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Shandra Forrest-Bank

The University of Tennessee Knoxville, sforres6@utk.edu

Jeffrey Jenson

University of Denver, jeffrey.jenson@du.edu

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Differences in Experiences of Racial and Ethnic Microaggression among Asian, Latino/Hispanic, Black, and White Young Adults

SHANDRA FORREST-BANK

College of Social Work
University of Tennessee

JEFFREY M. JENSON

Graduate School of Social Work
University of Denver

Racial and ethnic discrimination is a significant risk factor for health and mental health problems among non-White children, adolescents, and adults. Recent evidence suggests that a form of discrimination known as microaggression, characterized by subtle and often unintentional acts of discriminatory behavior, is associated with detrimental effects on the psychological and emotional well-being of non-White individuals. We examined differences in microaggression experiences among a sample of 409 Asian, Latino, Black, and White young adults. The Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale (Nadal, 2011) was used to measure respondents' experiences of racial and ethnic microaggression. Young adults in all the non-White groups reported significantly higher rates of microaggressive experiences than respondents in the White group. Black participants experienced the highest levels of microaggression, followed by Latinos/Hispanics and Asians. Exploratory post-hoc comparisons yielded significant differences in the nature and type of racial and ethnic microaggressions experienced by members of different racial or ethnic groups. Implications for policy and practice are discussed.

Key words: racial and ethnic discrimination, microaggression, young adults, ANOVA

Racial discrimination continues to be a vexing problem in the United States. On the one hand, discrimination has become less tolerated both socially and legally in the past several decades. This change in attitude coincides with the growing diversity of the American population in which Caucasian Whites are no longer the majority in many parts of the country and will be outnumbered nationally within a few decades (Craig & Richeson, 2014). In addition, civil rights legislation prohibits discrimination against people of color in all public contexts (Hasday, 2007). Despite these changes, social stratification based on skin color is related to inequities in housing, education, employment, and income in American society (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2001). Racial discrimination is an important determinant of social and emotional well-being among people of color (Paradies, 2006; Williams, Neighbors, & Jackson, 2003). From both a policy and public health perspective, racial and ethnic discrimination is a significant risk factor for many health and mental health problems experienced by people of color. Furthermore, discrimination adversely affects access and quality of health and mental health services for people of color (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2001).

Forms of racial and ethnic discrimination have evolved in the past several decades. One major trend has been that discrimination is now less likely to be overt and/or violent than it was in the past (Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakami, & Hodson, 2002). However, evidence indicates that an insidious form of discriminatory behavior referred to as *microaggression* has increased. Racial microaggression is characterized by small, insulting occurrences which tend to be subtle, often even unintentional acts of discrimination against people of color (Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, & Torino, 2007). Understanding the specific mechanisms by which microaggressions are perpetrated and examining the impact of such acts is critical to developing preventive interventions and policies necessary to reduce discrimination and service barriers for non-White people.

Racial and Ethnic Microaggression

The term *racial microaggression* was first introduced by Chester Pierce in the 1970s to refer to minor acts of

discrimination that are experienced frequently by people of color in their daily lives. Microaggression may occur interpersonally or environmentally (Sue et al., 2007). For example, a common interpersonal microaggression experienced by Asian-Americans is when they tell someone they are from somewhere in the contiguous U.S. only to receive the response, "No, where are you *really* from?" The underlying message to many Asian-American citizens is that they are not true Americans and never will be. An example of an environmental microaggression experienced by Mexican-Americans occurs when anti-immigration posters containing photographs of Mexican people are displayed at a place of commerce or business. In some cases, microaggressive acts are manifested by verbal or physical actions intended to inflict harm (Sue et al., 2007). More often, however, acts of microaggression are subtle insults toward people of color that are automatic, nonverbal, and unintended in nature (Soloranzo, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Sue et al., 2007).

Sue and colleagues (2007) created a taxonomy of racial microaggressions based on findings from qualitative research and evidence from the social psychological literature on racism. They identified three overarching categories of microaggression: (1) microassaults; (2) microinsults; and (3) microinvalidations. *Microassaults* are acts of racism or discrimination that are enacted knowingly toward others. Such acts include physical or verbal assaults that are racist in nature and intended to inflict harm. The other two forms of microaggression tend to be unintentional and subtle. *Microinsults* are messages relayed interpersonally or environmentally that relay negative, degrading, or exclusionary messages (Sue et al., 2007). Congratulating someone for being the exception to what is stereotypical or positionally expected due to skin color is an example of a microinsult.

The third type of microaggression is *microinvalidation*. This occurs when people say things such as that they do not "see color," or that racism does not exist. This type of thinking is perpetuated in the American myth that everyone has an equal chance to succeed if they simply work hard and embrace core societal values. Such myths often obscure racism and oppression and imply that inequities in society are solely due to the

inferiority of people who simply do not apply themselves hard enough to succeed. The danger in such a proposition is that it fails to acknowledge the presence and influence of oppressive structural forces in society that reinforce the disadvantage and marginalization of people of color (Sue, 2010; Wise, 2013).

Incidents involving acts of microaggression are often complex in nature and elicit a range of responses. Recipients of microaggressive exchanges are frequently confused about the nature of these interactions and are left to wonder about the intent of the exchange. For example, in some cases people may struggle to determine if what they just experienced was actually racist or discriminatory, or if the event was important or severe enough to warrant confrontation. In other instances, microaggressive exchanges trigger emotions from prior experiences. Other recipients may blame themselves or question why they are sensitive to acts that were perhaps unintentional in nature. They may become angry or mistrustful, or may adapt and "get used to it" and learn to expect that such experiences are simply what it means to be a person of color in America. Another response by recipients of microaggressions is to become depressed or to display feelings of helplessness. To confound matters, perpetrators are often unaware or fail to grasp the gravity and consequences of microaggressive exchanges on people of color (Dovidio & Fiske, 2012; Sue, 2010).

Experts note that subtle forms of discrimination are more insidious and harder to interpret, and therefore may cause more harm than blatant forms of discrimination (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004; Noh, Kaspar, & Wickrama, 2007; Sue, 2010). Investigators have found that racial and ethnic microaggressions are associated with detrimental effects on the psychological and emotional wellbeing of non-White individuals (Brondolo et al., 2008; Sellers, Caldwell, Schmeelk-Cone, & Zimmerman, 2003; Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008), affect self-esteem (Franklin, Boyd-Franklin, & Kelly, 2006) and contribute to physical health and behavioral problems (Brondolo, Rieppi, Kelly, & Gerin, 2003). Authors have also focused on how educators and clinicians often can perpetrate microaggression that harms students and clients and undermines learning and therapeutic processes (Sue, 2010), as well as creates barriers to non-White people accessing educational, health, and mental health services (Balsam, Molina, Beadnell, Simoni, &

Walters, 2011). Other studies have found that microaggression can lead to unsatisfactory work relationships (Constantine & Sue, 2007) and perceptions of hostility in school (Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2007).

It is important to recognize that experiences of microaggression are also linked to historical patterns of oppression. To illustrate, generations of American Indians and other native populations have experienced several hundred years of discrimination. The historical traumas against American Indians continue to adversely affect current generations of native people. Knowledge about these effects is limited; however, recent scholarship recognizes that the effects are similar to those associated with post-traumatic stress (Evans-Campbell, 2008). Therefore, current derogatory acts toward Native American people are likely to be both reminders and triggers of institutionalized racism and reduced status of native people in America (Evans-Campbell, 2008).

A related consideration in the study of racial and ethnic microaggression is that the specific acts of microaggression experienced by people are based on stereotypes and prejudice unique to each particular racial or ethnic group, pointing to the need to examine the differences in the types of microaggressions and their impacts separately for each group. Unquestionably, there are inherent limitations in categorizing racial and ethnic groups based on socially-constructed phenotypical groupings that actually represent considerable diversity within each group (Smedley & Smedley, 2005). However, members of non-dominant racial and ethnic groups are frequently stereotyped and marginalized based on those socially-constructed groups. Their experiences of how they are oppressed due to what makes them “other” becomes part of their shared identities with people who have similar differences from the majority norms (Young, 2009).

Complex historical and current issues such as these highlight the importance of conducting research aimed at better understanding the experiences of microaggression among members of different racial and ethnic groups. The differences in the experiences of microaggression among non-White people have seldom been studied. Understanding the prevalence and types of microaggression experienced by different racial and ethnic groups is an important next step in

preventing and reducing microaggressive behavior. To this end, we examined differences in microaggression experiences among a sample of Asian, Latino/Hispanic, Black, and White young adults.

Methods

Sample

Participants were 409 undergraduate students ages 18 to 35 enrolled at an urban public college in the western United States. The college roster was stratified by the four largest minority racial and ethnic groups represented in the student body (Asian, Latino/Hispanic, Black, and White) and an oversampling probability procedure was then used to select students who were invited to participate in an online survey. The participants identified themselves in these racial and ethnic categories when they enrolled in the college.

As shown in Table 1, the average age of participants was 24, and 64% of respondents were female. The study sample was diverse; 30% of subjects were White, 25% were Asian, 25% were Latino/Hispanic, and 20% were Black. In addition, 8% of the participants identified themselves as being GLBTQ (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, or queer). The average year in college for the participants was third year, with approximately 25% indicating they were in their 5th or greater year. More than half (54%) of the participants were in intimate relationships, approximately 46% of the participants were living with one or both of their parents, and approximately 17% of the participants indicated that they were parents themselves. Last, almost 50% of the respondents worked 30 or more hours per week during the past month.

Procedures

All prospective participants received an email invitation with a link to an anonymous survey. Several reminder emails were later sent and all data were collected in a two-month period in the fall of 2011. Participants who completed the survey were given an option to enter their email address in a random drawing for gift cards to Amazon.com. The survey generally took participants between 20 and 40 minutes to complete.

Table 1. Sample Demographics (N = 409)

| | | N | (%) |
|--|-----------------|-------|------------|
| Age | 18–23 | 213 | (52.1) |
| | <i>M</i> =24 | 24–29 | 168 (33.5) |
| | <i>SD</i> =4.2 | 30–35 | 61 (13.0) |
| Sex | Male | 136 | (33.3) |
| | Female | 271 | (64.2) |
| Race/ethnicity | White | 123 | (30.1) |
| | Asian | 101 | (24.7) |
| | Latino/Hispanic | 103 | (25.2) |
| | Black | 82 | (20.0) |
| Sexual orientation | Straight | 372 | (91.0) |
| | GLBTQ | 31 | (7.6) |
| Born in the U.S.? | Student | 338 | (82.6) |
| | Mother | 251 | (61.4) |
| | Father | 250 | (61.1) |
| Year in college | 1–2 | 147 | (35.9) |
| | 3–4 | 165 | (76.3) |
| | 5–6 | 79 | (19.3) |
| | 7 or more | 18 | (4.4) |
| In an intimate relationship? | | 219 | (53.5) |
| Who do you live with? | Partner | 126 | (30.8) |
| | Mother | 169 | (41.3) |
| | Father | 127 | (31.1) |
| Number of children | 0 | 341 | (83.4) |
| | 1 | 33 | (8.1) |
| | 2 | 21 | (5.1) |
| | 3 | 10 | (2.4) |
| | 4+ | 4 | (1.0) |
| Hours of work per week in the past month | 0 | 116 | (28.5) |
| | 1–29 | 94 | (22.9) |
| | 30–40 | 76 | (18.6) |
| | > 40 | 123 | (30.1) |

Measures

The *Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale* [REMS] (Nadal, 2011) was used to measure respondents' experiences of racial and ethnic microaggression. The instrument contains 45 items,

consisting of six subscales. The subscale items were not grouped together on the survey. The instructions read, "Think about your experiences with race. Please read each item and think of how many times this event has happened to you in the past six months." Item response choices were on a scale from 1-6: (1) *I did not experience this event*; (2) *I experienced this event 1 time in the past six months*; (3) *I experienced this event 2 times in the past six months*; (4) *I experienced this event 3 times in the past six months*; (5) *I experienced this event 4 times in the past six months*; and (6) *I experienced this event 5 or more times*. The scale and subscale scores are calculated as item means.

The items in the subscale *Assumptions of Inferiority* included eight statements in which someone made assumptions, such as low intelligence and social status, because of their race. For example, "Someone assumed that I would not be educated because of my race."

The subscale *Second-Class Citizen and Assumptions of Criminality* includes seven statements about experiences in which someone acted in ways that demonstrated fear or avoidance because of their race. One item, for example, reads, "Someone avoided walking near me because of my race."

The *Microinvalidations* nine subscale items have to do with experiences in which race and racial difference is minimized or invalidated. For example, "Someone told me that people should not think about race anymore," is one of the items in the subscale.

Exoticization and Assumptions of Similarity includes nine statements that involve experiences in which participation in certain aspects of culture were expected based on the assumption that all people of that race would be the same. For example, one item reads, "Someone asked me to teach them things in my 'native language.'" Other items in this subscale are more about experiences of objectification because of race. An example of this is an item that states, "Someone wanted to date me only because of my race."

The subscale *Environmental Microaggressions* included 7 reverse-scored items about observations of people "of my race" being presented positively in the media or in highly influential social contexts or government positions. For example, "I observed people of my race portrayed positively in movies," and "I observed that someone of my race is a governmental

official on my state." Unlike other REMS subscales that asked respondents to report the number of microaggressive incidents they experienced, *Environmental Microaggressions* is an assessment of young adults' observations of microaggression in their broader environment.

The last subscale, *Workplace and School Microaggressions*, consists of five items that describe experiences occurring in the context of school or work in which there were negative expectations or treatment due to race. One item, for example, reads, "An employer or co-worker was unfriendly or unwelcoming toward me because of my race."

Moderate to strong internal consistency for the total REMS and for individual scales was demonstrated in prior research in which the instrument was administered to 2 different samples of young adults (Nadal, 2011). With the current sample, internal consistency for the total REMS score yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .88. Alpha coefficients were $\geq .75$ for all six subscales of the REMS.

Analytic Strategy

One-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) tests were conducted for the total REMS score and each of the subscales in order to examine differences among the 4 racial and ethnic groups (Asian, Latino/Hispanic, Black, and White) in the study. Tests for normality indicated the data were not statistically normal. Additionally, Levene's tests for homogeneity of variance were significant. Therefore, the Brown-Forsythe test was used to conduct adjusted F-tests due to unequal variances and to provide robustness with the non-normally distributed data. Subsequent pairwise post-hoc comparisons were run with the Games-Howell, a recommended test when there are heterogeneous variances and sample sizes differ between groups (Howell, 2007). Mean scores were compared among the racial and ethnic groups for the microaggression scale and again for each type of microaggression measured by each subscale of the REMS. No adjustments were made to the alphas for the post-hoc comparisons, since Type II error was more of a concern than Type I due to the exploratory nature of this analysis. However, the specific p values are reported, and interpretations are made cautiously with acknowledgement of the potential for Type I error.

Results

Microaggression Experiences among Racial and Ethnic Groups

Mean scores for the total and subscales of the REMS are shown for each of the four racial and ethnic groups in Table 2. Sum scores on the total REMS ranged from 45 to 223 ($M = 95.3$; $SD = 32$) across groups. The average item score for the whole scale was 2.1 ($SD = 0.7$). Participants experienced forms of microaggression in the *Exoticization and Assumptions of Similarity* subscale at the highest rate on average ($M = 2.1$, $SD = 1.1$). Eight out of 10 of the highest scoring items on the REMS were in this subscale. The highest scoring single item in this subscale was "Someone assumed I spoke a language other than English" ($M = 2.7$, $SD = 2.1$). Examples of *Workplace and School Microaggressions* were experienced least frequently by participants ($M = 1.5$, $SD = 0.9$). Item score means on the *Assumptions of Inferiority*, *Second-Class Citizen* and *Assumptions of Criminality*, and *Microinvalidations* ranged from 1.5 to 1.7 for the total sample.

As noted above, scores on the *Environmental Microaggression* subscale reflect participants' perceptions of how people of different racial and ethnic groups are depicted in social media. This scale is reverse-coded so that higher response choices corresponded with more positive experiences with regard to microaggression, and then the items were reversed to calculate the scores. Participants averaged 4.3 ($SD = 1.5$) on this subscale.

Table 2 also reveals that there are important differences in the types of microaggression commonly experienced by racial and ethnic groups. For example, while Latino/Hispanic and Asian participants scored highest on the *Exoticization and Assumptions of Similarity* subscale, Blacks scored highest on the *Assumptions of Inferiority* subscale. Comparisons among different racial and ethnic groups on the total REMS and each of the subscales are reported below.

Differences in Microaggression Experiences among Racial and Ethnic Groups

The overall F-test for the REMS scale revealed a significant difference in scores by racial and ethnic group membership, $F(3, 280.97) = 41.85$, $p < .001$. Post-hoc comparisons revealed

Table 2. Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for the Racial and Ethnic Microaggression Scale (REMS) by Racial/Ethnic Group

| | | N | M | SD | SE |
|---|--------------|-----|------|------|------|
| Whole REM | Asian | 96 | 2.31 | 0.63 | 0.06 |
| | Lat/Hispanic | 97 | 2.34 | 0.65 | 0.07 |
| | Black | 76 | 2.43 | 0.79 | 0.09 |
| | White | 117 | 1.57 | 0.42 | 0.04 |
| | Total | 386 | 2.12 | 0.71 | 0.04 |
| Assumptions of Inferiority | Asian | 101 | 1.50 | 0.87 | 0.09 |
| | Lat/Hispanic | 103 | 2.03 | 1.20 | 0.12 |
| | Black | 80 | 2.30 | 1.42 | 0.16 |
| | White | 121 | 1.19 | 0.32 | 0.03 |
| | Total | 405 | 1.70 | 1.08 | 0.05 |
| Second-Class Citizen and Assumptions of Criminality | Asian | 100 | 1.45 | 0.77 | 0.08 |
| | Lat/Hispanic | 103 | 1.51 | 0.71 | 0.07 |
| | Black | 79 | 2.22 | 1.42 | 0.16 |
| | White | 120 | 1.15 | 0.48 | 0.04 |
| | Total | 402 | 1.53 | 0.94 | 0.05 |
| Microinvalidations | Asian | 100 | 1.54 | 0.75 | 0.08 |
| | Lat/Hispanic | 103 | 1.61 | 0.74 | 0.07 |
| | Black | 79 | 1.90 | 1.05 | 0.12 |
| | White | 120 | 1.48 | 0.63 | 0.06 |
| | Total | 402 | 1.61 | 0.80 | 0.04 |
| Exoticization and Assumptions of Similarity | Asian | 99 | 2.75 | 1.22 | 0.12 |
| | Lat/Hispanic | 102 | 2.43 | 1.12 | 0.11 |
| | Black | 79 | 1.91 | 0.87 | 0.10 |
| | White | 119 | 1.47 | 0.66 | 0.06 |
| | Total | 399 | 2.12 | 1.11 | 0.06 |
| Environmental Microaggressions | Asian | 100 | 5.09 | 0.96 | 0.10 |
| | Lat/Hispanic | 99 | 4.91 | 0.97 | 0.10 |
| | Black | 79 | 4.53 | 1.12 | 0.13 |
| | White | 120 | 2.99 | 1.73 | 0.16 |
| | Total | 398 | 4.30 | 1.54 | 0.08 |
| Workplace and School Microaggressions | Asian | 100 | 1.56 | 1.01 | 0.10 |
| | Lat/Hispanic | 102 | 1.53 | 0.76 | 0.08 |
| | Black | 80 | 1.84 | 1.21 | 0.14 |
| | White | 120 | 1.15 | 0.41 | 0.04 |
| | Total | 402 | 1.49 | 0.89 | 0.04 |

that all non-White groups experienced higher levels of perceived racial and ethnic microaggression than their White counterparts at $p < .001$ for all comparisons (Asian $M = 2.31$, $SD = .63$; Latino/Hispanic $M = 2.34$, $SD = .65$; Black $M = 2.43$, $SD = .79$; and White $M = 1.57$, $SD = .42$). There were no significant differences among Asian, Latino/Hispanic, and Black groups on the overall REMS score. Main effects tests of significance and post-hoc comparisons examining differences in microaggression experiences by group membership are shown in Tables 3 and 4 respectively.

Table 3. Main Effects Results of Brown-Forsythe Robust Tests of Equality of Means

| | Statistic ^a | df1 | df2 | Sig. |
|--|------------------------|-----|--------|-------|
| Whole REMS | 41.85 | 3 | 280.97 | 0.000 |
| Assumptions of Inferiority | 22.87 | 3 | 233.35 | 0.000 |
| 2nd Class Citizen and Assumptions of Criminality | 21.37 | 3 | 181.17 | 0.000 |
| Microinvalidations | 4.71 | 3 | 281.31 | 0.003 |
| Exoticization and Assumptions of Similarity | 34.99 | 3 | 326.03 | 0.000 |
| Environmental Microaggressions | 68.78 | 3 | 339.62 | 0.000 |
| Workplace and School Microaggressions | 9.74 | 3 | 244.32 | 0.000 |

a. Asymptotically F distributed.

Statistically significant effects were found among racial and ethnic groups on the *Assumption of Inferiority* subscale, $F(3, 233.35) = 22.87$, $p < .001$. Non-White groups experienced higher levels of this type of microaggression than their White peers ($M = 1.19$, $SD = .32$); $p < .001$ for Black and Latino/Hispanic comparisons and $p = .006$ for the Asian comparison. In addition, Latino/Hispanic ($M = 2.03$, $SD = 1.20$, $p < .001$) and Black participants ($M = 2.30$, $SD = 1.42$, $p = .002$) reported higher rates of this type of microaggression than Asians ($M = 1.50$, $SD = .87$).

Respondents differed significantly by race and ethnicity on the *Second-Class Citizen and Assumptions of Criminality* subscale $F(3, 181.17) = 22.87$, $p < .001$. Post-hoc comparisons indicated

Table 4. Games-Howell Post-Hoc Comparisons for Racial Group Experiences of Microaggressive Types

| Scale or Subscale | Race/ Ethnicity | Mean Difference | | | |
|--|--------------------|-----------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| | | Asian | Latino/Hisp | Black | White |
| Whole REM | Asian | - | -0.03 | -0.12 | 0.75($p < .001$) |
| | Lat/Hisp | - | - | -0.09 | 0.78($p < .001$) |
| | Black | - | - | - | 0.87($p < .001$) |
| | White | - | - | - | - |
| Assumptions of Inferiority | Asian | - | -0.54($p = .002$) | -0.80($p < .001$) | 0.31($p = .006$) |
| | Lat/Hisp | - | - | -0.27 | 0.84($p < .001$) |
| | Black | - | - | - | 1.11($p < .001$) |
| | White | - | - | - | - |
| Second-Class Citizen and Assumptions of Criminality | Asian | - | -0.05 | -0.77($p < .001$) | 0.30($p = .005$) |
| | Lat/Hisp | - | - | -0.71($p < .001$) | 0.36($p < .001$) |
| | Black | - | - | - | 1.07($p < .001$) |
| | White | - | - | - | - |
| Microinvalidations | Asian | - | -0.07 | -0.36($p = .051$) | 0.06 |
| | Lat/Hisp | - | - | -0.30 | 0.13 |
| | Black | - | - | - | 0.43($p = .008$) |
| | White | - | - | - | - |
| Exoticization and Assumptions of Similarity | Asian | - | 0.32 | 0.84($p < .001$) | 1.29($p < .001$) |
| | Lat/Hisp | - | - | 0.52($p = .003$) | 0.97($p < .001$) |
| | Black | - | - | - | 0.44($p < .001$) |
| | White | - | - | - | - |
| Environmental Microaggressions | Asian | - | 0.17 | -0.55($p = .004$) | 2.10($p < .001$) |
| | Lat/Hisp | - | - | 0.38 | 1.92($p < .001$) |
| | Black | - | - | - | 1.54($p < .001$) |
| | White | - | - | - | - |
| Workplace and School Microaggressions | Asian | - | 0.03 | -0.28 | 0.41($p < .001$) |
| | Lat/Hisp | - | - | -0.31 | 0.38($p < .001$) |
| | Black | - | - | - | 0.69($p < .001$) |
| | White | - | - | - | - |

that scores for Black participants ($M = 2.22$, $SD = 1.42$) were significantly higher than all other groups (Asian $M = 1.45$, $SD = .77$; Latino/Hispanic $M = 1.51$, $SD = .71$; White $M = 1.48$, SD

= .63) at $p < .001$. All of the non-White mean scores were also significantly higher than the mean scores reported by White respondents ($p < .001$ for the Latino/Hispanic and Black comparison and $.006$ for the Asian group).

Respondents also differed by race and ethnicity on indicators of the *Microinvalidations* subscale, $F(3, 281.31) = 4.71, p = .003$. Post-hoc comparisons indicated that Black participants reported higher rates of experiences of microinvalidations ($M=1.90, SD=1.05$) than Asian ($M=1.54, SD=.75$) at $p = .05$, and White ($M=1.48, SD=.63, p=.008$) participants. No significant differences were found for Latino/Hispanic participants ($M=1.61, SD=.74$) or between White and Asian groups.

Main effects for the ANOVA across racial groups for the *Exoticization and Assumptions of Similarity* scale also revealed significant differences, $F(3, 326.03) = 35.00, p < .001$. Post-hoc comparisons revealed that Asian ($M = 2.75, SD = 1.22$) participants experienced this type of microaggression more frequently than White ($M = 1.47, SD = .66, p < .001$) and Black participants ($M = 1.91, SD = .87, p < .001$). The multiple comparisons for this subscale found the same pattern for the Latino/Hispanic ($M = 2.43, SD = 1.12$) participants; Latino/Hispanic young adults scored significantly higher than the White group ($p < .001$) and the Black group ($p = .003$). In addition, Black participants had significantly higher mean scores on this scale than White participants ($p < .001$).

The main effects for the ANOVA test on the *Environmental* subscale revealed statistically significant differences among racial/ethnic groups, $F(3, 339.62) = 68.78, p < .001$. Environmental microaggression was scored lower on average by White participants ($M = 2.99, SD = 1.73$) than Black ($M = 4.53, SD = 1.12$), Latino/Hispanic ($M = 4.91, SD = .97$) and Asian ($M = .96, SD = .10$) at $p < .001$. In addition, the mean score for the Black group was significantly greater than the Asian group ($p = .004$).

The final REMS subscale, *Workplace and School Microaggressions*, also revealed significant main effects across the racial and ethnic groups, $F(3, 244.32) = 9.74, p < .001$. Latino/Hispanic ($M = 1.53, SD = .76$) reported significantly more frequent experiences of workplace and school microaggression than White participants ($M = 1.15, SD = .41$) at a p value $< .001$. Black respondents' ($M = 1.84, SD = 1.21$) mean

scores were significantly higher than their White peers ($p < .001$), as were Asian ($M = 1.56$, $SD = 1.01$) mean scores at $p = .001$. No statistically significant differences were found among the non-White groups for this subscale.

Discussion

We examined differences in microaggressions experienced by Asian, Latino/Hispanic, Black, and White young adults. As expected, non-White racial and ethnic groups experienced racial and ethnic microaggression significantly more frequently than Whites. This pattern was true for the total scale and all of the subscales except *Microinvalidations*; mean scores for only the Black respondents were significantly higher than Whites on this subscale. At the same time, there were no significant differences among the mean scores for the non-White groups on the total REMS, suggesting that in general, microaggression is experienced at similar rates among the different non-White groups. Post-hoc comparisons, however, revealed a number of significant differences in the experiences of microaggression depending on the type of discrimination in question. Differences among types of microaggressions experienced by non-White racial and ethnic groups are discussed below.

Overall, Black participants experienced more interpersonal microaggressions and were less likely to see positive images of their race in various forms of media than other participants, as measured by the *Environmental Microaggressions* subscale. Particularly noteworthy was the finding that Blacks reported significantly higher mean scores on the *Second-Class Citizen and Assumption of Criminality* subscale than any other group; none of the other non-White groups were statistically different from each other for this scale. Latino/Hispanic participants experienced the next highest rates of microaggressions, and endorsed similar rates to Blacks for *Assumptions of Inferiority*, and *Microinvalidations*. Asian participants reported less frequent experiences than the other 2 non-White groups overall for interpersonal microaggressions and indicated that they more frequently saw people of their race portrayed positively in the environment. Finally, Blacks experienced the lowest rates of *Exoticization and Assumption of Similarity* microaggressions, while the mean scores for Asians and Latinos/Hispanics were

similar on this subscale. There were no statistically significant scores between non-White groups on the *Workplace and School* types of microaggression.

The finding that White participants had significantly lower scores on the total microaggression scale than all non-White groups confirms that perceived discrimination is a significant issue for young adults of color. This finding is consistent with literature suggesting that many young people of color experience discrimination in the form of microaggressions in their daily lives (Brown et al., 2000; Rivera, Forquer, & Rangel, 2010; Sue, 2010). It is interesting to note that there were no significant differences among non-White group mean scores on the total REMS score. This finding may not be surprising since prior studies reveal that while different racial and ethnic groups do experience different types of discrimination (Araújo & Borrell, 2006; Brondolo et al., 2008; Solorzano & Yosso, 2000; Sue, 2010; Szalacha et al., 2003), the evidence does not indicate that particular racial and ethnic groups experience more or less discrimination than one another.

The results of the analyses assessing group differences in types of perceived racial and ethnic discrimination indicate that race and ethnicity has an important effect on the experiences and frequency of different types of racial and ethnic microaggression. These findings confirm the importance of examining differences in microaggressive experiences across racial and ethnic groups. As noted earlier, there was no difference in total REMS scores among the non-White groups. Thus, the significant differences found for different types of microaggression would be obscured if subscales had not been examined separately.

Some provisional interpretations of group differences in microaggression experiences can be made based on study findings. First, the results appear to be fairly consistent with commonly occurring racial and ethnic stereotypes occurring in American society. For example, the finding that Latino/Hispanics and Black groups reported high levels of *Assumptions of Inferiority* microaggressions may be consistent with negative stereotypes of Latino and Black people. Most people are likely familiar with stereotypic images suggesting that Latinos and Blacks experience limited success at school and in the workplace (Guyll, Madon, Prieto, & Scherr, 2010; Taylor, & Walton,

2011). The opposite, however, is true for Asians, who are often characterized stereotypically by the “model minority myth,” which imposes expectations of high achievement and ease in learning and acculturation (Gupta, Szymanski, & Leong, 2011). Study findings evidenced by the low reports of microaggression on the *Assumptions of Inferiority* subscale among Asian participants tend to support this characterization.

Asian and Latino/Hispanic participants endorsed higher rates of experiences of *Exoticization and Assumptions of Similarity* than Blacks. These findings may reflect stereotypes and prejudices that are associated with high numbers of recent immigrants from Latin American and Asian countries whose primary languages may not be English and whose cultural practices are less-Westernized. Asian participants experienced *Microinvalidations* at lower rates than Latinos/Hispanics and Blacks; only Black participants experienced such forms of microaggression at higher rates than Whites. These results may have implications about the way in which people perceive “color.” That is, Whites may perceive life in a way that places less value on color (e.g., color is no big deal!). White participants may also hold beliefs that “not seeing color” is equivalent to not being racist. The meaning behind these perceptions may be quite different for Whites and non-Whites. This leads to an interesting consideration of the intersection of the *intent* versus the actual *impact* of microaggressions. That is, well-intentioned people might believe that we are or should be a “post-racial” society, while others may be offended by such a belief because differences in race and ethnicity shape much of their own identities and lived experiences.

Limitations

Further interpretation of these results is guarded for several reasons. As noted earlier, the possibility of increasing Type I errors is present when multiple comparisons such as these are conducted. In addition, further interpretation of the study’s findings with regard to differences in microaggression awaits research that uses larger samples to assess relationships among variables in the various racial and ethnic groups. Another consideration for future research may be to examine how various forms of microaggression impact social, behavioral, and other outcomes among different racial and ethnic

groups. Longitudinal investigations are also needed to assess changes in the type and nature of microaggression over time, and find ways to account for the cumulative effect of microaggressions over the life course as well as inter-generationally. Future studies of the differences in exposure and frequency of microaggression among groups should also consider diversity within racial and ethnic groups. Finally, the concept of microaggression has been expanded in recent years beyond racial and ethnic minorities as a means of understanding and interpreting marginalization related to factors such as religion, sexual orientation, gender, disabilities, and aging (Sue, 2010). The available research on these types of microaggression is very limited and should be included in future research investigations.

Conclusion

Study results have several important implications for practice and policy. Commonalities in microaggression incidents among groups suggest a need for universal interventions in school, community, and family settings that seek to prevent discrimination among all young people. Prevention programs should include education and interactive curricula that expose students to microaggression examples; recognition and skills training may be effective in this regard.

Important differences in microaggression experiences among racial and ethnic groups found in the current study suggest that interventions need to be adapted to meet the needs of young people from different backgrounds. In this regard, high schools, colleges, and universities may be appropriate venues for educating students about the common and unique forms of microaggression across racial and ethnic groups. In addition, medical and clinical agencies are ideally situated to integrate knowledge about common microaggressions through strategies like cultural competency training. Furthermore, broad-based community and education campaigns that use media strategies to convey messages about the adverse effects of microaggression may be an effective policy-level response.

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