early childhood (Cunningham et al. 2013). Racial centrality and private regard may be especially beneficial for Black girls given their increased risks of experiencing discrimination (Ispa-Landa 2013; St Jean and Feagin 1998) and symptoms of depression (Mojtabai et al. 2016).

Only a proportion of the published literature on racial identity and wellbeing among Black youth, however, has focused specifically on Black girls. Research demonstrates that Black girls who report high racial centrality and private regard also experience fewer depressive symptoms (Mandara et al. 2009) and have higher self-esteem (Oney et al. 2011). Black girls who have a race central identity and hold positive feelings about being Black are more likely to practice "non-internalization" or disregard negative stereotypes about Black women, which has positive implications for their mental health (Hesse-Biber et al. 2004). Yet these findings are inconclusive as other scholars found that girls who strongly identified as Black were also more likely to internalize standards of colorism (e.g., belief that European features are superior to Black features), which can negatively impact their psychological wellbeing (Wallace et al. 2011). The current study seeks to further understand the relationship between racial identity and wellbeing among Black girls and how it might be influenced by racial socialization and gendered racial socialization.

Racial Socialization and Gendered Racial Socialization

Racial socialization in Black families is conceptualized as a "set of communications, interactions, and behaviors between parents and youth regarding how Black Americans ought to decide about their cultural heritage as well as how to respond to racial hostility, empowerment, or confusion" (Stevenson et al. 2002, p. 85). According to the Process Model of Ethnic-Racial Socialization, the communications and behaviors that parents transmit about race directly influence their child's beliefs, attitudes, behavior, and affect (Yasui 2015). Consistent with this model, racial socialization has been linked with self-esteem, mental health outcomes, and the racial identity attitudes of Black adolescents (Peck et al. 2014). The effects of racial socialization, however, likely depend on the context of the messages that parents transmit about race which often revolve around four dimensions: (1) racial pride (2) preparation for bias, (3) promotion of mistrust in other groups, and (4) egalitarianism (Hughes et al. 2006).

A recent meta-analysis found that racial socialization messages that promote feelings of pride about being Black (e.g., "You should be proud to be Black") are the strongest predictor of adaptive racial identity attitudes (e.g., centrality and private regard) among Black youth (Huguley et al. 2019). In addition, messages about racial pride are commonly linked with positive wellbeing among Black youth (Wang et al. 2020). The relationship between racial socialization and wellbeing has been less thoroughly examined, but scholars theorize that it works through intermediary channels like racial identity (Anderson and Stevenson 2019). For example, one study found that Black young adults who heard more messages about racial pride from their parents also reported more positive feelings about being Black which was, in turn, associated with experiencing fewer depressive symptoms (Neblett et al. 2013).

Researchers have also demonstrated that racial centrality plays a mediating role in the relationship between racial socialization and psychological wellbeing for Latinx college students (Rivas-Drake 2011). Thus, racial socialization could indirectly relate to positive wellbeing among Black girls due to the impact it may have on their racial identity, which is what the hypothesized model in this study seeks to explore. In addition, the role of gender in this dynamic is explored.

Gendered racial socialization is "a form of dual socialization designed to address the realities of the African American female experience and teach them how to cope with gendered racism (e.g., racialized sexual stereotyping)" (Brown et al. 2017, p. 182). General racial socialization includes messaging about Black people and experiences overall, whereas gendered racial socialization messages are inherently intersectional and speak to the realities of being both Black and a woman/girl. It is likely that Black girls receive both forms of racial socialization rather than one or the other. There is preliminary evidence that suggests that gendered racial socialization messages are distinct from general racial socialization messages and that the two may differentially impact the racial identity attitudes of Black women (Jones and Day 2018) and young girls (Thomas et al. 2011). More specifically, gendered racial socialization may be more effective in shaping attitudes and developmental outcomes among Black girls than general racial socialization (Brown et al. 2017; Thomas et al. 2013). These findings align with Intersectionality Theory, which contends that the experiences and wellbeing of Black women are determined by their intersecting gender and racial identities. Consequently, Black girls are often very much aware of their identity as both Black and woman and may be more receptive to gendered racial socialization messages that simultaneously highlight how girls should feel about being Black girls.

No published studies have investigated how gendered racial socialization messages relate to racial identity attitudes nor have any investigated whether gendered racial messages impact psychological outcomes among Black adolescent girls. The current study sought to address these gaps by examining the role of two aspects of gendered racial socialization that have implications for Black girls' wellbeing: (1) gendered racial pride and empowerment and (2) internalized gendered racial oppression. These types of socialization are not mutually exclusive and Black girls can receive messages of pride and internalized oppression simultaneously. Gendered racial pride and empowerment messages encourage Black girls and women to feel positively about themselves (i.e., "You should be proud to be a Black woman"; Brown et al. 2017). This dimension was examined because it is most similar to the general racial socialization messages that endorse racial pride (Stevenson

et al. 2002), which have been associated with higher self-esteem and fewer depressive symptoms among Black youth (Rivas-Drake et al. 2014b). The second dimension, internalized gendered racial oppression, refers to whether and how frequently one's parents speak negatively about Black women (i.e., Black women have bad attitudes; Brown et al. 2017). Prior research suggests that hearing oppressive messages from parents increases the likelihood that Black women will internalize negative attitudes about themselves (Davis Tribble et al. 2019), which has been associated with symptoms of depression (Jerald et al. 2017). This dynamic and the broader influence of gendered racial socialization, however, has not been thoroughly investigated among Black adolescent girls. The current study sought to address this gap.

It is also essential to consider whether racial socialization is associated with socioecological factors within family contexts. More specifically, socioeconomic status has been linked to the frequency and types of parental racial socialization practices in Black families (Henry et al. 2019). Black parents from lower SES backgrounds, for instance, report fewer racial socialization efforts than Black parents from higher SES families (Peck et al. 2014). Darling and Steinberg's (1993) Integrative Model of Parenting further theorizes that children who feel supported, accepted, and loved by their parents are more receptive to their socialization messages. The impact of racial socialization on psychosocial outcomes like racial identity thus appears to be stronger for Black children who report positive relationships with their parents (Williams and Smalls-Glover 2014). Accordingly, this investigation considers whether general and gendered racial socialization is associated with annual household income, mother–daughter closeness, and father–daughter closeness.

The Current Study

Prior research has linked racial socialization to racial identity attitudes and, in turn, symptoms of depression among Black youth (Umaña-Taylor and Hill 2020). However, scholars have not thoroughly investigated the gendered nature of racial socialization messages or considered their relationship to racial identity and wellbeing. The current study seeks to expand this work by concurrently examining general and gendered racial socialization to determine whether either contribute to racial identity and depressive symptoms among Black girls (See Fig. 1). The model was specifically designed to investigate the mediating potential of racial centrality and private regard in the relationship between general and gendered racial socialization and symptoms of depression in Black girls given the extant literature. The decision to focus on Black girls is

grounded in the fact that they report disparate rates of psychological distress like depressive symptoms (Kann et al. 2018). In addition, a gendered racial socialization scale for Black men, or boys, has not yet been developed or validated.

Consistent with the Sociohistorical Integrative Model for the Study of Stress in Black Families (Murry et al. 2018) and the literature above, general messages of racial pride are expected to be directly and positively associated with racial identity (centrality and private regard) attitudes. A similar, but stronger, relationship will likely emerge between gendered messages of racial pride and racial identity given the tenants of Black Feminism and Intersectionality Theory (Crenshaw 1989). In contrast, oppressive socialization messages about Black women are expected to be directly and negatively associated with both dimensions of racial identity. Finally, racial identity attitudes are expected to be directly and negatively related to depressive symptoms. All three forms of racial socialization (e.g., general pride, gendered pride, and gendered oppression) may be indirectly related to depressive symptoms as a result of their relation to racial identity attitudes. The study will also assess whether either form of socialization is associated with income and parent–child relationship quality to produce a more contextual understanding of the processes in Black families.

Methods

Procedure

Data for the current study comes from a dyadic survey of Black caregivers and their adolescent children that explored psychological, physical, and sociopolitical factors that contribute to the wellbeing of Black families that live in the United States (U.S.). Dyads with a Black caregiver and their adolescent child were recruited through Qualtrics Panels, an online survey delivery service that allows researchers to recruit representative samples of participants into their studies (see Brandon et al. (2013) for a detailed overview of Qualtrics Panels). Respondents were eligible to participate if they self-identified as Black/African-American and were the primary caregiver of a Black/African-American adolescent between the ages of 13 and 17. Adult caregivers who might fit these criteria were invited to participate in the study through an email that specified the anticipated duration of the survey and the general topic of the survey. The initial invitation did not provide specific details about the content of the survey to reduce self-selection bias. The adolescents were not emailed directly and only participated with parental consent. All participants were compensated directly from Qualtrics Panels for their time with an incentive-based on the length of their survey, panelist

profile, and how difficult it was to recruit someone with their specific profile (e.g., target acquisition difficulty). Possible incentives included cash, airline miles, gift cards, redeemable consumer points, sweepstake entrances, and vouchers and were determined by Qualtrics Panels, not the research team. The study protocols were approved by the host university's Institutional Review Board.

Participants

The current study is only based on data from the 287 self-identified Black adolescent females that participated in the study. Parents were not included in the analyses because there was not a valid measure of parental gendered racial socialization at the time of data collection. This decision is also supported by research that finds that youth-reports of socialization are more predictive of youth outcomes (e.g., racial identity and depression) than parent reports (Bañales et al. 2020). The adolescent participants ranged in age from 13 to 17 years old ($M = 15.4$ years; $SD = 1.25$). Most of the girls identified as African American (78.7%) with others identifying as African (12.2%), Caribbean/West Indian (5.5%), Afro-Latina (2.0%), and multiethnic (2.7%). Seven percent of the participants identified as LGBTQ. The sample was recruited from across the United States with participants coming from 37 states and the District of Columbia. Over half of the girls (54.4%) resided in the South, 25.3% in the Midwest, 13.3% in the Northeast, and 7.0% in the Western region of the U.S. With regard to residential family composition, 39.0% of the participants lived in a home with both of their biological parents, 30.0% lived in a home with only their biological mother, and 11.5% lived with their mother and stepfather. The remaining 19.5% of the sample resided in homes with their fathers, stepmothers, adoptive parents, and/or fictive kin. Over half (56%) of the caregivers to the adolescent girl participants reported an annual household income of less than $55,000, and 41% had at least earned a 4-year college degree. Sixty-five percent of the caregivers were employed full-time and some (17.4%) of the adolescents were also employed full-time, part-time, or with a temporary job.

Measures

General racial socialization

The Teenager Experience of Racial Socialization Scale (Stevenson et al. 2002) was used to assess the prevalence and frequency of general racial socialization messages that participants received from their parents. The cultural pride reinforcement subscale which consists of messages that teach Black children to be proud and knowledgeable of Black culture was used. The subscale is comprised of three items that ask participants to report whether and how

frequently (1 = "Never" to 3 = "A lot of the time") a primary caregiver relayed racial messages of cultural pride (e.g., "You should be proud to be Black"). The scale demonstrated strong internal consistency (α = 0.81).

Gendered racial socialization

The Gendered Racial-Ethnic Socialization Scale for Black women (GRESS-BW; Brown et al. 2017) was used to measure the prevalence and frequency of gendered racial socialization messages that participants received from their parents. Participants completed the gendered racial pride and empowerment subscale (11 items) and the internalized gendered racial oppression subscale (4 items). The gendered racial pride and empowerment subscale asks participants to document how often their parents endorse messages like "Black women are beautiful" and "You should be proud to be a Black woman" on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = "Never" to 5 = "All the time"). The internalized gendered racial oppression subscale assessed whether and how frequently family members speak negatively about Black women (e.g., "Black women typically have bad attitudes"). The gendered racial pride and empowerment subscale (α = 0.94) and the internalized gendered racial oppression subscale (α = 0.81) exhibited strong internal consistency.

Racial identity

Racial identity was assessed using the centrality and private regard subscales of the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity—Short (MIBI-S; Martin et al. 2010). Participants are asked to indicate their level of agreement with each item on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree." Racial centrality, the degree to which being Black is important to participants' identity, was measured using 3-items (e.g. "Being Black is an important reflection of who I am"). Private regard, the feelings that participants held about being Black and other Black people, was also assessed with three items (e.g., "I am happy that I am Black"). The items from each subscale were averaged to create composite scores for each dimension of racial identity. Higher scores indicate that being Black is a central feature of a participant's identity (centrality) and that they feel positively about being Black and Black people (private regard). The subscales demonstrated strong internal consistency for centrality (α = 0.86) and private regard (α = 0.81).

Depressive symptoms

The depression subscale from Depression, Anxiety, Stress Scale (DASS-21; Henry and Crawford 2005) was used to assess symptoms of depression. Participants were asked to report how often they experienced symptoms of depression over the past two weeks (1 = "Did not apply to me at all" to 4 = "Applied to me most of the time"). Example items include "I felt that life was meaningless" and "I felt downhearted and blue." The items were summed to construct a composite score for each participant. A low score represents fewer depressive symptoms, whereas a high score indicates the participant experienced more symptoms. The scale has been a reliable measure among a racially diverse sample of Black adolescent boys (α = 0.90; Del Toro et al. 2019) and Black college students (α = 0.84; Norton 2007). It also demonstrated strong internal consistency in the current sample (α = 0.95).

Covariates

Annual household income, maternal closeness, and paternal closeness were included as covariates in the model. Income was reported by the caregivers on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = "under $25,000" to 9 = "over $100,000." The adolescent's perception of closeness to each parent was measured with a single item (e.g., "How close do you feel to your mother figure?" and "How close do you feel to your father figure?"). Participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = "Not Close at All" to 5 = "Extremely Close."

Data Analysis Plan

The data were analyzed using *STATA Version 14*. Preliminary analyses were first conducted to examine the means, standard deviations, normality, and bivariate relationships among the study variables (see Table 1). Participants were required to answer all of the items on the survey, so there was no missing data. A recursive path analysis using maximum likelihood robust (MLR) estimation, which is a single-indicator technique that tests structural models of observed variables, was then conducted to examine the conceptual model. Path analysis was selected because it provided a way to test the hypothesized relationships between general and gendered racial socialization on racial identity and to assess how all three directly or indirectly relate to depressive symptoms. The MLR approach was specifically necessary because the multivariate data were not normally distributed (Kline 2015). Medsem, a post estimation package for statistical mediation, was used to investigate indirect effects (Mehmetoglu 2018). Medsem was designed to conduct mediation analyses in SEM using the Monte Carlo Method (MCM; MacKinnon 2008). This procedure uses the asymptotic covariance matrix of parameter estimates to simulate indirect effects and construct a confidence interval based on the percentiles of the distribution, which is comparable to parametric bootstrapping (Preacher and Selig 2012). It also offers more power for

Table 1 Descriptive statistics and correlations between study variables ($N = 287$)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Income	–								
2. Maternal closeness	0.02	–							
3. Paternal closeness	0.13*	0.15*	–						
4. General RS—pride	−0.01	0.07	0.05	–					
5. Gendered RS—pride	−0.02	0.13**	0.01	0.39**	–				
6. Gendered RS—opp.	−0.02	0.01	−0.04	−0.17**	0.00	–			
7. Racial centrality	0.04	0.17**	0.12	0.38**	0.43**	−0.07	–		
8. Private regard	0.02	0.20**	0.14*	0.39**	0.47**	−0.15**	0.75**	–	
9. Depressive symptoms	−0.06	−0.12*	−0.13*	−0.13*	−0.07	0.19**	−0.14*	−0.23**	–
M (%)	55.7%	4.45	3.51	2.73	4.43	1.92	4.22	4.50	1.35
SD		0.78	1.39	0.48	0.86	1.06	0.84	0.70	0.69
Skewness	0.37	−1.44	−0.63	−1.91	−2.14	1.13	−0.81	−1.40	2.15
Kurtosis	−1.22	2.06	−0.85	3.18	4.65	0.37	−0.36	1.17	3.91

% of income = participants whose parents earned <$55,000 per year

RS racial socialization, *Opp* Oppressive

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$

detecting effects than the Sobel test that is used in association with the Baron and Kenny (1986) approach to mediation. Given that the RMSEA power estimation occurs at the level of the overall model, the power to detect indirect effects in the model was assessed using Monte Carlo confidence intervals (Schoemann et al. 2017). The results suggested that the mediation analyses were powered at 74%.

An alternative model with racial identity predicting general and gendered racial socialization was also tested. The examination of both models offered a more robust interpretation of the directionality between the constructs. The achieved power of the models was calculated based on an optimal RMSEA fit index of 0.006, which demonstrated that they were powered at 76%, which is just below the recommended value of 0.80. (MacCallum et al. 1996). A moderated mediation model wherein centrality moderates the relation between private regard and depressive symptoms was also examined. These findings were not significant, and the model fit was poor. Additional information regarding this model can be requested from the first author.

Results

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, normality, and bivariate correlations for the study variables. On average, the participants reported feeling close to both of their parents but were closer to their mothers ($M = 4.45$, $SD = 0.78$) than their fathers ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 1.4$). The girls reported receiving high and comparable levels of general racial socialization pride messages ($M = 2.73$, $SD = 0.48$) and gendered racial socialization messages endorsing pride and empowerment ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 0.86$). However,

general and gendered racial pride socialization were only moderately correlated ($r = 0.39$), which indicated that the two could be included in the same model without a high risk of multicollinearity (Grewal et al. 2004). Participants reported hearing few gendered racial socialization messages that endorsed oppressive beliefs about Black women ($M = 1.92$, $SD = 1.06$). In terms of racial identity, participants generally reported high levels of racial centrality ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 0.84$) and private regard ($M = 4.49$, $SD = 0.70$). Participants, on average, indicated that they experienced few depressive symptoms ($M = 1.35$, $SD = 0.67$).
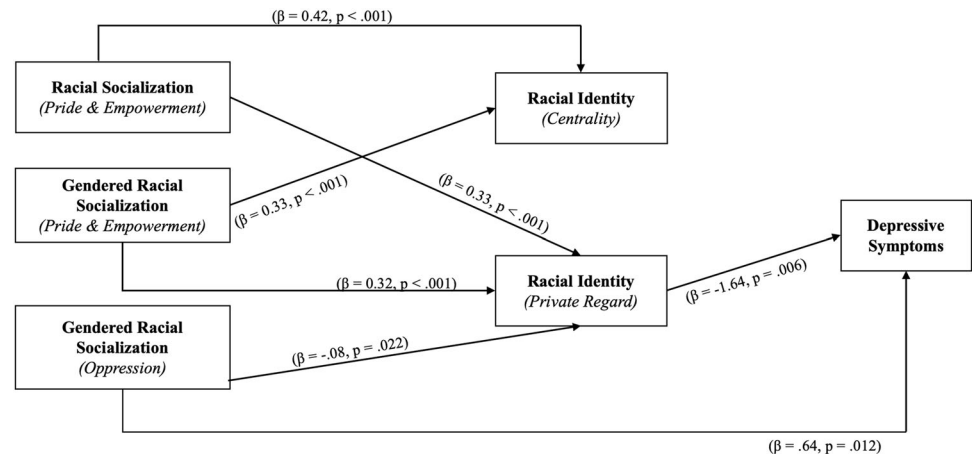
Path Analysis

Model fit

Multiple fit indices were examined before interpreting the model to ensure the specified parameters were aligned with the variances and covariances in the data. The chi-square test (χ^2), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) were all evaluated. The parameters are presented in Table 2. The χ^2 test for the original model was statistically significant (χ^2 (9) $= 17.96$, $p = 0.03$) which demonstrated that there was a slight discrepancy between the covariance matrix for the sample and the covariance matrix for the model. This test is stringently designed to detect even minor divergences between observed data and hypothesized models particularly in data with smaller sample sizes (Kline 2015). The TLI was also slightly lower than recommended in both models, but the remaining values were all within the recommended ranges, which suggested that there was still an adequate fit to the data (Hu and Bentler 1999).

Table 2 Fit Indices for hypothesized and alternative models

Fit index	Hypothesized model	Alternative model	Recommended values
χ^2	$\chi\chi^2$ (9) = 17.96 (p = 0.04)	χ^2 (3) = 5.28 (p = 0.15)	
RMSEA	0.06	0.05	Below 0.06
SRMR	0.04	0.02	Below 0.09
CFI	0.98	0.98	Above 0.95
TLI	0.92	0.88	Above 0.95

Fig. 2 Path diagram and standardized parameter estimates for significant direct effects in the hypothesized model

Path analysis results

The standardized regression coefficients, standard errors, and p-values of the hypothesized model are presented in Fig. 2. Below, the findings of the model with respect to each research aim are described, but first, the role of the covariates (e.g., income, closeness with mother, and closeness with father) on adolescent reports of parental racial socialization are explained. Participants who were closer to their mothers reported hearing significantly more gendered racial socialization messages that endorsed pride ($\beta = 0.14$, $p = 0.026$). There were no other significant relationships between the covariates and general racial socialization messages of pride or gendered racial socialization messages that were oppressive.

The first research aim was to examine the direct relationship between three dimensions of racial socialization and two dimensions of racial identity. General racial socialization messages ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$) and gendered racial socialization messages that endorsed pride ($\beta = 0.32$, $p < 0.001$) were significantly and positively associated with racial centrality. Similarly, messages about general racial pride ($\beta = 0.33$, $p < 0.001$) and gendered racial pride ($\beta = 0.32$, $p < 0.001$) were significantly and positively related to private regard. Finally, gendered racial socialization messages that were oppressive were significantly and negatively associated with private regard ($\beta = -0.08$, $p = 0.022$), but were not associated with racial centrality ($\beta = -0.03$, $p = 0.500$). Collectively, the racial socialization variables

explained 24% of the variance in racial centrality and 29% of the variance in private regard.

The second research aim was to examine the direct and indirect effects of racial socialization and racial identity on depressive symptoms (see Fig. 3). In regard to racial socialization, the results indicate that gendered messages that were oppressive were significantly and positively related to depressive symptoms ($\beta = 0.64$, $p = 0.012$). General ($\beta = -0.44$, $p = 0.483$) and gendered messages of pride ($\beta = 0.22$, $p = 0.553$) were not directly associated with depressive symptoms, but there were significant indirect effects. General racial pride socialization messages ($\beta = -0.41$, $p = 0.038$) and gendered racial socialization messages about pride ($\beta = -0.42$, $p = 0.008$) both had a negative and indirect effect on depressive symptoms through private regard. The effect sizes for these mediations were subsequently calculated by taking the ratio of the indirect effect on the direct effect (MacKinnon 2008). The mediated effect of general racial pride messages on depressive symptoms was 1.2 times larger than the direct effect. In comparison, the mediated effect of gendered racial pride messages on depressive symptoms was 2.4 times larger than the direct effect. Finally, private regard was significantly and negatively associated with depressive symptoms ($\beta = -1.64$, $p = 0.006$). There were no significant effects of racial centrality ($\beta = 0.30$, $p = 0.544$) on symptoms of depression. The final model explained 8% of the variance in depressive symptoms.

Fig. 3 Path diagram and standardized parameter estimates for significant indirect effects in the hypothesized model
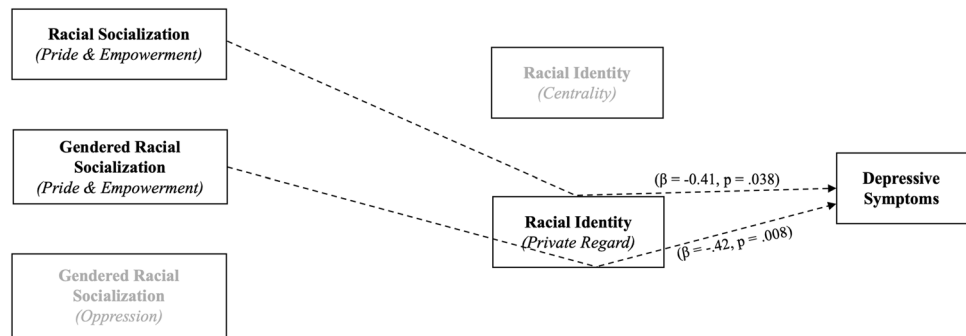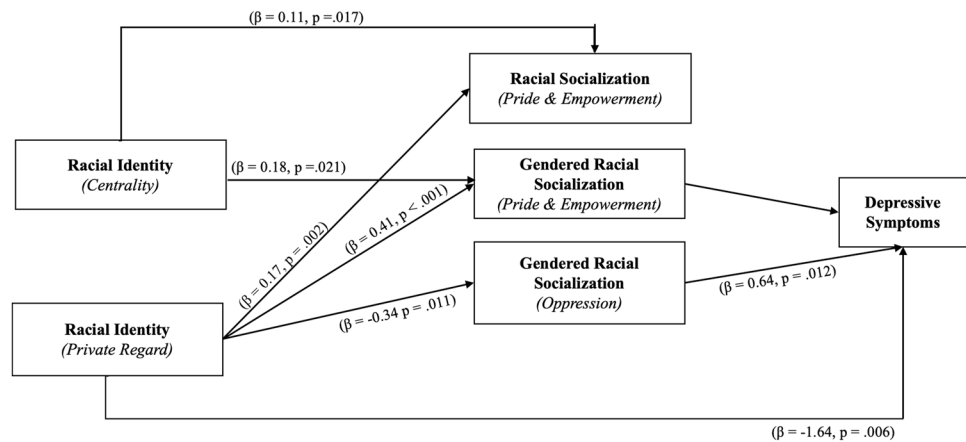

Fig. 4 Path diagram and standardized parameter estimates for significant direct effects in the alternative model

The alternative model was tested to examine the reverse directionality between racial socialization and racial identity (see Fig. 4). Similar to the first model, the direct paths between private regard and all three racial socialization variables were significant. The direct path between racial centrality and gendered racial messages that were oppressive was significant as well. In contrast, none of the racial socialization variables mediated the relationships between racial identity and depressive symptoms. This model also explained 8% of the variance in depressive symptoms.

Discussion

Racial socialization, or the ways that parents communicate about race with their children, is one mechanism that can reduce risk and promote psychological wellbeing among Black youth (Umaña-Taylor and Hill 2020). This recognition is important, considering Black adolescent girls report disparate amounts of depressive symptoms (Kann et al. 2018). Grounded in Intersectionality Theory, scholars contend that Black girls may benefit even more from gendered racial socialization because the messages center around the realities of being both Black and woman (Brown et al. 2017). The implications of gendered racial socialization, however, have not yet been examined among adolescents.

This study sought to expand the literature by comparing the roles of general racial and gendered racial socialization on Black girls' attitudes about being Black (e.g., racial identity) and further examine their direct and indirect associations with symptoms of depression.

The Sociohistorical Integrative Model for the Study of Stress in Black Families (Murry et al. 2018) posits that racial socialization and racial identity are cultural coping assets that can protect Black youth from negative mental health outcomes, particularly within our current system of racial oppression. The current findings support this assertion. Racial socialization messages that encouraged pride in being Black broadly, and pride in being a Black woman specifically, were associated with more race-central and positive attitudes about being Black and other Black people (e.g., private regard). In contrast, Black girls who heard oppressive messages about Black women were more likely to report negative feelings about being Black and experience more depressive symptoms than Black girls who did not.

Given the cross-sectional nature of the data, an alternative model where identity predicted general and gendered racial socialization was assessed to evaluate the directionality between the constructs. The paths in that model were still significant, which suggested that (1) racial identity impacted racial socialization among Black girls, or (2) that a bidirectional relationship existed. This latter has received

more theoretical support as scholars contend that Black adolescents are active agents in their own racial socialization processes (Evans et al. 2012). Thus, it will certainly be important to explore the directionality of these relationships in future longitudinal research with Black girls. Nonetheless, the results indicated that racial identity mediated the relationship between general and gendered racial socialization and depressive symptoms. This provided evidence to support the sequence hypothesized in the original model. These findings highlight both forms of racial socialization as potential points for intervention and prevention to better support Black girls' wellbeing through adolescence.

Promotive Pathway via Racial and Gendered Racial Socialization—Pride

Black adolescent girls who heard more empowering messages about Black people and Black women from their parents also reported that race was more central to their identity and held more positive attitudes about their race (e.g., private regard). Private regard was also promotive for Black girls as those who reported more positive attitudes about being Black and about Black people also reported fewer depressive symptoms. The mediating role of private regard in the relationships between general and gendered racial socialization and symptoms of depression in Black girls is a novel and promising finding. Moreover, the effect sizes suggest that gendered racial socialization may be slightly more beneficial than general racial socialization. This outcome was consistent with the initial hypothesis that gendered racial socialization messages may be more applicable to Black girls and thus more salient in shaping their identities and wellbeing given the tenets of Intersectionality Theory. Thus, parental racial socialization messages that highlight Black womanhood may help Black girls adopt positive attitudes about their race, which decreases the likelihood that they experience symptoms of depression.

However, the hypothesis that centrality would be directly or indirectly associated with depressive symptoms among the Black girls was unsupported. The analyses did not offer insight as to why this was the case, but research with Black women during emerging adulthood offers some potential considerations for exploring this finding in future studies. For example, one investigation of racial identity and depressive symptoms among young Black women illustrated that racial centrality might serve as a moderator between private regard and wellbeing, rather than a predictor (Settles et al. 2010). The authors reached this conclusion because Black women who held positive attitudes about being Black and about other Black people were less likely to report depressive symptoms if they also felt that race was an important part of their identity (Settles et al. 2010). Most of the girls in the current study reported that

race was central to their identity. As an alternative model, we tested a moderated mediation hypothesis, but centrality did not moderate the relation between private regard and depressive symptoms. This may be in part, due to our sample size or variation in centrality within our sample. Future research is needed to determine how different components of racial identity might interact to bridge racial socialization and mental health among Black girls.

Finally, it is important to note that Black girls who felt closer to their mothers reported hearing more gendered messages of pride than Black girls who reported less maternal closeness. This finding supports Darling and Steinberg's (1993) Integrative Model of Parenting, which posits that the emotional climate of the parent–child relationship shapes the frequency and efficacy of parental socialization processes. It is possible that Black girls who felt closer to their mothers actually received more positive messages about Black women, or they were more sensitive to their mother's socialization practices than Black girls who felt less close to their mothers. Nonetheless, perceptions of closeness to one's mother was only positively associated with gendered messages of racial pride and not general messages of racial pride. This nuance further demonstrates that gendered racial socialization messages are distinct from general racial socialization messages. It also suggests that the gender of the parent who delivers racial socialization is especially important to consider as Black girls who felt closer to their father did not necessarily report more instances of gendered racial socialization. Thus, scholars should examine whether mothers and fathers both convey gendered racial pride messages and, if so, are Black adolescent girls more likely to internalize them from their mothers than their fathers.

Risky Pathway via Gendered Racial Socialization—Oppression

Another goal of this study was to understand how gendered racial socialization messages about Black women that are oppressive relate to the racial identity and wellbeing of Black adolescent girls, a question that has been underexplored in the literature. Findings demonstrate that hearing negative messages about the attitudes, appearances, and behaviors of Black women have direct and negative relationships with the wellbeing of Black girls. More specifically, participants who heard more oppressive messages about Black women were less likely to feel positively about being Black or about other Black people (private regard). This finding is consistent with Way et al. (2013) study, which illustrated that the racial identity attitudes of Black youth were influenced by their awareness of gendered racial stereotypes. In this case, it appears that the more parents deliver oppressive messages about Black women to their

daughters, the more likely they are to internalize them which can result in feelings of resentment or shame about their Blackness (Davis Tribble et al. 2019; Jerald et al. 2017). These findings are consistent with Settles (2006) description of the Intersectionality framework, such that adolescent participants may "often see themselves not as Black people or as women, but in terms of the intersected identity of a 'Black woman'" (p. 599); thereby providing support for a compound negative effect when receiving oppressive messages regarding their identities. This is concerning given the finding that positive feelings about being Black and other Black people can reduce the risk of depressive symptoms among Black girls. Moreover, Black girls who reported hearing a degrading message about Black women from a parent were more likely to report experiencing depressive symptoms. Neither general nor gendered messages of racial pride directly contributed to depressive symptoms. Therefore, it appears that gendered racial socialization messages that endorse oppressive or stereotypical beliefs about Black women serve as a salient risk factor among Black girls that may exacerbate the effects of sociocultural and environmental racial stressors, whereas messages about general and gendered racial pride are promotive in nature. Of note, this study did not examine a general form of oppressive racial socialization because the TERSS does not include questions that align with this dimension. One dimension of the scale, alertness to discrimination, was considered but the items were conceptually different as they assessed messages about structural forms of marginalization (e.g., Blacks don't always have the same opportunities as Whites) rather than messages specific to the personhood of Black women (e.g., Black women have bad attitudes). Scholars differentiate these types of socialization messages as oppressive racial socialization are negative messages that reflect stereotypes and denigrate Blackness, while alertness to discrimination messages are intended to prepare children for realities of bias they may face in everyday life (Lesane-Brown 2006). Accordingly, no conclusions can be made about the differential impact between gendered and general messages of internalized oppression.

Strengths and Limitations

The findings from this study must be considered with respect to several limitations. First, the data was self-reported and collected via a web-based survey, which increased the risk of social desirability bias. The larger study also recruited caregiver-child dyads so the adolescents may have been in close proximity to their guardian while taking the survey which could have further influenced their responses. Second, the data is cross-sectional, so no casual claims about the relationship between racial socialization,

racial identity, and depressive symptoms among Black girls can be made. While prior research and theoretical models support the sequencing of the events in the hypothesized model (e.g., racial socialization shapes the racial identity attitudes of Black youth which may mitigate or exacerbate their risk of experiencing depressive symptoms), the current research unable to confirm whether that is the case especially when considering the results of the alternative model. Researchers have also demonstrated that racial socialization and racial identity processes are dynamic and transactional phenomena that change across time and context (Hughes et al. 2016a), so longitudinal research is needed to investigate their individual and collective impact on the wellbeing of Black adolescent girls. Third, most of the participants were African American and identified as heterosexual, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Additional research with samples that represent Black girls across the African Diaspora and sexual and gender identities is needed to understand the influence of gendered racial socialization and racial identity on depressive symptoms more broadly.

The participants also reported few depressive symptoms, which is not consistent with national reports. This is possibly due to the fact that the measure of depressive symptoms used primarily assesses emotional symptoms rather than behavioral or physiological symptoms. Future research should, therefore, use clinical measures that assess more dimensions of depressive symptoms to examine these race-based coping assets among Black adolescent girls, especially those who are experience more severe symptoms. It should also seek to uncover how disparate rates of distress among Black girls are exacerbated by the gendered racial discrimination that they experience in addition to normative developmental stressors (i.e., getting good grades and navigating peer relationships) as both impact the psychological functioning of Black girls (Cooper et al. 2011). Finally, the chi-squared test was statistically significant for the first path analysis, and the TLIs for both were lower than recommended. This could indicate that models were not an excellent fit. The other fit indices, however, were within acceptable ranges.

While the limitations are important to consider, this research is undoubtedly novel and expands the current understanding of how race-based psychological processes contribute to wellbeing among Black adolescent girls. More specifically, this study contributes to a growing area of literature on Black girlhood as it is one of the first to explore the importance of gendered racial socialization for mental health among Black girls using quantitative measures. The results demonstrate that gendered racial socialization messages relate to racial identity attitudes and wellbeing of Black girls differently than general racial socialization messages. This knowledge is valuable as it can enhance researchers' understanding of gender in the effectiveness of general racial socialization practices and interventions and

shed light on the importance of studying both general and gendered racial socialization. Moreover, the study indicates that gendered racial socialization messages may serve as a promotive factor (e.g., pride about Black women) or a risk factor (e.g., internalized gendered oppression) for Black adolescent girls. This study exemplifies the need to explore the experiences of Black girls as both Black and girl by reconsidering a place for the complexity of Black girlhood in quantitative methods. By furthering the understanding of promotive and risky pathways to depressive symptoms among Black girls, this study has powerful implications for future research and practice that can address mental health disparities among Black girls during adolescence.

Implications for Future Research and Practice

The findings from this study expand the scholarship on racial socialization, racial identity, and wellbeing by highlighting the importance of intersectionality. However, this work is in the preliminary stages, so future longitudinal research should replicate these findings especially with samples that are diverse and representative of Black girls living in the U.S. Given the findings, future research should focus on understanding predictors of parental gendered racial socialization practices (e.g., parent gender, parent–child relationship quality, adolescent racial identity, ethnicity, phenotypical appearance, geographic region, etc.) and how they impact developmental outcomes among Black girls over time. It would be especially important to understand whether gendered forms of racial socialization can better prepare Black girls to cope with gendered racial microaggressions, which have been identified as a risk factor for psychological distress (Cooper et al. 2011; Grollman 2012). It is equally important to investigate other agents of gendered racial socialization (e.g., peers, teachers, media) within different contexts (e.g., school, neighborhood, online; Hughes et al. 2016a). Research in this vein should consider how these factors are additionally impacted by interlocking identities such as class and social status (Walton and Boone 2019). Finally, future research should include a measure of gendered racial identity to assess whether and how Black adolescent girls' self-concept is influenced concurrently by their race and gender. A growing body of qualitative literature has demonstrated that racial identity among Black women is certainly gendered, but to date, there are no published quantitative measures that assess this construct. The development of this type of measure is an obvious next step in this line of research and would not only allow scholars to better understand important developmental processes among Black girls but help to inform prevention and intervention efforts that seek to enhance and protect them. For now, practitioners and parents of Black adolescent girls should be critical of the messages they send about Black women and work to foster feelings of pride about Black girlhood as doing so may promote positive attitudes among Black girls that can mitigate symptoms of depression.

Conclusion

Parental racial socialization is a key mechanism for promoting psychological wellbeing among Black girls who report disparate amounts of depressive symptoms. The practice may prove especially important during adolescence because this is when Black youth take on the developmental task of understanding who they are (Erikson 1968) in addition to the importance and meaning of being a Black person (e.g., racial identity; Rivas-Drake et al. (2014a)). Adolescence is also when they gain the cognitive ability to interpret when they are the target of racial discrimination and perceive more instances of it (Hughes et al. 2016b). Research suggests that Black parents can support positive adolescent development by helping their children adopt more positive feelings about their race and cope with discrimination through positive communication about Black people and Black culture (Huguley et al. 2019). The existing literature on racial socialization, however, has not broadly examined the gendered nature of racial socialization messages in Black families and how they might differentially impact Black girls whose experiences are inherently shaped by their intersecting racial and gender identities. The current study began to fill this gap by examining how racial socialization and gendered racial socialization contribute to racial identity and depressive symptoms in a sample of Black adolescent girls. The results indicated that Black girls who hear messages that celebrate Black people (e.g., general racial pride) and Black women (e.g., gendered racial pride) are more likely to feel that race is central to their identity and adopt positive attitudes about their racial group. Black girls are also less likely to experience depressive symptoms as a result of feeling more positively about being Black. In contrast, Black girls who hear demeaning messages about Black women (e.g., "Black women have bad attitudes") from their parents experience more symptoms of depression. These findings illuminate the importance of positive parent-adolescent communication at the intersections of race and gender for Black girls during adolescence.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval This study involved human participants and was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional review board (North Carolina State University Institutional Review Board Protocol 12622).

Informed Consent Informed consent was obtained from all participants in the study.

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