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African American Mothers Talk to their Preadolescents about Honesty and Lying

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Abstract

Objectives: While existing work points to the ways parenting behaviors and specific value socialization approaches influence children's internalization of moral values (Baumrind, 1972; Hoffman, 2001; Grusec & Davidov, 2010), little work has considered the experiences of African American and lower income families. The current study capitalized on the availability of 53 video-recorded mother-preadolescent conversations about their disagreements from the Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project (Vogel et al., 2010).

Methods: Using inductive analysis, we assessed mothers' affective tone, communication styles, and message content during discussion of problems involving honesty and lying.

Results: Mothers tended to display warm yet firm affect, incorporate both autonomy-supportive and dominant-directive communication styles, assert that lying is never acceptable, and explain why lying is problematic.

Conclusions: Mothers' affect, communication styles, and message content reflected a no-nonsense approach to transmitting values about honesty to their children. To our knowledge, the current study is the first qualitative observational investigation of low-income African American mothers' conversations regarding honesty with their children.

Keywords

Value socialization; Honesty; Preadolescence; Parenting; African American Families

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Lying, common in childhood and adolescence, is widely frowned upon by parents. (Cumsille, Darling, & Martinez, 2010). Parents across societies value moral conduct and aim to promote children's internalization of moral values so that they can function in desired ways at home and in society (Grusec, 2002). At the same time, there are nuances that vary across cultures and social classes in expected standards and ways of transmitting them to the next generation (Grusec & Davidov, 2010; Hardy, Padilla-Walker, & Carlo, 2008; Hoffman, 2001). The purpose of the current study was to identify patterns in the content and manner in which low-income African American mothers impart their standards regarding honesty

during conversation with their preadolescent children. Pre-adolescence is an important period to consider in parenting research, as the transition from middle childhood to adolescence involves intrapersonal and interpersonal changes that have implications for openness to parental influence and for the navigation and internalization of values (e.g., Booker & Dunsmore, 2017; Kambam & Thompson, 2009; Smith-Bynum et al., 2016).

Existing theoretical and empirical work points to cultural similarities and differences in the socialization approaches parents use to encourage children's internalization of moral values (e.g., Grusec & Davidov, 2010; Hardy et al., 2008; Hoffman, 2001). The positive effects of warm responsiveness and clear articulation of guidelines for acceptable behavior in the context of autonomy support appear to be cross-culturally applicable (Chirkov, 2014; LeCuyer & Swanson, 2017; Steinberg et al., 1992). At the same time, researchers have identified characteristics of positive parenting that are more characteristic of African American than European American families. This research on parenting styles has called attention to the beneficial impacts for African American children of high family interconnectedness, parental vigilance regarding social risks, firm limit-setting with clear communication of expectations and standards, and attention to fostering racial awareness and pride (Brody et al., 2006; McWayne et al., 2018; Smith-Bynum et al, 2016; Varner et al., 2018). Thus, while the results of within-group research with African American and European American families similarly support the benefits of authoritative parenting practices, higher levels of control and distinct strategies that may address discrimination and neighborhood-related risks characterize positive parenting in African American families. These additions highlight the importance of meaning-making and individual and socio-ecological contextualizing factors that afford or constrain parental value transmission (Jackson-Newsom et al., 2008; Murry et al., 2014; Spencer, 1995).

The current study was initiated in hopes of contributing depth to knowledge about the "what" and "how" of low-income African American mothers' transmission of moral values to their children. The focus was on what mothers say to 10- and 11-year-old children about honesty and lying. So as to support an open approach to unexpected patterns, we opted for an inductive analysis of observed conversations on the topic. In keeping with past research indicating that affective tone, the content of value statements, and the style in which parents communicate their values operate jointly to influence children (Caughy et al., 2017; Grusec and Goodnow, 1994), we focused on these three aspects of mothers' efforts to transmit values concerning honesty and lying.

Maternal Affective Tone While Talking about Honesty and Lying

Children may read parental emotions as barometers of the seriousness of the issue at hand (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Talwar et al., 2015). Many studies distinguish between negativity and positivity in maternal affect during interactions with children. However, less attention has been paid to a third affective tone that can be described as *firm, but not harsh*. Researchers have speculated that African American parents' firmness in guidance and disciplinary situations is protective, given that it is grounded in awareness that their children are growing up in a prejudiced society where they risk severe punishments should they defy

authority figures or disregard mainstream societal norms (Brody & Flor, 1998; Jackson-Newsom et al., 2008; Smith-Bynum et al., 2014).

Following from this line of research, we coded mothers' predominant affective tone as falling into one of four possible categories (neutral, warm, firm, or negative) while talking to their children about honesty. To provide a point of reference, we compared maternal affective tone at the beginning of the videotaped session, when mothers and children were deciding which topics to discuss, with maternal affective tone during the minutes when conversation about honesty and lying was taking place. We wanted to know if mothers' affective tone would change from neutral or positive during the minutes when they were choosing the topics they would discuss to firm or negative during the minutes when they discussed honesty. We expected—in line with the ability of firm affect to garner youths' attention (Hoffman, 2001) and tendencies for African American parents to set a firm, yet warm tone (Brody & Flor, 1998; Rious et al., 2019; Smith-Bynum et al., 2016)—that sample mothers would shift from warm or neutral affective tones to more firm, but not hostile, affective tones.

Communication Style

Brody and Flor (1998) popularized the term "no-nonsense parenting" to describe a parenting style they found to be characteristic of rural, low-income African American families. The style involves strictness and clarity about desired expectations alongside expressions of warmth and care (see also McLoyd, 1990, 2006). Firm and no-nonsense approaches during talk about behavioral standards is associated with positive child and adolescent outcomes in both low- and middle-income African American families (Lamborn et al., 1996; Smetana et al., 2002). Accordingly, we endeavored to identify the communication styles the mothers participating in our study used when talking to their children about honesty and lying. We wanted to know the extent to which mothers used autonomy-supportive and power-assertive strategies. Examples of autonomy-supportive strategies would include inviting children to discuss their perspectives, explaining reasons why honesty is important, and helping children think through appropriate responses to difficult situations. In contrast, power-assertive strategies would include threats of punishment and simple directives to follow parental rules. In one interview-based study with middle-income African American parents of early adolescents, most parents reported that it is more important to set strict rules for behavior than to foster independence (Smetana & Chuang, 2001). However, in that study parents were not asked *how* they convey their strict rules to their children.

Most research indicates that when maternal feedback on children's behaviors is delivered in an autonomy-supportive way, children tend to adopt parental values as their own (Grolinick & Deci, 1997; Ryan & Deci, 2000). For example, Bureau and Mageau (2014) demonstrated that adolescents' perception of parental autonomy support is positively associated with their endorsement of the value of honesty. At the same time, research on socialization in families living in high-risk neighborhoods, suggests that more controlling parenting strategies can be adaptive and acceptable to children and adolescents (Ispa-Landa, 2016; McElhaney & Allen, 2001). This may be because in such environments, children understand parental strictness to be legitimate and motivated by caring. For African American families concerned about

safeguarding their children in a prejudiced society, high control may be necessary (Hughes et al., 2006; Rious et al., 2019; Smetana, 2002). Accordingly, power-assertive approaches do not appear to constrain African American and European American youths' feelings of autonomy in similar ways (Phinney et al., 2005).

The Content of Mothers' Messages about Honesty and Lying

In addition to documenting the affective tone and communication styles evident in mothers' comments to their children about honesty and lying, we identified themes in the content of mothers' messages. For example, we wanted to know what mothers told preadolescents they should and should not do, and the specific nature of their reasons—the *what* and *why* of shared values. Would they, like parents in some cultural groups (DePaulo & Jordan, 1982), teach flexibility in the moral domain of honesty, such that select forms of lies (i.e., "white lies") are acceptable? Or, would mothers in this sample discourage all types of lying? How would they define honesty? Further, would mothers' comments to their children emphasize what they should not do (lie), or would they emphasize what they should do (tell the truth). In one study, researchers found that classic moral stories promoted honesty when they emphasized the positive consequences of honesty but not when they emphasized the negative consequences of lying (Lee et al., 2014). We examined whether these and/or other unique honesty-lying socialization strategies were employed by our sample of African American mothers. Use of inductive analysis allowed for the emergence of themes we did not anticipate at the outset.

The Current Study and Research Questions

The ways in which African American mothers use discourse to socialize moral topics with children remain understudied. We capitalized on the availability of videotaped mother-child discussions from the Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project, grade 5 follow-up protocol (Vogel et al., 2010) to examine how African American mothers with low-income backgrounds discuss honesty-related values and concerns about lying with their pre-adolescent children. We aimed to describe aspects of African American mothers' approaches to discussion of honesty issues by focusing on three questions. First, what affective tone did sample mothers display when engaged in discourse with their children, and did this tone differ from earlier, "lower risk" portions of the interaction? Second, what were the communication styles mothers used in discourse with their children? And third, what content did mothers emphasize?

Method

Participants

Our sample was drawn from a larger sample of 172 African American mothers who participated in the 5th grade wave of the Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project (EHSREP) in 2007 – 2009 and whose conversations with their children during the Parent-Child Discussion Task had been videotaped and later transcribed for two other studies. Among the 172 mothers, 53 (31%) discussed honesty or lying with their children; this was the sample for the current study. All children were 10 or 11 years old ($M = 10.65$, $SD = .48$).

Mothers' average age was 32.90 years (SD = 5.26, range = 26 – 49). Participants resided in eight states scattered across the U.S.

Approximately half of the children (50.9%) lived with their mothers only, 28.3% of the children lived with their mothers and fathers, and 11.3% with their mothers and mothers' romantic partners. The remainder (9.5%) lived with their mothers and various extended family members (e.g., grandparents, aunts, uncles).

Seven (13.2%) of the mothers had not completed high school, 30 (37.7%) had high school diplomas, 23 (43.3%) had post-high school vocational school or Associate's degree diplomas, and 13 (24.5%) had attended some college. Few (7.6%) had Bachelor's degrees. Figures for welfare participation (52.8%), children's eligibility for reduced-price lunches (92.5%), income-to-needs ratios (M = 1.38, SD =1.13, range = .10 – 5.98 in 2007–2009, and family household income (M = $27,200, SD = $25,423.15, median = $22,500), indicate modest means. Forty-five percent of the mothers were employed full time; 11 percent were employed part-time. Thirty percent were unemployed. Employment data for the other 13% are missing.

Procedure

Demographic information was collected at the time of enrollment in the EHSREP and at each of the ensuing data collection waves. When the children were in 5th grade, 2-hour home visits were arranged. The current study focuses on the Parent-Child Discussion Task, which was administered close to the conclusion of the visit. Mothers and children were asked to sit together and were handed 15 cards, each naming an issue that was a common source of parent-child disagreement (e.g., chores, school/homework, honesty and lying). The directions were to spend 8 minutes choosing three of the issues and then discussing them to try to find solutions. Dyads were assured that it was not necessary to solve all three problems. Those who finished talking before 8 minutes had elapsed were asked to choose other issues to talk about until 8 minutes had passed. At the end, research assistants asked children to tell how they had solved their problems. Discussions about honesty and lying varied in length (M = 80.5 seconds, SD = 63.3; range = 8 – 287s). In most cases (n = 32; 66%), mothers unilaterally decided to discuss this topic; In 18% of the cases, the topic was chosen by children.

Discussions were transcribed verbatim by trained undergraduate research assistants. The process of transcribing involved two phases: an original transcription followed by checking and editing by a second research assistant. For each videotape, the original transcriptionist or the checker was African American. Two example transcriptions are provided in the Appendix.

Inductive Analysis

We used qualitative methods to arrive at the affective, stylistic, and content themes that characterized mothers' discourse. Coding proceeded in four passes, which we present in the chronological order that they took place. In the first pass, we identified the person (mother or child or both together) *who initiated* talk about honesty or lying.

The remaining passes were focused on analysis of the ensuring conversations about honesty and lying. In the second pass, we coded for *message content*: the specific problem(s) being addressed and the rationales and solutions offered by mothers. For example, mothers' comments about lies regarding homework completion were coded as "school and homework" and their warnings that one lie tends to lead to another were coded as "spiral of lies." During the third pass, we focused on *communication style* – the strategies that mothers used to arrive at problem resolution. For instance, when mothers told of a time when they themselves were honest, we coded their comments as "mother uses self as model." Codes were entered in NVivo 12 (NVivo 12, 2018), a software program that aids in the management of qualitative data.

For the fourth pass, we reviewed the videotapes at two time points: at the beginning of the session, when mothers and children were choosing the topics to discuss; and during the actual discussions about honesty and lying. In each of these sections, we determined whether mother's *predominant affect tone* was (a) positive, i.e., *warm*, bright, or cheery; (b) *firm*, but not harsh, conveying the seriousness of the message; (c) *negative* or critical; or (d) *neutral* or low intensity. This was the only coding scheme that was determined prior to the beginning of data analysis; in other words, it was arrived at deductively rather than inductively.

During each weekly meeting, the first five authors assigned themselves a set of transcripts that each would code independently. During the subsequent meeting, the team compared independently identified codes and honed operational definitions. In cases of ambiguity or disagreement, we discussed the nuances of code definitions until we had arrived at consensus.

We used the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to eliminate redundant codes and to group specific codes into superordinate themes. For example, "Mother asks Child why honesty is important," "Mother teaches perspective-taking," "Mother explains why," and "Mother invokes moral lesson" were grouped together into the superordinate code, "Mother wants Child to understand why." Only aggregated codes that pertained to at least 20% of the sample are reported in this article. The operational definitions of all codes are shared in Table 1.

Key Points about the Authors

Guidelines for establishing the trustworthiness of qualitative research require researchers to consider how their societal positions and personal experiences may be influencing their selection of topic and their perspectives on the data they have collected (Levitt et al., 2018). In that spirit, we share some relevant details about the authors.

The first author is a professor trained in topics of parental emotion socialization and autobiographical reminiscing in African American communities. The second author is a professor who has a longstanding interest in early childhood education, childrearing values and how parents transmit them in diverse cultural and socioeconomic contexts. The third, fourth, and fifth authors were doctoral students researching culturally diverse families and youth. The graduate students assisted in the development of coding schemes and ratings for a larger study of mother-child interactions in a large, low-income multi-ethnic sample. The

sixth author is a professor who has studied parents, families and youth from culturally-diverse groups.

Findings

Mothers' Affective Tone During Discussion of Honesty and Lying

Table 2 presents the number of mothers evidencing each category of affective tone during topic selection and during the honesty and lying conversation. Mothers were most likely to exhibit neutral ($n = 25$) or warm ($n = 25$) affective tone during the initial, topic-selection phase of the discussion task. However, when turning to the actual discussion of honesty and lying, 40% ($n = 21$) shifted to a firm tone ($n = 21$), indicating that the topic at hand was serious. Tanisha's interaction with her son exemplified this transition. She shifted from warm initial affect to a firm, serious tone when discussing the importance of honesty. Throughout the discussion, she pressed her son for insights about why lying is a problem and discussed in detail the ways he should handle situations to be more honest—often pausing or stressing certain words to emphasize the importance of the message. Other mothers maintained neutral ($n = 16$) or warm ($n = 11$) affective tones throughout the session. For example, during the topic selection period, Jennifer laughed with her daughter as she placed topics in a pile to discuss later. She and her daughter continued with a lighter conversation about honesty and lying that included small jokes and laughter, even as she criticized her daughter's frequent lying ("but you lying it up") and told her she should be honest ("you shouldn't lie; you should tell the truth"). Only five mothers used a negative tone at either phase.

Communication Styles During Discussion of Honesty and Lying

Dominant-Directive—We classified several approaches as dominant-directive because they involved *taking control* of the conversation to assert desired standards of behavior. Fifty of the mothers showed this pattern. Dominant-directive strategies included *not letting children off the hook* by pressing children to continue to talk about honesty and lying even when children were clearly reluctant to do so ($n = 13$), *criticizing children's dishonest* actions and statements ($n = 32$), asking rhetorical questions about how one should behave and making straightforward statements about the importance of being honest ($n = 38$). Shonda displayed multiple dominant-directive approaches in re-directing the discussion with her son and challenging his responses:

Shonda: How come you never told me that they were picking on you at school? That's lying, I ask you every day how was school? And you always come home and say "good". You didn't tell me anyone was bothering you. And just because you didn't lie, if you don't tell me that's still lying. That's not telling the truth. So what are we gonna do about that?

Son: I don't know.

Shonda: What do you mean you don't know? You're supposed to come home and tell your mother…Why, why do you feel like you can't tell your mother when someone is bothering you?

Son: No one picks on me.

Shonda: No one picks on you?

Son: No.

Shonda: So, are you lying now?

Autonomy-Supportive—Most (n = 42) mothers asked questions and made comments reflective of autonomy supportive, guided teaching (Grusec & Davidov, 2010; Joussemet, 2008): *explaining* why honesty is preferable to lying or teaching a moral lesson (n = 33); and *inviting openness* from children by asking children for solutions or their perspectives about the problem of lying (n = 33). Most requests for help generating solutions were stated in a straightforward fashion, as when Latisha stated the problem and asked her daughter, "Being honest is a big problem that we have. So, what are we gonna do about that?" Further, mothers' attempts to validate and accept children's perspectives and solutions were often bolstered by their use of reasoning in providing feedback to children. Christina showed this in responding to and expanding on her son's plan to reduce lying:

> That's a good plan. Cause there's no reason to lie. I always tell you, telling you [that] telling the truth is easier—maybe not easier—but it's better than lying. Cause you get in trouble for lying a whole lot more than telling the truth. Right?

Autonomy-supportive styles were often used *alongside* dominant directive approaches. In our sample, 39 mothers (73.6%) used an autonomy supportive style (i.e., inviting openness from children) at one point of the discussion, and a dominant-directive style (i.e., criticizing children's behaviors) at another point.

Commenting Briefly—The conversation of 10 dyads about honesty with children included only one or two conversational turns. We termed these conversations *brief* because they involved simple statements that children should not lie, or should tell the truth, but with minimal reasoning or additional input.

Message Content During Discussion of Honesty and Lying

The inflexible position that lying is *never* the right option was striking in this sample (n = 33). Destiny, for example, was adamant that, "you should always tell the truth. No matter what it is. Tell the truth and we good…and we don't have no problem." Kaisha also pressed this message, stating that "Number 1, lying is my biggest pet peeve, and you know that. I don't like when you lie to me because it's pointless for you to lie…".

Other messages can be grouped into those that contained lessons about the *negative consequences* of lying (avoidance messages) and those that contained lessons about the *positive consequences* of being honest (approach messages). Messages about avoiding lying were much more common than messages about becoming more honest, and most mothers (88.9%) who mentioned the positive consequences of being honest below also pointed out the negative consequences of lying at some point of the discussion. We focus on these content themes below.

The point that lying is *never* permissible ($n = 33$) tended to be accompanied by points about the negative consequences of lying – why it should be avoided. Mothers explained that lying *destroys trust* ($n = 13$), *creates burdens for the mother* if she must explain her child's behavior to authority figures such as teachers ($n = 8$), and *makes problems worse for children* because they will eventually be found out ($n = 7$). One example that encapsulated some of this emphasis on avoiding lying comes from Diana's discussion with her son:

> You just don't want to get in trouble… But I think what me, Grandma, and everybody else want you to realize is that you're gonna get in trouble regardless if you tell the truth or if you lie. But if you lie, it makes the situation worse. So, you actually come out better just telling the truth because if there is a punishment, then it will be, you know, not as severe because it would be that, okay you did something wrong just like everybody does, but you told the *truth* about it.

Only nine mothers in our sample emphasized the benefits of being honest. Among these, the most common was the point that one feels freer after telling the truth. Gaby, for example, told her daughter that "honesty gets you to be able to do whatever you want," to help her understand that being honest can help manage concerns about getting in trouble for having made a mistake.

Discussion

We analyzed low-income African American mothers' discourse about honesty and lying with their pre-adolescent children, finding that mothers were warm as well as firm while engaging with children, that for the most part their communication styles combined dominant directiveness with autonomy support, and that they were inflexible in holding that lying is never acceptable. Other researchers have also used observational methods to gain insight into African American mothers' contributions to their children's positive development (e.g., Caughy et al., 2017; Smith-Bynum et al., 2016), but the current study is unique in its focus on inductive analysis of mothers' comments specifically about issues concerning their preadolescent children's honesty. The current findings add to our understanding of how low-income African American mothers engage in value socialization with their preadolescent children. African American discourse about moral topics remains understudied, and there is a particular dearth of studies addressing the strategies that African American mothers use to instill moral values in their children.

Mothers' Affective Tone

Two broad patterns concerning affective tone emerged. First, during the discussion about honesty and lying, the modal tone mothers set was firm (40%), transitioning from neutral or positive facial and voice expressions as topics were being chosen to firm when the topic at hand was honesty or lying. Consistent with Hoffman's (2001) notion that shifts to firmness in tone grab children's attention, the shift we observed likely signaled to children that their mothers viewed this topic as highly important. Importantly, firmness of tone should be distinguished from harshness (Brody & Flor, 1998; Rious et al., 2019; Smetana, 2000). Instances of negative affect were few even as children were called out for previous lies. As scholars have noted, the use of a firm tone of voice not only enhances the likelihood that the

child will attend to the mother's moral messages; it might also reinforce respect toward authority (Hughes et al., 2006; Smetana, 2002).

Mothers' Communication Styles

Two communication styles predominated during the discussions about honesty and lying. Most mothers used dominant directive styles that emphasized their authority. However, dominant direction was used *alongside* autonomy supportive approaches that included elicitation of children's perspectives and guidance about the reasons why being honest or avoiding lying is important.

Mothers demonstrated demandingness by *refusing to let children off the hook* – to insist that conversations about honesty and lying continue even when children tried to change the subject. Another, related, strategy was to *clearly communicate standards* about honest behavior. These strategies are consistent with firm parenting styles (Brody & Flor, 1998; Rious et al., 2019) and could reflect the challenges that African American families face — the need to carefully adhere to rules in a prejudiced society (Keyes et al, 2015). For children, these approaches likely signal mothers' resolve that they listen and comply (Hoffman, 2001).

There is evidence across cultures that parental autonomy support is linked to positive child development, including internalization of prosocial values (Collins et al., 1997; Bureau & Mageau, 2014; Deci & Ryan, 2000). About three-fourths of the mothers in the current sample used at least one autonomy supportive strategy to instill the value of honesty. These included asking children to reflect on the reasons they had lied, providing reasons why lying is harmful and honesty is desirable, and asking children to help generate ways to keep themselves from lying. Some of these discussions provided scaffolding about possible obstacles to honesty and how children might handle them. For example, some mothers coached children through elaborative ideas about how they might better handle responsibilities (e.g., homework and chores) and temptations from peers so as to avoid the "need" to cover up by lying. In such conversations, children may have benefited from the advantages of scaffolded reasoning (Turner & Berkowitz, 2005; Vygotsky, 1997/1926).

There may be a delicate "ideal" balance between directiveness and autonomy support. That is, directiveness, while useful to a degree, at high levels may push the child away from the parent (Grusec & Davidov, 2010; Irons, Gilber, Baldwin, Baccus, & Palmer, 2006; Smetana et al., 2002). This might be why, for example, African American mothers are perceived by their children and adolescents as blending warm and demanding approaches (e.g., Rious et al., 2019)—they could be encouraging independent thought alongside adherence to family values and rules. Future studies that utilize inductive methods could further investigate how observed dominance and autonomy support operate together in African American families, particularly in ways that are not easily captured by existing self-report scales (e.g., Coolahan et al., 2002).

A few mothers spoke only briefly about honesty or lying before quickly moving on to other topics. These instances seemed like "missed opportunities" for greater involvement in communication of moral values. Brief mentions tended to reflect a dominant directive *or*

autonomy supportive communication style that did not allow for in-depth socialization of relevant values. Spending little time on talk about this topic could give children the impression that the topic is not important, which could have implications for the extent to which children internalize parents' values.

Research based on youth's self-reported perceptions of parental involvement as well as *observational research* on parental involvement support the importance of parental involvement and effort in the promotion of value internalization. For example, Spera's (2006) study of ethnically and economically diverse seventh and eight graders found that adolescents' perceptions of parents' involvement and monitoring were positively related to their reports of internalized academic values (i.e., learning goal pursuit, interest in school). Further, Pratt and colleagues' (1999) longitudinal study of observed parental socialization styles among White, middle income families found that mothers' responsiveness to 12-year-old's statements and fathers' critical and counterfactual statements during conversations about moral reasoning dilemmas each predicted increases in children's moral reasoning at a two-year follow-up. We know of no work that has investigated observed dominant directive and autonomy supportive approaches to moral discourse among low-income, African American families, but it is reasonable to assume that observed low engagement approaches is less likely to promote the later internalization of values by children.

Mothers' Message Content

Mothers who pointed out the folly of lying explained that it could erode others' trust in them, worsen problems in their lives because one lie leads to another, and create burdens for others. Inflexibility toward lying was common—mothers told children to *never* lie. Our results are striking in that they highlight the seriousness with which most mothers approached discussion about honesty and their apparent belief that lying is never an appropriate option. It would be useful to determine if the position that lying is never acceptable and the focus on what one should not do is more common among mothers who use predominantly dominant directive styles of communication than among mothers who use predominantly autonomy supportive styles. That is, are parenting styles associated with the extent to which children are allowed flexibility and trusted to flexibly adjust as situations demand?

In addition to the message that a lie is never acceptable, mothers discussed consequences of lies. However, messages about the positive consequences of honesty—what children *should* be doing—were rare in this sample. Most mothers did not spend time offering strategies that could promote honesty or minimize lying.

The Intersections of Affect, Style, and Content in Discourse about Honesty

Together, these themes weave together to offer new insights about value socialization within African American families, broadly reflecting African American mothers' reasoning as they problem-solved with their children. Mothers in our sample tended to display warmth and firmness when discussing honesty with their preadolescent children, creating a no-nonsense affective backdrop for the messages they wished to convey (Brody & Flor, 1998; Hoffman, 2001; Rious et al., 2019). Opportunities to promote children's autonomy by asking for their

perspectives and scaffolding opportunities to problem-solve were balanced with assertion of parental authority. Thus, they used warm styles that have traditionally been viewed as ideal (Baumrind, 1972; Jackson-Newsom et al., 2008) along with a firmer, more assertive approaches that can reflect specific concerns for children growing up in a prejudiced society (Hughes et al., 2006; Smetana, 2002; Smetana & Chuang, 2001). The bulk of these warm, yet firm conversations focused on clear rules for children (i.e., lying is *never* acceptable) and the reasons for them (i.e., lying will make your life more difficult down the road). Such rule-setting accords with the standards that African American youths expect and accept from their parents (Bureau & Mageau, 2014; Ispa-Landa, 2016; McElhaney & Allen, 2001). Jointly, these findings add rich insights and nuance about African American and low-income mothers' value socialization with children.

Limitations and Future Directions

The findings of this study are limited to low-income African American mothers who were willing to be involved in an intervention program and who elected to discuss honesty and lying during the Parent-Child Discussion Task. Future research including larger samples with ethnically and socioeconomically diverse families is required to replicate and expand findings. Further, work that includes fathers, father-figures, and other relatives who influence children's conceptions of morality remains important (see Cabrera et al., 2018).

Most of the mothers and children in our sample were not visibly phased by the presence of a research assistant and video camera. However, we understand the conversations we observed may not be consistent with conversations held when only family members are present. As a step toward ascertaining the ecological validity of the conversation task, future research could include post-session interviews or questionnaires asking both parties to reflect on the typicality of the points they and their partners made during the sessions. Future research could also benefit from protocols that allow dyads more time to talk or that ask them to discuss hypothetical dilemmas involving honesty problems. In addition to future examinations of the generalizability and validity of the patterns we observed, it will be important to conduct research on the effectiveness of each pattern in furthering mothers' aims to deter children from lying and to instill in them the desired commitment to always speak the truth.

Despite the study limitations, the findings provide a window into the ways low-income African American mothers talk to their children about honesty, an issue of clear significance to them. It is of great importance that educators, other practitioners, and policy-makers understand and respect the efforts that the mothers in this group are making to raise children with positive values. If any advice is to be given, it would be that the many stakeholders in African American children's development should recognize and appreciate the ways these children's parents show high commitment to the value of honesty. It is also important to recognize that some of the strategies parents use to convey high valuing of honesty may look different from the strategies used by parents in other socioeconomic or ethnic groups. In the sample we observed, commitment to raising children who would tell the truth in all circumstances was evident in the firmness of their affect as they instructed their children about the truth-telling they expected, and in the mix of directive statements and autonomy-

supportive questions and explanations they employed to convince children that honesty was in their families' best interests. So much of the research on this population is about risk; it is important that their strengths be given equal or more attention.

Acknowledgments

Appendix Two Examples of Honesty Discourse

Example 1:   Audrey with her son

Audrey: Honesty and lying.

Son: Yes.

Audrey: Why'd you choose this one first?

Son: Because, like, sometimes when, like, you tell, you ask me about something and I tell you…you always know that I'm lying or not. And sometimes I'm telling the truth.

Audrey: Okay, what do you mean by, you, "I always know when you're lying?"

Son: You tell me that I'm lying.

Audrey: So if you know that I'm gonna find out that you're lying, or if you already know, that I always know when you're lying, why do you still lie?

Son: Sometimes I lie just because I get in trouble. Just because I'm gonna get in trouble. Or sometimes you know when I'm lying, but I'm really telling the truth but you just don't know.

Audrey: Do you think it's unfair of me to think that you're lying when you are really telling the truth?

Son: Mm [affirmative]

Audrey: Why?

Son: mm because I think you should know when I'm lying, like it's like your job as a mother, like, know in your head that I'm lying or not, like, understand that [unclear]

Audrey: Okay, but what's gonna happen when you're really telling me the truth and I don't believe you?

Son: The reason that that happens is I lie so much, that the first time I'm telling the truth it's like you don't believe me and then I get into really bad stuff.

Audrey: So what we gonna do about that? 'Cause that's a [unclear] problem. If somebody come to me and tell me you did something wrong and you say, "Oh no, Mother I didn't do that," I'm gonna, you know, if you're always lying I'm gonna think that you're lying. I'm not gonna believe you, I'm gonna believe the person. So what are we gonna do about that? Cuz that's a serious problem.

Son: Mmm. Just so I won't lie to you, we could like, whenever I come home and you're home [unclear] we should, we should, me and you should stop what we're doing and spend some alone time and talk about my feelings and…

Audrey: You don't think we do that enough?

Son: mmm yeah we do but the days that I come home late we should do that…so I can calm down so I won't be nervous about lies.

Audrey: So you lie when you're nervous?

Son: Yeah [unclear].

Audrey: Okay, so you know sometimes I'm tired when I come home from work, but if you really want to have time for us to talk you have to let me know. You have to say, "Mom, I know you're tired, but can we do this, can we do that," and I'll try harder.

Son: Okay.

Example 2: Margaret and her daughter

Margaret: Discipline…So, what about the honesty and lying? That's a major one.

Daughter: Yeah.

Margaret: What's up with the lying? You tend to lie a lot.

Daughter: Sometimes maybe I just try to be cool, or something or not.

Margaret: I think that could be, I think that is a very good answer.

Daughter: And the other way is 'cause I don't wanna get in trouble.

Margaret: But 'member what I told you before?

Daughter: mmhm.

Both: That it'll get ya in more trouble.

Margaret: Exactly. So, when you tell the truth, that might save you. Even if it's bad. I can deal with stuff better if you're telling the truth than if you lie.

Daughter: Mhm.

Margaret: Then I don't know, then I don't know who to believe. Like the incident that happened yesterday.

Daughter: Yeah.

Margaret: That's not to me a really serious incident. You guys are kids, you guys are gonna hang out amongst each other. You guys are gonna talk about each other. That's what kids do. But you…You lie so much that no one never knows what the truth might be, you know, you coulda truthfully not said nothin to that girl and, you know and she just lied to her Mother but we don't know because you lie a lot. So we can't trust you because we know [Daughter's Name] has a history of lying. Right?

Daughter: Mother, Grandma told you what she told me?

Margaret: What's that?

Daughter: She said that if she wants to believe me, she said I have to put in other words, like when I say, I say, "I didn't do it, I mean it." Like when I say, "I mean it" that ….

Margaret: Well, no you can't do it like that cause then if you wanna lie you'll just say that too. "I mean it".

Daughter: Oh.

Margaret: Yeah, see? You just gotta start telling the truth, and let us have records of you telling the truth.

Daughter: Mhm.

Margaret: And then we can trust you better.

Daughter: Ok.

Margaret: But trust takes time. You can't just tell us the truth one time and then lie to us five more times and then we're just gonna believe you that's not gonna happen.

Daughter: Ok.

Margaret: So, lying. Even if it's bad…

Daughter: Mhm.

Margaret: …tell the truth. Then we develop a trust for you then we can work things out better than you just lying to us cause then that. Like yesterday you know Grandma called me sayin' that, you know, that I'm barkin' at you but I sat back and I thought about it and I'm like kids is kids. I don't really you know. I don't really care about what kids do as long as you didn't put your hands on her or vice versa

Daughter: I didn't.

Margaret: Yeah, I don't care what you guys tell each other, or if you don't like each other, or her earrings is fake. Who cares; you're kids. Oh well. Kids are gonna say that. But I can't have your back because you lie so much. So anyway…

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Public Significance Statement:

African American mothers with low-income backgrounds were observed during conversations with their preadolescent children. The seriousness with which mothers viewed the goal of honesty and their disapproval of lying was conveyed in facial expression and voice tone (warm but adamant, firm), their unequivocal statements that lying is never acceptable, and their explanations that lying erodes trust, leads to further dishonesty, and create burdens for others.

Table 1

Operational Definitions of Inductive Analysis Codes

Code	Larger Theme	Definition
Not letting the child off the hook	Style (Dominant-Directive)	Mother presses or redirects the conversation multiple times to build her argument/ maintain the child's attention to the topic.
Criticizing the child	Style (Dominant-Directive)	Mother challenges the child's behaviors, attitudes, and/or reasoning, showing distrust of the validity or sincerity of the child's claims.
Asking rhetorical questions	Style (Dominant-Directive)	Mother asks questions that have only one "correct" answer.
Explaining	Style (Autonomy-Supporting)	Mother shares reasons why lying is unacceptable or honesty is the best option.
Inviting openness	Style (Autonomy-Supporting)	Mother asks for the child's perspective or views or recognizes and validates the child's arguments/claims.
Commenting briefly	Style (Brief)	Mother moves on to another topic after only one or two conversational turns about honesty or lying.
Lying is never acceptable	Content (Negative Consequences)	Mother explicitly says that there are no instances when lying may be tolerated as a way to handle a situation.
Lying destroys trust	Content (Negative Consequences)	Mother explains that lying can threaten social relationships within and beyond the home by diminishing trust.
Lying creates burdens for Mother	Content (Negative Consequences)	Mother explains that lying increases obstacles for Mother, either by making it more difficult to defend Child or by threatening Mother's standing with others.
Lying makes problems worse for children	Content (Negative Consequences)	Mother explains that the child's lying will lead to increased punishment or other setbacks, thus undermining children's attempts to avoid problems
Being honest sets you free	Content (Positive Consequences)	Mother explains that honesty can promote Child's autonomy and opportunities to pursue meaningful goals

Table 2

Counts of Mothers' Affect Tone During Card Selection and During Discourse about Honesty and Lying

Baseline Affective Tone	Affective Tone during Honesty Discussion				
	Firm	Negative	Neutral	Warm	*Total*
Firm	0	2	1	0	*3*
Neutral	12	1	11	1	*25*
Warm	9	2	4	10	*25*
Total	*21*	*5*	*16*	*11*	*53*

Note. $\chi^2(6) = 24.69$, $p < .001$.