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Overcoming Obstacles: Academic Achievement as a Response to Racism and Discrimination

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Previous studies have suggested that in response to occupational and educational discrimination based on race, many African American students have mentally withdrawn from the schooling process, as indicated by low levels of achievement and high levels of school dropout. By contrast, the present study's analysis of interview data collected from 28 African American urban eighth-graders indicates that some African American students with a high awareness of racial discrimination respond to this discrimination in ways that are conducive rather than detrimental to academic success. For these students, positive racial socialization was a primary factor influencing and promoting academic success. Implications for future research on the academic performance of African American students are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Several authors have examined the relationship between racial and economic inequality and individual mobility. Among these, Ogbu (1978, 1988, 1991) has arguably had the greatest impact on the way educators today view the relationship between racial inequality, educational attainment, and academic achievement, especially among African American students. Chief among Ogbu's contentions is the argument that, as a response to racial discrimination and limitations on their educational and occupational opportunity, African Americans have failed to develop a strong academic orientation. In an attempt to explain differential achievement levels among minorities in the United States, Ogbu (1991) identifies immigration status as a key factor determining minorities' academic attitudes, efforts and levels of success. Using the terms "caste-like" and "involuntary" to describe the minority status of African Americans, he contends that the historical legacies of racism and discrimination, especially as they relate to educational and employment opportunities, have had a decidedly negative influence on the school performance of African Americans.

Ogbu's (1988) argument rests on the supposition that African Americans have adapted to discriminatory educational and employment policies and practices by disengaging from the schooling process. He maintains that African Americans have come to characterize striving for academic success as culturally "subtractive" (p. 177). As Ogbu posits in a 1978 article:

As caste-like minorities, [African Americans] have had access mainly to inferior education; they have experienced the job ceiling and other caste barriers that prevent them from maximizing their efforts in school in terms of future social and economic rewards; they have, generally speaking, responded to these barriers with "mental withdrawal," failing to persevere in their schoolwork. (p. 237)

In an extension of Ogbu's earlier work, Fordham and Ogbu (1986) advance two additional factors influencing the academic achievement of African American adolescents: an

oppositional collective or social identity and an oppositional cultural frame of reference. Accordingly, they assert that:

Subordinate minorities like black Americans develop a sense of collective identity or sense of peoplehood in opposition to the social identity of white Americans because of the way white Americans treat them in economic, political, social, and psychological domains, including white exclusion of these groups from true assimilation. . . . Along with the formation of an oppositional social identity, subordinate minorities also develop an oppositional cultural frame of reference which includes devices for protecting their identity and for maintaining boundaries between them and white Americans. (p. 181)

Fordham and Ogbu further contend that oppositional identity and oppositional cultural frame of reference enter into the schooling equation for African American adolescents through these students' perceptions and interpretations of schooling as "learning the white American cultural frame of reference which they have come to assume to have adverse effects on their own cultural and identity integrity" (p. 182). Thus, they conclude that racial discrimination in education and in the work force has created a cultural norm of underachievement among African American adolescents that is enforced by pressures emanating from the larger African American community. Consequently, academically successful students are those who can circumvent these pressures by carrying out strategies that allow them to "do well academically and meet the expectations of school authorities on the one hand and the demands of peers for conformity to group-sanctioned attitudes and behaviors that validate black identity and cultural frame on the other" (p. 186).

Fordham (1988) goes on to argue that one strategy employed by academically successful African American adolescents is that of developing a "raceless persona" (p. 61). According to Fordham, such a persona indicates a "lack of identification with, or a strong relationship to, the Black community" (p. 58). As she contends:

... [W]ithin the school structure, Black adolescents consciously and unconsciously sense that they have to give up aspects of their identities and of their indigenous cultural system in order to achieve success as defined in dominant-group terms; their resulting social selves are embodied in the notion of racelessness. (p. 82)

Thus, Fordham suggests that to succeed in the dominant society, African American adolescents may have to divorce themselves from the larger African American adolescent community, given that it is characterized by an oppositional identity and cultural frame of reference that does not value academic success.

Other authors argue that some African Americans have responded to racism and discrimination in ways that have promoted educational attainment and academic excellence. For example, Weinberg (1977), Anderson (1988), and Perry (1993) assert that historically many African Americans have possessed a strong belief in and desire for learning that has been exhibited in an ongoing, collective struggle for educational opportunity and equality. Though not discounting the work of Ogbu, these authors suggest that more than one response to racism has existed within the African American community, with wholly different educational outcomes. They argue that African Americans have possessed a strong achievement orientation that is reflected in their multifaceted and continuous struggle for equal educational opportunity and educational attainment and success.

McCullough-Garrett's (1993) qualitative study on the effects of desegregation on African American teachers highlights the strong sense of racial pride and commitment to academic excellence that African American teachers historically have sought to instill in Black youth. Segregation and discrimination notwithstanding, what was important to these teachers, she posits, "was that each student developed a desire to achieve and was empowered to do so" (p. 439).

Studies by Benjamin (1991) and Edwards and Polite (1992) show that many African American men and women have been empowered to succeed academically, economically and socially, partly due to their awareness of racism and racially discriminatory practices

in education and employment. Contrary to developing a personae of racelessness, Edwards and Polite note:

... [T]he one common trait that emerges from all the interviews presented here is that successful blacks are first and foremost affirmed and empowered by a positive sense of racial identity. They fully understand that as blacks they will encounter obstacles, prejudices, and inequities, but they never view their race as the cause of the problem. . . . It is this essential recognition that grounds the thinking of achieving blacks, enabling them to . . . gain a powerful measure of spiritual strength from the physical and psychological struggles that racism inevitably demands. (p. 6)

Edwards and Polite's study also reveals that many successful African Americans have been and remain aware of the necessity of proving themselves qualified, not by producing work that is equal to that of their White counterparts, but by producing work that is superior. In an historical examination of Blacks in the film industry, Bogle (1990) discusses this tendency among Blacks to "overprove" themselves as a response to racism and racial stigmatization. In effect, he maintains that Blacks are forced to prove their equality by being superior, as captured in the adage commonly stated in the African American community that "Blacks have to be twice as good to get half as far."

Thus, there is evidence that despite racial discrimination, many African Americans possess an achievement ethos that demands a commitment to excellence for both individual and collective mobility. Using interview data collected from 28 African American eighth-graders in an urban school district in the southeastern United States, the primary objectives of the present study were to identify the existence of this achievement ethos among African American urban adolescents and determine its effects on their school performance. The study also explores factors that influence the development of this achievement ethos, which allows African American students to respond to racial discrimination in ways that are conducive rather than detrimental to academic success.

METHOD

Data Source

The present study is part of a larger investigation of the academic achievement of African American youth in an urban school district in the southeastern United States. The larger study was conducted in 10 middle schools in a southeastern city with a population of approximately 300,000. The city's public school district comprises 81 schools, which serve approximately 42,000 students enrolled in grades K-12. Nineteen of these schools are middle schools serving grades 6 through 8. Ninety percent of the student population is minority, predominantly African American. The racial composition of the student population in this district is reflective of a number of urban school districts in major southeastern cities. For example, the school districts of New Orleans (Louisiana), Jackson (Mississippi), Memphis (Tennessee), and Richmond (Virginia) have student enrollments that are more than 80% African American (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). Further, these school districts are similar in that 25% or more of their school-age children are from families with incomes below the poverty level (Market Data Retrieval, Inc., 1994-95).

The larger study explored the effects of teacher, family, and church support on the school-related attitudes, behaviors, and academic achievement of African American urban adolescents. Toward this end, 826 students completed a questionnaire, which included items measuring: (a) student perceptions of teacher support; (b) student perceptions of parental support, (c) church involvement, (d) school behavior, (e) academic self-concept, and (f) achievement ideology. A mean score of students' self-reported grades in social studies, science, English, and mathematics was used as the measure of academic achievement. Interviews were conducted with a subset of the research population to enhance

and aid in the interpretation of the questionnaire data. Results of the quantitative and qualitative analyses indicated that students' perceptions of teacher and parental academic support and church involvement indirectly influenced their achievement through the positive and significant influence these perceptions had on one or more of the attitudinal and behavioral variables measured (Sanders, in press).

Sample

The data reported here are drawn from the qualitative portion of the larger study, which involved 40 students from the population described above. Students who were interviewed for the study were selected by school counselors and teachers as "representative" of students at varying achievement and school engagement levels. The selection was verified through student self-reported grades. There was generally an even distribution of high-, mid-, and low-achievers. High-achievers were defined as those with a grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 (B) or higher in their academic subjects (based on a four-point scale); mid-achievers were those with a grade point average between 2.9 and 2.0 (B and C) in their academic subjects; and low-achievers were those with a grade point average of less than 2.0 (C) in their academic subjects. Male and female students were represented at each level of achievement. Students' ages ranged from 12 to 15. Students living above and below poverty level were represented, although, as is the case in many predominantly African American urban school districts, more students came from homes with incomes below poverty level than above it. Students from various family structures were also represented: 11 resided in two-parent households; 17 resided in single-parent households. Within these structures, however, considerable variation was found. For example, one student resided with her single mother and her maternal grandmother, while another resided with his single aunt.

Of the 40 students interviewed, 28 generated sufficient data on their perceptions of racism and racial discrimination to be included in the study. Table I summarizes demographic data for this sample.

TABLE I
Academic Grade Point Averages (GPAs), Poverty Level, Family Structure, and Ages of Students in Sample (N=28), by Level of School Achievement

	HIGH- ACHIEVING (3.0 OR < GPA)	MID- ACHIEVING (2.0-2.9 GPA)	LOW- ACHIEVING (< 2.0 GPA)
Number of students	10	10	8
Number of females	5	6	5
Number of males	4	4	3
Mean GPA	3.4	2.5	1.4
Maximum GPA	4.0	2.8	1.9
Minimum GPA	3.0	2.3	.6
Maximum age	14	15	15
Minimum age	12	13	13
Above poverty level	4	2	3
Below poverty level	6	8	5
Female-headed household	4	8	5
Two-parent household	6	2	3

Interview Protocol

The interview protocol ensured that basically the same information was obtained from all 40 students; however, the open-ended format of the questions maximized each respondent's freedom to discuss the questions he or she was most interested in or concerned about as precisely or extensively as the student saw fit. Follow-up questions were asked when appropriate, and students were allowed to speak freely about any related topics. As Seidman (1991) attests, adherence to this format and procedure prevents interviewers from imposing their interests on interviewees.

The first two questions of the protocol gathered demographic information. Questions 3 through 7 elicited information from the students about their school, their course of study, and their current grades. Questions 8 and 9 inquired about the larger context of the students' lives, who they turned to for academic support, the challenges they faced, and additional sources of support outside the school. Questions 10 through 12 were included to gather information about how the students spent their free time and, more specifically, to gauge the amount of time they spent on school-related activities when not in school. Question 13 inquired about students' future aspirations. Question 14 asked students to share their perceptions of racism and racial discrimination and comment on the degree to which they viewed these forces as barriers to their future success. Table II lists each of the questions included in the protocol.

Procedures

The student sample was interviewed by the author between October 1993 and January 1994. The interviews lasted an average of one hour each, and covered a variety of topics according to the 14-item protocol established prior to data collection. They followed a face-to-face, semistructured design to ensure that specific topics would be covered while allowing unique or individual factors to emerge naturally. All interviews were conducted privately in the school guidance counselor's office, library, or an empty classroom; and

TABLE II
Interview Protocol Items

1. How old are you?
 2. Do you receive free lunches?
 3. How long have you been at this school?
 4. If you could change anything about this school, what would it be? Why?
 5. What subjects do you take?
 6. What is your favorite school subject and why?
 7. What grades did you make on your last report card?
 8. Who helps you the most with your school work?
 9. Describe your neighborhood. What is the best thing about it? What is the worst?
 10. Describe what you do on an average weekday.
 11. Describe what you do on an average Saturday.
 12. Describe what you do on an average Sunday.
 13. Imagine yourself 20 years from now, what is your occupation/job? What will it take for you to reach your goal(s)? Who is helping you to achieve your goals?
 14. Does racism and racial discrimination affect African Americans' ability to achieve in the United States? If so, how? Has racism affected you? If so, how? Do you think that racism or racial discrimination will affect your future goals? If so, how?
-

students were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. To avoid the distractions that often accompany taking detailed descriptive notes, interviews were audiotaped with students' permission and later transcribed.

Data Analysis

The raw data generated from the 28 respondents, which consisted of 75 pages of written text transcribed by the author, was coded and analyzed according to the ongoing, iterative process delineated by Schofield (1989) and Seidman (1991). This process entailed reading through the written text to identify emerging categories and themes within these categories that related to students' academic achievement. It also involved finding distinctions and connections among identified themes across the research population. One category that emerged from this data pertained to students' awareness of racism and racial discrimination.

RESULTS

From the interview data collected, three categories of racial awareness emerged, reflecting the diversity of attitudes that exists within the African American adolescent population. These categories were distinguished as follows:

- (1) minimalization, or denial of racism and racial barriers;
- (2) moderate to low awareness of racism and racial barriers; and
- (3) high awareness of racism and racial barriers.

Students in the minimalization/denial category articulated a belief in an increasingly color-blind society. They maintained that racism is more a historical than contemporary problem, and that the primary obstacles to African Americans' success in the United States are individual shortcomings and lack of effort. Students in the second category, moderate to low awareness, articulated a greater awareness of racism than did students in the first category. Though they expressed the belief that racism may present challenges and obstacles in some situations, they had not yet come to any conclusions about the potential racial barriers that might exist. Moreover, they did not describe racism as a pervasive phenomenon nor express a strong personal awareness of racism. Students in the high-awareness category articulated a strong personal awareness of racism as a pervasive phenomenon in the United States. Unlike their peers in the first two categories, these students expressed a belief that racism would likely present challenges to their educational and occupational attainment, challenges that they believed they would have to surmount in order to achieve their future goals.

Seven students fell into the minimalization/denial category. The students in this category were represented at each of the three achievement levels; however, the majority (6) were mid- to low-achievers (see Table I). Some examples of these students' responses to protocol items that assessed awareness of racism and racial discrimination include the following:

I don't think that people should talk about race and racism. I don't like to hear it. They may not be lying, but I think that people should just try to work for what they want. (Johneta, 13 years old, 1.8 GPA)

I don't believe that the White man is stopping Blacks from anything, not in these days and times. The White man ain't got his foot on you, you got your own foot on you. You got to work; you got the knowledge now that you can get ahead. It's your decision what you do in life. . . . There was a time when I was really proud to be Black, but nowadays, it ain't cool. (William, 15 years old, 1.0 GPA)

I don't believe that being Black or female will matter. That won't happen today cause now it has changed and all. It really doesn't matter if you are a Black woman. (Trina, 13 years old, 3.6 GPA)

A number of attributes characterized students in this group. First, they typically expressed an avoidance of the issue of racism. In Johneta's case, this avoidance was

evident despite her acknowledgment that racism may exist. Second, these students expressed a “pull one’s self up by one’s boot-straps” type of individualism that seemingly precludes the notion of oppression or discrimination based on one’s membership in a particular racial or ethnic group. For example, when low-awareness students like Trina acknowledged the existence of racism, racial discrimination, and sexism, they referred to it as a historical rather than a contemporary phenomenon. Furthermore, these students generally concurred that the comparatively lower social and economic status of African Americans is due more to a lack of effort than to a lack of opportunity.

The majority of students (11) in this 28-member sample fell into the moderate- to low-awareness category. These students were evenly distributed among the three achievement levels. Representative responses about racial discrimination from students in this category include the following:

I think that sometimes it might be hard being a Black man because people might try to put pressure on you, but I won’t listen to them. . . .No one has ever really said anything to me yet, but maybe in the future someone will try to tell me I can’t, but I’ll tell them that I can be whatever I want to be and I’ll just keep at it. (Jonathan, 13 years old, 2.25 GPA)

Sometimes when I think about the future, I think that some White person might say that, “She is Black and probably been doing something wrong back when she was coming up, and she doesn’t need to be here in this setting.” I wonder how they will act when I want to go to college or cosmetology school. But I figure that I’ll just keep trying until somebody lets me, they’ll get tired of me coming back all the time. (Gloria, 13 years old, 2.75 GPA)

Nobody has ever told me that I can’t do something because I am Black, not yet. Some people may try to prevent me from achieving because of my color, but I think that no matter what color you are, if you do your best you can accomplish anything. (Paul, 15 years old, 2.5 GPA)

These students’ awareness of racism as a potential obstacle to the economic and social success of African Americans was greater than that of students in the minimalization/denial category. However, their awareness was nebulous and abstract. For them, racial discrimination was less a concrete reality and more a metaphysical specter that may or may not reveal its presence in their lives or the lives of other Blacks. These students could not recount acts of racial discrimination that had directly or indirectly affected them or their family members; thus, their responses to racism were conjectural. Although they typically asserted that they would persist toward their goals despite racial barriers, they did not provide examples of occasions on which they or their families had ever done so.

The students of primary interest to this study were those 10 who fell into the third or high-awareness category, the majority of whom (6) were high achievers (see Table I). In contrast to the students in the other categories, these students expressed a strong awareness of racism and the challenges it presents to them and to other African Americans. For the majority of these students, however, instead of reducing their motivation and academic effort, this awareness seemed to increase them. These students stressed the need for themselves and for other Blacks to be better than their White counterparts in order to achieve the same level of social and/or economic success. The following excerpt from one high-awareness student’s interview illustrates this:

You got to be two or three times smarter than the White man, just to get his job. . . .But I know that I have what it takes to be better than the White man. You see, I am smarter than the average person, but my mouth gets me into too much trouble. But, I’m getting more mature now and disciplining myself better. (Dewayne, 15 years old, 2.8 GPA)

Other high-awareness students indicated that they viewed racism as a challenge, and saw their academic success as an opportunity to prove to a racist society that stereotypes depicting African Americans as lazy and intellectually inferior are false. According to one student in this category:

I want to come to school so that I can get an education, and make the White man know that just because he says that Black people are not going to succeed, doesn't make it so. I want to show him different. (Beverly, 14 years old, 2.75 GPA)

Most of the students in this group also expressed an awareness of how race and gender interact to present more complicated barriers to be overcome. The following comments typify these students' understandings about and responses to race- and gender-based discrimination:

I know that being Black and being a woman, I am going to have to work harder to prove what I can do and what I can be. I am willing to work hard, because it is not what you are on the outside, but what you are on the inside and what you know that you can do and feel able to do. All my life, I have hated to hear anyone say, "You can't do this." If someone tells me that I can't, I just find a way to do it. It makes me want to do it more. (Denise, 14 years old, 3.75 GPA)

Racism makes me strive harder. I see Black men everywhere. They are there, making it, regardless of what people say, and I see getting there as a challenge. . . . I know that it is going to be hard because boys and girls have the same dreams inside, but boys have more pressure because people believe that if you have seen one Black man you have seen them all. (Kenneth, 13 years old, 3.3 GPA)

I know that there will be people to hold me back, there will be people to tell me that I cannot succeed, that I am Black and I am a woman, but I am willing to strive in order to reach my goals. (Patricia, 12 years old, 3.0 GPA)

These students indicated that they had gained their awareness of racial discrimination and racism through their observations of and conversations with their parents, who either explicitly or implicitly transmitted their racial attitudes and coping strategies to their children through positive racial/ethnic socialization. The interview data collected in this study confirms that many of the students in the high-awareness category came from families that practiced this type of socialization, as revealed in the following comments:

I will never forget who I am. . . . I have been taught. . . . When I was little, my dad said, "These are White people and these are Black people. You are Black. Blacks and Whites are equal. White people remember who they are, and Blacks need to remember who they are. It is important to remember. Even though Whites and Blacks are different, they still have to interact." I think that he gave pretty good advice. (Mark, 13 years old, 3.5 GPA)

My mom says that Black people are the chosen people and that we are now coming into our own. . . . She tells me not to let anybody take me down and to stand up for my rights and respect people, and with those I will accomplish what I want to accomplish even in the face of racism and sexism. (Cassandra, 13 years old, 4.0 GPA)

My parents started their own advertising agency, and they go through a lot being Black. My mother and I are very close and she has told me about the different problems, and she says that in order to reach your goals, you have to make decisions about how hard you are going to work and what you will and will not do. I have made my decision and it gives me confidence. (Patricia, 12 years old, 3.0 GPA)

DISCUSSION

The finding that the majority of high-awareness students were also high-achieving ones suggests that a keen awareness of racism and discrimination may not lead, as Ogbu (1978) attests, to mental withdrawal among some African American adolescents. Rather, in some instances, this awareness leads to the promotion of greater academic effort on the part of these youth. Like the successful Black adults described in other studies (Benjamin, 1991; Edwards & Polite, 1992), the academically successful Black students in the present study's high-awareness category expressed a strong racial identity. They also expressed a keen awareness of the obstacles that exist because of their race and, in several cases, gender. In response, these students did not consciously or subconsciously withdraw from schools. Instead, they exerted more academic effort, the evidence of which was generally reflected in their above average grades.

The importance of the type of racial socialization this group of students received in their homes, schools, and communities is critical in this regard. Positive racial socialization is that which is positive toward one's racial (or ethnic, as the terms are often used interchangeably) group of membership, and that promotes a healthy racial identity as well as an awareness of and constructive responses to racism without promoting hatred or discrimination toward members of other racial or ethnic groups. Billingsley (1992) reports that racial socialization is an important aspect of child-rearing in Black families. As Taylor, Chatters, Tucker, and Lewis (1990) maintain in their review of a decade of research on African American families: "The process of explicit racial socialization is clearly a distinctive child-rearing activity that black parents engage in as an attempt to prepare their children for the realities of being black in America" (p. 994).

Parents and other significant adults are instrumental insofar as they pass on to children their personal attitudes about and responses to racism, racial barriers, and sexism. Whether a mother discusses her experiences and struggles with racism and sexism in the workplace, or a father communicates his racial philosophy to his children at the dinner table, these significant others share stories of the historical and contemporary struggle of African Americans. Within these stories and through their actions, those African American adults who engage in positive racial socialization emphasize the importance of hard work, a good education, and racial pride to the outcome of that struggle.

In the present study, for example, high-achieving Patricia (3.0 GPA) related with pride that her grandmother, who was forced to leave school in 11th grade to help her father on the farm, was returning to school to complete her high school diploma and attend a local university. Similarly, Mark (3.5 GPA) noted that his father was urging him to attend a historically Black college so that he would maintain a "sense of his racial identity" as he pursues his professional dreams. These practices of positive racial socialization may be one reason why some students in the high-awareness category were more likely to positively identify themselves as part of a racial group and express greater awareness of racism and its potential to affect their present and long term goals. These practices may also be the reason why the high-awareness students in this sample offered more concrete responses to questions about racism compared to those in the moderate- and low-awareness categories. Whereas the latter two groups of students possessed an abstract, future-oriented conception of racism, the former group held a tangible, present-oriented conception that appeared to fuel their academic efforts.

Indeed, African American youth whose families practice positive racial socialization have been found to achieve higher grades than similar youth whose families do not (Bowman & Howard, 1985). Using multiple classification analysis, Bowman and Howard analyzed data collected from 377 African American youth to determine the effects of race-related socialization on academic performance. They found that racial socialization influenced student achievement directly as well as indirectly through its positive effect on personal efficacy. In effect, those African American youth who were socialized to be cognizant of racial barriers and cautioned about "interracial protocol" attained significantly higher grades than did youth who were taught little or nothing about relations between African and European Americans. Thus, positive racial socialization practices that teach Black youth about racism and discrimination and that expose them to constructive ways to respond to each may be important to the educational and personal success of the African American child.

CONCLUSION

The present study's findings reveal that a range of awareness levels exists among African American adolescents about the presence and prevalence of racism. They further

point out that African American adolescents respond to racial discrimination, particularly educational and occupational discrimination, in different ways. Whereas one response may be mental withdrawal and lack of achievement effort (Ogbu, 1978; 1988), another response, rarely addressed in the literature on Black student achievement, may be a strong racial identity and a commitment to academic and professional success.

The interview data collected for this study suggest that family practices of positive racial socialization may, in part, explain the latter orientation in some high-awareness students. By transmitting an awareness of racial discrimination and an achievement orientation that has been a central part of the African American experience, Black students' family members, teachers, ministers, and others responsible for their upbringing and socialization may diminish the likelihood that these youth will have a negative orientation toward schooling and academic achievement. Such practices of positive racial socialization may be aptly and usefully conceived of as an important and heretofore under-researched form of parental and community involvement in the education of African American and other minority youth.

The data further suggest that additional research with broader samples of African American adolescents is needed to fully explore the relationship(s) between racial perceptions, positive racial socialization, achievement motivation/effort, and school success. Future studies should seek to determine the degree to which African American students' perceptions of racism and discrimination interact with additional factors such as racial composition of the school population to influence student achievement, motivation, and academic success. Future research should also seek to understand the effects of positive racial socialization on the development of African American students' perceptions of and responses to racism and discrimination in different geographic and racial contexts. Additionally, researchers should investigate how positive racial socialization interacts with other factors, including levels of academic support from teachers, families, and communities, to better explain the academic performance of Black youth. Such research is increasingly important as we move into the 21st century and attempt to educate African American adolescents to take their rightful place as citizens in a country that is, at once, characterized by opportunity and oppression.

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