The Role of Racial Microaggressions on Academic Belonging among African American and Latino/a College Students

Evelyn Sarsar, B.A., Katharine H. Zeiders, Ph.D., and Antoinette M. Landor, Ph.D.

Background and Significance

Background

- Racial microaggressions are subtle forms of racial discrimination experienced by marginalized groups during day-to-day interactions.
- Research suggests these experiences are common among racial minority young adults on college campuses, particularly at Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) (Boysen, 2012).
- Although racial microaggressions are subtle and sometimes unintentional, past research has indicated that the exposure to racial microaggressions can impact one's psychological and physical well-being (Forrest-Bank & Cuellar, 2018; Huynh, 2012; Nadal et al., 2017; Sue et al., 2007).
- Less is known, however, about how racial microaggressions may impact academic belonging within the college setting.
- The purpose of this study was to investigate if racial microaggressions were associated with three aspects of academic belonging—belonging with peers, faculty members, and administrators.
- We utilized a 4-week diary study to link week-to-week fluctuations in microaggressions to young adults’ belonging.

Hypotheses

- H1: On weeks that college students experienced higher than average levels of microaggressions, they would report lower academic belonging among peers, faculty members, and administrators (within-person effect).
- H2: On average, racial microaggressions would be related to lower belonging among peers, faculty members, and administrators (between-person effect).

Method

Participants: Latino and African American college students (N = 145) attending a Midwestern PWI participated in a four-week diary study.

Sample characteristics

Race/Ethnicity

- African American: 91 (62.8%)
- Latino: 54 (37.2%)

Gender:

- Female: 101 (69.4%)
- Male: 44 (30.6%)

Method Contd.

Academic year:

- Freshman: 26 (17.9%)
- Sophomore: 36 (24.8%)
- Junior: 35 (24.1%)
- Senior: 48 (33.1%)

Measures

- 35 items total; 5 subscales
  - Assumptions of Inferiority
    - “Someone acted surprised at my scholastic or professional success.”
  - Second-Class Citizen and Assumptions of Criminality
    - “Someone clench her/his purse or wallet upon seeing me.”
  - Microinvalidations
    - “Someone told me they ‘don’t see color.’”
  - Exoticization and Assumptions of Similarity
    - “Someone told me that all people in my racial/ethnic group are all the same.”
  - Workplace/School
    - “I was ignored at school or at work.”

Academic belonging. Participants completed the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) (Strayhorn, 2008).
- Assessed the quality of relationship and sense of belonging with their peers, faculty members, and administrative personnel.
- 3 items on a 7-point Likert scale
  - Participants were asked, “thinking of your own experience, rate the quality of your relationships with other students/faculty/administrators.”
  - Responses ranged from 1 (“competitive, uninvolved, sense of alienation”) to 7 (“friendly, supportive, sense of belonging”).

Results

- Multi-level modeling was used to estimate both within-person and between-person effects of racial microaggressions.

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<th>Table 1: Multi-level regression model of microaggressions and academic belonging</th>
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Note: Race/Ethnicity was coded 0 = Latino; 1 = African American. Gender was coded 0 = female, 1 = male. Time is included in the model to control for changes in the IV (i.e., peer, family, or administrator belonging) across the four weeks. WP = Within-Person effect; RP = Between-Person effect.

- Across the study, young adults reported and averaged 4 racial microaggressions a week.
- Nearly 90% of all young adults reported at least 1 racial microaggression across the 4 weeks.
- Multi-level regressions indicated a within-person effect on peer belonging; on weeks that students reported more microaggressions, they reported lower academic belonging with peers (Table 1).
- Within-person effects on faculty or administrator belonging were not significant.
- Between-person effects emerged for all aspects of belonging: on average, students who reported more microaggressions reported lower academic belonging with peers, faculty, or administrators.

Conclusions and Implications

- Racial microaggressions can impact one’s sense of belonging with others.
- College institutions must acknowledge that these subtle, yet impactful forms of discrimination, are still very prominent on college campuses have implications for young adults’ academic belonging.

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