Abstract

Black Like Me? A Narrative Study of Non-Anglophone Black U.S. Immigrant Selves in the Making

by

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The passage of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act abolished discriminatory national origin quotas that favored European immigrants. The U.S. has since experienced steady flows of immigrants of color. These diverse groups have brought their racial, social, cultural and historical experiences, adding greater complexity to the existing Black/White and ingroup/outgroup models that shaped group relations, and psychological theorizing about identity. This dissertation focuses specifically on a much smaller less visible, but growing segments of these immigrant populations. It presents a study of the lives of ten individual immigrants of African descent originating from a non-Anglophone country within Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. Using a narrative identity framework informed by critical race and cultural theories, life story interviews were conducted. The objectives were as follows: First, this investigation aimed to understand how this diverse group of individuals construct, and make meaning of their identity development while situating each life within a global/local and temporal context. Specific attention was devoted to the formative role played by historical experiences, cultures, migration, and the power dynamics framing the varied localities of each individual's development. Also considered were the specific influence other individuals and groups play in shaping conceptions of self/other. Secondly, this study documents how being Black and an immigrant are socially and subjectively experienced within race, and across differences in ethnicity and nationality. Thirdly, the distinct changes, opportunities and difficulties that each negotiates as his/her hybrid racial and cultural identity challenge dominant stereotypes, and static conceptions of group identity were explored. The findings highlight nuances in meaning-making and in narrative constructions of self. A small group constructed narratives focused on the historical, cultural and political nature of racial identity and its intersections with class, gender and nationality- illustrating the influence social location plays in navigating different environments marked by power dynamics. The other set of stories focused on multiple adaptation and movements within and across national borders. Both sets of narratives speak to the human capacity to assert agency and adapt to change. They also magnify the multidimensionality and elasticity of identity. The implications of these findings for studying persons and groups in psychology are discussed.