Food Choice as a Signal of Racial Identity

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**Food Choice as a Signal of Racial Identity**

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**INTRODUCTION**

- People use visual and audible cues (e.g., language, physical appearance, clothing) to make judgments about others’ social identity (e.g., race/ethnicity, sexuality, gender).
- Perceived social identity then can affect both inter- and intra-group relations.
  - White Americans tend to respond negatively to African Americans who express stronger racial identity.
  - African Americans tend to respond negatively to ingroup members who do not express/bolster their racial identity.
- Food has yet to be examined as a cue of racial identity.
- People use visual and audible cues (e.g., language, physical appearance, clothing) to make judgments about others’ social identity (e.g., race/ethnicity, sexuality, gender).

**METHODS**

**Participants:**
- 365 VCU undergraduate students [63.3% White & 36.7% Black, 74.2% cis-women, age $M = 19.39$ (SD = 3.23)]
- Recruited via the Psychology Department Online Participant Pool (SONA)

**Procedure:**
- Participants read a cover story indicating that the purpose of the research was to examine impression formation based on limited amounts of information.
- Participants first provided their personal information that would be shared with “another student.”
- Next, participants reviewed personal information ostensibly provided by another student.

**Measures:**
- **Perceived student’s racial identity:** A modified version of the centrality subscale from the Collective Self-Esteem Scale (Crocker and Luhtanen, 1992) was used to assess participants’ perceptions and emotional reactions to the student.
- **Emotional reactions:** A modified version of Positive Affect and Negative Affect Schedule (Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988) was used to assess how the student made participants feel.

**RESULTS**

1. Participants’ perceptions of the student’s racial identity

2. Participants’ positive emotional reactions toward the student

**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

- The target students, regardless of gender, were perceived to have stronger racial identity by both Black and White participants when they preferred “Soul Food,” as opposed to “Fresh salad.”
- Black participants responded more positively to the target students when they preferred “Soul Food” as opposed to “Fresh salad.”
- Food preference may serve as another racial identity cue, by which others may shape their impressions and subsequent relationships.
- For African Americans, fear of identity denial may possibly serve as one psychological barrier to regular consumption of a healthy diet.

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**RESEARCH QUESTION**

- Do people perceive and react differently to African Americans who prefer to eat “Soul food” (which is a culturally-significant diet) vs. “fresh salad” (which is a culturally-discordant diet)?

**Manipulation of student gender**

- False name: DeShawn/LaKeisha
- Age: 20
- Born in the United States: Yes
- Race/Ethnicity: Black or African American
- Gender: Male
- Academic major: Psychology
- Hobbies: Playing music, hanging with friends
- Favorite colors: Yellow
- Favorite dishes/foods: Fresh salad!! Mmmm../Soul food!! Mmmm.

**Manipulation of food preference**

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