

# Applying a Strengths-based Approach to Research with Marginalized Youth

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We reject bigotry.**

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# Overview

- Broader approaches to my research
- Example from recent research
- Q&A

# Psychological Research with Marginalized Populations

- Marginalized vs. at-risk (emphasis on context)
- Psychological study of marginalization
- Within group studies to highlight heterogeneity and emphasize strengths

# Applying a Risk and Resilience Framework

- Documenting adversity
- Yet acknowledging adaptive response
- Learning from processes of resilience

# Incorporating Multiple Methods

- Increasingly valuing open-ended inquiry
- Allows for discovery
- Particularly relevant when conducting research with marginalized groups

# Utilizing Research as Vehicle for Social Justice

- Situating participants' voice front and center
- Ethical practices (e.g., applied research)
- Research can help us more effectively respond to issues of oppression and inequality

“I didn’t come to school for this”

Qualitative inquiry of Black students’  
experiences of race-related stressors and role  
of natural mentors in coping



# Background

- Black students have reported experiencing various forms of discrimination which have been associated with decreased academic & psychosocial functioning
- Less is known about specific coping responses to discrimination experienced at PWIs
- Some research suggests seeking social support may be common coping strategy; not much known about role of NMRs

Harper, 2013; Hurtado & Alvarado, 2015; Museus et al., 2008

# Research Questions

- What are the race-related stressors that Black students face in the PWI context?
- How do Black students cope with these race-related stressors?
- What is the role of natural mentors in the coping process?

Student	Student Gender	Student Ethnicity	Natural Mentor	Natural Mentor Gender	Natural Mentor Ethnicity	Relationship to Student
Jermaine	Male	African American	Gus	Male	African American	Uncle
Dominick	Male	African American	Natalie	Female	African American	Academic advisor
Sean	Male	African American	Monica	Female	African American	Older friend's girlfriend
Christina	Female	Kenyan	Yvonne	Female	Kenyan	Older sister
Serena	Female	African American	Tonya	Female	African American	Former peer advisor
Sonia	Female	African American/White	No mentor interviewed			
Michelle	Female	African American	Nancy	Female	African American	Older sister
Veronica	Female	African American	Kim	Female	African American	Former resident advisor
Lisa	Female	Nigerian	Omar	Male	African American/White	Neighbor
Teresa	Female	African American	No mentor interviewed			
Vanessa	Female	Nigerian	Janay	Female	Nigerian	Older cousin
Felicia	Female	African American	Nadia	Female	African American	Academic advisor

# Methods

- Semi-structured interviews with students
  - What types of experiences, if any, have you had with discrimination since being a student at [this school]?
  - Students deal with experiences of discrimination in lots of different ways. Some students say they drink or party, or talk to friends, family, or other adults about it . . . How do you deal with these experiences?
  - Does [mentor] ever give you advice about dealing with discrimination? Tell me about the kinds of advice [mentor] gives you for dealing with discrimination.

# Methods

- Semi-structured interviews with natural mentors
  - Do you ever talk to [student] about experiences of discrimination?
  - Do you ever give [student] advice about dealing with discrimination? If so, what kinds of things do you tell them?
  - Some adults try to prepare young people for experiences of discrimination and some adults don't do this. Can you tell me more about what you do?

# Data Analysis

- Thematic analysis to identify meaningful patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006)
- Provisional codes were developed based on 6 interviews; codes were verified by second coder
- Trustworthiness of codes established through discussion among 2 primary coders and through conversations with ethnically diverse research team

# Results

- Race-related Stressors
  - Heightened awareness negative stereotypes
  - Microaggressions
  - Blatant discrimination
- Coping Responses
  - Processing
  - Selectively seeking support
  - Persisting/working harder
  - Educating White peers

# Heightened awareness of negative stereotypes (n= 8)

- Negative stereotypes: Blacks are unintelligent and lazy
- Heightened awareness stemmed from “onlyness”
- “. . . you don’t want to create the idea to the group if you come five minutes late to meetings consistently. Alright. You’re “the late Black guy” instead of just “the late person.” You don’t want to be that quiet in meetings because you don’t want to be “the lazy Black guy in our group that doesn’t pull any weight.” The other person in the group that doesn’t work could be just as quiet, but it’s just “they’re waiting to give their insights.” It’s a different vibe when you know you’re the only person who looks like you in the group.” ---Sean



# Microaggressions

(n= 10)

- Perceived as unintentional racial slights
- Most communicated insults specific to seeing Blacks as unintelligent, unattractive, monolithic, and interchangeable
- “Most of the time we don’t look anything alike [but] . . . they’ll call you by the wrong name or something. But you can have a class full of White people and you can get their names right. And it’s like only a few Black students and you mix them up. And it’s kinda just like you don’t even care enough to learn our names but you can learn everyone else’s.” -- Monica

# Blatant Discrimination

(n= 8)

- Being called racial slurs, especially in social contexts like fraternity row: “We don’t let [N-word]s in.”
- Being treated differently by professors (e.g., skipped over)
- Encountering racist posts on social media
- “I’m thinking that there are only a few people that feel this way, but then you get on Yik Yak and see all these comments and things that aren’t funny. They’re just downright racist and prejudice and discriminatory. It’s [The upvotes/likes are] going up by the second, and you’re just like, “What?” And then that sort of made me, for a minute there, question all the—this is bad but—White people I know. This is anonymous. I don’t know who said this. This could be someone who I thought was a close friend, and this is how they really feel.” --Teresa

# Cumulative Toll of Race-related Stressors

- “I didn’t come to school for this. I came to school to learn and do really well. I didn’t come to school to have to always think about racism or am I safe on campus or why did I get rejected from that party when all my friends got to go in or why did they ignore me? Is it because I’m—you know what I mean? Or why did the professor ask me this question? Or because I got into this honors program and I’m the only Black person, I have to perform well and it’s just things like that.” -- Veronica

# Processing the Event

(n= 8)

- “I mostly just take the time to process it in my head before talking to anybody.” –Christina
- “I go through what I call a vetting process first, where I go home and I’m thinking it through, before I actually verbalize a lot of this stuff.” –Dominick
- Yvonne (mentor) said she communicated to Christina the importance of being calm and encouraged her to “think objectively and logically before giving into your emotions and being reactionary.”

# Selectively Seeking Support

(n= 11)

- Talking to natural mentors and others helped them
  - process the experience
  - validate their interpretation of the event as discriminatory
  - validate their emotional response to the experience
  - cope when they were exhausted
- Students reported employing a network so as to not overwhelm one individual
- Natural mentors connected students to a host of other supportive resources (e.g., African American affairs office, Black churches, Black student orgs)

# Persisting/Working Harder

(n= 9)

- Persist: stay focused on school and not allow race-related stressors to detract them from their academic performance
- Work harder: “I try to turn them [the experiences] to the positive, so use it as almost motivation. So when my group members thought that I couldn’t do certain things, basically proving them wrong in various situations. But then also keeping in the back of my head that I probably won’t be friends with these people when I leave.” –Serena

# Persisting/Working Harder

(n= 9)

- Natural mentors reported providing these messages
  - “You’re at [the university] for a reason. Focus on school. Focus on what you want to do when you grow up, and you’ll get there either way, with or without the stigma.” – Omar
  - “I advise Black students on campus who are upset about racist comments on Yik Yak to persist rather than get frustrated, distracted, and angry by the comments because otherwise, ‘you’re the one who is taken away from the work you actually came here to do.’” – Nadia

# Educating White Peers

(n= 5)

- Educating peers who were friends, those who seemed to be open to learning, and seizing opportunities during class to educate classmates
- Intentions: increasing their White peers' self-awareness and have a ripple effect on society
- “because I don't think you can ever improve a situation just by speaking to the people who are harmed by it. You have to speak to the people who are also in a position to do the harming.” –Jermaine
- Strategy was encouraged by a few natural mentors



# Discussion

- Race-related stressors exclude students from academic and social spaces
- Race-related stressors are cumulative and omnipresent (e.g., social media)
- Staged Coping Model
  - Processing
  - Selective Support Seeking
  - Behavioral Strategy (e.g., working harder, educating White peers)

# Discussion

- Substantial overlap in student and natural mentor interviews re: coping processes
- Although natural mentors can help students navigate race-related stressors, inarguably their efforts would be better served if they could focus on enhancing students' academic success without also contending with a hostile racial climate

# Next Steps: Responding to Discovery

- Salience of online discrimination
- Shift from thinking only about coping with adversity to thinking about changing the climate
- Bystander intervention for White students to confront racist posts

Questions?

