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### Personal Research Agenda

The focus of my research agenda is to examine the developmental trajectory of aggression in African American girls. African American girls are at increased risk for engaging in aggressive behavior in comparison to their European American counterparts (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2006; Putallaz et al., 2007). However, findings surrounding the linkage between aggression and the social and psychological adjustment of European American and African American girls have been mixed. Whereas some research suggests that physical and relational aggression is associated with maladjustment in girls (Crick, Ostrov, & Werner, 2006), other studies suggest that aggressive girls are well adjusted socially and psychologically (Blake, 2007; Xie, Farmer, & Cairns, 2003). The degree to which social and psychological maladjustment is experienced by aggressive girls appears to be moderated by ethnicity as well as the form of aggression exhibited. Given inconsistent findings surrounding the adjustment patterns of aggressive girls, more research in this area is necessary to fully understand the developmental trajectory of aggression in girls and the degree to which this developmental course varies across ethnic group membership.

It is also important to identify factors that might predict African American girl's engagement in aggression as well as deter African American girls from utilizing aggressive strategies. Such information will facilitate the development of interventions aimed at reducing aggression in girls of color, and thereby curtail the negative effects of aggression on educational and adjustment outcomes. Therefore, a secondary goal of my research agenda is to understand how parental and collective models of socialization influence African American and European American girls engagement in aggression.

There is considerable support in the aggression literature for the association between childhood aggression, particularly peer-directed physical aggression, parenting styles, and

discipline techniques (Coie & Dodge, 1998). There is also a growing body of research examining the influence of parental endorsement of aggression on childhood physical aggression (Orpinas, Murray, & Kelder, 1999; Solomon, Bradshaw, Wright, & Cheng, 2008). However, less is known about the influence parental attitudes and reactions to childhood aggression have on girl's use of different forms of aggression (e.g., physical and relational aggression) and how this relationship varies by ethnicity (Blake, 2005; Blake, 2007). My previous research suggests that African American parents differ from European American parents regarding their reaction to their daughter's use of aggression, but not their sons (Blake, Lease, Olejnik, & Turner, under review). Whereas parents' reaction to their children's use of aggression was predictive of girl's engagement in aggression, it was not predictive of boy's engagement in aggression. Ethnic variation was also observed in the relationship between parent's reaction to aggression and girl's engagement in relational, verbal, and physical aggression.

The proposed study will extend my previous research by exploring how parental attitudes towards aggression influences African American and European American girl's engagement in aggression and subsequent psychological adjustment in a regionally diverse sample. Specific research questions will: (1) examine if parental attitudes toward aggression predict African American and European American girl's engagement in aggression, (2) explore the degree to which parental attitudes to aggression influence aggressive girl's social and psychological adjustment, and (3) examine whether the relationship between parental attitudes to aggression and aggressive girl's social and psychological adjustment varies by ethnicity.

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## Do parenting attitudes to aggression explain ethnic differences in girlhood aggression?

### Abstract

African American girls are at increased risk for engaging in aggressive behavior in comparison to European American girls. Parental endorsement of aggression has been offered as one possible explanation for understanding why ethnic differences in aggression exist among girls. Preliminary research suggests that African American parents differ from European American parents regarding their reaction to their daughter's use of aggression and that ethnic variation exists in the relationship between parent's reaction to aggression and girl's engagement in specific forms of aggression. The proposed study will extend previous research by exploring how parental attitudes towards aggression influences African American and European American girl's engagement in aggression and subsequent psychological adjustment. African American and European American girls (N=240) in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade, their teachers (n=10), and parents (n=240) will be recruited for participation. Various measures assessing student participant's social and emotional functioning and school and family experiences will be administered. Findings from this study have the potential to impact the development of culturally relevant school-based and family-centered interventions targeting aggressive girls of color and to assist school psychologists in reducing emotional and behavioral barriers to learning for at-risk girls.

Do parenting attitudes to aggression explain ethnic differences in girlhood aggression?

Parental endorsement of aggression is associated with childhood aggression (Olweus, 1980; Orpinas, Murray, & Kelder, 1999; Solomon, Bradshaw, Wright, & Cheng, 2008) and is thought to be a common socialization practice for families living urban communities (Anderson, 1994). Anderson (1994) proposed that low-income urban parents, many of whom are African American, encourage their children to engage in aggression when provoked in order to maintain a certain level of respect with peers, but more importantly to ward off future attacks from same-age perpetrators. Thus, parents in urban communities perceive aggression not only as a marker of social dominance, but more importantly as a survival strategy which prevents persistent victimization and engagement in more serious acts of violence and promotes assertiveness (Ness, 2004; Miller & Sperry, 1982). Although Anderson's theory provides a possible explanation for understanding elevated levels of aggression in African American girls, it is unclear if Anderson's proposed theory of parental socialization of aggression applies specifically to African American parents, in that it generalizes to African Americans parents from higher SES and nonurban communities, and if it is applicable in aggressive situations with children that do not involve provocation. Much of the research on parental endorsement of aggression has focused on physical aggression in predominately male populations (Orpinas, Murray, & Kelder, 1999; Solomon, Bradshaw, Wright, & Cheng, 2008). Less is known about the relation between parental attitudes toward aggression and girl's use of aggression, particularly relational aggression.

The objectives of the proposed study are (1) to investigate if parental attitudes toward aggression predict African American and European American girl's engagement in aggression, (2) to examine the degree to which parental attitudes to aggression influence aggressive girl's social and psychological adjustment, and (3) to explore if this relationship varies by ethnicity.

We expect that girls whose parents endorse aggression will exhibit less psychological adjustment than girls whose parents who do not condone aggression.

*Study design.* African American (n=120) and European American (n=120) girls in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade, their teachers (n=10), and parents (n=240) will be recruited for participation.

Middle schools with equivalent school free and reduced lunch rates and racial/ethnic composition from urban communities in the Southwestern and Northeastern United States will serve as the primary sites for participant recruitment.

*Procedures.* Data will be collected in a single time point to provide a snap shot of preadolescents' peer relations, family life, and school experience. Student and teacher data collection will occur in the classrooms of participating schools. Parent measures will be collected via phone interviews.

*Measures.* Students, parents, and teachers will complete a variety of measures to assess preadolescent's social and emotional functioning and school and family experiences. Students will complete peer nominations of aggressive behavior (Blake, 2007) and self-report measures of psychological adjustment (BASC-2 Self-report Scale; Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004). Teachers' ratings of student aggression (Blake, 2007) and student's psychological adjustment and academic engagement within the classroom setting will be collected (BASC-2 Teacher Report Scale; Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004). Parents' will complete the Hypothetical Aggression Situations-Parent-Child scale (Crick, 1997) and a parent demographic questionnaire.

*Collection Sites:* Charter schools in the greater Dallas and Houston area will serve as data collection sites for the southwestern region. The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, with Drs. Tom Powers and Stephen Leff, serving as site collaborators will serve as site for data collection for the northeastern region. The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia has established partnerships with community schools through existing grants on aggressive African American girls and

therefore, will be useful in recruiting preadolescent African American girls, their teachers, and their parents from Philadelphia public schools.

*Multi-site research program.* The advantages to conducting a multi-site research program is the increased expertise and feedback that can be gained by collaborating with scholars with similar levels of expertise in the areas of study. In addition to developing collaborative relationships that can result in more improved study designs, multi-site research programs allow for greater recruitment of larger and more diverse samples. In the proposed study, the recruitment of African American girls from both southern and northern areas of the United States is novel and could enhance study questions in unexpected ways; for example, region of the country might serve as a moderator of adjustment outcomes. The greatest limitation for conducting multi-site research involves proper implementation of study procedures and recruitment of participation and expense of travel between sites. A certain level of participant consent rates is required in order to ensure reliability in peer nomination data. Thus, recruiting child participants for the study can be a daunting task to researchers unfamiliar with this data collection procedure. Additionally, the expense of traveling between sites to foster communication surrounding data collection procedures can be costly.

*Estimated Budget.* Estimated budget for the project in years 2009-2010, including indirect costs for institutions, is \$65,000. Travel costs anticipated for participant recruitment and data collection and domestic travel to train Drs. Power and Leff and their research team on the school-based data collection procedures is estimated at \$5000.00. Operating supplies to manage the multi-site data collection is estimated at \$60,000. Operating expenses include expenses for personnel, psychological protocols and scoring programs, participant incentives for parents, teachers, and student participants, and clerical expenses such as printing, postage and long distance calling for conference calls.

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