

The Impact of Family Functioning on African American Males' Academic Achievement: A Review and Clarification of the Empirical Literature

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This article reviews and clarifies many inconsistencies and misconceptions in the research literature on the effects of family functioning on African American male academic achievement. It was concluded that when parents use an African American version of authoritative parenting, teach children about their cultural heritage and personal power to achieve in spite of barriers, and are actively involved by monitoring homework and limiting counterproductive time, the odds of African American boys succeeding in school are greatly increased. Implications for parenting interventions, educational policy, and future research are also discussed.

One of the most consistent findings in educational research is the underachievement of African American males at all levels (i.e., elementary, secondary, and postsecondary) of the educational pipeline (Fan, 2001; Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992). Low teacher expectations (Murray & Jackson, 1999), tracking into low-ability classes (Kershaw, 1992), underperforming schools with undereducated teachers (Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002), and underachieving peer groups (Bankston & Caldas, 1998) all contribute to these trends. Family environment factors, such as undereducated parents, living in poverty (Duncan, Yeung, Brooks-Gunn, & Smith, 1998; McLoyd, 1998), and living in single-parent homes (Bankston & Caldas; Barbarin & Soler, 1993; Heiss, 1996; Teachman, Day, Paasch, Carver, & Call, 1998), also contribute to these trends. However, less attention has been given to the family functioning factors that influence African American male achievement.

This lack of attention is unfortunate because policy and interventions are more likely to succeed if they target family functioning as opposed to demographic factors (Mandara & Murray, 2000). This is because most parents have the capacity to modify their parenting behavior in a way that is

conducive to child development (Kumpfer & Alvarado, 2003). Socioeconomic or marital status is something that most people have little control over. This is especially true for African American women, given the imbalanced gender ratio and limited job opportunities in their communities (Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995). Most of the socioeconomic status (SES) and family structure effects on achievement are mediated by various family functioning factors anyway (Clark, 1983; Mandara & Murray, 2002; McLoyd, 1998). As a result, family functioning factors are the most influential and modifiable resources that parents have.

Regrettably, the empirical literature on African American family functioning is riddled with limitations and inconsistencies. This has resulted in a great deal of confusion about the importance of various factors and in turn has stymied the development of effective interventions. The purpose of this article is to clarify the available research on how (a) parenting styles, (b) physical discipline, (c) racial socialization, and (d) direct academic involvement relate to the academic achievement of African American children, particularly males. Because of the scant and inconsistent nature of the research on the topic, academic achievement is broadly defined to include those outcomes related empirically or conceptually to school achievement (i.e., grades, academic motivation, and behavior problems). The underlying goal is to stimulate the implementation of culturally competent and comprehensive family level interventions. For that reason, this article concludes with a summary and discussion of possible areas in which more research, policy, and intervention strategies can be focused.¹

METHODS

This article summarizes the current state of knowledge in the four areas of family functioning discussed above. The main point of this review is to illustrate the methodological and conceptual reasons for the discrepancies in the studies and give a more accurate assessment of the actual effects of each family functioning factor. This is not intended to be an exhaustive review of every article on the subject, but a review of enough major empirical articles to help clarify inconsistencies in the literature. Thus, this review focuses more on the breadth of content than on the depth of one specific area. However, most of the major empirical studies in each area published since the early 1990s that had a sizable percentage of male African American participants were reviewed. Searching the electronic database PsychLit and bibliographies of published manuscripts was the main method used to locate primary research articles and reviews. PsychLit was chosen because it is one of the largest interdisciplinary databases, containing 98% of all peer-reviewed journals (American Psychological Association,

2004). The interpretation of results was based on examinations of the methods, sample sizes, and all available descriptive and inferential statistics in each article.

PARENTING STYLES

Almost all family researchers agree that optimal child development requires children to be immersed in an environment that offers both supportive and nurturing responsiveness (e.g., warmth and love) and firm guidance and demandingness (e.g., control and discipline; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). The most obvious and studied consequence of warmth and control is the classification of families by their parenting styles (Mandara, 2003). By crossing the two dimensions, four qualitatively different parenting styles are uncovered (Maccoby & Martin). The *authoritative* parents are high in both warmth and control. The *authoritarian* parents are firm disciplinarians, yet they lack the warmth of the authoritative parents. *Permissive* or *indulgent* parents are high in warmth, but they lack the focus on discipline and control of the authoritative parents. *Neglectful* parents are low on both dimensions, and consequently have been characterized as neglecting their childrearing duties altogether (Baumrind, 1989).

The basic argument of early parenting style studies is that, because authoritative parenting styles are associated with higher achievement in European Americans, and because African American males have the lowest academic achievement of all major American groups, they must receive the least amount of authoritative parenting (Steinberg et al., 1992). To test this theory, a few large sample studies with small percentages of African Americans examined the effects of parenting styles on academic achievement (Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, & Dornbusch, 1994). Mixed support for the theory was found. On one hand, the typical African American and Latino parents were slightly less likely than the average European American parents to be authoritative, and slightly more likely than the average European and Asian American parents to be authoritarian, by European American standards (Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh 1987; Radziszewska, Richardson, Dent, & Flay, 1996; Steinberg, Mounts, Lamborn, & Dornbusch, 1991). However, the actual correlation between authoritative parenting and African American academic achievement was not found.

One of the earliest studies found no relationship between parenting style and African American high school students' grade point average (GPA; Dornbusch et al., 1987). Another found that across various family structures and socioeconomic backgrounds, African American children in authoritative homes did much better on all well-being variables except for academic achievement variables (Steinberg et al., 1991). In a 1-year follow-up, they

confirmed the earlier studies and found that parenting style was a major predictor of GPA for all adolescents except African Americans (Steinberg et al., 1994).

These findings made it clear that the relationship between parenting styles and the academic achievement of African American children was much more complex than researchers previously thought. Another interesting finding was that Asian American children were also less likely to come from authoritative homes than were European American children, even though Asian Americans almost always had the highest levels of academic achievement. This differential effect of authoritative parenting on academic achievement was difficult to explain (Radziszewska et al., 1996; Steinberg et al., 1991).

Several researchers began to argue that authoritarianism was not as detrimental to African American children's academic achievement as it was to European American children. They reasoned that because African American children, especially boys, are often exposed to the realities of the harsh inner city, firm parental control is adaptive in these environments (Florsheim, Tolan, & Gorman-Smith, 1996; Mason, Cauce, Gonzales, & Hiraga, 1996; Ogbu, 1981; Steinberg et al., 1992). However, the critical flaw in most early studies was that researchers did not measure parenting styles in African American families separately from other racial groups. Because African Americans represented a small percentage of each sample, the standards and norms of the largest group in the sample (i.e., European American families) were essentially applied to African American families.

Recent studies with predominantly African American samples have shed more light on their parenting styles. For instance, Mandara and Murray (2002) used cluster analysis on a large set of family environment variables and uncovered three prototypical African American family types that resembled Baumrind's authoritative, authoritarian, and neglectful parenting styles. The researchers concluded that African American styles are similar to, yet qualitatively different from, European American parenting styles in important ways. African American authoritative parents tend to be more demanding and less acquiescent to children's demands than are European American authoritative parents. Thus, by European American family standards, African American authoritativeness would be considered authoritarian. Although they did not directly examine academic achievement, this investigation did illustrate the cultural differences between African American and European American parenting styles.

Furthermore, the researchers found that African American boys with neglectful parents scored lower than boys with authoritative and authoritarian parents on several indicators of psychological health, such as self-control, feelings of personal power, and identity integration. They also displayed personality profiles of highly cynical, rude, uncooperative, and

generally emotionally unstable individuals. Those boys in the other family types, especially the authoritative homes, had high self-esteem, self-control, and feelings of personal power, a secure racial identity, and displayed a personality profile of a very well adjusted adolescent. Therefore, boys in authoritative homes have psychological profiles conducive to academic achievement.

In a similar study, Gorman-Smith, Tolan, Henry, and Florsheim (2000) assessed a sample of 1,105 inner-city students on a variety of parenting and academic measures. They found that African American parents who used an authoritative style similar to the one uncovered in the Mandara and Murray (2002) study had boys who were involved with more prosocial activities at school and in the community and who had more positive attitudes toward school, higher educational aspirations, and less externalizing and internalizing problems across five waves of assessments. Another recent study using a large national sample of 5–18-year-old African Americans found that those whose parents used an authoritative style had higher grades than those whose parents used an authoritarian or permissive parenting style (Taylor, Hinton, & Wilson, 1995). Collectively, then, these studies imply that raising African American boys with an African American version of authoritative parenting (e.g., more demanding and less acquiescent to child demands) is most conducive to a wide variety of positive outcomes, including their academic achievement.

PHYSICAL DISCIPLINE

One of the most politically controversial topics in parenting research is the issue of spanking as a form of discipline (Baumrind, Larzelere, & Cowan, 2002; Deater-Deckard, Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 1996; McLoyd & Smith, 2002; Straus, 2000; Whaley, 2000). At one end, those who are rightly concerned with the outrageous cases of child abuse in the Western world argue that corporal punishment is not only detrimental to child development but that it is also a form of child abuse (Straus). Others argue that ordinary spanking can be effective when properly used (Baumrind et al.; Whaley). Early studies tended to confirm the former view because they found that European American children whose parents used “harsh” discipline had higher rates of aggressive behavior at home and school (see Straus, 2000, for a review). The definition of *harsh* varied from study to study, but it usually allowed the physically abused to be grouped with those who received ordinary spankings for misbehavior (Baumrind, 1996). Because of this, a bias toward not spanking has been pushed by social workers, school personnel, and the popular media (Baumrind, 1996; Whaley).

However, several studies looking within African American samples have found very different and consistent results. Deater-Deckard et al. (1996)

followed an economically diverse sample of 100 African American and 466 European American children from kindergarten to third grade. They found that the use of physical discipline was positively associated with peer and teacher ratings of externalizing behavior at school (e.g., peer aggression, teacher-child conflict, and other disruptive behavior) for the European American students but not for the African American students. The researchers concluded that, like parenting style in general, physical discipline has a different meaning in African American families. Therefore, children may respond differently to it.

In another sample of African American and European American children ages 4 to 11, spanking was associated with fewer fights at school and lowered general aggression for African American children (Gunnoe & Mariner, 1997). The authors also concluded that the effectiveness of spanking might depend on the meaning that the child ascribes to it. Likewise, McLoyd and Smith (2002) found that, after income-to-needs ratio and gender were controlled, African American children who received high levels of maternal emotional support had fewer behavior problems across 6 years of assessments regardless of whether they were spanked. Those who had low maternal emotional support showed an increase in behavior problems over time. This was especially true for those who were spanked an average of 2 or more times per week. As with the other researchers, McLoyd and Smith concluded that "the child may be less likely to view spanking as harsh, unjust, and indicative of parental rejection when relations with the parent are generally warm and supportive" (p. 51).

To test this theory, Simons et al. (2002) used a sample of 841 families of 10–12-year-old African Americans. They found that parental control was negatively related to conduct problems across all community contexts. However, they found that the relationship between conduct problems and spanking depended on the frequency of spanking in the community in which the child lived. In communities in which overall levels of spanking were high, child conduct problems (e.g., shoplifting, fighting, lying, setting fires, burglary, and so on) were at their lowest, regardless of the spanking frequency of the individual child's parents. In communities in which spankings were rare, conduct problems were higher overall, especially for those children whose parents spanked them more often. The authors concluded that the widespread acceptance of spanking in African American communities may explain its differential effects in African American versus European American communities.

This body of research lends support to the notion that spanking African American boys, not excessively harsh or abusive discipline, is effective in reducing their behavior problems at school. This is particularly true when the boy interprets spanking as an accepted form of discipline for misbehavior. Spanking is believed to be more effective if it is done in the

context of a warm and supportive home environment (McLoyd & Smith, 2002) and when it is accepted in the boys' social network (Gunnoe & Mariner, 1997; Simons et al., 2002). Essentially, if the boy knows that there will be consequences for unwanted behavior (including possible spanking), and the thought of those consequences prevents or modifies unwanted behavior, then spanking is an effective form of discipline. However, spanking children, even African American boys, 2 or more times per week is undoubtedly excessive and may imply a dysfunctional parent, child, and/or parent-child relationship. It should also be noted that these studies do not imply that spanking should be the only or even first means by which African American parents should discipline their sons.

RACIAL SOCIALIZATION

A unique task of many non-White parents living in a predominantly White society is to foster a sense of cultural and racial identity in their children (Murray & Mandara, 2001). This is particularly true for African Americans, who are constantly bombarded with negative and stereotypical images from the media, the educational system, and religious mythology (Bullock, Wyche, & Williams, 2001; Murray & Mandara, 2001). To foster a sense of cultural and racial identity, most African American parents discuss racial and cultural issues with their children. Collectively, this is referred to as racial socialization and is used by most African American families in one form or another (Murray & Mandara, 2003), especially as children get older (Hughes & Chen, 1999).

Unfortunately, research on the effects of racial socialization on African American well-being, especially academic achievement, is limited and inconsistent. Some studies show that racial socialization has positive relationships with psychological health (Murray & Mandara, 2003; Thornton, Chatters, Taylor, & Allen, 1990), grades (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Sanders, 1997), and cognitive development (Caughy, O'Campo, Randolph, & Nickerson, 2002). Others show associations with lower grades (Marshall, 1995; Miller & MacIntosh, 1999) and delinquency (Taylor, Biafora, & Warheit, 1994).

These different findings, however, may be primarily a function of the differential measurement and conceptualization of racial socialization in each study. A few recent studies have found four prototypical types of racial socialization messages, which have differential effects on African American children's psychological health and academic achievement (Caughy et al., 2002; Hughes & Chen, 1997, 1999; Murray & Mandara, 2003). For instance, based on structured interviews with African American parents, Hughes and Chen (1997, 1999) argued that there are messages (a) about cultural heritage and pride, (b) that prepare children for future discrimination, (c) that

promote outgroup mistrust, and (d) that emphasize “racelessness” or similarity among groups. Other researchers also found that racial socialization messages can be (a) proactive, emphasizing cultural heritage and overcoming barriers through self-development; (b) active, emphasizing cultural heritage and bias in American society; (c) reactive, emphasizing a mistrust of African Americans and European Americans; and (d) passive, emphasizing racelessness, and devaluing the effects and persistence of racism and the need to have cultural and racial identity (Murray & Mandara, 2003).

By using a typological approach, one can plot out these four types of parents in a two-dimensional framework (see Figure 1). Although the empirical research is too limited to make more definitive statements, I believe that the two dimensions that distinguish the four groups are (a) a focus on racial awareness and pride and (b) a focus on personal power or locus of control. As with all typologies, arbitrary boundaries exist between the groups (Mandara, 2003). Consequently, not every parent falls neatly into one category. However, this framework describes the prototypical parents of each major category.

When reviewing the literature using this framework, a clearer picture regarding the effects of racial socialization arises. Several studies show that proactive socialization, or messages of cultural/racial pride and strategies for

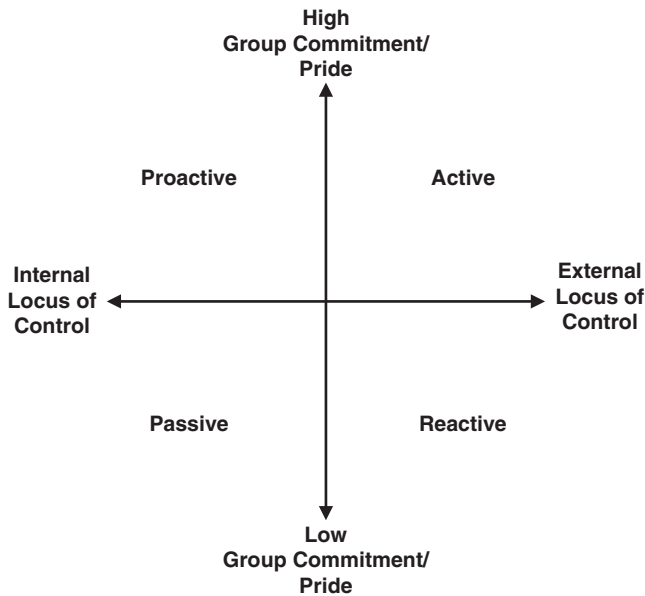


Figure 1. Racial Socialization Typology

overcoming barriers through self-development, is positively associated with well-being in a variety of domains (Hughes & Chen, 1999; Murray & Mandara, 2003). A study of 377 African American adolescents found a positive association between a combination of proactive and active racial socialization and school grades (Bowman & Howard, 1985). A more recent study found that those African American preschool children whose parents facilitated a home environment rich in culturally appropriate toys, pictures of African Americans, and African cultural features scored significantly higher on measures of achievement and cognitive development compared with those from less African-centered homes, even after SES was controlled (Caughy et al., 2002). Caughy et al. also found that proactive racial socialization was associated with fewer internalizing and externalizing problems among African American boys. Therefore, those parents who generally use more proactive racial socialization strategies have higher achieving and more emotionally and behaviorally stable boys.

Very few studies have directly examined the relationship between passive racial socialization and achievement in African American children. Some data even suggest that those passive parents who promote a racelessness ideology tend to have children with psychological problems (Hughes & Chen, 1999, 1997; Murray & Mandara, 2003). Although a racelessness identity has small positive correlations with academic achievement in African Americans (Arroyo & Zigler, 1995), the link between racelessness socialization and achievement has been frequently theorized (Fordham, 1988; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986), but not empirically examined. Similarly, the effects on achievement of active socialization (or preparation for racism) are unclear because no studies have specifically examined both variables. On the other hand, the children of parents who focus on reactive racial socialization, or promotion of mistrust, tend to have psychological problems (Hughes & Chen, 1999; 1997; Murray & Mandara, 2003) and be high in delinquency (Taylor et al., 1994) and low in achievement (Marshall, 1995).

In summary, much more research on African American racial socialization needs to be conducted for researchers to have a fuller understanding of the effects of family functioning on African American boys' achievement. However, evidence does suggest that African American parents who stress both personal power and racial/cultural pride tend to have well-adjusted and academically achieving boys. Those parents who are low on both dimensions tend to have boys with psychological, behavioral, and academic problems (Hughes & Chen, 1999, 1997; Murray & Mandara, 2003).

PARENTAL ACADEMIC INVOLVEMENT

The extent to which parents' involvement in school activities and homework influences the academic achievement of their children has a long

history in educational research. Early studies found that African American parents' involvement at home and school was positively related to their children's academic achievement, especially for elementary school-aged boys (Reynolds, 1989, 1992). For instance, a study of almost 1,500 African American children found that parental involvement had direct effects on first-grade reading and math achievement and socioemotional maturity, even after kindergarten math and reading achievement scores, motivation, and SES were considered (Reynolds, 1989). A more recent study found that parental involvement had an important effect on several outcomes for African American children, including overall GPA, math and science scores, verbal ability, work habits, and social development (Marcon, 1999). An interesting finding was that African American boys whose parents were not perceived by their teachers to be actively involved were the group at greatest risk for underachievement by far.

However, upon closer examination of these studies, the actual effects of parent involvement are less clear. Most of the studies that show positive effects measure parental involvement by asking teachers how involved the parents were over the past year. Therefore, if the teacher thought that the parents were actively involved, the child was more likely to do better. It could also be that if the child did well, the teacher inferred that the parents must have been involved (Murray & Jackson, 1999). Either way, teacher report is not a direct measure of parental involvement.

Studies that asked students or their parents how involved the parents were in their children's education found very different results. For instance, a study of 729 low-income African American sixth-graders was designed to deal with this teacher expectation effect by asking parents how involved they were during the academic year (Reynolds & Gill, 1994). Unlike the previous studies, the researchers found that involvement in school had small correlations with reading and math achievement, problem behavior, and prosocial behaviors. Another study found that African American students and parents reported the same amount of parental involvement as other racial groups across several domains. However, actual parental behaviors, such as contacting the school, volunteering, and participating in direct educational supervision, had no effects on African American children's reading, math, science, or social studies achievement, but these parental behaviors did affect the scores of European American children (Fan, 2001). Several other recent studies of similar design found consistent results (Ardelt & Eccles, 2001; Halle, Kurtz-Costes, & Mahoney, 1997; Taylor et al., 1995).

However, recent experimental and longitudinal studies have shed even more light on the subject. In a promising set of experiments, researchers found that a parental involvement and peer tutoring intervention was effective in improving the mathematics skills and school adjustment of low-SES African American fourth- and fifth-grade children (Heller & Fantuzzo,

1993; Fantuzzo, Davis, & Ginsburg, 1995). Another convincing study followed 1,250 urban children (63% African American) from kindergarten to the third grade (Izzo, Weissberg, Kaspro, & Fendrich, 1999). After each school year, teachers were asked to rate the children on problems and competencies in many social and academic areas, and their perceptions of the quality and quantity of the parents' involvement. They found that teacher perceptions of parental involvement quality were very stable over the 3 years ($\alpha = .79$) even though different teachers were performing the ratings each year. They also found that teachers rated boys less favorably and perceived their parents as participating at home less often as compared with girls. Most important, even after controlling for year 1 performance, most parental involvement measures had significant relationships with school performance in year 3. Collectively, this body of research illustrates a sizable effect of parental involvement on African American boys' achievement, and it seems to be particularly true when teachers perceive boys' parents as being actively involved.

GENERAL SUMMARY

The purpose of this article was to critically examine and clarify the empirical research examining the effects of parenting styles, physical discipline, racial socialization, and direct parental involvement on African American male academic achievement. The review more often uncovered consistencies than discrepancies. First, it was found that African American boys who have authoritative parents are more psychologically and behaviorally adjusted and have higher academic achievement than those in other types of families. Those in neglectful and permissive homes tended to be more at risk for psychological, behavioral, and academic problems (Gorman-Smith et al., 2000; Mandara & Murray, 2002; Taylor et al., 1995). However, African American authoritativeness is qualitatively different from European American versions.

Another important finding was that spanking (and the fear of being spanked) appeared to be an effective way for parents of African American boys to gain and maintain control and discipline. Spanking tends to be most effective in the context of an authoritative home environment, especially when it is an accepted form of discipline in the child's social environment. However, the exclusive and excessive use of spanking will likely counter its effectiveness.

Third, a detailed examination of the empirical literature revealed four racial socialization styles that African American parents commonly use. Using this reconceptualization of racial socialization, it was found that those African American parents who focus on self and group development and

racial/cultural pride (i.e., proactive socialization) have boys who are more likely to be psychologically healthy and higher in academic achievement compared with those whose parents use other types of racial socialization messages. Those who use passive, or “racelessness” messages, may increase their chances of facilitating academic achievement in the short run, but they have a greater risk of producing children with low self-esteem and other psychological problems in the long run (Caughy et al., 2002; Mandara & Murray, 2002). Those parents who use a reactive racial socialization style are placing their boys at risk for a variety of psychological and academic problems (Murray & Mandara, 2003; Hughes & Chen, 1997, 1999).

The fourth major finding was that when African American parents are actively involved in their sons' academic efforts by monitoring homework and other academic pursuits, limit nonproductive and destructive activities (e.g., television, radio, and video games), and create a constant and positive dialogue with the teachers and school officials, they increase the odds of their sons succeeding in school. Much of the available data also suggests that teachers' perceptions mediate the impact of parental involvement on African American boys' academic achievement. Specifically, those African American boys whose teachers think that their parents are not involved are at risk for academic underachievement regardless of actual parental involvement.

IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERVENTION, POLICY, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

A major focus of family policy and interventions should clearly be training parents to facilitate a home environment in which children feel loved and supported, yet have structure and discipline (Baumrind, 1996). Persistent poverty and other stressors significantly impact parents' abilities to be warm and supportive (McLoyd, 1998). Consequently, for family functioning interventions to be effective, public policy must be directed toward eliminating poverty and teaching people how to better cope with life stressors (e.g., divorce, job loss). This has been a mantra for many family researchers over the last several decades (Duncan et al., 1998; McLoyd, 1990, 1998).

Policy and interventions directed toward establishing discipline and control by parents are also critical. The generally permissive parenting style that is currently in vogue is inadequate for middle-class European American girls (Baumrind, 1996), let alone urban African American boys. Nonetheless, to be effective, discipline and control must not be excessive and must be in the context of warmth and support. Balance is therefore the key lesson for beneficial parental control (Baumrind, 1996). This goes for spanking as well. Interventions that more clearly define and explain the appropriate use

of spanking and at what ages are sorely needed. This is especially true for authoritarian parents, who spank their children too much, and permissive parents, who avoid spanking at the potential cost of parental authority and child self-control.

Unfortunately for African American boys, the modern American public school system is, for the most part, designed for and run by European American women. One problem that African American boys may have in such an environment is the cultural discontinuity between their parents' belief in firm parental control and their teachers' belief in a more permissive socialization style. For instance, several studies show that children who receive inconsistent socialization at home have more externalizing and internalizing problems at home and school and lower academic achievement (Gonzales, Dumka, Dearnorff, Carter, & McCray, 2004). Because children are socialized both by their parents and teachers (Wentzel, 2002), there may be situations in which teachers' styles complement or reinforce parents' styles (e.g., as is the case for most middle-class European American girls) and other situations in which they conflict. If African American parenting styles are qualitatively different from middle-class European American patterns, as was found in the research literature, the discontinuity between home and school socialization styles may result in a form of inconsistent socialization for some African American boys.

This does not imply that African American parents should modify their parenting styles to be aligned with the more permissive school environment. As the saying in African American communities goes, "either you discipline your boys, or the police will do it for you." Furthermore, the permissive parenting style simply does not actualize the full potential of most children, let alone African American boys. Ethnocentric public policy initiatives that attempt to force African American parents to not use spanking as a disciplinary option will thus be misguided and counterproductive (Baumrind, 1996; Whaley, 2000). To reduce the many problems associated with cultural discontinuities, teachers also need much more training in understanding the cultural differences between themselves and their students (Allen & Blaisure, 2003; Delpit, 1995). They also need training in how to develop more adaptive socialization styles overall.

It is not clear how to create interventions that promote proactive racial socialization in African American families. It may simply be ignorance about the importance of stressing racial/cultural identity or self-development for some parents. It may also be that their racial socialization styles are a function of their political ideologies and cultural awareness. This is a difficult topic to bring up, let alone attempt to modify. At this point, the most promising route may be to impress upon African American parents the need to teach their children that there is no inherent dichotomy between achievement and embracing one's cultural heritage. This seems to be the

fundamental error of the passive and reactive parents. Public policy directed at eliminating derogatory stereotypes in the media and stressing to parents the need to monitor the negative messages that their children receive will help reduce this erroneous belief.

African American parents also have to be made aware of the enormous implications of teachers' expectations of their sons' abilities, study habits, and parental involvement. Since the end of the civil rights era, most American-born parents, especially poor African American parents, have relied on teachers and school officials to educate their children (Turner, 2003). For parents of African American boys, this excessive reliance on teachers can be a deathblow to their sons' futures because, unlike the parents of boys of other racial groups and girls, African American parents have to assume that teachers expect their sons to fail (Murray & Jackson, 1999). That teachers' perceptions of parental involvement and student ability are more predictive of later achievement than parents' actual involvement or a student's actual ability is a clear sign that teachers have entirely too much control over the education of African American males. Therefore, policy and interventions must focus on making parents the most important factor in their sons' education by increasing parents' control of their children's education.

Note

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