Abstract

Objective: Addresses literature gap on experiences of boys and men of color (BMoC) and attempts to shift to a strengths-based perspective. Investigates asset-based traits of BMoC with qualitative analysis as a lens to understand racial identity through assets and protective factors.

Methods: 15 male participants (10 African American, 1 Caribbean Black, 1 Latino, 3 Multiracial) were drawn from a larger rural Southern U.S. sample. We analyzed qualitative interviews that focused on key points in participants’ lives and coded for themes using grounded theory analysis.

Results: Identified three major themes and corresponding subthemes: Turning Points (family, faith), Mediating Strengths (self-regulation, motivation, generosity, reciprocity), and Positive Outcomes (positive role model for others, self sufficiency, stability).

Conclusions: Participants’ descriptions of personal strengths, growth, and well-being suggests a multi-faceted, continuous process of resilience for BMoC that is consistent with the Resilience Portfolio Model (Grych, Hamby, & Banyard, 2015). The analysis can inform prevention and intervention programs.

Introduction

- Previous studies have linked masculinity with fatherhood and being a role model which allows men to build self-respect and pride in communities where men of color are unemployed and underemployed (Marsiglia & Pleck, 2005; Demo & Hughes, 1996; Roberts-Douglas & Curtis-Boles, 2013).
- Previous research also connects individual pride in gender identity and ethnicity with self-improvement (Abreu, Goodyear, Campos, & Newcomb, 2000; DeGruy, Kjellstrand, Briggs, & Green, 2012).
- Early challenges to deficit-focused portrayals of African American men (Cazanave, 1979) paved the way for more strengths-based research with men of color, demonstrating, for example, that this population values generosity, positive role models, and provider roles (Rogers, Sperry, & Levant, 2015).
- Other research has used similar themes, such as a positive sense of self, prosocial group norms and behaviors, adaptive strategies for coping, and a moral system of belief in the examination of identity for boys and men of color (DeGruy et al., 2012; Williams, Anderson, Francois, Hussain, & Tolan, 2014).
- Identity research often focuses on the deficits-based aspects of racial identity (e.g. experiences of violence, discrimination), often lacks an intersectional perspective, and rarely includes youth of color (Rogers, Scott, & Way, 2015).

Intersectionality Theory: Individual experiences are comprised of the intersections of multiple social identities (race, age, gender) and are therefore informed by systems of privilege and oppression (Cole, 2009 & Shields, 2008, as cited in Rogers, Sperry, & Levant).

This study aims to employ an intersectional perspective with the intent to identify aspects of resilience for boys and men of color.

Method

Participants. Our sample consisted of 15 face-to-face interviews with boys and men of color that were part of a larger community sample (N = 202). Participant ages ranged from 12 to 40 years (M = 27.9 years; SD = 10.1 years). Our sample consisted of 11 adults and 4 adolescents who identified as African American (66%), Caribbean Black (6%), Latino (6%), and Multiracial (20%).

Procedure: In semi-structured qualitative interviews, participants discussed prominent moments in their life stories, including high, low, and turning points, positive and not positive behavior, significant challenges, and coping strategies. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and discussions were coded for themes using grounded theory analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Walker & Myrick, 2006).

Thematic Results from Grounded Theory Analysis

Turning Points

Family: “After the flood… it made me think. ‘Oh, [they] are the only people I got in my life… my family’, so those are the ones I’m going to have, so I better start caring for them…” (White adult)

They took me to jail in front of my [daughters]… I violated my probation. I probably did 82 days in jail. Seeing her through that glass, that’s something I never want to do again.” (African American adult)

Faith: “One day… I was feeling I wanted to do something bad… my sister made me mad that day… and we [went] to church again.” (African American adult)

“I learned [to count] to 10, like inhales and just crunch my fist together and then just walk away for a few minutes, and then come back and say I’m sorry.” (Multiracial adolescent)

Interpersonal & Meaning Making Strengths:

Personal & Meaning Making Strengths: “I just try to be the best father and husband I can own to be… I know it could get better, and it’s going to get better because every time I look at my boy, my son, I know I got to work harder each and every day for him.” (African American adult)

“Once you see other people and hear other people’s [stories]… I think it helps me to show more gratitude toward people when I see somebody in need…” (African American adult)

“I try to make everybody laugh, smile. I try to do a good deed a day, if not more.” (African American adult)

“I’m not going to expect it, but maybe for me doing it this early, maybe when I get older and I can’t take care of myself, maybe somebody will be nice to me. So I just look at it [as] a karma point of view. Do good and good will be done to you.” (Latino adult)

“I felt like if you help other people, they would end up helping you and it will just keep going on and on and on.” (Multiracial adolescent)

Mediating Strengths

Regulatory Strengths: “...for me to get that kidney [transplant]… I had to be willing, strong, and I had to want to do it, basically.” (Caribbean adult)

Positive Role Model:

Referring to the Big Brother/Big Sister program “You had to take time and listen too and then once you get them trusting and believing, they open up… because some of the time they believe in people and… it’s failed on them… It turned out to be a positive thing, the three kids I had, they graduated from high school, actually.” (African American adult)

Self Sufficiency: “When you’re out on your own like that, and you’re miles and miles away from your home, you pretty much have to, you know, rely on yourself. It just shows you that people aren’t always going to be there to help you, to give you a place to stay. That just pretty much straightened me out there.” (Multiracial adult)

Discussion

- Similarly to past research (DeGruy et al., 2012), family and faith were two major subthemes of identity. However, the participants described them not only as support mechanisms, but also as catalysts for personal Turning Points.
- The importance of Positive Role Models was particularly noticeable among most participants, an aspect of identity that has been found before (Rogers, Sperry, & Levant, 2015). However, the participants in this study indicated that having a Positive Role Model is just as important to men of color as being a Positive Role Model.
- The strengths were interconnected in many stories. Changes in interpersonal (family) or meaning making (faith) often created turning points which led to better self-regulation and helped created more positive outcomes.
- Future research would benefit from replicating these results with larger samples and participants from other geographic regions.
- Future research can explore the role of intersectionality in fatherhood, masculinity, and resilience, focusing on the strengths-based aspects of identity for boys and men of color. The exploration of asset-based qualities and coping strategies can improve our understanding of racial identity and lead to the improvement of programs that can successfully integrate culture, family, and community (DeGruy et al.; Williams et al., 2014; Rogers, Scott, & Way).

References


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