Parental Cultural Socialization Practices in a Predominantly White Rural Community

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Abstract

Grounded Theory was used to understand parental cultural socialization perceptions and practices in a predominantly White rural community. Parents of color (N = 8) employed at a northeastern university were interviewed for this study. Findings show that the context of the community influenced ethnic-racial identity perceptions and socialization approach.

Introduction

- Parents/caregivers are the primary agents of ethnic-racial cultural socialization.
- Parental cultural socialization practices teach children about their heritage and history; promote cultural customs and traditions; and engender cultural pride, either explicitly or implicitly.
- Ethnic and racial identity constructs have been associated with positive coping, wellbeing and psychological functioning across ethnic-racial groups.
- Influence of neighborhood and communities indicates that parents' cultural socialization strategies vary by the diversity of the neighborhood, experiences with racism, and the child's gender.
- Studies that directly examine the influence of community context are limited and, among those available, most have examined community influences in inner city predominantly Black and/or Latinx communities.

Guiding Question
What are the ethnic-racial socialization parenting practices implemented by parents of color raising children in a predominantly White rural community?

Methods

- Constructivist approach
- Qualitative design
- Interview Guide modeled after the Cross Ethnic-Racial identity Scale-Adult (CERIS-A; Worrell et al., 2017). Sample question:
  - *How does living in this community impact how you raise your child?*
- Semi-structured interviews
- Grounded Theory approach
- Nvivo Qualitative Software

Participants
- 8 self-identified faculty and staff of color (6 mothers, 2 fathers)
- Black (*n*=3), Asian (*n*=2) and Latinx (*n*=3)
- Age range: 42-62 (*M* = 50.88, *SD* = 6.90)
- Years living in the community: 2-27 (*M* = 11.63, *SD* = 7.46)

Results

Theme 1: Community Context Increased Identity Salience. Parents were conscious of how others in the community perceived them and their children. Their marginalized structural position triggered reflections about how they might be perceived and motivated actions to protect their children physically and emotionally. The daughter of a parent was told:

'You don't look . . .' that's the thing you get all the time, 'You don't really look American.' It's like, what really is American? What looks American?

A parent referring to her sons:
[They] weren't really conscious of themselves as Black boys inhabiting this Black male body. I kept telling them, 'You have to be careful.' This was before Tamir Rice was killed. I said, 'You can't go running around with toy guns.

Results

Theme 2: Socialization Approach
Subtheme 2.1: Main Strategy. Parents took their children on excursions and travel outside the community for short or extended periods.

We [parents] need to take a lot more ownership in [town] than had we been out somewhere else, it would have kind of happened organically. But here, recognizing where we are and what we need to do - we need to show what else is out there.

Subtheme 2.2: Multiculturalism. Cultural socialization was fueled by the conviction that diversity, multiculturalism and inclusion would help their children in their social relationships. Parents searched for activities on and off campus.

Exposure [to diversity] is one of the best ways for folks to learn and to get a better level of awareness.

Theme 3: Parenting Post 2018 Presidential Election. Parents expressed distress over the demeaning messages about their cultural groups that children were hearing in the news and in school. Parents had to work diligently to contextualize the derogatory comments their children were hearing to protect their self-esteem and ethnic-racial identity.

So, since the election, the younger one is reserved, but the older one talks a lot about the nastiness that he observes at school from White kids who are just awful. Kids, who are openly Neo-Nazis, who say offensive things about a particular population, so I think he's [older son] much more aware.

Discussion

- The context of the community influenced ethnic-racial identity perceptions and socialization approach.
- Being underrepresented resulted in an uncontrollable and alienating sense of invisibility & hypervisibility.
- Deliberate and sustained socialization efforts were related to lack of community diversity (e.g., short & long-term travel).
- Parents espoused an egalitarian perspective; multiculturalism & inclusivity of all people, including Whites.

Limitations:
- Self-selection bias
- Small sample size and transferability
- High SES a possible influence

Future Research:
- Research in urban communities & with more economically diverse samples.

References

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