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

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Background
Racial microaggressions are subtle forms of racial discrimination experienced by marginalized groups during day-to-day interactions.

Research suggests that these experiences are common among racial minority young adults on college campuses, particularly at Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) (Boyesen, 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 — prevalent among marginalized groups during day-to-day interactions — experienced by marginalized groups during day-to-day interactions can impact one’s psychological and physical well-being (Forrest-Bank & Cuellar, 2018; Huynh, 2012; Nadal et al., 2017; Sue et al., 2007).

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Hypotheses

- **H1**: On weeks that college students experienced higher than average levels of microaggressions, they would report less academic belonging among peers, faculty members, and administrators.

- **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%)

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

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

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

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Belonging with Peers</th>
<th>Belonging with Faculty</th>
<th>Belonging with Administrators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b (SE)</td>
<td>t (df)</td>
<td>p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>WP Microaggressions</td>
<td>-0.98 (0.45)</td>
<td>-2.17</td>
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Note: Race/Ethnicity was coded 0 = Latino, 1 = Mexican American. Gender was coded 0 = female, 1 = male. Year is included in the model to control for changes in the DV (i.e., peer, faculty, or administrator belonging) across the four weeks. WP = Within-Person effect; DP = Between-Person effect.

- Across the study, young adults reported and average of 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 among 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.

Acknowledgements

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