Perceived Stress and Ways of Coping in African, African American, and Afro-Caribbean College Students

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Acknowledgement

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Background

- Currently, there are limited studies that have examined the presentation of perceived stress in sub-groups of Black individuals (i.e., African, African American, and Afro-Caribbean) living in the United States (Moodley, 2000; Hall, 1999).

- Studies often group the three groups together as “Black/African Americans” drawing on Western ideology to diagnose or treat these individuals.

- Few studies have distinguished possible differences in the perception of stress or use of coping strategies within individuals of African descent: African, African American, and Afro-Caribbean.
Purpose

Using the Normative Theory (Taylor, Doswell, Braxter, & Tull, 2012), the purpose of this study was to investigate the possible differences in perceived stress and coping styles utilized within three ethnic groups among 18-22 year old individuals attending a western Pennsylvania university:

- African immigrant (AI)
- African American (AA)
- Afro Caribbean immigrant (ACI)
Normative Theory (Taylor, Doswell, Braxter, & Tull, 2012)

Unjust Environments

Positional and Ontological Angst

Cognitive, Affective Behavioral Adaptation

Molecular Adaptations, Epigenomic and Genomic

Physiological and Neuro-Psychological Adaptations

Process Disparities

Outcome Disparities
Design

- Descriptive using a between-group design.

- Groups comprised of African, African-American, and Afro-Caribbean young adults.
Sample

- Self-identified African, African-American, and Afro-Caribbean college age students.

- Ages of the students between 18 and 22 years.
Protocol

- Following receipt of IRB approval, students were recruited using flyers and other video advertisements.

- Participants were contacted by email and provided a time and date to meet to complete the on-line survey.

- Upon completion of the survey, participants received a $25 gift card.
Instruments

- Perceived Stress Scale (PSS; Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983)
  Ten items; 5-point Likert Scale
  “Never” (0) to “Very Often” (4)

- Exemplar item: In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?

- Normed mean for African Americans 14.7 (S.D. 7.2); other minority 14.1 (S.D. 5.0).
Instruments (contd.)

- COPE Inventory (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989)
  Sixty items; 4-point scale
  “I usually don’t do this at all” (1)
  “I usually do this a lot” (4)

- Five scales conceptually assess problem-focused coping (e.g., active coping, planning); five scales examine emotion-focused coping (e.g., positive reinterpretation, denial); and three scales measure less useful strategies (e.g., behavioral disengagement, mental disengagement).

- Exemplar item:  *I take additional action to try to get rid of the problem.* (Active coping)
## Demographics

**n=57**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>11</td>
<td>19.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>47.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afro Caribbean</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>28.1</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Birth place</strong>*</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Outside of US-No</td>
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*Missing data
Demographics (contd.)
n=57

<table>
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<th>Age (yrs.)</th>
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<td>19</td>
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<td>21.1</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>28.1</td>
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<td>21</td>
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<td>23</td>
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<td>5.3</td>
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### Perceived Stress Score

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<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean (S.D.)</th>
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<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21.3 (5.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20.1 (7.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afro-Caribbean</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24.6 (4.2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Perceived Stress Score (contd.)

- Approximately 99% of the Afro-Caribbean college age students had high stress scores compared to respectively 90% of African and 72% of African American counterparts.
Coping Strategies

- The most prevalent coping strategies used by the African college age students were: active coping, positive reinforcement, and religious strategies.

- African American students endorsed active coping, positive reinforcement, and acceptance.

- Afro-Caribbean students styles of coping mirrored that of the African American students.
Conclusion

- The findings from this pilot suggest that the three ethnic groups are not homogeneous.

- Treatment strategies targeting perceived stress, and coping styles need to be tailored for each ethnic group.
Next Steps

- Assess the health concerns specifically of the Afro-Caribbean students given the high stress level.

- Examine the manner in which each ethnic group employs the different styles of coping.

- Explore what each group wants from health interventions targeting stress and which interventions are viewed as useful or not useful.


