INTERSECTIONAL SCHOLARSHIP & POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT: POST-MODERN PARADIGM SHIFT IN UNDERSTANDING ADJUSTMENT OF MARGINALIZED YOUTH

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Abstract: *Research on intersectionality of marginalized youth is generally situated in the assumption that non-normative identity leads to pathology and victimization. Further, most research to date has studied marginalized youth using a traditional nuclear family paradigm. In this paper we discuss how intersectionality addresses the combination of strengths and challenges of living with stigmatizing identities and family processes, towards developing successful youth adjustment. We apply the three-step intersectionality approach to study findings among a group of racial/ethnic minority and sexual minority identified youth and discuss the particular role of familism and extended kinship support beliefs that are unique to these youth as a promoter of successful adjustment.*

Key words: Intersectionality, multiple identities, racial/ethnic minority, marginalized youth, positive youth development.

1. Introduction

Research and scholarship in the field of developmental and acculturation psychology are increasingly concerned with the effects of multiple identities and experiences in understanding adjustment of marginalized youth, which are even more relevant to ethnic minority, immigrant, and diaspora communities. Therefore, understanding factors leading to individual empowerment, health, and wellbeing in one context may uncover important and underscored factors in cross-cultural and cross-national contexts.

Based on a principle found in positive psychology regarding Virtues and Strengths-strengths as part of human nature, everyone has them and deserves respect for them-, we take a person-centred approach (Rogers, 1979) A focus on the multiple identities of an individual allows us to investigate the co-occurring nature of race/ethnicity, gender, culture, class, sexuality, religion, caste and other diverse experiences, as embedded in particular

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cultural contexts, that intersect and influence the mechanisms of intra- and inter-variation in development.

Intersectionality has roots in the U.S. law and feminist scholarship, which began with the recognition of double discrimination of African American women based on gender and racial identity, and that in extension recognizes important differences among individuals rather than simply between individuals in the axis of power differentials, oppression, access, opportunity, and individual agency (Crenshaw, 1989; McCall, 2005).

Intersectionality as a theoretical framework guides methodological considerations and data interpretation; it compels us to examine the process by which individuals negotiate competing and harmonious social identities, as well as the fluidity, variability, and temporality of interactive processes that occur between and within multiple social groups, institutions, and social practices (Choo & Ferree, 2010; Few-Demo, 2014; Hancock, 2007).

Adopting a strengths-based intersectional worldview has key implications for intervention, policy, and practice concerned with positive youth development (PYD). PYD is about how youth and emerging adults develop the skills and attitudes they need to take a positive part in society, now and in the future, as well as, how government and society can cultivate strategies and create safe spaces to improve the lives of young people, who are the future.

Therefore, as part of a broader global discourse in developmental and acculturation psychology, we postulate that examinations of adjustment and well-being outcomes requires a post-modern paradigm shift, a lens that departs from the assumption that non-normative identity leads to pathology and victimization (Damon, 2004). This perspective is important and uniquely relevant to the marginalized co-existing ecology of racial/ethnic and non-normative identified individuals, of which the context of this example is sexual minority.

Thus, scholarship based on Intersectionality Theory is uniquely positioned to address the combination of strengths and challenges of individuals living with stigmatizing identities and family processes, towards developing successful youth adjustment by creating cultures of empowerment in which postmodern discourse regarding marginalized identities may evolve. Adopting the intersectionality perspective adds to the discourse of developmental and acculturation psychology the complexity of legal and feminist views regarding multiple identities and the influence of cultural politics on individual development and community empowerment.

2. The Present Study

The aim of this present paper is to expand the discipline of developmental and acculturation psychology in relevance to techniques based on intersectionality perspective, a postmodern paradigm, as a theoretical framework that guides theoretical and methodological considerations in research, applications, and policy endeavours.

In particular, we discuss how the intersectionality three-step approach to categorization (Grünenfelder, & Schurr, 2015) is useful in examining strengths and challenges in individuals who navigate multidimensional, intersectional (co-occurring and co-influencing), and cross-cultural contexts stemming from multiple identities. Since individuals may experience strengths in addition to challenges based on identification within particular identities, we briefly draw from the findings in a recent large-scale study to explicate the methodological and discussion application of intersectionality in regards

to instrumentalization and discussion of findings pertaining to this marginalized youth sample consisting of racial/ethnic minority experiences with "Coming Out" (the process of disclosing an intersectional non-normative sexual identity) and the roles of familism and kinship networks that are relevant to the PYD dimension of Connection (Lerner, 2005) to extended family networks that is characteristically found among minority, immigrant, and diaspora families as promoters of youth adjustment.

Theoretical Framework: Intersectionality Person-Centered Approach 3 Step to Categorization. Step 1: Identify the Multiple Identities (e.g., basic categories: gender, race/ethnicity, sexual identity). Step 2: Explain the Shared Common Social Characteristics of the Individual Category Groups (e.g., complexities of living within that group: caste, religion, class, sexual orientation). Step 3: Discuss Inter- and Intra-Categorical Complexities of Identity (e.g., non-homogeneity of groups: illiterate vs. literate, married vs. unmarried, normative vs. non-normative, national vs. ethnic).

Research Question: How extended family mitigates the effects of negative parental reactions of racial/ethnic minority individuals to disclosing an intersectional sexual minority identity?

3. Methods

Participants. 499 Latin-American (40%), Black-American (36%), & White-American (24%) racial/ethnic minority and sexual minority-identified youth (all with reported biological parents) ages 15 to 19 from three sites in a major U.S. metropolitan area who completed self-assessments and a structured interview with a masters-level clinician (D'Augelli & Grossman, 2006).

Instruments- Example 1. Parents: A broad definition of "parent" determined by the question "Who raised you?"

1. If youth reported having a mother (biological, adoptive, step or foster) who raised them, she is considered to be "mother."
2. If no mother was present, but a grandmother was, she is considered to be the "mother."
3. If someone other than their biological parents raised them, they were asked about their biological parents as well, so if no mother or grandmother raised the youth, but information on a living biological mother was reported, she is considered to be the "mother". Similar logic follows for "father".

Instruments- Example 2. Parental reactions to racial/ethnic youth's sexual orientation identity disclosure.

a) Actual reactions. Youth reported their parents' current reactions to their sexual orientations on a scale from 1 (*very positive*) to 4 (*very negative*) with an additional indicator for "no reaction." If youth reported "no reaction," then they reported what they thought their parent was feeling. These were combined to make one indicator for maternal and paternal reactions, separately.

b) Anticipated reactions. Youth whose parents "probably" or "definitely" did not know about their sexual orientation were asked what their parents' reactions would be if they found out on a scale from 1 (very positive) to 4 (very negative) with an additional indicator for "no reaction." As with actual reactions, youth who thought their parents would have no reaction were asked what they thought the parent would be feeling and this answer was combined with the previous question to create one indicator.

Instruments- Example 3: Extended Family.
a) <u>Extended family members</u> were identified in two ways: 1) after being asked about parents and siblings, youth were asked to name up to 4 other family members who were "very important" to them and 2) for youth who had two family members of the same sex who raised them (e.g., mother and grandmother), the non-immediate family member was considered an extended family member.
b) <u>Extended family reactions</u>. In an identical fashion to parental reactions, youth reported their current or anticipated reactions to their sexual orientation. Responses were coded as 0 (negative) and 1 (positive) and a combined mean extended family member reaction was calculated.

Instruments- Example 4: Mental Health Measure.
a) Youth completed the Youth Self Report (YSR), and internalizing, externalizing, and total problem behaviors were used as adjustment indicators in this investigation (Achenbach, 1995).
b) Although all three measures of problem behaviors were normally distributed within the sample; the sample was highly skewed to the right in comparison to the national normative values for the YSR (median percentiles: internalizing = 81; externalizing = 79; total problem behaviors = 81). Because the focus of this investigation was within-sample differences in adjustment, totals for each scale were used rather than percentiles.

4. Results

The results of our study revealed:

1) Negative maternal and paternal reactions to racial/ethnic minority youth disclosure of sexual minority identity both significantly predicted increased internalizing, externalizing, and total problem behaviours for all youth (Table 1).

2) A significant three-way interaction between race/ethnicity, maternal reactions to youth sexual orientations, and extended family reactions wherein Black-American and Latin-American youth with positive extended family had significantly fewer internalizing problems than White-American youth as maternal negative reactions increased (Table 2).

3) Black-American youth were also less likely than White-American youth to have total problem behaviours increase as maternal negativity increased if mostly positive supportive family members were present (Table 2).

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The main objective of this paper was to explicate the methodological application of the intersectionality perspective in regards to instrumentalization and discussion of findings pertaining to marginalized youth sample consisting of racial/ethnic minority experiences with "Coming Out" (the process of disclosing an intersectional non-normative sexual identity). We also addressed the roles of familism and kinship networks that are relevant to the PYD dimension of Connection (Lerner, 200) to extended family networks that is characteristically found among minority, immigrant, and diaspora families as promoters of youth adjustment.

Problem behaviours predicted by maternal and paternal reactions   Table 1

	Internalizing Model		Externalizing Model		Total Problems Model	
Variable	B	SE B	B	SE B	B	SE B
Maternal reaction	1.45*	.66	1.34*	.55	1.53*	.61
Paternal reaction	1.67*	.83	1.67*	.71	2.38**	.80

Note: ** p < .01, * p < .05

Predicted problem behaviours   Table 2

	Internalizing Model		Externalizing Model		Total Problems Model	
Variable	B	SE B	B	SE B	B	SE B
1 x 3 x 4	-4.96*	4.04	-4.57	3.43	-5.71	3.76
2 x 3 x 4	-10.22*	4.26	-5.42	3.62	-9.45*	3.96
3 x 4	5.10	3.30	3.36	2.80	5.61+	3.07
1 x 4	1.35	2.83	1.02	2.40	0.75	2.63
2 x 4	6.62*	2.96	4.56+	2.52	6.72*	2.76
1 x 3	7.92	9.15	6.40	7.77	7.87	8.51
2 x 3	20.88*	9.48	13.96+	8.05	20.34*	8.81
4	-1.69	2.32	-0.86	1.97	-1.54	2.16
3	-11.64	7.15	-8.19	6.07	-12.37+	6.65
2	-4.59	7.68	-3.26	6.52	-3.36	7.14
1	-20.39**	7.85	-13.80*	6.67	-20.68**	7.30

Note: 4 Maternal reactions, 3 Positive extended family reactions, 2 Black vs. White, 1 Latino vs. White, ** *p* < .01, * *p* < .05, + *p* < 0.1

5.1. Discussion

Example 1: Latino-American cultural familism.

As one of the fastest growing racial/ethnic populations in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014) Latino-Americans have been historically subjected through media, political, and social ideology as an undeserving population (Gonzales, Suárez-Orozco, & Dedios-Sanguineti, 2013).When adding the characteristic of sexual minority identity, this already vulnerable population has intersecting experiences that directly contribute to further resource inequality and lack of institutional support. For Latino-Americans, connections between parent-child relationship characteristics and their extended families highlight cultural values, beliefs, and practices that emphasize close and promotive relationships. For example, compadres, aunts, cousins, siblings, and family friends are sources of support. Thus, cultural strengths perspective recognizes that support, loyalty and interdependence among extended family members, captured in the construct of familism characterizes Latino family life (Baca Zinn, 1994; Cauce & Rodriguez, 2001;

Marin & Marin 1991) and that extended family relationships can be a critical asset for Latino-American racial/ethnic and sexual minority identified youth/emerging adults who experience further marginalization extending from their sexual orientation.

From a psychological point of view, familism refers to a normed cluster of values, beliefs, and attitudes that emphasize the relevance of the family for personal and social life, the development of a feeling of duty among the members of the family group, and the belief that to have children is a requirement for personal and social realization (Popenoe, 1988; Gundelach & Riis, 1994). Past research between groups of White European American descent and Latino adults found that Latinos report higher values of family support and obligations to family members (Sabogal, Marín, Otero-Sabogal, Marín & Perez-Stable, 1987). Additional research (Fuligni, Tseng, & Lam, 1999) found that in comparison to White European American youth, Latinos placed significantly higher value on family assistance, support, and future obligation. Furthermore, research (Rosario, Scrimshaw, & Hunter, 2004) also explains that Latino culture is characteristically familism, in which the close and extended family stick together through challenges, continuously supporting all members in spite of the normative disruptions caused by disclosures of sexual orientation. From a positive psychology perspective, Latino-American racial/ethnic and sexual minority identified youths may feel comfortable with seeking out extended family members knowing about their sexual orientation because they know that given cultural familism, they will not be totally abandoned.

5.2. Discussion.
Example 2: Black-American kinship networks.

Black-American connection is emphasized by multigenerational, interdependent kinship systems highlighting a sense of mutual aid and obligation toward relatives that extend beyond blood and geographical ties and that are concerned with the welfare of members and family maintenance. For example, the definition of family is broad and extended kin such as siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents, as well as, fictive non-relative kin members such as friends and religious community members are also sources of support. Thus, a cultural strengths perspective recognizes that the extended family network keeps families in touch with each other, maintains a sense of solidarity and provides members in time of adversity the basic necessities for survival (Martin & Martin, 1980) and that connection to others who share their particular racial/ethnic, cultural background and a sense of connectedness, are an important asset that can lead to positive psychological adjustment and wellbeing.

From a psychological point of view, Black-American family kin networks are flexible and permeable boundaries allow continued care and support to family members. For example, research (Taylor, 2010) has found that fictive kinship social support moderated the relation between Black mother-child communication problems and adolescent internalizing (e.g., anxiety, withdrawal) and externalizing (e.g., conduct disorder) problems. Also, racial and religious communities and fictive kinships provide Black-Americans with a connection to others who share their ethno racial background and a

sense of connectedness, which in turn led to psychological well-being (Follins, Walker, & Lewis, 2014). Therefore, the concept of cultural kinship networks as related to Black-American families is characterized as one of dynamic change and adaptation due to historical poverty and joblessness, high incarceration of males, high single-mother led households, and a growing older population. In line with past research (Dilworth-Anderson, 2001), the history of threats and adaptive coping to issues of status, situation, and condition has contributed to the resilient socio-demographic characteristic of Black-American extended kin networks. Thus, the extended kin network is a powerful asset for racial/ethnic youth/emerging adults through grandparent role models and less-rigid and more diverse family arrangement configurations (e.g., Families of Choice).

6. Conclusion

We can conclude that studies of racial/ethnic minority and intersecting sexual minority identity youth/emerging adults have underscored extended family networks. These studies have done a disservice by adopting a deficit model rather than reflecting the complex family structures in which these youths/emerging adults live and are supported. We present key characteristics of Latino- and Black-American family structure to highlight the complexity of family configurations and arrangement that are ethnically and racially unique. These youth/emerging adults also encounter intersectional experiences of simultaneous impact of being a double minority, by being an ethnic minority and a sexual minority, contributing to further marginalization from society and family.

Family processes do not occur in isolation to individual identity development. As families are primarily based on connections involving interdependent members and interacting social contexts whose functioning may be altered by changes in the behaviour or relationships of other extended and non-family members, understanding these processes and relationships are particularly important for racial/ethnic and sexual minority youth/emerging adults as powerful assets in adjusting to "coming out."

Uncovering family processes that occur in one context, may serve to inform family processes that occur in another, and in cultures that demonstrate similar child-parent and extended family relational characteristics. PYD emphasizes a key dimension of connection that is important in strengths-based human development, and particularly important for ethnic minority youth.

This study highlights unique experiences of racial/ethnic minority and sexual minority parental experiences with coming out by increasing knowledge of the complexities of multiple identities and awareness to differences among cultural groups that can inform scholarship, extension and intervention/prevention policy and practice.

Implications. Positive Youth Development (PYD) emphasizes a person-centred approach and is the result of Positive Experiences + Positive Relationships + Positive Environments. PYD in combination with intersectionality approach considers ethnic minorities themselves, their multiple identities, and their individual assets (e.g., Connection- with extended family) as promoters of healthy social integration and well-being in a young person's ecology.

According to data provided by The National Institute of Statistics of Romania, this country has a population of about 19 million inhabitants, of which more than 50% lives in municipalities and cities. Population density is 79.9 people/square km, at country level. Ethnic distribution of the Romanian population is: 90.6 % Romanians 6.7 % Hungarians and 2.7% Ukrainians, Germans, Turks, and Russians. Youth aged between 15 and 24 years old represent 12.3% of the Romanian population**.**

Therefore, recognizing that there is much diversity in Romania and multiple Romanian identity (e.g., citizen and non-citizen, national and ethnic, normative and non-normative). We make a call for future consideration of Intersectionality Approach to inform postmodern scholarship, policy, and practice.

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