

Microaggressions' Associations with Well-Being in Academia

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Introduction

- Subtle racism and microaggressions (MA) are omitted from literature due to its perceived invalidity because of a lack of quantitative data (Sue et al., 2007). The lack of existing research led us to explore MAs on a college campus. MAs are verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or not, that communicate derogatory insults towards marginalized people (Sue et al., 2007).
- Current research shows that racial microaggressions negatively predict a lower self-esteem, and that microaggressions that occur in educational and workplace environments are particularly harmful to self-esteem. Individuals of various racial and ethnic minority groups experience racial microaggressions differently (Nadal et al., 2004).
- Beyond self-esteem, the existing literature lacks an in-depth look at microaggressions in college settings and mental well-being, such as levels of stress and feelings of belonging.

Research Question:

What are the associations between racial and ethnic microaggressions and students' psychological well-being?

Hypothesis:

We hypothesize that the more racial and ethnic microaggressions someone experiences, the higher stress and lower feelings of self-esteem and belonging they will have.

Method

Participants: 181 undergraduate and graduate students

- Age Range: 19-33
- 71.2% Female, 28.8% Male
- Black: 9.1%
- Hispanic: 48.1%
- Asian: 38.5%
- Middle-Eastern: 3.7%
- Native-American: 0.5%

Procedure

This study was approved by the university IRB. Students attended an information session where they were given a brief definition of microaggressions. They completed a survey and were compensated.

Measures

- Racial/Ethnic Microaggressions Scale (Nadal, 2011).
Someone avoided eye contact with me because of my race.
- Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965).
I certainly feel useless at times.
- Basic Needs Scale (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Gagné, 2003).
I often do not feel very capable.
- Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen et al., 1983).

In the last month, how often have you felt nervous or stressed?

	Belonging (Relatedness)			
	B	SE	t	p
Inferiority	-.155	.062	-2.496	.013
Criminalization	-.347	.081	-4.308	<.001
Invalidation	-.123	.063	-1.953	.052
Exoticism	-.116	.077	-1.502	.135
Environment	.097	.106	.918	.360
Work	-.246	.077	-3.204	.002

	Self-Esteem			
	B	SE	t	p
Inferiority	.000	.041	.005	.996
Criminalization	-.063	.055	-1.144	.254
Invalidation	-.111	.040	-2.786	.006
Exoticism	-.142	.049	-2.885	.004
Environment	.099	.068	1.457	.147
Work	-.097	.051	-1.895	.060

Results Summary

- Linear regression analyses indicated that microaggressions do affect overall stress, belonging, and self-esteem. While all subspects of stress yielded significant results, particular subspects within belonging and self-esteem were not significant.
- Microaggressions related to inferiority, criminalization, work, and invalidation are negatively associated with students' feelings of belonging. However, feelings of belonging were not significantly lowered by the exoticism and environment subspects.
- Students reported feeling significantly low levels of self-esteem while experiencing invalidation, exoticism, and work microaggressions. However, low self-esteem was not associated with the inferiority, criminalization, and environment subspects.

Discussion

Implications:

- Ethnic minorities are at a disadvantage compared to Caucasian students, because not only are they experiencing the same academic stressors, but they are also experiencing psychological stressors on an everyday basis.
- Students' young ages makes them more susceptible to weakened well-beings due to simultaneous social and biological developments.
- Students' ethnic and racial identities ought to be factored into how they behave/perform in school and everyday life.

Limitations:

- The distribution of races within the sample was uneven. Some minority groups had significantly less participants than others.
- Survey answers were based on the past 6 months, asking participants to recall memories that may have been weakened over time.
- Participants' pre-existing knowledge may have made them either more or less sensitive to recognizing MAs.
- The setting, a predominantly white university in northern California, offered limited potential minority participants.
- We had to exclude a chunk of our data due to incomplete responses by participants

Future Research:

- We suggest that future research should further investigate the differences of significance within Self-Esteem and Belonging and the MA subscales.
- Greater population diversity would yield even more significant results and perhaps new perspectives.

References

- Nadal, K. L., Wong, Y., Griffin, K. E., Davidoff, K., Sriken, J. (2014). The adverse impact of racial microaggressions on college students' self-esteem. *Journal of College Student Development* 55(5), 461-474.
- Sue, D. W., Capodilupo, C. M., Torino, G. C., Bucceri, J. M., Holder, A. M. B., Nadal, K. L., Esquilin, M. (2007). Racial microaggressions in everyday life: Implications for clinical practice. *American Psychologist*, 62(4), 271-286.