Understanding the Context and Frequency of Racial Barrier Socialization Among African American Emerging Adults

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Background

- **Ethnic-Racial socialization (ERS)** is a culturally specific parenting practice where parents give verbal or nonverbal messages to teach youth about race (Hughes et al., 2006).
- **Racial barrier messages (RBMs)** refer to parents giving youth in order to prepare them for bias and racial inequalities (Neblett et al., 2008).
- Most ERS research focuses on how frequently youth receive messages and on labeling the types of messages received.
- There is a lack of research examining context in which ERS messages are given and there are few articles about messages given to African American emerging adults (defined as 18-25 year olds).
- One of very few studies (i.e. Juang et al., 2018) looked at context by coding how ERS messages were given by second-generation Asian American parents.
- Results supported the idea that parents promote an awareness of discrimination via proactive (given as a result of parental experience of discrimination but not connected to youth’s own experience of an event) and reactive (given in response to a specific discriminatory event experienced by youth) ERS practices.
- It is important to examine context to understand more about how RBMs influence African American emerging adults during a time of many new transitions in life.

Research Questions & Hypotheses

1. **In what context do African American emerging adults receive racial barrier messages?**
   
   **Hypothesis 1:** Based on a review of racial socialization articles (e.g. Hughes et al., 2006; Neblett et al., 2008) we think important contexts will be: age of receiving messages, ethnic background, and if they still live with their parents.

2. **Are these messages more frequently given proactively or reactively?**
   
   **Hypothesis 2:** Based on findings from the Juang et al. (2018) article, we think proactive messages will be given more often.

Method and Analysis

- Participants were recruited from the psychology subject pool.
- Data come from 2 out of 4 cohorts of a large survey study focused on the health and well-being of African American college students.
- Data are responses to an open-ended survey question: “Describe a specific event when your parent told you that Blacks have to work twice as hard as Whites to get ahead, or that some people may dislike you or feel better than you because of race?” (Smalls Glover, Unpublished Measure)
- Inductive coding in Nvivo was used to analyze data for context.
- 4 researchers independently coded responses and then came together to discuss and finalize themes.

Results

- Of the total 240 responses, 67 reflected the contextual theme of “transitions in adulthood”.

**Transitions in Adulthood Subthemes**

- 72% College/Post-Secondary Education
- 37% Careers/Jobs
- 12% Future Endeavors/General Statements About Future
- <1% Driving/License
- 12% About Employment
- 12% About About Family

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**Participants**

- **Sample:** 240 African American college students
- **Age Range:** 18 – 25
  - M = 18.86
  - SD = .99
- **Gender:** 80% Female, 19% Male
- **Classification:** Freshmen: 83%, Sophomore: 16%
- **Employment Status:** Full-time: 37%, Part-time: 37%, Unemployed: 25%
- **Where they live:** At home with parents: 25%, On campus: 63%, Off campus: 11%

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**Discussion**

- Many contexts in which participants received barrier messages were identified; most frequently mentioned was transitions to adulthood.
- Messages were most often given proactively which supports our hypothesis and reflects past research findings (Juang et al. 2018).
- These findings help us understand that as college students become more independent they are continuing to receive guidance from their parents about how to navigate society before discrimination happens.

**Limitations & Future Directions**

- These results may not generalize beyond this study due to specific demographics (e.g. geographic region and gender) of the sample.
- Researchers should continue to examine ERS in different contexts (e.g. school, parents experiences, events in the news, regions of the country, ethnic background).
- This study may help build the foundation for future research to continue to examine how proactive and reactive messages influence emerging adults’ success in college (e.g. academic performance, well-being and ability to cope with racial discrimination).