Racial Identity and Maternal Functioning in First-time Black Mothers

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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 PPDs 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.

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 theory\(^4\) and Cross’s Nigrescence theory\(^5\) were used to guide this pilot study to better understand the influence of racial identity on Black mothers’ maternal functioning.

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±9.8); 21% of mothers had scores <80, indicating poor maternal functioning.

![Image](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude Type</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>n (%)</th>
<th>Total Maternal Functioning Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afrocentric</td>
<td>Takes deep interest in Black culture</td>
<td>9 (27.3)</td>
<td>61.0 ± 7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-White</td>
<td>Strong hate for White people</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>46.2 ± 8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assimilation</td>
<td>Adopts ways/beliefs of White people to dissociate from Black culture</td>
<td>9 (27.3)</td>
<td>53.5 ± 12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miseducation</td>
<td>Believes negative stereotypes of Black people</td>
<td>1 (2.5)</td>
<td>2 (2.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiculturalist</td>
<td>Respect all cultures while having high regard for being Black</td>
<td>19 (57.6)</td>
<td>83.6 ± 10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-hate</td>
<td>Interacts negatively towards Black people</td>
<td>2 (6.1)</td>
<td>47.5 ± 5.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. 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)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude Types</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Total Maternal Functioning Score</th>
<th>Correlation with Barkin’s Maternal Functioning (maternal functioning)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afrocentric</td>
<td>5.92 (1.31)</td>
<td>80 (0)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-White</td>
<td>2.04 (2.9)</td>
<td>61.1 ± 7.4</td>
<td>-0.57*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assimilation</td>
<td>3.85 (1.67)</td>
<td>53.5 ± 12.5</td>
<td>-0.59*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miseducation</td>
<td>3.87 (1.38)</td>
<td>47.5 ± 5.2</td>
<td>-0.54*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiculturalist</td>
<td>5.64 (0.63)</td>
<td>83.6 ± 10.0</td>
<td>-0.65*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-hate</td>
<td>3.26 (1.45)</td>
<td>46.2 ± 8.6</td>
<td>-0.52*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .01

**Results**

- 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