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THE EFFECT OF RACIAL SOCIALIZATION ON PARENTAL STRESS IN A
SAMPLE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN PARENTS

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation project to my children, Brent and Mia. You mean more to me than anything in the world. I tried my best to not let school get in the way of the attention and affection you deserved, and hope that you got all that you needed from me over these past years I love you more than you'll ever know.

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To my husband, Brent and my parents...thank you for the untiring support you have shown me over the years. I only wish that I could find a way to repay you for all that you have done and sacrificed in order to help me reach my goals. Brent, I am so lucky to have you, you have taken such good care of us. I never had to worry because I knew you had it covered. You are truly the greatest!

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Abstract

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Virginia Commonwealth University, 2010.

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The typical duties of parenting may be multiplied when they must be performed within very demanding situations and with limited personal and physical resources. African American families may also be subject to race-related challenges that further complicate child rearing. In an effort to combat the effect of imminent racism, some African American parents have sought to racially socialize their children. Within the racial socialization literature, it has been determined that racially socializing one's children has positive effects for those children, however, there is some ambiguity regarding the way it is best done. Although racist acts cannot be predicted nor avoided,

parents can likely prevent their children's effects by racially socializing them. If this is done appropriately, and parents feel secure in their preparation it will likely buffer the effects of racism their children feel, which may impact their level of parental stress.

However, no literature exists that examines the parental effects of racially socializing one's children. Therefore, this project proposes to 1) examine whether there is a correlation between racial socialization and parental stress in African American parents and to 2) determine whether being exposed to a racial socialization intervention significantly reduces parental stress from pre-test to post-test as compared to the control and comparison groups. 159 African American mothers were randomly assigned to 3 groups, a control, experimental and comparison group, and administered pre and post tests on a scale of racial socialization (SORS-P), affective mood state (POMS-B), and parental stress (PSI).

A hierarchical multiple linear regression was conducted to determine whether racial socialization beliefs predict parental stress after controlling for mood. It found that racial socialization beliefs accounted for an additional significant proportion of the variance in parental stress. A preliminary MANOVA was run to determine if there was a significant difference between groups' baseline levels of mood and racial socialization beliefs. Hypothesis 2 was tested by running a (2 X 3) Time (pre-test and post-test) X Group Assignment (intervention, comparison group, control) mixed design ANCOVA. As predicted, changes in parental stress from pre-test to post-test depended on the group

assignment. Study results highlighted the importance of racial socialization interventions to reduce parental stress that may accompany racist encounters with their children.