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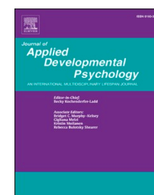

Consistency is key: Understanding academic socialization among high-achieving Black boys

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ABSTRACT

Despite the racial achievement gap, many Black adolescent boys excel in school. Academic socialization is one way that parents can contribute to these youths' success. However, only a few studies have examined the specific ways that Black parents support their sons' high achievement. To address this gap, we used a multi-wave, multi-informant, mixed-method design to examine the conversations, rules, and after school routines of 12 Black boys and their primary caregivers. First, using latent class growth curve analyses, boys were grouped into a high-achieving or low-achieving group according to their average grade in Math and English across 5 assessments from 6th to 11th grade. Then, using content analysis, we analyzed semi-structured interviews from these families for evidence of academic socialization. Drawing on the Stage Setting Framework, we found that parents of high-achieving Black boys engaged in four types of academic socialization practices that facilitated their children's academic success.

Introduction

Education is considered the key to preparing youth for a successful life. However, despite some progress, the racial achievement gap in American education continues to expand even as we enter the third decade of the 21st century (Barbarin, Murry, Tolan, & Graham, 2016; Taylor, Kyere, & King, 2018). The term "racial achievement gap" refers to differences in multiple indicators of achievement between students from marginalized minority and/or low-income groups and their White, Asian, and higher income peers. The gap is particularly stark for Black boys, who are at risk for poor achievement on all available indicators including grades, standardized test scores, placement in advanced and special education courses, and high school and college graduation rates (Barbarin et al., 2016; Barbarin, Chinn, & Wright, 2014). This risk increases during adolescence—a period when academic grades and engagement often decline precipitously and the nature of both schooling and parenting shift (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Black adolescent boys, in particular, are also more likely than their White, Asian, and female counterparts to encounter discrimination and negative stereotyping in school (Benner & Graham, 2013; Hughes, Harding, Niwa, Del Toro, & Way, 2017) and are disproportionately subject to disciplinary actions including suspensions and expulsions (Losen, 2011; Toldson, 2011). Despite these troubling patterns, there are Black boys in every corner of the U.S. who excel in school. However, only a few studies have examined these academically successful Black boys or the contexts that influence their academic trajectories (e.g., Allen, 2015; Barbarin et al., 2016; Henfield, 2013; Iruka, Winn, & Harradine, 2014). Therefore, there is a critical need for more nuanced knowledge about the factors and contexts that support the efforts of academically successful Black boys.

The role of academic socialization in children's academic success

One key factor in the academic success of Black boys is their parents' involvement (PI) in their education (Barbarin et al., 2016; Rawlings, 2015). PI is typically defined as parents' behaviors that promote positive academic development and outcomes in their children including supervising homework, volunteering at school, communicating with teachers, and discussing school events (e.g., Fan & Williams, 2010; Park & Holloway, 2013). Among middle and high school students, the most effective form of PI for promoting academic success is *academic socialization* (e.g., Baeck, 2017; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Suizzo et al., 2012). Although academic socialization has been variously defined, it is most commonly conceptualized as (a) communicating expectations about the value and utility of education; (b) linking schoolwork to educational and other goals; (c) encouraging educational and occupational aspirations; (d) discussing learning strategies with children; and (e) planning for

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adolescents' future (Hill & Tyson, 2009). In a recent meta-analysis based on over 400 studies, Barger, Kim, Kuncel, and Pomerantz (2019) concluded that facets of academic socialization—e.g., discussion, encouragement, and cognitive-intellectual engagement—were associated with academic achievement across all developmental stages but most strongly for high school students. Thus, parents' academic socialization has emerged as a powerful predictor of academic success during adolescence.

Academic socialization in Black families

Several studies have examined academic socialization practices among Black families specifically (e.g., Chun & Devall, 2019; Cooper & Smalls, 2010; Hill & Wang, 2015). One of the earliest studies of high-achieving Black students and their parents found that successful Black students were more likely to talk about school and future plans with their parents than were non-successful Black students and White students (Yan, 1999). In a study of 144 Black adolescents, Cooper and Smalls (2010) found that parental educational encouragement and engagement through conversations about school and homework help were both associated with greater academic self-esteem, classroom engagement, and academic impression management. More recently, Wang, Hill, and Hofkens (2014), in examining associations between achievement trajectories in high school and parental educational involvement, found that while all aspects of involvement were related to reduced declines in GPA, the provision of structure at home, which included family rules about TV use and homework, was more strongly related to these declines among Black adolescents, compared to their White counterparts. For Black boys specifically, Graham and Anderson (2008) found that parents' aspirations and expectations were positively associated with academic performance. Other studies on high-achieving Black boys have found that parents' strict discipline and nurturance (Maton, Hrabowski, & Greif, 1998), and family obligation (Land, Mixon, Butcher, & Harris, 2014; Mcgee & Pearman, 2014) contributed to boys' high academic achievement. Studies have also found that Black males in college consider their families, both parents and extended family members, to be the primary source of support and reason for their success in school (Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, & George, 2004; Perna & Titus, 2005). Overall, these previous studies suggest that parents' academic socialization plays a crucial role in promoting and sustaining academic success among high-achieving Black boys.

Despite the demonstrated importance of academic socialization, little scholarship has qualitatively investigated the specific ways that parents engage in academic socialization. Most existing studies of academic socialization have relied primarily on quantitative measures (e.g., Cooper & Smalls, 2010; Hill & Tyson, 2009). Although this approach is useful for examining the frequency or presence of academic socialization, it cannot provide a complete picture of the specific behaviors and messages that parents use to communicate educational norms and expectations (Harris & Robinson, 2016). As such, little is known about both *how* parents convey their educational expectations and messages about the importance of school, and *what* is discussed between parents and their children. In the current study, we draw from the sociological framework of "Stage Setting" (Harris & Robinson, 2016) to guide our investigation of the specific ways that parents might engage in academic socialization.

Theoretical perspective: The stage setting framework

In a recent conceptual paper, Harris and Robinson (2016) likened the role of parents in the academic success of their children to the role of a stage-setter in theater. Stage-setters create the stage or "life space," and set the parameters within which the actor performs (Harris & Robinson, 2016, p. 189). A poor stage-setter impedes an actor's ability to successfully play the role, leading to poorer performance during the production, while an effective stage-setter creates and maintains the stage in a way that amplifies the actor's ability to successfully embody his or her role. Correspondingly, Harris and Robinson (2016) posit that parents create and maintain the stage or the "social environment around their children in a manner that creates the conditions in which academic success is possible" (Harris & Robinson, 2016, p. 188).

According to the Stage Setting framework, parents' strongest influence on their children's academic achievement is exerted via two paths: (1) communicating *messages* about the importance of education to children and (2) creating a *life space* in which learning can be maximized. A *life space* that is conducive to learning includes environmental supports outside the home (via neighborhood choice) and inside of the home (study space, books, modeling learning, routines, rules, and expectations). Thus, in building on the concepts in this framework, we sought to describe *how* low-income, ethnic-minority parents of Black boys support the high achievement of their children despite the challenges they and their children might encounter.

The present study

In the present study, we sought to provide an in-depth description of academic socialization among families of high-achieving Black adolescent boys. We explored the ways that parents of high-achieving Black boys, relative to parents of low-achieving Black boys, communicated messages and created learning-conducive life spaces for their children's academic success (Harris & Robinson, 2016). To do this, we used a multi-wave, multi-informant design to examine the stage-setting strategies of parents of Black boys who maintained consistently high grades from 6th to 11th grade, compared to the strategies used by parents of Black boys whose performance was consistently poor during that same period.

Method

Our data was drawn from a longitudinal mixed methods study of ethnically and socioeconomically diverse adolescents in New York City. The larger study examined adolescents' experiences across the contexts of school, family, and neighborhood vis-a-vis adolescents' socio-emotional, behavioral, academic, and psychological adjustment over time. A total of 1042 adolescents were recruited from six New York City schools to participate in classroom-based surveys in the spring of their 6th, 7th, and 8th grade academic years. The procedures for the larger study have been described in detail elsewhere (Hughes, Del Toro, Harding, Way, & Rarick, 2016).

During the first wave of data collection, an intensive subsample of 240 adolescent-caregiver dyads was also recruited. In addition to the 6th, 7th, and 8th grade classroom surveys, these dyads completed surveys in 9th and 11th grade and participated in in-depth interviews in 6th, 8th, and 11th grade. Research assistants distributed parent interest forms to identify dyads who were willing to participate in the intensive sample. After collecting these forms, research assistants called interested parents to screen them for eligibility and schedule interviews. Adolescents and their caregivers were eligible to participate in the intensive sample if they self-identified as Black, Dominican/Puerto Rican, Chinese, or White. Due to the primary theoretical questions of interest for the study, target numbers were set for the intensive sample of 60 parent-adolescent dyads from each of the 4 ethnic-racial categories, and participants were recruited until that goal was met. Thus, the intensive sample was not representative of families in the larger study but provided an opportunity to explore, in-depth, the beliefs, goals, and practices of a socioeconomically and ethnically diverse sample of families. Separate teams of trained interviewers conducted the parent and adolescent interviews, which typically took place over two sessions and lasted 2 to 4 h. Parents and adolescents read and signed informed consent forms prior to all interviews and received a small remuneration after completing each interview.

Interview protocols across all waves were designed to obtain

extensive information on adolescents' and caregivers' school experiences and behaviors pertaining to academics. The schooling and academic portion of caregiver and adolescent interviews typically took 45–60 min to complete. Interviewers asked detailed questions about daily routines, how, when and where homework was completed, ways caregivers were involved with homework and school, whether caregivers and their adolescents talked about school, the specific content of those conversations, the frequency with which conversations occurred, what school-related rules adolescents had to follow, whether these rules were consistently enforced, consequences for breaking rules, in-depth descriptions of the most recent time a rule had been broken, adolescents' racial identity and experiences, and caregivers' messages about race.

Participants

Twelve Black boys and their caregivers from the intensive sample were selected for inclusion in the present study. To identify this sample, we first used latent class analysis in MPLUS with the full intensive sample of 240 adolescents to identify clusters of students with varying trajectories of academic performance based on their self-reported grades in 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, and 11th grade. We used the complete intensive sample in the latent class analysis because our goal was to identify Black boys who were high-achieving relative to the sample as a whole rather than relative to each other. We tested models with two to six classes of trajectories for English and Math grades separately. Grades in each subject were assessed on an 8-point scale (1 = 55–64, or D's and F's; 8 = 95–100 or Mostly A's). For each subject, we selected the model that was significant according to the LMR-LRT test and had the lowest BIC as the best fitting model. For English grades, the model with five classes had the lowest BIC and was significant according to LMR-LRT tests. For Math grades, the model with three classes had the lowest BIC and was significant according to LMR-LRT tests. Fit indices for the analyses and average trajectories for English and Math are included in Table A1, Table A2, and Fig. A1 in the Appendices.

The final qualitative sample included 12 Black boys who were high-achieving ($n = 6$) and low-achieving ($n = 6$) from middle school to high school, and their 12 caregivers (10 mothers, 1 grandmother, and 1 father). The "high-achievers" in the present study were adolescents who earned grades in the 90s in Math and 85 or above in English, on average, from 6th to 11th grade, while the "low-achievers" were adolescents who, on average, earned grades between 65 and 75 in both Math and English from 6th to 11th grade. We did not include Black boys in the middle trajectories with moderate performance in the present study due to our interest in the contrast between low- and high-achievers. See Appendix B for self-reported Math and English grades at each wave for all boys in our final sample.

The boys in our final sample attended three of the six NYC middle schools originally recruited for the larger study. Of the six high-achieving boys, four attended an honors program at McKinley Middle School and two were enrolled in a Gifted and Talented program at El Rey Middle School. Of the sox low-achieving boys, three attended non-honors classes at McKinley Middle School and two were enrolled at Yuan Middle. Demographic characteristics of the sample, GPA, and number of interviews for the 12 caregiver-adolescent dyads are shown in Table 1.

Data coding and analysis

All interviews were digitally recorded and professionally transcribed verbatim. Using 3-digit identification numbers assigned to each family, we retrieved all available transcripts for each of the 12 families. We then used content analysis (Huberman & Miles, 2002) to systematically read and code transcripts. First, the first author and an ethnically diverse team of research assistants read interview transcripts over the course of one academic semester to develop a coding scheme that included any topics that were related to academic socialization and stage setting, such as after school routines, routines around homework completion, knowledge of child's schooling, conversations about school, mentions of educational expectations and aspirations, rules and punishments, and racial messages pertaining to navigation of the school environment. Research assistants then wrote case summaries that holistically described the home environments of each family. Finally, the first author re-read all 12 families' transcripts across all available waves of data the following semester, coded the interviews in Dedoose, and wrote memos noting trends while coding. She then read through her memos

Table 1
Participant list.

Family ID	Pseudonyms	Available interviews	Academic Trajectory	Middle School Attended	Maternal Education	Family structure
243	Matthew Elise	6th, 11th 6th, 11th	Low-Achieving	McKinley Middle	Completed high school	Two-parent household with siblings
257	Arnold Beth	6th, 11th 6th, 11th	Low-Achieving	McKinley Middle	Completed college or beyond	Single parent household with sibling and neices
265	Curtis Violet	6th, 11th 6th, 11th	Low-Achieving	McKinley Middle	Completed high school	Two-parent household* with grandmother
365	Samuel April	6th 6th	Low-Achieving	Yuan Middle	Completed high school	Two-parent household with siblings
369	Michael Alexander	6th 6th	Low-Achieving	Yuan Middle	Some college or vocational training	Two-parent household with siblings
371	Allen Nicole	6th, 8th, 11th 6th, 8th, 11th	Low-Achieving	Yuan Middle	Completed college or beyond	Two-parent household* with sibling
138	Noah Denise	6th, 11th 6th, 8th, 11th	High-Achieving	McKinley Middle	Completed college or beyond	Two-parent household with sibling
182	Tommy Keira	6th, 8th, 11th 6th, 8th, 11th	High-Achieving	McKinley Middle	Completed college or beyond	Single-parent household with sibling
223	Daniel Irene	6th, 8th, 11th 6th, 8th, 11th	High-Achieving	McKinley Middle	Completed high school	Two-parent household* with grandmother and siblings
237	Andre Hazel	6th 6th	High-Achieving	McKinley Middle	Some college or vocational training	Two-parent household with siblings
417	Gerald Traci	6th, 8th, 11th 6th, 8th, 11th	High-Achieving	El Rey Middle	Completed college or beyond	Single-parent household with sibling
615	Derrick Sharon	6th, 8th, 11th 6th, 8th, 11th	High-Achieving	El Rey Middle	Some college or vocational training	Single-parent household with sibling

Note. Under the columns, *pseudonym* and *available interviews*, adolescents' records are listed first, then their respective guardians'. *=one parent in the household was a step-parent.

and excerpts in Dedoose to indicate observable patterns in the data and reviewed these with the second and third author and a another doctoral student colleague who was familiar with the interview data from other projects, to share, discuss, and interpret the memos and excerpts coded. The final agreed-upon themes were chosen based on their relevance to academic socialization and stage-setting. All four themes are presented below.

Results

Results revealed that almost all parents in our sample engaged in the same four categories of academic socialization behavior: (1) academic monitoring, (2) conversations about school, (3) rules about academics and homework completion, and (4) racial socialization messages. Distinctions emerged primarily in the *level* of caregivers' diligence, clarity, and consistency in implementing or communicating these practices and goals. First, caregivers and their high-achieving Black sons reported parental behaviors and conversations that demonstrated *vigilant* monitoring of their son's academic performance in school. Second, they reported *regular*—often daily—conversations about school in which they learned about the details of their son's school experiences and consistently communicated high performance expectations. Third, caregivers of high-achieving boys clearly articulated and enforced specific rules about academics and requirements for homework completion. Finally, caregivers of high-achieving boys demonstrated greater racial literacy and provided their sons with specific strategies for navigating racial stereotypes and barriers in school settings. Moreover, caregivers of high-achieving Black boys were more likely than their low-achieving counterparts to simultaneously engage in *all four* of these academic socialization practices in a manner that suggested assiduous engagement in their son's schooling—a level of engagement that indicated persistent attention to their boys' performance as well as to the quality of their school experiences. Below, we provide more detail about these four categories of academic socialization and the specific ways that parents of high-achieving Black boys went above and beyond to support their son's academic success.

(Vigilant) monitoring of academic behavior and performance

All but one of the caregivers and adolescents in our study, regardless of boys' achievement status, reported that caregivers checked their son's homework and school progress, especially in 6th grade. However, all of the high-achieving dyads described intricate procedures for making sure that homework was complete and correct, which often included monitoring bookbags and daily agendas. Fewer low-achieving dyads conveyed clear, consistent, and diligent routines, although they also reported checking homework and asking about school.

High achievers. Denise, an immigrant mother from the Ivory Coast, was among the six mothers of high-achieving boys. Her son, Noah, was a student in an honors program throughout middle school and, by 11th grade, was attending one of New York City's most selective public high schools. A key way that Denise supported her son's success was through creating, enforcing, and participating in his daily homework routine. During an interview when Noah was in 6th grade, Denise explained the homework routine that she established for her son. She shared:

> I review his math homework and see if everything is okay, if everything is okay we don't go over it again, but if there are mistakes, we may have to cover the lesson again and do some other work and just make sure that he understands it. We follow a set schedule for the week, we usually do it at a certain time. If it is science homework, I usually like to go over the science homework to make sure that he gets everything right, because he usually tends not to do it right and we'll go over his math homework…we have to sometimes do some review and editing and do other things.

Evident in this narrative is a set regimen that Denise and Noah follow, replete with conditions that must be met. In Noah's 6th grade interview, he confirmed that his mother "usually checks [his] homework," but he wished that she was less of a "perfectionist" and less uptight about his grades. By 11th grade, although he did well in the majority of his subjects and believed his parents did not need to "push" him to do his homework, Noah stated that his parents were still on top of his schoolwork, "almost" checking his homework and "complain[ing]" about his habits in certain subjects. Thus, Noah's parents were consistent in reviewing his homework from middle to high school.

Similarly, Sharon—whose son Derrick was an A student in the Gifted and Talented program at El Rey Middle School and later attended a selective public high school in NYC—also described clear routines for ensuring her son's school success and high performance that were consistent from middle school to high school. Derrick referred to these routines as well. When asked how she was involved while Derrick completed his homework in her 6th grade interview, Sharon explained that Derrick either read his homework to her or she reviewed it directly. She also examined his notebooks and textbooks. She explained:

> He'll read them to me or I'll look at uh, I'll look at his books and I'll look at the textbook sometimes, but he doesn't seem to need much help. He uh - you ask him if he needs help and he seems to, he seems to have a handle on it, but I'm here in case he has some questions or he um, just whatever, whatever I can do, I'm here. If I have to run, go to the store or something, my other son is here, um, or lately he's been here for the past two weeks, and um, he'll help him, so he has a lot of support.

Although Sharon stated her son "doesn't seem to need much help," she stayed readily available and informed so that she could support him if needed. In Derrick's 8th grade interview, he was ever-aware of his mother's efforts to create a home environment that was conducive to him successfully completing his work. He said:

> My mother makes sure that whenever I do homework that it's in a quiet setting. And I have enough light so that if I need to read anything I can read clearly. She turns all of the TVs off so that there are no distractions. She makes sure that the phones are off, and that my phone is turned off in case my friends call who finished their homework earlier. So there's absolutely no distractions.

In this excerpt, Derrick demonstrated clear knowledge of the steps his mother took to create a learning-conducive environment and recognition that she did these actions to support his academic success.

Low achievers. Similar to parents of the high-achieving boys, 5 of the 6 parents of low-achieving boys reported that they checked their son's homework. However, only one of them described homework checking routines that were consistent and regimented. In other cases, the description of homework checking consisted of asking if there was homework or help needed, relying solely on boys' judgements about whether it was complete and accurate.

Arnold, whose grades were in the C-D range in 6th grade and was no longer attending formal school by his 11th grade interview, lived between the homes of his mother, Beth, who was ill with cancer and his 29 year old sister, Janelle, who was his primary caregiver while his mother was sick. Although both Beth and Janelle said that they helped with, checked, and monitored Arnold's homework and other school work in their separate 6th grade interviews, there was little evidence of the level of monitoring that caregivers of high-achieving boys exhibited. For instance, when asked what Arnold does after school, Beth said:

> R: He came in the door and he go "anything I can do for you Mommy?" I say no, or then I ask him "don't you want to do your homework?" So he go get his books, so he come in the room and we sit down and I'm doing his homework with him.
> I: Mm-hmm. You did the homework with him?

R: Yeah, <laugh> well he's, he's sitting there, not acting like he got any. If he needs any help, then I help, so I'm sitting there and once in a while he might ask me a question. Then after he finish he sit down, watch TV, watch the cartoons.

In this excerpt, although Beth asked if Arnold "wanted" to do his homework, there was no evidence that Beth had examined his homework or assignment book, or that she was proactive in ensuring that Arnold completed his homework beyond asking about it. Arnold's description was quite similar to Beth's. When describing his mother's routine in 6th grade, he said:

R: She says uh, "did you do your homework?" and I um, cuz if my favorite show is on and I'm trying to watch it, she be like, "did you do your homework first?" and I'll be like, no, and well, first she's like "did you do your homework?" and I'll be like "yea" and then she'll be like, "did you do your homework?" and I'll be like, no, she'll be like, yea, well, and then sometimes, she's like "get straight to it." And I'll, and I'll go inside my book bag and then, she'll ask me do I need help and I'll be like "yes I do."
I: Ok, so she helps you.
R: Yea.

Notably, in Arnold's interviews, he admitted several times that he had gotten in trouble at school for not completing his homework. In his 11th grade interview, Arnold described a homework routine that started late in the evening, around 8 pm. He was aware that his mother still wanted to see his homework before submission, but said that he could easily get around this homework check by showing her old homework or papers that were unrelated to the actual homework that was due.

Curtis, a D student at McKinley Middle in 6th grade, being raised by his father and paternal grandmother, Violet, had a similar homework routine with his grandmother. Although Violet cared deeply about Curtis' school performance, she shared that she had not imposed a structured homework routine until he was already failing.

Before I would let him go and let him do their homework, it was haphazard-like, there was no real structure. So I started noticing, and sent Curtis' father to help but he would get frustrated, not even realizing so then when I started noticing those things, I stepped back in.

At the time of the interview, according to both Violet's and Curtis' descriptions, Violet would sit at the dining room table with all of her grandchildren to work on and check homework. This nightly routine included giving Curtis sample math problems or sample questions to ensure understanding. However, there was no evidence in Violet's or Curtis' interview that Violet proactively monitored his assignments or school work. When asked how she knew what Curtis' assignments were, Violet said: "Well the only way I can make sure is that they [the teachers] are not calling me, okay. But other than that I try to trust his word."

(Frequent) conversations about school

All dyads reported having conversations about school and about the boys' futures, a key component of academic socialization identified in prior literature (Hill & Tyson, 2009) and of the Stage Setting framework (Harris & Robinson, 2016). However, high-achieving dyads reported in-depth conversations about school on a regular basis. These conversations covered what happened in class, in the lunchroom, or during recess, social interactions with peers, communication with teachers, and academic performance. High-achieving boys commonly indicated that these conversations conveyed their caregivers' dedication to their academic performance and future educational attainment. Although low-achieving dyads also reported having conversations about school, they were less likely to indicate that these conversations occurred on a daily basis. In addition, conversations described by low-achieving dyads often followed a report card or call from school, and was about parents' expectations for their sons to do well in school rather than boys' daily school experiences.

High achievers. Tommy, who expressed appreciation for his mother's efforts in getting him admitted to both an honors and a college preparatory program throughout his 6th grade interview, described having daily conversations with his mother Keira about his school experiences, performance, and the importance of school success. These conversations had been part of his after school routine for as long as he could remember, lasting between half an hour to two hours "everyday." When asked in 6th grade why he thinks these daily conversations occurred, he said:

R: She deserves to know what's happening in school.
I: Why do you think you think she deserves to know what happens in school?
R: I'm in the honors program and um, she went out of her way to put me in this program, I think, and I just kind of want to tell her what's happening, and if I need help, she can help me.

In his 8th grade interview, Tommy described his relationship with his mother as "open" and "weird," because they talk so intimately about school and other areas of his life:

I: Do you and your parents talk about school?
R: Yeah, my mom and I have a really weird relationship…I don't really see her that often…and our family, we're very open when like we talk about what happened in school you know uh like I got a test back I failed, uh, school's boring…I will probably call my mom and tell her like all the details. Some moms want to know if some girl likes you, my mom wants to know everything.

Derrick, a student in the Gifted and Talented program in middle school, also reported having regular conversations about school with his mother, Sharon. Like Tommy, in 6th grade Derrick alluded to the fact that these conversations occurred "everyday," and recalled the kinds of questions his mother asked. He said:

My mother will always, everyday ask me about what I had for lunch and if I didn't eat it, why I didn't eat it and any problems that I've been having in school with the work or in recess. Well, we are always talking about things that could help me in school next time.

Consistent with her son's responses, Sharon also reported regular conversations about school. Describing her typical after-school routine, she said:

I'll say, "hi Derrick", "hi mom", how was your day? It was good. And he's not very talkative at first…Then when he's unloading a very heavy book bag and taking his jacket off, he lets me know that he's hungry. Time to wash your hands and you know, he'll have his snack. Cause I want him to unwind a bit before he starts his homework… And so maybe about a half an hour or forty-five minutes before he starts his homework. And while he's eating, he'll tell me what happened in school, I'll ask questions about practically everything: How were you treated today? Were there anything that I should know about? and so let me know now don't let me hear about it in two weeks or three weeks. If it's important, if it's serious I want to hear about it from you and I want to hear about it today. Cause sometimes children, they will forget or sometimes they will just not tell you.

Sharon emphasized that she would ask Derrick about "practically everything," and wanted to hear about his day, everyday, not several weeks later. These inquiries were a part of her after school routine with him.

As noted earlier, high-achieving boys in our sample often cited the frequency and content of conversations about school as evidence that their caregivers were devoted to their school success. For example,

Andre, an honors student attending McKinley Middle School, when asked how much he thought his parents care about his school performance, answered confidently "100%." The interviewer then asked how he knew, to which Andre responded, "Cause they always ask me, when I come home from school, 'How'd you do in school?' or 'What happened at school?' Noah, another student in that honors program, likewise stated that these frequent conversations were how he knew "grades" and "doing well in life" were important to his mother:

I: Ok. Um, so what kinds of things does your mom always tell you are important?
R: Uh, well she did say grades and doing well in life.
I: Mm-hmm, ok. Um, how do you know that those things are important, grades and doing well in life? What do you think she means by doing well in life?
R: Because oh, uh, she always talks to me about it. She lectures me about them.

As an 11th grader, Noah reiterated that these frequent conversations about school guided and inspired him to sustain his school performance:

When it comes to grades my mom usually says I should come up with goals to set for my subjects so I'll actually be motivated to do work in them....Usually after these discussions I feel motivated and I set goals for myself and then I do it.

Daniel, another high-achieving boy, noted that his mother, Irene, a dancer, had very high educational aspirations for him and similarly marked their daily talks about school as evidence that his mother cared about his education:

I: How much do you think your parents care about how you do in school?
R: Well they care – um she, my mother cares almost as much as she cares about her dancing school.
I: So how do you know that? How do you know she cares about it that much?
R: Because she asks me, and then she signs my report card and…she asks me what's happened, like "anything good happen? You have a nice day? You have a sad day?" you know. She doesn't care about the very specific stuff like "what did she teach us? what did you do in math today?" but sometimes she does ask that.

Low achievers. Conversations about school and education were also evident among low-achieving dyads. However, caregivers' and boys' descriptions of the frequency and content of these conversations were noticeably less specific compared to those shared by high-achieving dyads. Three of the low-achieving boys could not recall a recent conversation they had with their caregiver about school when initially asked. Two stated that they talk about school with their caregivers "once a week" or "almost every week." Furthermore, unlike the conversations high-achieving boys reported about the details of their school day, conversations that low-achieving dyads described were often about report cards and other grades, prompted by specific phone calls placed by a teacher or a counselor, or generally about doing well in school.

Allen, who was a C student at Yuan Middle School in 6th grade but, after multiple suspension, was placed in special education at a different school by 8th grade, was among the low-achieving boys who could not recall the last conversation he had with his mother about school when asked during his 6th grade interview. Later, when asked how often he speaks to his parents about his homework or schoolwork, Allen's response again suggested that these conversations were not frequent.

I: How much does your mom or dad talk to you about your homework or schoolwork?
R: Not on a daily basis.
I: You said not. If you had to put it on a number every week is it once a week, two times a week, ten times a week, twenty times a week. What would you say?
R: Once a week maybe.

Similarly, when the interviewer asked Curtis how often he talked to his parents about school in 6th grade, his initial response was that he could not recall. Later, with interviewer probing, he said the following:

I: How often do you talk about school with your parents?
R: Almost every week.
I: I know you had a parent teacher conference. What are the other ways that school comes up like when do you guys talk about school?
R: When my parents go to school or they call them.

Matthew, a C student who attended McKinley Middle School as a 6th grader, reported that the most recent conversation he had with his mother was about "doing good at school." When asked what types of things his parent thought were important, Matthew said:

R: Do good in school. Accomplish your goals.
I: When was the last time they told you about those things?
R: My mom tells me…she used to tell me everyday in school. She says, "don't slack off or nothing. Be good. Behave."

Although Matthew reported that his mother talked to him about school every day, he spoke in the past tense implying that these conversations no longer occurred as frequently. Also, when they did occur, these conversations appeared to be vague and mostly about her expectations for his behavior.

(Consistent) rules and rule enforcement

All but one of the dyads in our sample reported household rules regarding homework and academic performance. Some described rules that referenced an implicit understanding that homework was a priority and must be completed. However, high-achieving dyads tended to also report specific rules that included the conditions under which homework should be done. These rules often described homework completion and adequate performance as prerequisites for participation in leisure activities, such as playing video games or with friends. High-achieving boys were also more likely than their low-achieving peers to know that rules existed because their parents told them and enforced punishments if they were not followed.

High achievers. In 8th grade, Gerald, a high-performing student at El Rey Middle School, stated that the homework rule in his family was to finish his homework and have his mother check it. He attributed the fact that he viewed this as a rule to the consistency with which homework completion and checking were required:

I: Okay, so what are the rules in your family about homework?
R: Um, um…to get it all done and then let her see it, and see if it's correct…And that's basically it.
I: How do you know that that's like the rule?
R: Cause every time she say – my mom asks me, do you have homework? I say, yes. And she says did you finish it? I say, yes. She says, let me see it…And then she – I give her all the books and if it's like a couple answers wrong, or I didn't answer a few questions – even though it's okay, she says, you have to answer those questions…And if it's wrong she makes me correct them -.
I: How often does she do that?
R: A lot.
I: Mmm. Like, what's a lot like?
R: Like every time I have homework.

Gerald's mother, Traci, confirmed this basic homework rule in her 8th grade interview, and was quite clear regarding the consequences of not following this rule:

I: What rules do you have about homework?
R: That it should be completed before I get home or you know do what you can and I'll work with you when I get home, but it should be done the night that's its due.
I: Okay and what happens if it's not done?
R: Again you will do it. Again he is on the honor system, so if I get a call that it's not done, even though it's past due, he has to do it anyway; he has to make it up. Even if she doesn't want to see it, I want you to do it; it has to be done.

Daniel and his mother, Irene, also stated this basic requirement that homework be completed and offered evidence that this rule was enforced. When asked about homework rules in 6th grade, Daniel responded, "I don't have any rules actually, but the basic rule is just get it done." Then, when asked what happens at home when homework is not done, Daniel said, "my mother is usually very sad, but I still finish it." In Irene's 6th grade interview, she reported more intricate rules surrounding homework completion that included no TV use and how to handle homework difficulties, in addition to this "basic rule". She also stated clear consequences if the rules were not followed. When asked to recount a time when a homework rule was broken, Irene shared this story about Daniel:

He was at his father's house actually for the weekend and he was supposed to do his homework, and he didn't….It wasn't difficult, it wasn't something that he couldn't do by himself, and he just, you know, was at his father's house with his step brothers, little sister, all the fun I guess he was having he didn't do his homework. And I called him every day I said 'did you do it?', 'I'm a do it, I'm a do it', and when he came home Sunday evening, we had to stay up late to do his homework. So for that whole week, or was it two weeks? I think it was a week he couldn't play his games or watch TV.

Irene implemented her homework rule even when her son was not physically home with her, because she prioritized homework.

This prioritization of homework completion over leisure activities was seen in other mothers of high-achieving boys. Sharon, Derrick's mother, when asked about homework rules, shared that the rule in her house regarding Derrick's homework is that it comes first:

I: What are the rules regarding the homework?
R: That [homework] comes first…That comes before everything. That comes before friends, TV, video games, anything. For me that's number one, and it's number one because I used to work in higher education and so that and I've seen the students that came in and how unprepared they were.

Derrick also reported specific rules about homework in his 6th grade interview:

R: The rules. Well the rule is that I can't have company, I can't go outside. I would stay in here and do all my homework until it's done. And the regular rules are I can't have company or I can't go outside on the weekdays. Sometimes my mother bends that rule knowing that I'm doing well in school and that sometimes I like to be with my friends from the other – with my friends in the building.
I: Okay. So the rules were set by your mom it sounds, right?
R: Yes.

Hazel and her son, Andre, also described clear rules and expectations pertaining to homework completion. Hazel stated that the homework rule in her household was "Homework first, when you come in from school eat lunch and do your homework, and then after you do your homework, you can go outside...if their homework is not done, they won't go anywhere, so homework is important." Hazel explained that if Andre did not do his homework, he would be punished:

I: How do you reinforce all of the kids about homework, you said homework is first, how do you reinforce that?
R: If you don't do your homework, you don't go outside, you don't do anything, you just stay in the house, watch a little TV, but no homework you don't do anything.

Andre corroborated the existence of this punishment stating:

I: What happens at your home when your homework isn't done?
R: I'd get in trouble. I'd tell my mom that I did all I could.
I: What happens when you get in trouble?
R: She'd say, no outside for the rest of the day. Or she'll tell me that I'm grounded for the day. Can't watch TV.

Low achievers. Although most low-achieving dyads also reported that homework must be done, they were more likely to say that this was an implicit understanding rather than a rule that caregivers had clearly communicated, with consequences if broken. Four of the six low-achieving boys and their caregivers either stated that there were no rules or failed to mention homework rules when asked about rules in general. Although some low-achieving dyads reported punishment for poor school performance or homework non-completion, these punishments were frequently abandoned prematurely. Only one low-achieving dyad described clearly articulated and regularly enforced rules for homework completion.

Samuel, a C student in Math at Yuan Middle School in 6th grade, reported that there were no rules about homework in his house. When the interviewer probed further, he also stated that there were no consequences for not completing homework. In Samuel's mother, April's 6th grade interview, she confirmed that there were no homework rules. When explaining why she did not implement any homework rules, she said, "because I know he does it. 'Cause I know he does his work."

She further explained that she had signed a letter allowing his teachers to keep him after school when he missed a homework assignment. She believed this arrangement was a sufficient punishment:

I: Are there any other punishments, besides staying after school?
R: Well his punishment…He stays after school. You know? And that's something he don't like because staying after school? Hmm! I mean all his friends out there waiting for him, and he's still in school? <laughs>.

Samuel admitted in 6th grade that he only "sometimes" followed his mom's other rules, stating that he rarely got into trouble if he did not follow them. This statement is further evidence that rules and punishments were ineffectively and inconsistently enforced in Samuel's household.

Several mothers of low-achieving boys, even those who stated rules about homework and reported checking it, had trouble enforcing consequences for their son's poor school performance. Nicole, like most of the other caregivers of low-achieving boys, stated repeatedly that she wanted her son, Allen, to finish high school and attend a four-year college. Over the course of the study, however, she described frustrated attempts to place Allen in an educational environment where he would succeed. When asked about rules and consequences for Allen for failing to complete homework, Nicole admitted that they were difficult to enforce and that she overlooked punishment breaches:

Well right now he's getting punished for not acting right in school and supposedly he's not supposed to do any TV watching, which is hard, and I think I try to act like I don't see him watching TV.

By 11th grade, Nicole continued to describe homework rules that she was unable to enforce:

I have rules, like you supposed to come home and do them and ya know do it at a quiet time, a quiet space.…He doesn't care, doesn't do it, and I'm not gonna argue and fight with him everyday ya know. I know he's not doing it.

Allen corroborated his mothers' description, indicating that his

mother did not impose punishments for poor performance:

> My mother she's not a big, she'll discipline me when it's like, when I'm doing very bad, but she'll tell me it's on you at the end of the day so if you don't do this, if you don't do your homework, you're failing the class not me…She's not the type of person that hits you because you didn't do your homework or take something from you because you didn't do your homework, she'll just say it's on you. She's like I'm going to let you be the young adult and let you make the decision.

Arnold's mother, Beth, also mentioned inconsistently punishing Arnold for staying up late on school nights watching TV and playing video games rather than preparing for school:

> R: I told him he won't be playing the game at all if he don't know when to stop. Someone is going to take it from him, he won't be able to play with it for another two weeks.
> I: Have you, have you taken it away from him?
> R: Mm-hmm, last week. And he like "please Mommy, please, please what could I do, what could I do, I don't have nothing to do if I can't play my game" I said "nope, you're on punishment".
> I: Did you stay the whole two weeks without him playing?
> R: A week.
> I: A week. What made you give it back?
> R: Well he was doing everything extra.
> I: Like what? <laugh>.
> R: Everything, I'm sitting here, here comes Arnold, sitting down rubbing, massaging my feet, "want me to massage your feet?". I was like "get out of here". <laugh>…He go to the store and bring me back something, "I bought this for you," <laugh> he know I like ice cream, he go buy me some ice cream.

Arnold's bribing and use of sweet but unrelated gestures to make up for breaking the rules led Beth to lift her punishment early.

Racial socialization

Although not included in current conceptualizations of academic socialization or stage setting, racial socialization was an ongoing component of what caregivers described in their efforts to ensure their boys' school and life success. All caregivers, regardless of achievement level, showed evidence that they were aware of the risks involved in raising Black sons. All caregivers and sons also referred to status inequalities among Blacks relative to other groups and all mentioned the existence of racism and discrimination. The distinction between groups were primarily observed in the manner in which dyads reported that they approached discussions of racial issues with their son's. Caregivers of high-achieving boys described an approach that included instilling a deep knowledge of Black history and racial pride and explicitly coaching their sons on etiquette, proper demeanor, and how to navigate varied settings as a Black boy. Whereas caregivers of low-achieving boys emphasized street smarts, rather than school smarts, in discussing how to navigate racial discrimination, if they had discussions about race or discrimination with their sons at all.

High achievers. All high-achieving dyads reported extensive and ongoing conversations with their sons about race in America and both historical and contemporary oppression of Blacks. They described unwavering efforts to instill racial pride, to alert sons as to how others will view them based on their appearance and behaviors, to train their son's regarding how to manage encounters with police, and to emphasize that success as a Black man requires harder work, greater effort, and better performance than for their White peers.

In her 6th grade interview, Derrick's mother, Sharon, emphasized both the importance she placed on teaching Derrick about the contributions Blacks have made in the U.S. and her deliberate efforts to teach him how to carry himself in public spaces. Regarding the former, she explained that it was "extremely" important that Derrick feel connected to being African American and described the strategies she used to instill such a connection:

> We talk about the accomplishments of all kinds of African Americans in this country, but also in Africa and what their region, what they represent, what they're known for, their population, and just some history. And we just let him know that as a young black boy, he's going to be a black man some day, you know, we teach him about cops and harassment and how things are going in our community and what to be, the things that my older son has had to be subjected to [being arrested], um, and just to be on the look-out for and to um, so we constantly, you know, like I said, we talk about these things and we talk about what goes on in our community.

Sharon further explained that she emphasized the importance of success in school and learning how to navigate predominantly White settings in her conversations with Derrick:

> I: So what kind of things are important for Derrick to understand or learn about being African American?
> R: That you have to, you have to get a good education to succeed because where a white person may not need as much education, they will be successful, because they're white. They will be given more opportunities because they're white. You're not going to be given those opportunities, but if you show them how smart you are, and if you show them that you can do this job and you're not white, you, you always have to be better than they are, so that's what I instill in him.

The teachings Sharon described were evident throughout Derrick's interviews. When the interviewer asked in 6th grade what his parents taught him about being Black, he said, "That I need to try to do what I can and try to be smart in this world because I will need not only street smarts but real – regular smarts so I can live in this world." When asked about specific things his parents taught him and how these conversations came up, Derrick said:

> R: They'll talk to me before anything happens.
> I: Before what happens?
> R: Like any issue that happens. When any issues about me being African American come up so I'll know what to do when it comes.
> I: Can you give me an example of a time you guys had a conversation about that?
> R: <pause> Maybe they told me once to not – arguing isn't going to be the best thing. That you shouldn't always retaliate because.
> I: But this is talked about in the context of being African-American?
> R: Yes. And, oh, like to always be proud of your race.

The strategies Traci reported in describing her approach to discussing racial issues with her son, Gerald, closely mirrored Sharon's. She said that with her children she reads books and watches documentaries about Black history, takes them to museums, and enrolled Gerald in a leadership program where they "give them consciousness about what they call strong Black men." She also explicitly schooled Gerald about the risk of run-ins with the police. When asked to describe the things she thought were important for Gerald to understand about being Black, Traci said, "even though you might have the same, or kind of similar backgrounds it's always going to be a little bit different for you. You're always going to have to try harder." She went on to explain the specific things she instills in him and the basis for her views:

> I ride the First Avenue bus, and what I see these young White people doing is, is wrong, and then I ride the same bus and when I see the young Black kids doing the same thing, it's always talked about, how they're thieves or they're losers that get in the way. It's like, "Oh my God, they're on the wrong track, forget it!" So I try to tell Gerald that image is everything, ya know, even though people may think it's cool

to have their pants big, down around their knees, they are not looked at the same, they're looked at as hoodlums, ya know.

Traci's teachings, alongside those of Gerald's father, were quite evident in different parts of Gerald's interviews over the course of the study. By 8th grade, he was fluent in naming Black historical figures and their respective contributions. He was also fluent in discussing the history of slavery, sharecropping, desegregation, and voting rights. When asked what his parents taught him about being African American as a 6th grader, Gerald said:

> I don't think they really have to tell me about what it means to be African American. Like I didn't always know that I was African American. But when they said I'm African American, like when I put on my paper what is my race, African American. Like it may be hard for me to go look at colleges and stuff because I'm African American and stuff like. Like I should always excel and do higher like try to do better because I'm African American. Usually my father's friend, he usually always talks about African Americans, discrimination, and about how we should always strive to be like be the best. Cause he always says you shouldn't blend in, you should stand out. Like academics, like always be educated.

Gerald also described how his father had lectured him on managing his anger and controlling his temper, especially in public where it was easy for Black boys to be arrested. He explained, "like, if you're mad at somebody, don't hit them. Try to walk away and just hit something else besides the person you're mad at." He emphasized throughout his interviews his awareness that innocent Black men were put in jail and that "it's hard to...get a good job after going to jail."

The focus on knowledge of Black history, awareness of racial discrimination, and proper demeanor also emerged strongly in the interviews of Kiera and her son, Tommy, as in other high-achieving dyads. Keira described herself as "the foremost expert on racism in public schools." When asked if she talked to Tommy about racism, she answered emphatically, "Absolutely. I want him to bring it to me." She continued:

> R: I point it out to them every day of their lives. That they live with that. Point out the statistics. My children read, they're very well read, so they know what's going on.
> I: What kinds of things do they read?
> R: My god, well, read a book – black history, my son was in Shonberg and they really teach you about black culture. We read education week, talk about the reality of that. What minority students, people of color, are getting in comparison to other students. We see it in my son's program – he's the only black boy in his class, they're all white.

She said that, specifically, Tommy needed to understand the reality that our society is one with "two sets of rules," one for African Americans and one for everyone else. She, like the other caregivers of high-achieving boys, provided great detail about her efforts:

> I teach them everything about African American history. I want them to be proud of who we are. Given the line of restrictions and racism, I want my children to know that African American is alright by me. We've done a lot of good for the world, and we're going to continue to do a lot for the world, and that's the end of the story. I want them to know about being an African American; be proud of your history, if they were Irish I would say the same thing and I would say the same thing if they were Puerto Rican, Indian…

Kiera, like the other mothers, also coached Tommy on how others perceived Black men based on their demeanor and recounted story after story about conversations in which she and Tommy had discussions about this topic. In Tommy's interview, he expressed gratitude for his parents efforts, as seen in the following account of how Tommy had prepared for his high school interviews:

> R: When I go to like private schools for interviews, I speak well.
> I: How do you do it all like on demand?
> R: I don't know. I just like, well I get a lot of help from my mom and my dad, so.
> I: What do they do?
> R: They like counsel me so I am ready.
> I: In what way?
> R: Like um, like they tell me what to do and how I should do it and all the main things that are [important], yeah.
> R: What do you think about that?
> I: I'm thankful.

As an 8th grader, Tommy reiterated his parents' emphasis on how to correctly carry himself as a Black boy:

> R: Like most of the African-Americans, like with the bandanas and the baggy jeans and stuff. Like if my mom saw me like that, she'd get really mad. Because she thinks it's really degrading and other things would get in the way. She always like um, you could be walking down the street maybe in the way you carry yourself could say something to a person whose watching your body language. And that person might like offer you a job or something that like would change your life forever, but if you're like walking like, with your pants all the way down and then you're like a really big shot and see you with a bandana and a cap and um, going out with stuff like that.
> I: So what do you think about that?
> R: I agree.
> I: You agree? How come you agree?
> R: Um, I think two parts because um, like because, I don't, because there are a lot of people who like will frown and then discover it because of the way they carry themselves. I don't know. I can get a scholarship that's awesome or a really good college because of the way I carry myself.

Low achievers. The conversations about race described in the narratives of low-achieving dyads were distinctly different from those in high-achieving dyads, if and when they occurred. None of the low-achieving dyads described the type of intense socialization about Black history, heritage, and pride that was evident in the narratives of high-achieving dyads. Moreover, although they did report doing socialization practices that included proper protocol for some circumstances, these practices were less likely to be accompanied with explicit conversations about race.

Several low-achieving boys indicated that they did not discuss race with their family. Curtis was among them. When the interviewer asked how issues of race or about "being Black" came up in his family, Curtis said, "We don't really talk about [race] like that. We just talk about how we should do as a family...So, we don't really talk about race like that." Samuel and his mother, April, likewise, stated that race was not discussed in their household. When asked why, Samuel said, "They [his parents] don't teach me about my race." Similarly, when April was asked if she speaks to Samuel about being Black, she replied, "Nothing like that. No!".

Nicole, another mother of a low-achieving boy, reported extensive awareness of issues her son, Allen, was likely to face as a Black boy, including risks of being stereotyped or arrested and needing to "work three times harder being a Black man." However, throughout her interviews, she said that she downplayed discussions about race, racial barriers and discrimination with him. In her 6th grade interview, she said that she was careful about what she said because "they repeat things and I don't want him saying things that [sound] racist but really were not." In accordance with his mother, Allen said in his 6th grade interview that his parents told him "nothing" about race growing up.

Michael's father, Alexander, reported that he and Michael's mother made efforts to instill knowledge about Michael's cultures (his mother is from Belize) by way of routine practices, such as drawing a red, black and green flag on his bedroom wall "the way we used to do it...so they

can know how it was when I was coming up," telling family stories, cooking ethnic foods (e.g., fried chicken, black eyed peas), and teaching about historical figures like Rosa Parks and Marcus Garvey. However, regarding explicit conversations about racial issues, Alexander said:

> We don't really have no real discussions, like I don't talk about, you know, too much politics around me, like black people or white people are no good. I don't try to do none of that negative stuff, I let them figure that out for themselves.

Similarly, Michael did not relay any of his parents' efforts in his interview. When asked what his parents told him about being Black while growing up, he indicated that "they never talk about it." When the interviewer probed further about whether Michael's parents talked about Black history, music, or any people, his response was "No."

Discussion

In the present study, our goal was to describe the academic socialization practices of Black caregivers and their high-achieving Black adolescent boys, relative to caregivers of low-achieving Black adolescent boys. Using Harris and Robinson's (2016) Stage Setting Framework and scholarship on academic socialization as a frame, we used interviews with Black boys and their caregivers over the middle and high school years to describe caregivers routines for monitoring homework and academic performance, conversations with son's about school, house rules around academic performance, and their messages to their sons about race.

One key finding, although not the focus of our paper, was that virtually all dyads in our sample, regardless of achievement level, valued education, had aspirations for their adolescent to attend postsecondary education, and were involved in their son's schooling in traditionally examined ways, such as helping with homework, visiting school, talking to teachers, and talking about school with their sons. Most also described strategies for monitoring performance, discussing school with their sons, implementing rules for homework and academic performance, and talking about race. This important pattern in our data is in contrast to contemporary storylines that Black parents of low-achieving boys are uninvolved and uninterested in their boys' education. However, caregivers of high-achieving boys were more vigilant, diligent, thorough, clear, and consistent in their efforts to manage their home environment or "life space" (Harris & Robinson, 2016, p. 185) in ways that reinforced their value of education and expectation for success, according to both caregivers' and sons' reports. This finding suggests to us that Black boys' school success requires relentless focus on the part of caregivers, due to challenges that Black boys encounter in school environments (Ferguson & Noguera, 2020; Lewis & Diamond, 2015).

The first theme we identified was that, in contrast to low-achieving dyads, high-achieving dyads described a level of caregiver vigilance in monitoring son's academic behaviors and performance that included: (1) reviewing their son's homework daily, (2) requiring that sons show their assignment to them before submitting it to teachers the next day, (3) checking that homework was accurate and that boys understood their responses, and (4) suggesting strategies for learning and remembering. Importantly, according to high-achieving dyads' descriptions, these routines to support homework and monitor performance were in place every day, and both caregivers and sons knew what was expected. This vigilant monitoring is distinct in subtle ways from the sorts of "homework help" that have been found to undermine adolescents' academic efficacy and emotional engagement in school in prior studies of White middle class parent involvement (Hill & Tyson, 2009). In our study, this vigilant monitoring and review of schoolwork among caregivers of high-achieving boys can be considered academic socialization or stage-setting in that it was a routine behavior that signified that doing well in school was prioritized and expected.

In line with Yan's (1999) finding that successful Black students were more likely to talk about school and future plans with their parents than were non-successful Black students, high-achieving dyads in the current study reported having conversations about school that occurred more regularly than they did among low-achieving dyads. These conversations also more often covered all of the details of son's school day, from interactions with teachers and peers to what was served for lunch. All but one of the low-achieving dyads reported talks about school, but the conversations they described were intermittent, and often prompted by report card grades or communications from school staff. Open, frequent, and extensive conversations about all aspects of boys' daily school experiences may be one way parents set the stage for their son's school success because it serves as a running temperature check, permitting caregivers to immediately and efficiently correct any mishaps that may dampen their son's performance.

In addition to keeping caregivers informed, frequent conversations about school communicated to boys that their caregivers believed school was important and were there to support them. This finding is consistent with Hill and Tyson's (2009) conceptualization of academic socialization as the communication of parental expectations and conversations about school that fosters future aspirations. This finding is also consistent with Harris and Robinson's (2016) Stage Setting Framework which posits that parents' success in stage-setting depends, in part, on the degree to which they are able to convey messages about the importance of education in ways that children internalize. In other words, in motivating boys to work hard to maintain their high achievement in school, these conversations and messages set the stage for what was expected.

The existence of clearly established house rules was the third theme we identified in our study. Parents of high-achieving boys were more consistent in having rules and enforcing punishments if broken than parents of low-achieving boys. Similarly, high-achieving boys were more likely to show agreement with their parents about the presence of these rules and consequences than low-achieving boys. This agreement between parents and their high-achieving sons about the presence of rules, and the consistency in which rules were enforced and dealt with if broken, suggests that parents' consistent and appropriate enforcement of rules at home can support or sustain high achievement for their Black sons during adolescence. These findings are similar to Wang et al.'s (2014) finding that the provision of home structure through rules about homework and TV use was associated with a reduced decline in achievement among Black adolescents.

We also found that high-achieving boys were more likely to adhere to their parents' established rules, compared to low achieving boys. This finding is consistent with a meta-analysis of 20 studies on parent involvement and achievement outcomes, which found that parents' rule-setting about homework had the strongest association with achievement outcomes, compared to other parental involvement strategies (Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008). Parents' reinforcement of these rules could be a means through which they create and maintain an academically conducive homework environment for their sons. Parents' rules can serve as guidelines on how, where, and up to what standard their son should do their homework and behave in and around their house.

Although neither academic socialization or stage setting frameworks include a specific focus on how parents socialize adolescents about race, our finding regarding differences between low and high-achieving dyads in how race was talked about in families was not surprising. Indeed, these findings are consistent with a relatively large literature on positive relationships between *cultural socialization* (emphasizing group history, heritage, and pride), *preparation for bias* (discussions with youth about discrimination and how to cope with it) and children's academic engagement and achievement (Wang, Smith, Miller-Cotto, & Huguley, 2020). However, our analysis provided needed insight into what these associations look like "up close." We found that high-achieving dyads' descriptions of discussions about race had a particular profile that was not evident in low-achieving dyads' descriptions. This profile included instilling a deep knowledge of Black history in their children, which

often occurred through reading and watching documentaries, visits to Black museums, and enrollment in Black manhood programs. It also included frequent discussion about discrimination and proper protocol for how to carry oneself as a Black man. Although low-achieving dyads certainly reported keen awareness of challenges that Black boys face, their descriptions of their approach to navigating those challenges did not include the strategies that high-achieving dyads included.

Strengths and limitations

There were several strengths in our exploration of academic socialization practices among parents of Black boys. Unlike some previous studies on Black families, we used an asset-based approach that highlighted how parents of Black boys support the academic endeavors of their children, contrary to some popular belief. Furthermore, because the high and low-achieving boys were from similar socioeconomic backgrounds, similar neighborhoods, and similar schools, the differences in the practices of their respective caregivers were less likely to be attributable to differences in those demographic factors. Last, we used a multi-wave, multi-informant research design which incorporated both caregiver and adolescent reports on their home environment and parental practices across three points from middle to high school. Thus, we were able to observe progress and patterns of consistency from 6th to 11th grade for most adolescents, as well as combine the perceptions of more than one respondent for accuracy.

Despite these strengths, our study also had limitations. First, all families volunteered to be a part of the study. Thus, our sample is neither representative of all Black boys nor of those from the larger study. In particular, the sample consisted of middle to low SES boys from a large and ethnically diverse city. Practices around academics among caregivers of high-achieving Black boys in other settings, such as suburban, rural, or less ethnically diverse settings, may be quite different. Second, in contrasting the strategies that high and low-achieving dyads used, we were unable to account for the fact that all caregivers in the high-achieving group were mothers whereas the caregivers in the low-achieving group included four mothers, one grandmother, and one father. This lack of consistency in caregivers' roles may have influenced the themes we identified. Third, because the protocol was not designed to explore all aspects of stage-setting theory (e.g., we did not examine neighborhood choice, parental role modeling, or the physical layout of the home), several aspects of the theory were not explored in our study. Finally, because we did not also examine interview data from Black girls or non-Black boys, we cannot claim that our findings are unique to Black boys, but simply, indicative of some of their experience.

Future directions

Future research on academic socialization and stage setting practices among high-achieving Black boys could benefit from exploring all aspects of boys' home lives and of caregivers' influence. Harris and Robinson (2016) argue that physical features the home, the neighborhood in which children grow up, parents' lifestyle and behavior, and school characteristics communicate their own messages about the importance of education in ways that children subconsciously and consciously witness and internalize. Thus, studies can expand the breadth of ways parents set the stage for their child's academic success by exploring these other factors. Nonetheless, our study highlighted four main ways Black parents raising Black sons successfully manage their home to allow their sons to thrive academically, and to convey that education is important for their future.

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Author's statement

The first author, Trenel Francis, contributed to the conceptualization and design of the current study. She also analyzed and interpreted the data presented in the study. She primarily drafted the original submission and was the lead author on the current submission. She also create all visualizations (e.g., tables and graphs) included in the manuscripts with the assistance of her research assistants. Francis supervised a team of research assistants who helped with the initial coding and conceptualization of the project. Their names are listed under the acknowledgment.

The second author, Diane Hughes, contributed to the conceptualization and design of the current study as well. She acquired the original data from which the present data was taken and was the co-principal investigator (PI) for the original study. Hughes contributed greatly to the editing and reviewing of the original and current draft. She also primarily revised the manuscript critically for important intellectual content. Last, Hughes supervised and managed the work of the first author and acquired the financial support for the project leading to its publication.

The third author, J. Alexander Watford, primarily contributed to the reviewing and editing of the current paper. He read and edited multiple drafts. He also assisted in the interpretation of the analyses done by the first author and also reviewed the manuscript critically for important intellectual content.

The fourth author, Niobe Way, contributed primarily to the acquisition of the original data of the study. She was the co-PI on the original project alongside the second author, and helped secure the funds and data used for the current study.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2020.101181.

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