

## BRIEF REPORT

Parental Influence on Sexual Intentions of Black Adolescent Girls:  
Examining the Role of Gendered-Racial SocializationReina Evans<sup>1</sup>, McKenzie N. Stokes<sup>1</sup>, Elan C. Hope<sup>1</sup>, Laura Widman<sup>1</sup>, and Qiana R. Cryer-Coupet<sup>2</sup><sup>1</sup> Department of Psychology, North Carolina State University<sup>2</sup> School of Social Work, North Carolina State University

Parents can promote the sexual health of adolescents in a number of well-established ways, such as through sexual communication and parental monitoring. Another unexplored avenue through which parents might influence sexual decision-making among Black girls is gendered-racial socialization—the process through which parents send messages to their Black daughters about what it means to be a Black girl, in part, to improve their self-esteem. In a national, U.S.-based sample of 287 Black girls ( $M_{\text{age}} = 15.4$ ) and their parents (87.8% female), we examine how two dimensions of gendered-racial socialization (gendered-racial pride socialization; gendered-racial oppression socialization): (a) are related to adolescents' intentions to have early sex and (b) moderate the association of parental communication and monitoring with adolescents' intentions to have early sex. We found Black girls who are exposed to more empowering messages about Black girls and women are less likely to intend to have early sex. Additionally, gendered-racial pride socialization moderated the relationship between parental monitoring and intentions to have sex, such that more monitoring was associated with lower intentions to have early sex among girls low in gendered-racial pride socialization. For girls high in gendered-racial pride socialization, there was no relationship between parental monitoring and sexual intentions. Gendered-racial pride socialization is an important asset in Black families, which can be leveraged to improve the sexual health of Black girls. Future studies are needed to examine the causal, temporal pathways between gendered-racial socialization and sexual health.

*Keywords:* adolescence, gendered-racial socialization, sexual communication, parental monitoring, sexuality

Black adolescent girls are at risk for unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV, due to system-level risk factors (e.g., discrimination, poverty) at the intersection of race and gender (Crooks et al., 2021; Lopez, 2013; Prather et al., 2018). According to the Integrative Model for the Study of Developmental Competencies in Minority Children, families may buffer adolescents from the consequences of systemic inequities (e.g., racism, sexism) through processes related to family values, structure, and socialization (García Coll et al., 1996). In this

study, we take a strengths-based approach to understand how unique strengths of Black families contribute to the sexual health of Black girls. This study focuses on two well-studied family processes, parent sex communication and parental monitoring (Dittus et al., 2015; Widman et al., 2016), and one understudied family process, gendered-racial socialization (Brown et al., 2017). The aim of this study is to examine how gendered-racial socialization relates to Black girls' sexual health and whether gendered-racial socialization moderates known pathways to sexual health (e.g., parental sexual communication; parental monitoring).

### Parental Sexual Communication and Monitoring

Parental sexual communication occurs when parents and adolescents talk about sexuality (e.g., pregnancy, STIs/HIV, condoms, sexual desire, sexual coercion; Evans et al., 2020; Flores & Barroso, 2017). When parents communicate comprehensively with adolescents about sex, adolescents are likely to make healthy sexual decisions (for a review, see Coakley et al., 2017; Widman et al., 2016). Among Black girls, more frequent, open sexual communication is related to less sexual activity and more condom use (Donenberg et al., 2011; Taggart et al., 2020).

Parental monitoring is also important for adolescent sexual health (Causey & High, 2020; Dittus et al., 2015). Parental monitoring includes a parent's knowledge of their child's life (e.g., their friends and behavior) and their enforcement of rules around what the child is allowed to do and who they can be with (Dittus et al., 2015).

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When parents have more knowledge of their child's friends and behavior and establish developmentally appropriate rules, adolescents are more likely to exhibit healthy sexual behavior (i.e., delayed sexual activity, condom use, and contraceptive use; Dittus et al., 2015). Black girls who report more parental monitoring also report fewer sexual intercourse partners and less frequent sexual activity (Ritchwood, Traylor, et al., 2014).

### Gendered-Racial Socialization: A Culturally Specific Parenting Practice

Gendered-racial socialization is the process through which caregivers send messages to their children about the intersections of their race and gender (e.g., what it means to be a Black girl). Gendered-racial socialization is multidimensional and includes gendered-racial pride and empowerment and internalized gendered-racial oppression (Brown et al., 2017). Gendered-racial pride and empowerment messages focus on self-worth and positive aspects of Black girlhood (Brown et al., 2017). In contrast, internalized gendered-racial oppression messages convey negative stereotypes about Black girls and women (Brown et al., 2017).

Negative sexual portrayals of Black women include the aggressive "sapphire" and the promiscuous "jezebel" stereotype (Rosenthal & Lobel, 2016; West, 2008). Black girls who are exposed to or internalize these negative stereotypes about Black women may be more at risk for negative sexual health outcomes (Crooks et al., 2019; Townsend et al., 2010). We hypothesize that gendered-racial socialization that promotes self-worth may be an important family practice to help Black girls reject negative stereotypes, which likely promotes sexual health. Conversely, we suspect that gendered-racial socialization reinforces negative stereotypes may hinder healthy sex behavior. Research on a related construct, racial socialization, demonstrates that hearing positive messages about Black people buffers Black adolescents from the sexual health consequences of racial prejudice and discrimination (Adams-Bass et al., 2014; Murry et al., 2007)—likely because it leads them to adopt positive attitudes about being Black (Huguley et al., 2019). Those attitudes can prevent Black girls from internalizing racist and sexist stereotypes (Jerald et al., 2016). However, both theoretical (Crenshaw, 1989) and empirical (Saleem et al., 2016) work suggests racial socialization is qualitatively different based on gender. Indeed, gendered-racial socialization may be more influential than racial socialization in shaping health outcomes for Black girls (Stokes et al., 2020).

We examine gendered-racial socialization and how this culturally specific parenting practice relates to the sexual health of Black girls. Specifically, we examine adolescents' intentions to engage in early sexual intercourse (sex before or at age 17—the average age of first sex; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2017) as an indicator of sexual risk behavior. Early adolescents' underdeveloped prefrontal cortex and vulnerability to peer pressure make them more likely to practice unsafe sex (e.g., condomless sex; Steinberg, 2007, 2008). Thus, delaying sexual intercourse is one effective strategy for preventing negative sexual health outcomes among young people.

In a national sample of Black parent–daughter dyads, we address two research questions. First, is there an association between gendered-racial socialization and adolescent intentions to have early sex? We predict that more positive parent gendered-racial socialization will be associated with decreased intentions to have early sex.

Second, are the relationships between sexual communication and monitoring and adolescent intentions to have early sex moderated by gendered-racial socialization? We expect that positive gendered-racial socialization will strengthen the positive effects of sexual communication and monitoring on adolescents' sexual intentions and negative gendered-racial socialization messages will reduce the positive effects of frequent sexual communication and monitoring between parents and their adolescents.

## Method

### Procedure and Participants

Data come from a survey of Black adolescents (ages 13–17) and their primary caregivers who were recruited from across the U.S. through Qualtrics Panels (for a detailed overview of Qualtrics Panels, see Brandon et al., 2013). Parents were eligible to participate if they self-identified as Black/African American and were the primary caregiver of a Black/African American adolescent. Adolescents participated with parental consent. Parents were instructed to let their adolescent complete the survey in a private space and adolescents were reminded that all responses were confidential. Participants were compensated directly from Qualtrics Panels based on survey length, panelist profile, and how difficult it was to recruit someone with their specific profile. To protect the validity of our data, Qualtrics Panels removed and replaced any participating dyad who completed the survey in less than half of the median completion time. The study protocols were approved by the host university's Institutional Review Board.

Adolescents who self-identified as female were retained in our analytic sample ( $n = 287$ ). Adolescents were aged 13–17,  $M_{\text{age}} = 15.40$ ,  $SD = 1.25$ ; 21 (7.3%) lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer or questioning (LGBTQ). Most adolescents identified as African American ( $n = 226$ , 78.7%), 35 as African (12.2%), 16 as Afro-Caribbean (5.6%), 6 as Afro-Latino (2.1%), and 8 as another ethnicity (2.8%). Parents ( $M_{\text{age}} = 43.36$ ,  $SD = 8.64$ ) were mostly female ( $n = 252$ , 87.8%). Importantly, over 50% of U.S. Black families are led by a single (i.e., *no partner present*) mother—which may, in part, explain why there were more female than male parents in our sample (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). There were 253 (88.2%) biological parents, 11 (3.8%) adoptive parents, and 17 (5.9%) other relatives, and six parents chose not to specify their relationship. Parents reported their annual household income: 41 (14.3%) made under \$25,000, 86 (30%) made \$25,000–\$44,999, 60 (20.9%) made \$45,000–\$64,999, 38 (13.2%) made \$65,000–\$84,999, and 62 (21.6%) made over \$85,000. Parents' level of education also varied: 51 (17.7%) had a middle or high school education, 68 (23.7%) attended some college, 50 (17.4%) had a 2-year college degree, 70 (24.4%) had a 4-year college degree, and 48 (16.6%) had a graduate/professional degree. Dyads resided in the South ( $n = 155$ , 54%), Midwest ( $n = 72$ , 25.1%), Northeast ( $n = 38$ , 13.2%), or West ( $n = 20$ , 7%).

### Measures

#### Gendered-Racial Socialization

Adolescents rated the frequency with which they received gendered racial socialization messages from their parents (Brown et al., 2017) on a scale from 1 = *never* to 5 = *all of the time*.

Adolescents completed 11 items from the gendered-racial pride and empowerment subscale (e.g., Black women can accomplish anything). A mean score was used with higher scores indicating that parents frequently conveyed empowering messages to their daughters (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .95$ ). Adolescents also completed three items from the internalized gendered-racial oppression subscale (e.g., "Black women typically have bad attitudes"). A mean score was used with higher scores indicating parents frequently conveyed oppressive messages (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .72$ ).

### Parent–Child Communication About Sex

Parents rated how often they talked to their adolescent in the last 6 months about five topics related to sex (e.g., condoms, sexually transmitted disease [STDs]) from 1 = *never* to 4 = *often*. A mean score was used in analyses with higher scores indicating more communication (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .93$ ).

### Parental Monitoring

Adolescents rated how much their parents monitor their behavior on nine items (e.g., "Do your parents know what you do during your free time?") from 1 = *never* to 5 = *always*. A mean score was used with higher scores indicating frequent monitoring (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .82$ ).

### Intentions to Have Early Sex

Adolescents were asked to rate how likely it was that they would have sex in the next month from 1 = *not at all likely* to 4 = *very likely*. All participants were of age 17 or under, so any indication of an intention to have sex in the next month was an intention to engage in early sex (CDC, 2017). Because preliminary analyses showed this variable was skewed, we dichotomized this variable such that 0 = *no intentions to have early sex* and 1 = *any intentions to have early sex*. For most skewed variables, log transformation is not adequate to ensure normality, and dichotomization of skewed variables is a good alternative (Tripepi et al., 2011).

### Analytic Plan

To address our first research question, we ran a binomial logistic regression to examine the association of parental sex communication, parental monitoring, and gendered-racial socialization (pride, oppression) with the likelihood that adolescents intended to have early sex. All predictors were mean centered. In preliminary analyses, we included parent gender, adolescent age, maternal closeness, and paternal closeness as covariates; however, these variables were not significant predictors and were removed for a more parsimonious final model. To address our second question, we ran a logistic regression which included main effects as well as interaction terms: sex communication by gendered-racial pride socialization, sex communication by gendered-racial oppression socialization, parental monitoring by gendered-racial pride socialization, and parental monitoring by gendered-racial oppression socialization. To test significant interactions, we ran simple slope analyses. We used Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) v27 for all analyses.

## Results

On average, the sample received frequent gendered-racial socialization pride messages ( $M = 4.43$ ,  $SD = 0.86$ ) and infrequent oppressive gendered-racial socialization ( $M = 1.90$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ). There were moderate–high levels of parental sexual communication ( $M = 2.66$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ) and high levels of parental monitoring ( $M = 4.28$ ,  $SD = 0.64$ ). Just 11.8% of the adolescents in our sample reported intentions to have early sex. We found that gendered racial pride socialization was associated with less intentions to have early sex ( $r = -0.15$ ), more parental sex communication ( $r = 0.18$ ), and more parental monitoring ( $r = 0.19$ ). Gendered-racial oppression was not associated with early sex intentions ( $r = 0.05$ ) or parental sex communication ( $r = 0.04$ ) but was associated with less parental monitoring ( $r = -0.17$ ). More parental sex communication was not associated with parental monitoring ( $r = -0.03$ ) or intentions to have sex ( $r = 0.11$ ). More parental monitoring was associated with less intentions to have early sex ( $r = -0.30$ ). Intentions to have early sex is dichotomized, thus, correlations between predictors and sexual intentions are point-biserial correlations whereas all other correlations are Pearson correlations.

The first model included the main effects of all predictors and explained 20% (Nagelkerke  $R^2$ ) of the variance in intentions to have early sex (Table 1). The model was statistically significant,  $\chi^2(4) = 31.29$ ,  $p < .001$  and correctly classified 88.9% of cases. Increased sexual communication was associated with an increased likelihood of having early sex intentions ( $B = 0.54$ ,  $p = .02$ ). More parental monitoring ( $B = -1.18$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and gendered-racial pride socialization ( $B = -0.47$ ,  $p = .02$ ) were associated with reduced likelihood of intentions to have sex. Gendered-racial oppression socialization was not significant ( $B = 0.02$ ,  $p = .89$ ).

The second model, with interactions, explained 25% (Nagelkerke  $R^2$ ) of the variance in intentions to have early sex (Table 1) and correctly classified 90.2% of cases,  $\chi^2(8) = 31.35$ ,  $p < .001$ . More sex communication was associated with an increased likelihood of having intentions to have early sex ( $B = 0.64$ ,  $p = .01$ ), but more parental monitoring was associated with a reduced likelihood of having intentions to have early sex ( $B = -1.10$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Some variables were not significant: gendered-racial pride ( $B = -0.24$ ,  $p = .40$ ), gendered-racial oppression ( $B = -0.12$ ,  $p = .64$ ), Gendered-racial pride  $\times$  sex communication ( $B = -0.12$ ,  $p = .63$ ), Gendered-racial oppression  $\times$  sex communication ( $B = -0.09$ ,  $p = .70$ ), and Gendered-racial oppression  $\times$  monitoring ( $B = -0.29$ ,  $p = .32$ ). There was a significant interaction between gendered-racial pride socialization and parental monitoring predicting intentions to have early sex ( $B = 0.88$ ,  $p = .03$ ; Figure 1). In simple slopes tests, the association between parental monitoring and intentions to have early sex for Black girls high in gendered-racial pride socialization was not significant. There was an association between parental monitoring and intentions to have early sex for girls low in gendered-racial pride ( $B = -1.86$ ,  $SE = 0.48$ , Wald = 15.19,  $p < .001$ ): more parental monitoring predicted lower early sex intentions among Black girls low in gendered-racial pride socialization.

### Post hoc Sensitivity Analysis: Examining the Impact of Outliers

We performed sensitivity analyses with 90% Winsorization for our predictors. A similar pattern of results emerged—though

**Table 1**  
*Binomial Logistic Regression Analyses With Gendered-Racial Socialization, Parent–Child Sex Communication, and Parental Monitoring Associated With Intentions to Have Early Sex*

Model	Independent variables	B	Wald	p	OR [95% CI]
1	(Constant)	-2.40	97.79	<.001	0.10
	Sex communication	0.54	5.85	.016	1.72 [1.11, 2.67]
	Parental monitoring	-1.18	17.94	<.001	0.31 [0.18, 0.53]
	Gendered-racial pride	-0.47	5.42	.020	0.63 [0.42, 0.93]
	Gendered-racial oppression	0.02	0.02	.893	1.02 [0.72, 1.46]
2	(Constant)	-2.53	90.63	<.001	0.08
	Sex communication	0.64	6.80	.009	1.90 [1.17, 3.07]
	Parental monitoring	-1.10	13.59	<.001	0.33 [0.18, 0.60]
	Gendered-racial pride	-0.24	0.71	.399	0.79 [0.45, 1.37]
	Gendered-racial oppression	-0.12	0.22	.638	0.89 [0.55, 1.45]
	Gendered-racial pride × sex communication	-0.12	0.24	.626	0.89 [0.55, 1.44]
	Gendered-racial oppression × sex communication	-0.09	0.15	.703	0.92 [0.59, 1.43]
	Gendered-racial pride × parental monitoring	0.88	4.69	.030	2.42 [1.09, 5.37]
	Gendered-racial oppression × parental monitoring	-0.29	1.00	.317	0.75 [0.43, 1.32]

Note. Results for two binomial logistic regressions, with intentions to have sex (0 = no intention to have early sex, 1 = intends to have early sex) as the outcome variable.

the *p* value of the interaction between gendered-racial pride and monitoring predicting intentions to have early sex changed from *p* = .03 to *p* = .07.

**Discussion**

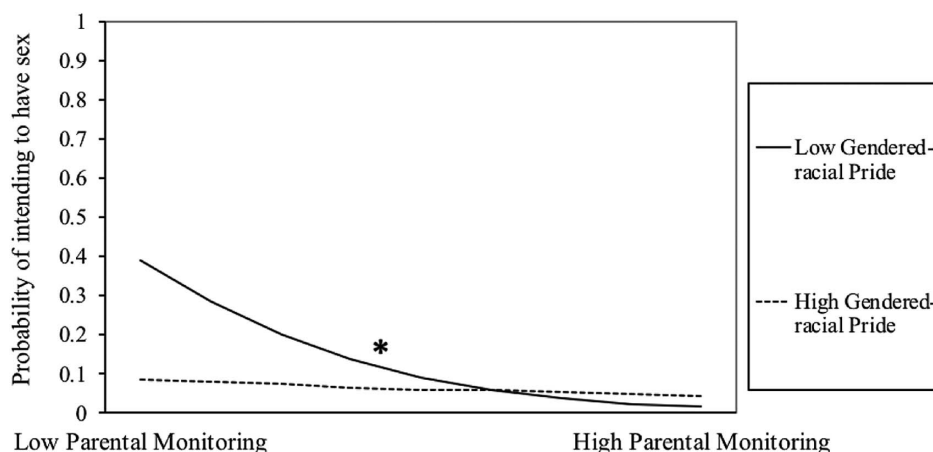
Parents have an important role in promoting adolescent sexual health. Parent–child sexual communication and monitoring are related to improved adolescent sexual decision-making (Causey & High, 2020; Coakley et al., 2017; Dittus et al., 2015; Widman et al., 2016). However, less is known about how gendered-racial socialization may predict and influence these pathways to adolescent sexual health. This study begins to fill this gap by examining the association of gendered-racial socialization with intentions to engage in early sex among Black girls.

We found that Black girls who receive more gendered-racial pride socialization from their parents have less intention to have early sex. Gendered-racial pride socialization is an important asset that Black

families can leverage to improve the sexual health of Black girls. Perhaps, when Black girls receive empowering messages about their gender and race they develop a more positive self-concept, which has been linked to sexual health outcomes (Ritchwood, Howell, et al., 2014; Salazar et al., 2004). We also found that more parent–child sex communication was associated with higher intentions to have early sex for adolescents. This seems to stand in contrast to the literature on parent–child sexual communication, which suggests this communication is a protective factor for adolescent sexual health. Perhaps, adolescents who already intend to have sex are more likely to seek relevant information from their parents and communicate more frequently with them about sex.

We found that more parental monitoring was associated with adolescents having less intention to have early sex, and this relationship was moderated by gendered-racial pride socialization. Among Black girls who heard fewer strength-based messages about Black girls, parental monitoring is especially important for decreasing their intentions to have sex. Whereas, Black girls who receive

**Figure 1**  
*Gendered-Racial Pride and Parental Monitoring Interact in Their Association With Adolescent Intentions to Have Early Sex*



more gendered-racial pride socialization have low intentions to have early sex; so while the direction of effects shows parental monitoring is still helpful, it appears to be less necessary to ensure safer sexual decision-making. The developmental need for privacy and autonomy grows in adolescence (Dahl et al., 2018). Adolescents may keep information about their friends and activity private (Finkenauer et al., 2008)—making parental monitoring difficult. As a result, parents may look for alternative ways to help adolescents make safe decisions. Gendered-racial pride socialization may be an important way parents can instill values that encourage their Black daughters to make safer sexual decisions, even in the absence of constant monitoring. Though, sensitivity analyses show this finding may have been, in part, motivated by outliers so future studies are needed to address this as well as other study limitations.

This study was cross-sectional. Longitudinal and experimental research is needed to confirm causation and the temporal ordering of the associations between gendered-racial socialization and sexual health, including for behavioral outcomes (e.g., condom use) and biological outcomes (e.g., STIs/HIV). Also, researchers could examine whether gendered-racial socialization moderates the relationship between discrimination and sexual health to determine if gendered-racial socialization buffers Black girls from the effects of discrimination. Future research is needed to understand the unique parental gendered-racial socialization that Black trans and gender nonbinary youth may experience. Finally, there were only 35 fathers included in this sample. Research finds that fathers may have a unique influence on Black adolescents' development and engagement in risk behaviors (Cryer-Coupet et al., 2020; Dorsey, 2020; Johnson & Young, 2016). Future studies should examine the dynamic ways in which fathers' gendered-racial socialization may impact Black girls' sexuality.

While research often highlights health disparities across race and gender (Dariotis et al., 2011; Millett et al., 2012), fewer studies take a strengths-based approach to examine how messages about being a Black girl may promote well-being among Black girls. This preliminary study finds a relationship between gendered-racial socialization from parents and Black girls' intentions to have early sex and, thus, lays a foundation for researchers to examine the generalizability as well as mediators and moderators of this relationship. While this study broadens our understanding of parenting in Black families and provides support for gendered-racial pride socialization, we must critically examine the oppressive contexts that necessitate this parenting strategy. While families can buffer Black girls from the effects of racism and sexism, it is urgent that we move to eliminate race- and gender-based discrimination from interpersonal interactions and systems (e.g., healthcare and education) that place Black girls at risk.

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