



# Society for Research in Child Development

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## PRESS RELEASE

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## **Neighborhood Affects Impact of Messages about Race on Children**

The impact of African-American parents' messages to their children about race differs depending on the type of neighborhoods in which families live, finds a study published in the September/October issue of the journal *Child Development*. The study was supported by the National Institute of Child Health and Development (NICHD).

Previous research has found that children of African-American parents who promote racial pride and awareness have better cognitive development and fewer behavior problems, while parents who promote mistrust of other races often have children with more behavior problems. In this study, researchers from the University of Texas School of Public Health in Dallas, Georgia Southern University in Statesboro, the University of Toronto in Canada, and Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore set out to learn if those findings were consistent across the wide range of neighborhoods in which African-American families live.

The study sample included 241 African-American first graders and their parents residing in varied neighborhoods in a northeast urban area. The parents were interviewed in their homes and questioned about their neighborhood, their attitudes about parenting and the messages they communicated to their first grader about race. The researchers also observed whether the home included books, music and/or decorative elements reflecting African-American culture. Finally, the researchers interviewed the child to assess his/her cognitive development.

"We found that a home rich in African-American culture was associated with better cognitive development for first graders who lived in high-risk neighborhoods," said lead researcher Margaret O'Brien Caughy, ScD, associate professor at the University of Texas School of Public Health. "High risk" neighborhoods were characterized by high levels of poverty, physical and social disorder such as trash or graffiti, and high levels of fear.

Researchers also found that promoting mistrust of other races was associated with more behavior problems for African-American first graders living in low-risk neighborhoods, but not for those living in high-risk neighborhoods.

"Our study supports the conclusion that messages about race affect young African-American children differently depending on the community in which they live," said Dr. Caughy. "These results have implications for interventions developed to support parents and

their children because they confirm that there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach. Rather,” she says, “intervention strategies will also have to consider the community context.”

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Summarized from Child Development, Vol. 77, Issue 5. *Neighborhoods matter: Racial socialization and African-American child development* by Caughy M (University of Texas School of Public Health), Nettles S (Georgia Southern University), O’Campo P (St. Michael’s Hospital, University of Toronto), and Lohrfink K (Johns Hopkins University). Copyright 2006 The Society for Research in Child Development, Inc. All rights reserved.