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Exploring Racial Variations and the Impact of Parental Attachments and Psychological Health among Diverse College Students

Paper based on a study presented at the 2009 American Counseling Association Annual Conference and Exposition,
March 19-23,
Charlotte, North Carolina



The College Years

- The college experience can be stressful due to the many challenges that students face (Allen, 1992; Kalsner & Pistole, 2003). Such challenges include:
 - Striving for academic excellence, establishing friendships, making career decisions and establishing romantic relationships.
- These stressors can be exasperated for students of color, which makes them more vulnerable to psychological distress (Rice, Cunningham & Young, 1997) .
- Researchers should delineate factors that promote psychological health among college students, particularly students of color.



Factors that Affect Psychological Health

- Parental Factors
 - Parental attachments are enduring emotional bonds between infants and their primary caregiver (Bowlby, 1969). Secure attachments are characterized by warm, supportive relationships; whereas, insecure attachments are characterized by emotional detachment and inconsistent/neglectful care.
 - Attachment security provides a psychological resilience that individuals can rely on during times of stress (Bowlby, 1977).
 - Research supports that secure attachment relationships are related to numerous positive psychological outcomes (e.g. Arbona & Power, 2003; Love, 2008).



Factors that Affect Psychological Health

- Family factors affecting psychological health include:
 - Family Identity refers to one's sense of family pride and the level of importance that an individual places on family relationships (Giordano, Cernkovich & DeMaris, 1993).
 - Trust and open communication refers to a sense of dependability and support (Giordano, Cernkovich & DeMaris, 1993).
 - Communalism refers to a sense of interconnectedness among individuals who share social bonds (Boykin & Bailey, 2000).



Literature Limitations & the Current Study

- Empirical studies have historically neglected to include adequate representations of students of color. Thus, this current study examined the extent to which attachment and family factors predicted psychological health among a racially diverse sample college students.
- Research Hypotheses:
 - (1) Parental attachments and family factors will predict high self-esteem among racially diverse students?
 - (2) Parental attachments and family factors will predict psychological health among racially diverse students?



Sample Participants: Race

Race/Ethnicity	% of Sample
African American	52.2% ($N = 165$)
Asian American	1.9% ($N = 6$)
Caucasian	39.6% ($N = 125$)
Latino/a	.3% ($N = 1$)
Biracial	2.2% ($N = 7$)
International	1.3% ($N = 4$)
Other (e.g. multiracial)	1.9% ($N = 6$)

Sample Participants: Other Information

Demographic Characteristic	% of Sample
Age: 20.68 years old ($SD = 3.94$)	
Gender	
Men	27.5% ($N = 87$)
Women	71.2% ($N = 225$)
Parental Income	\$70,000 (median)
Family Type	
Two parent (biological)	57.3% ($N = 181$)
Single parent	27.8% ($N = 88$)
Stepfamily	5.7% ($N = 18$)
Two parent (non-bio)	2.5% ($N = 8$)
Other	3.8% ($N = 12$)



Measures

- Parental Attachment:
 - Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987):
 - Trust ($\alpha = .81$)
 - Communication ($\alpha = .77$)
 - Alienation ($\alpha = .83$)
- Family Identity:
 - Home Communalism Measure (Boykin & Bailey, 2000):
 - Family Identity ($\alpha = .74$)
- Psychological Health:
 - Self Esteem Questionnaire (Dubois et al., 1996):
 - Global Self-Esteem ($\alpha = .86$)
 - Student Adaptation to College (Baker, & Siryk, 1999):
 - Personal Emotional Adjustment ($\alpha = .75$)



Preliminary Demographic Checks

- Significant racial group differences-
 - Parental income ($t = -3.38, p < .01$)
 - African Americans ($M = \$72.5K$)
 - Caucasians ($M = \$122.2K$)
 - Gender ($\chi^2 = -2.33, p < .05$)
 - More women were represented in the Caucasian group (80%), than the African American group (67%).
 - Family Type ($\chi^2 = -5.83, p < .001$)
 - A larger percentage of African Americans were from a single-parent household than other participants.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Gender	---										
2. Income	-.04	---									
3. Family Type	.02	-.14*	---								
4. Ethnicity	-.14*	.22**	-.14*	---							
5. Trust	.01	.08	-.10	.11	---						
6. Communication	-.08	.14*	-.11	.09	.81**	---					
7. Alienation	.11	-.15*	.12	-.16**	-.76**	-.67**	---				
8. Family Identity	-.12*	.03	-.04	.05	.31**	.37**	-.18**	---			
9. Communalism	-.16**	.08	-.05	.02	.17**	.27**	-.14*	.86**	---		
10. Self-Esteem	.05	.14*	-.08	.03	.31**	.26**	-.32**	.28**	.18**	---	
11. Psych. Health	-.06	.11	-.05	.03	.07	.12*	-.12*	.11	.10	.23**	---



Results: Predicting Self-Esteem

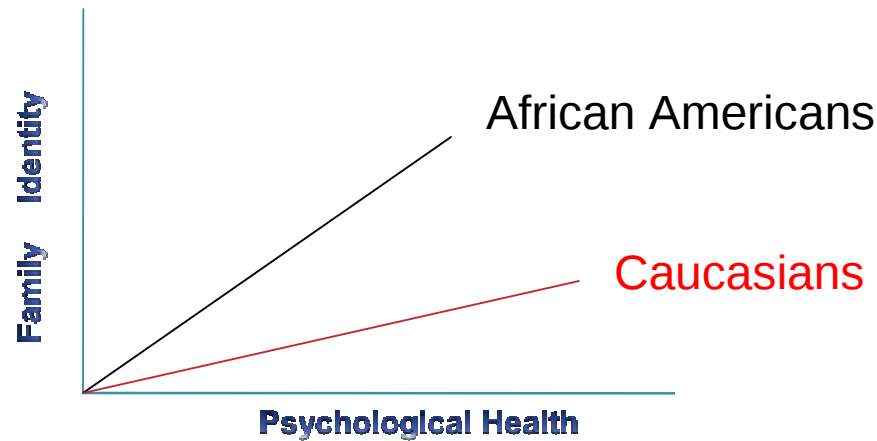
Step	Predictor	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	β
1	Gender	.19	.04	.04	.20	.13	.11
	Parental Income				.10	.01	.13*
	Family Type				-.06	.05	-.08
2	Gender	.74	.55**	.51**	.13	.09	.07
	Parental Income				.06	.00	.09
	Family Type				-.01	.03	-.01
	Ethnicity				-.09	.04	-.11*
	Trust				.53	.10	.49**
	Communication				-.01	.09	-.00
	Alienation				-.26	.08	-.25**
	Family Identity				.16	.15	.12
	Communalism				-.04	.17	-.02
3	Gender	.75	.56**	.01	.12	.09	.06
	Parental Income				.07	.00	.09
	Family Type				-.00	.03	-.14
	Ethnicity				-.10	.04	-.12*
	Trust				.53	.11	.49**
	Communication				.03	.09	.03
	Alienation				-.24	.09	-.22*
	Family Identity				.12	.17	.08
	Communalism				-.06	.19	-.04
	No significant interactions				---	---	---

Results: Predicting Psychological Health

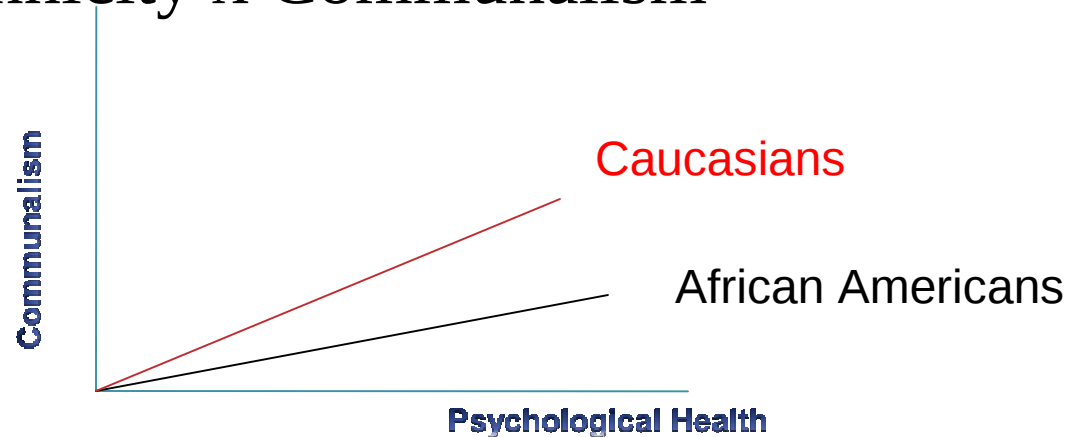
Step	Predictor	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	β
1	Gender	.12	.01	.01	.01	.18	.00
	Parental Income				.01	.00	.12
	Family Type				.04	.07	.04
2	Gender	.36	.13**	.12**	.06	.18	.02
	Parental Income				.01	.00	.07
	Family Type				.06	.07	.07
	Ethnicity				-.05	.08	-.04
	Trust				-.16	.19	-.10
	Communication				.44	.18	.28*
	Alienation				-.26	.15	-.18
	Family Identity				-.18	.28	-.09
	Communalism				.01	.34	.13
3	Gender	.40	.16*	.03	.13	.18	.05
	Parental Income				.07	.00	.07
	Family Type				.06	.07	.06
	Ethnicity				-.03	.08	-.02
	Trust				-.07	.22	-.05
	Communication				-.42	.19	.27
	Alienation				-.18	.18	-.12
	Family Identity				-.52	.32	-.25
	Communalism				.67	.38	.28^t
	Ethnicity x family identity				-.62	.27	-.34*
	Ethnicity x communalism				.60	.27	.32*

Interaction Terms Predicting Psychological Health

- Ethnicity x Family Identity



- Ethnicity x Communalism





Discussion

- Support for cross-cultural applicability of attachment theory was demonstrated.
- The influence of parental factors on psychological health did not vary by race,
 - High trust = greater self-esteem
 - Open communication = greater psychological health
 - Emotional alienation = low self-esteem.
- African American students reported higher base levels of self-esteem.



Discussion

- The influence of family factors on psychological health varied by race.
- Variations occurred in the strength of the associations,
 - Family identity is a stronger predictor of psychological health for African Americans.
 - Communalism is a stronger predictor of psychological health for Caucasians.



Counseling Implications

- Assess clients' family background as a source of support (i.e. aspects of the attachment relationship, sense of family identity and communalism).
- Encourage trust and communication between clients and parental figures and family members.
- Counselors can serve as “supplemental” models for clients by conveying supportive, emotionally warm behaviors and by encouraging autonomy in the therapeutic relationship.
- Clients can enhance psychological health by establishing secure connections with their counselors.



Counseling Implications

- Display cultural sensitivity;
 - Be aware of cultural issues; both, your own and the clients.
 - Understand the client's cultural values, norms, expectancies, and attitudes.
 - Understand how the influence of parents and family is impacted by the client's racial/ethnic background.
- Implement interventions that are culturally appropriate;
 - Culturally appropriate interventions are fundamental, as they are designed based upon the belief that in order to be effective, interventions need to consider the specific personal and shared characteristics of the client (Marin, 2006).
- Networking and normalizing;
 - Normalize the therapeutic experience.
 - Encourage clients to elicit support from supportive parental figures, friends, clergy, or other significant persons in their lives to promote psychological health.



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