

Racial Identity and Maternal Functioning in First-time Black Mothers

Kortney Floyd, PhD(c), MSN, RN, CPNP & Dawn Aycok, PhD, RN, ANP-BC, FAHA

Background & Significance

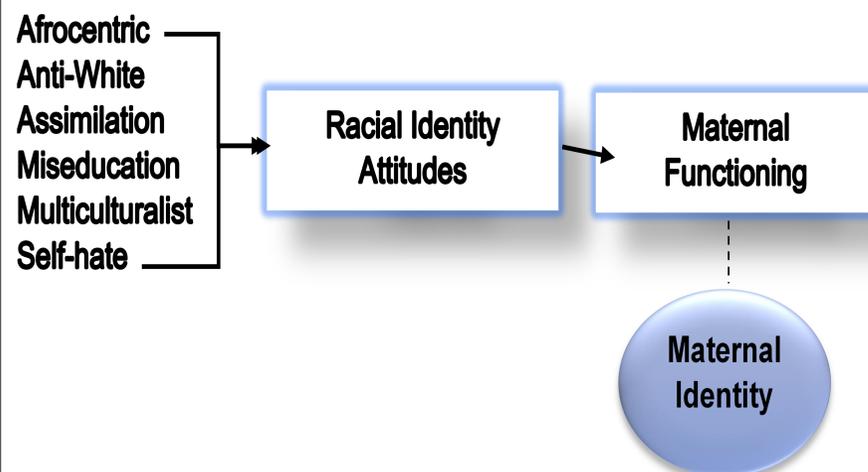
- Approximately 4 – 21% of Black mothers report experiencing postpartum depressive symptoms (PPDS).^{1,2}
- Due to cultural beliefs, Black mothers may be less likely to share their PPDS¹ with their healthcare providers. As a result, postpartum depression (PPD) may be more common in this population than statistics reveal.
- Left untreated, PPD may negatively affect Black mothers' maternal functioning, which is their ability to care for themselves and their infant.³
- An understudied concept that may help explain the experience of PPD in Black mothers is racial identity.⁵

Purpose

To assess the relationship between racial identity attitudes and maternal functioning of first-time, Black mothers during the first twelve months of the postpartum period.

Theoretical Framework

Mercer's Becoming a Mother theory⁴ and Cross's Nigrescence theory⁵ were used to guide this pilot study to better understand the influence of racial identity on Black mothers' maternal functioning.



Racial identity is the degree to which individuals define themselves with regard to their racial group membership. It has been shown to influence the self-esteem and mental well-being of Black people.⁵

Methods

- **Design:** Cross-sectional, correlational
- **Sample:** Participants recruited over two months via social media platforms and email and eligible if they: (1) self-identified as Black, (2) were first-time mothers, (3) were at least 18 years of age with an infant ≤ 12 months, and (4) had no history of depression or other mental illnesses.
- **Data Collection:** Participants electronically completed a demographic survey, the Cross's Racial Identity Scale (racial identity attitudes), and Barkin's Index of Maternal Functioning (maternal functioning) via Qualtrics software.
- **Analysis:** Descriptive statistics and Spearman's rho correlations.

Results

- Mothers ($N=33$) had a mean age of 25.7 ± 3.5 years and their infants were 6.8 ± 3.4 months.
- Most mothers were college graduates (73%), married (85%), and working full-time (48%) with a total household income of at least \$75,000 (64%).
- Overall the sample had adequate maternal functioning scores ($M=88.6 \pm 9.8$); 21% of mothers had scores <80 , indicating poor maternal functioning.

Table 1. Racial Identity of Black Mothers by Dominant Attitude Type (N=33)

Attitude Types	Definition	n (%)
Afrocentric	Takes deep interest in Black culture	9 (22.5) [†]
Anti-White	Strong hate for White people	0 (0)
Assimilation	Adopts ways/beliefs of White people to dissociate from Black culture	9 (22.5)
Miseducation	Believes negative stereotypes of Black people	1 (2.5)
Multiculturalist	Respect all cultures while having high regard for being Black	19 (47.5) [†]
Self-hate	Internalizes negative beliefs towards Black people	2 (5) [†]

[†] Of the 33 participants, 7 had two dominant racial identity attitude types. Of the 7 participants, 6 had Multiculturalist and Afrocentric identities, and 1 had Self-hate and Afrocentric identities.

Table 2. Mean Racial Identity Attitude Type Scores and Correlations with Barkin's Maternal Functioning Scores (N=33)

Attitude Types	M (SD) ^a	Total Maternal Functioning Score
Afrocentric	5.01 (1.31)	.21
Anti-White	2.0 (1.20)	-.61*
Assimilation	3.85 (1.67)	-.59*
Miseducation	3.87 (1.28)	-.18
Multiculturalist	5.68 (.83)	.53*
Self-hate	3.26 (1.45)	-.50*

* $p < .01$. ^a Possible racial identity attitude type scores range from 1-7.

- Most of the mothers with Multiculturalist as their dominant racial identity type had adequate maternal functioning ($n=17$).
- Of the mothers with poor maternal functioning ($n=7$), 5 had Assimilation as their dominant racial identity type.
- Having a positive regard toward Black race (Multiculturalist) was related to higher maternal functioning, while having a negative regard toward Black race (Assimilation and Self-hate) was related to lower maternal functioning.

Conclusion

- In this cohort of Black postpartum mothers, most had adequate maternal functioning and a positive regard towards being Black.
- Black postpartum mothers with a negative regard towards their race may be more likely to have poor maternal functioning, which suggests a higher risk for PPD.
- Further research is needed to determine if assessing racial identity attitudes and maternal functioning is beneficial for identifying Black mothers at risk of PPD.

References

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