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Megan Rodgers

Governors State University, mrodgers3@student.govst.edu

David Swanson

Governors State University, dswanson3@student.govst.edu

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The Impact of Fictive Kin Relationships on the Development of Attributional Styles

Megan Rodgers and David Swanson

Development Lab, Governors State University



INTRODUCTION

Fictive kin relationships provide a method of social support that is not fully understood or accepted in segments of society however, these relationships have long been common in African American communities (Nelson, 2014).

An attributional style refers to the way in which an individual explains life events to oneself and is analyzed on three dimensions: internal, global, and stable (Lewis, Waschbusch, Sellers, Leblanc, & Kelley, 2014). The development of attributional style originates in experiences of trust or lack of trust with negative events adding to depressive symptoms and attributions of positive events acting as a protective factor in the development of depression (Rueger & George, 2017). By engaging in fictive kin relationships, individuals develop a surrounding environment that provides dependable, supportive, stable, and loving relationships (Weeks, Heaphy, & Donovan, 2001).

Research has explored African American family relations with regards to socialization and social support from fictive kin as an adaptive response to social and economic challenges to a healthy family life (Garcia-Coll et al., 1996; Jarrett, Jefferson, & Kelly, 2010). Furthermore, social support from outside the family structure is commonplace among African Americans in communities overwhelmed with poverty (Jarrett, Jefferson, & Kelly, 2010). Fictive kin relationships create social ties based on neither blood ties nor by marriage thus providing social relationships in the form of positive emotional coping strategies (Jarrett, Jefferson, & Kelly, 2010).

Research revealed the development of fictive kin relationships within the African American LGBTQ community, where the intersectionality of stressors is displayed including marginalization, discrimination, and oppression (Weeks, Heaphy, & Donovan, 2001). Research among both African American (Anderson, 1978; Stack, 1974) and LGBTQ (Weeks, Heaphy, & Donovan, 2001) communities have documented the formation of networks of fictive kin relationships. For instance, in the Southern region of the United States, groups comprised of predominantly African American gay men and transwomen have bonded together to socially construct their own family networks (Weeks, Heaphy, & Donovan, 2001).

METHODS

A literature search for related articles was conducted in March 2019. The initial search was conducted using PsychInfo and SocINDEX for peer-reviewed empirical articles published between 1974 and 2017 and relevant to fictive kin relationships and attributional style. Articles were included if they were: (a) written in English; (b) provided a definition or description of fictive kin relationships and/or attributional styles and (c) focused on the benefits of social support systems. By examining the results of 20 studies, 7 were deemed relevant to this review. Review of the selected articles sought to answer how social support provided by fictive kin relationships impacts the development of an individual's attributional style in a positive manner.

ANALYSIS STRATEGY

The analysis of the 7 sources involved three subsequent rounds. First, the articles were examined to develop a general profile of the research on fictive kin relationships and attributional styles. This round of the analysis was also aimed at identifying the benefits of non-familial social support systems. The second round of analysis focused on how the construct of social bonds impact minority groups. This round of analysis included an addition of a book as a source of reference. In the third round of analysis, articles were reviewed for unclear aspects and inconsistencies. When needed, original articles were consulted to clarify main points. The final part of the third round of analysis involved a critical review of the interpretations as presented in the text.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Please contact Megan Rodgers at mrodders3@student.govst.edu or David Swanson at dswanson3@student.govst.edu

SUMMARY

Fictive kin relationships are often seen in African American communities. Throughout history, these communities have faced discrimination, oppression, and marginalization which all have the capability to negatively impact one's attributional style. The social bonds created through fictive kin suggest that these relationships are the foundation for engaging in helping behavior, a characteristic of positive attributional styles.

The current scientific literature on fictive kin relationships and the development of an individual's attributional style suggests that these social bonds create positive effects on how individuals view life events. By making the effort to treat non-family members as if they are family members, individuals in fictive kin relationships develop the ability to engage with others from a positive aspect.

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