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A smartphone-based intervention to buffer the negative effects of perceived discrimination among ethnic minority college students

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We present a smartphone-based self-affirmation App that has been designed to help buffer ethnic minority college students from the negative effects of perceived ethnic discrimination experienced on campus. Self-affirmation theory suggests that if an individual is threatened (i.e., devalued) in an important area of the self (such as being denigrated for being a part of a particular racial/ethnic social group), then affirming a different area of the self (e.g., reminding individuals of the important values that they hold), can diffuse the threat by dampening stress responses. Self-affirmation writing interventions have successfully helped prevent academic decline (i.e., grade point average) among African-American and Latino/Hispanic college students in the United States. These self-affirmation writing interventions have been delivered through paper-and-pencil and have not yet been tested using mobile technologies. We present descriptive statistics and qualitative analyses of a pilot smartphone study conducted with Latino- and Asian-heritage college students at the California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo (Cal Poly). The participants completed a two-week daily diary on their smartphones. In addition, they completed an initial intake survey and 2-month follow-up survey. The survey included measures of psychological well-being, health risk behaviors (alcohol, drug use, and nutrition), sense of belonging to the campus community, grade point average, and general physical health. Participants were randomly assigned to an experimental group (who completed the self-affirmation intervention) and a control group (who completed a no affirmation writing exercise). Ethnic minority students at Cal Poly reported experiencing significant microaggressions on campus. Participants further reported that the App was easy to use and not overly burdensome in terms of time commitment. The App's potential use in educational and therapeutic settings is discussed.

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