Including Black Mothers’ Perspectives:
Adapting Racial Centrality to Mercer’s Becoming a Mother Theory
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Black Women and Motherhood

- Motherhood is a phenomenon experienced by women of various ages, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity.
- The identity and lives of Black mothers differ from other women in America.
- Black women and their families have thrived during times of tragedies such as, slavery and the Jim Crow era.
- Although Black culture in America has evolved over time, some traditions persist:
  - Elders pass tradition to younger generations through story-telling,
  - Older women in the family often pass down survival strategies to new mothers,
  - Utilizing extended family to teach young children their worth and value despite living in a society in which they are devalued and dehumanized.

Including Black Mothers’ Perspectives in Research

Due to their culture, traditions, and race, Black women have different perspectives on life and motherhood. In order to assess Black mothers’ experiences, research exploring their journey mothers must utilize a modified version of BAM to include the concept of racial centrality as described in the Multi-Dimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI).

BAM explains the complex process in which a woman transitions into motherhood. BAM provides multiple factors which influence a woman’s journey in developing her identity as a mother, including the woman’s self-esteem, self-concept, attitudes, maturity, empathy, birth experience, and health status.

The MMRI integrates several theories on racial identity which are sensitive to the historical and cultural experiences which form the unique identity of Black people. A key component of this theory is racial centrality.

Racial centrality is the extent to which one identifies herself in terms of her Black racial group. The MMRI poses that Black women’s racial centrality also influences their sense of well-being and self-esteem.

Triangulated Theories = New Perspective

By utilizing Walker and Avant’s iterative theory derivation process, the BAM theory was adapted to incorporate racial centrality. By modifying the BAM model to include racial centrality, a component of MMRI, the experiences of Black women as they transition into motherhood can be better understood.

This modification allows assessment of key concepts in BAM and racial identity in order to better understand the influence of race on Black mothers’ maternal identity, self-esteem, and their ability to adapt to their new role.

Are Black Mothers Included In Research?

Often, when Black women have been included in research related to motherhood, the focus has been exploring health disparities, deficits, and poor outcomes.

The Becoming a Mother Theory (BAM) focused on “traditional” mothers who were middle to upper-class, highly educated, and partnered White women.

References