



One Family, Many Races: A Study of Race Talk in Multiracial Families

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Introduction

Multiracial youth, or youth with biological parents of two different racial backgrounds, are the fastest growing racial group under the age of 18 in the United States (Saulny, 2011), yet we know little about how their parents teach them about their unique racial status. Because there are very real consequences associated with one's real or perceived racial background, it is essential to understand how parents prepare Multiracial youth for the experiences of marginalization and monoracism they may face as individuals who do not fit neatly into the racial categories prescribed by society (Harris, 2016). It is also important to learn how Multiracial families negotiate passing down culture and a sense of belonging to racial groups to their children, as these experiences have implications for their identity development and health outcomes (Hughes et al., 2006; Phinney & Ong, 2007). In addition, this study examines how parents support and validate their Multiracial child's racial experiences.



Theoretical Framework

This investigation is guided by Critical Multiracial Theory (Harris, 2016) which highlights the systemic nature of racism against Multiracial individuals. This framework also advocates for centering Multiracial voices in research.

Significance

In monoracial families, parents and children are more likely to understand and relate to one another's racial experiences, so parents are able to provide guidance for how to navigate race and racism. In Multiracial families however, each parent has a different racial background and unique racial experience, and their Multiracial child has their own unique set of experiences. For example, Multiracial youth report experiencing racism from their own family members and other monoracial members of their racial groups (Snyder, 2012). Parents may not always be aware of the struggles their children are facing because they do not have the same racial background and have never experienced these issues. Thus, this research is needed to understand how Multiracial family members are communicating with one another about race and supporting their Multiracial children.

Research Questions

Research question 1: What explicit and implicit messages do parents of Multiracial youth transmit about discrimination, racial-ethnic identity, and culture?

Research question 2: How do adolescents interpret their parents' racial-ethnic socialization messages and behaviors? Do adolescents' perceptions of messages vary based on the race and gender of their parent?

Research question 3: How do family members understand and support each other despite having different racial backgrounds and experiences? How do parents respond to their Multiracial adolescents' racial experiences? Which responses do Multiracial adolescents see as supportive?

Methodology

Step 1 Recruitment:

A diverse sample of 20 families with Multiracial adolescents will be recruited.

Step 2 Data Collection:

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with the entire family, followed by separate interviews with the adolescent and parents.

Step 3 Transcription and Coding:

Interviews will be transcribed. Two coders will code all of the transcripts. Interrater reliability will be calculated.

Step 4 Analysis:

Thematic analysis will be used to identify themes in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Innovation

While most research studies rely on either parent report or child report, research suggests that there is likely to be a discrepancy between parent and child report. Thus, the current study advances the literature by capturing the perspectives of both parents and children to further understanding of the messages parents think they convey and the ways in which these messages are received and interpreted by youth. Furthermore, by recruiting a diverse sample of families, I plan to investigate whether the race and gender of the parent plays a role in how youth perceive racial-ethnic socialization messages.



Implications

Findings will have implications for practitioners working with diverse families. Strategies drawn from the study for improving communication between parents and Multiracial youth will be made into a tip sheet and shared with the participating families and the public (including the Multiracial Families Project Facebook page).

For more information, please contact me at: Alatkin@asu.edu