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Experiences with Diversity: Microaggressions, Religiosity, and Psychological Wellbeing in a Diverse College Sample

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Abstract

This study examined students' beliefs about the existence of racial discrimination on Andrews' campus and their experience with behaviors classified as microaggressions. We used a survey composed of the following measures: Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (Hill and Argyle, 2002), Intrinsic/Extrinsic Religious Orientation (Francis, Fawcett, Robbins, & Stairs, 2016), Social Dominance (Pratto, Felicia, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994), and Racial and Ethnic Microaggression (Nadal, 2011). Pearson's R correlations and Qualitative Comparative Analysis (Thiem, 2016) were used to analyze subjects' responses (N=147). We found low overall levels of microaggressions across campus and focused our detailed analyses on three specific microaggressions: microinvalidations, exoticization, and environmental. 70% of subjects reported at least 1-3 microinvalidations, 80% of subjects reported at least 1-3 exoticization microaggressions, and Latino/Latina subjects reported a lack of visible representation in media and leadership. These findings provide valuable insight in microaggression research in that not all kinds of microaggressions are experienced in the same way by the same kinds of people.

Experiences with Diversity: Microaggressions, Religiosity, and Psychological Wellbeing in a

Diverse College Sample

In the last year, Andrews University has been on a journey of inclusion, acceptance, and

communal wellbeing. On Saturday, February 18, 2017, a group of students released a video

concerning the presence of racism on the campus of Andrews University, both in the past in the

present. In this video, they expressed their grievances and gave the university administration one

week to agree to the terms they established. That following Thursday, Dr. Luxton stood at the

pulpit of Pioneer Memorial Church during chapel and spoke the first words that began her

speech, "We will be okay." In the wake of this event, students began to dialogue about their own

experiences on campus and the impact that race had on those experiences. Andrews University is

a very diverse campus (rated #1 in diversity among National Universities in the 2017 US News

rankings). As such, it is important to understand attitudes, interactions, and experiences in

diverse social spaces. This study examines whether experiences of microaggressions exist on

campus, and to what extent those experiences involve students of other racial and ethnic groups.

We examined whether religiosity, psychological well-being, and social dominance beliefs were

related to the experiences of microaggressions. We hypothesized negative correlations between

microaggressions and all of the selected variables. We also expected to find that different

demographic groups experience different types of microaggressions.

Literature Review

While America has seen significant progress in race relations since the days of Jim Crow,

the traces of racism still permeate the fabric of American society today (Thompson & Neville,

1999). While it is less acceptable to condone violent acts of racism such as lynching and cross

burning that were likely to have occurred up to even 30 years ago, contemporary narrative

accounts reveal an array of daily injustices that people of various races experience because of

their race (e.g., Cose, 1993; Dees, 1991; McCall, 1994). Less overt acts fall under the notional

umbrella of microaggressions—while individuals may not be outspoken racists, they may have

unconsciously adopted biases or prejudices towards certain groups of people that shape their

interactions with those people. *Racial* microaggressions are subtle statements and behaviors that

unconsciously communicate denigrating messages to people of color (Nadal, 2011). Sue and

colleagues (2007) describe several categories of microaggressions, including subtle racial insults

(i.e. verbal and nonverbal behaviors that send denigrating messages to people of color) and racial

invalidations (i.e., unconscious verbal statements in which the perpetrator may have good

intentions, but which convey negative messages to people of color).

Stress of frequent, repeated interactions that subconsciously remind an individual of their

status as 'other' or 'less than' in society can significantly impact their health and self-identity.

Eckenrode (1984) found a strong correlation between chronic and acute stressors and daily

reports of mood. Many studies have shown that racial discrimination is related to increased

depression (Lambert, Herman, Bynum, & Lalongo, 2009), psychological stress (Fang & Myers,

2001), and sleeping problems (Steffan & Bowden, 2006), indicating that continuing research in

this area is important in order to support the physical and mental health of minorities and people

of color.

However, Lilienfeld (2017) argues that the study of microaggressions is far too

underdeveloped on the conceptual and methodological fronts to warrant real-world application.

While Lilienfeld's criticisms of the field open important discussion, he does note that there are

some instruments used the study of microaggressions that are effectively designed and can push

the conceptual and methodological components of microaggressions forward, singling out the

Nadal (2011) Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale as an instrument that avoid many of his concerns about validity. I intend to use this instrument to add to the body of knowledge concerning microaggression and thereby contribute towards further developing the construct.

Microaggressions are important to study in a social context. At a religious institution, Christian beliefs shape attitudes and motivate interactions between students and faculty. Studies show that group-based experiences such as religious, gender, and class influences worldviews and color one's perception of reality of particular groups (Babbington, 2008; Hanna et al., 2000). For example, Derald Sue explained that "women continue to report that sexism keeps them from rising to top managerial positions, that their contributions are not recognized by their male counterparts" (p. 11, 2010).

In addition to religious beliefs, the basic belief that hierarchies are a necessary part of the social world could lead people to dismissing microaggressive behaviors. Social dominance, defined as the belief in stability of group-based social hierarchies, will be studied in the context of microaggression experiences to observe the possible relationship between them. Stronger belief in maintaining societal hierarchy could lead to the internalization of denigrating messages towards oneself—and less frequent reporting of microaggressions—as a result of accepting social dominance as the natural way of life.

In light of these findings, this study will examine the following research questions:

(1) How is the prevalence of microaggressions related to religiosity, well-being, and social dominance beliefs?

(2) How do different demographic intersections related to the likelihood of experiencing different types of microaggressions?

Procedure

Subjects

Subjects were recruited from both the Behavioral Sciences Research Subject pool as well as by social media. Subjects were required to be at least 18 years of age and enrolled at Andrews University.

The full survey was completed by 147 subjects (107 females, 39 males, 1 other). Of these respondents, 44% of subjects identified as White, 18% of subjects identified as Black or African American, 19% of subjects identified as Hispanic or Latino, 9% of subjects identified as Caribbean, 1% of subjects identified as American Indian or Alaska Native, 27% of subjects identified as Asian, 1% of subjects identified as Pacific Islander, and 4% of subjects did not identify with the provided demographic labels. The average age of subjects was 20.7 (SD=4.95). The entire subject pool self-identified as Seventh-day Adventist.

This project was reviewed and approved by the Andrews University Institutional Review Board.

Materials

All subjects completed the instruments online via a lab-specific installation of LimeSurvey Version 2.05+.

Table 1. Survey Measures

Measure	Source	Number of Items
Demographics	--	7
Oxford Happiness Questionnaire	Hill & Argyle (2002)	29
Intrinsic/Extrinsic Religious Orientation	Francis, Fawcett, Robbins, & Stairs (2016)	18
Social Dominance	Pratto, Felicia, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle. (1994)	16
Diversity	--	5
Racial and Ethnic Microaggression	Nadal (2011)	45

Well-being. The Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (Hill & Argyle, 2002) is designed to assess levels of well-being in college students. It contains 29 items using a 6-point Likert-like scale with a response set ranging from *strongly agree* (7) to *strongly disagree* (1). Items on this list include: "I don't feel particularly pleased with the way I am," "I do not think that the world is a good place," and "I don't have particularly happy memories of the past." The reported reliability of the scale (Cronbach's alpha) was 0.92 (Hill & Argyle, 2002).

Religious Orientation. The Intrinsic/Extrinsic Religious Orientation Scale by Francis, Fawcett, Robbins, and Stairs (2016) is designed to assess intrinsic and extrinsic religious internalization. It contains 18 items using 5-Point Likert-like response set ranging from *strongly agree* (5) to *strongly disagree* (1). Items on this scale include: "While I believe in the Christian faith, there are more important things in my life" (Extrinsic orientation); "My Christian faith shapes how I live my daily life" (Intrinsic orientation). The Cronbach's α for Intrinsic Orientation was .82 and .65 for Extrinsic Orientation (Francis et al., 2016).

Social Dominance. The Social Dominance Scale by Pratto, Felicia, Sidanius, Stallworth, and Malle (1994) is designed to assess attitudes towards group-based social hierarchies. It

contains 16 items using 7-point Likert-like responses from *very positive* (7) to *very negative* (1). Items on this list include: "Some groups of people are simply inferior to other groups," "We should do what we can to equalize conditions for different groups," and "To get ahead in life, it is sometimes necessary to step on other groups." The reliability of the scale (Cronbach's α = .88; Pratto et al., 1994) was in the very good range.

Diversity. Diversity, defined as differences between people on a range of attributes (race, ethnicity, gender, and other attributes) that may be either observable or unobservable to a casual bystander, was measured using a 5-point Likert-like scale created for this study that contained 5 items with a response set ranging from *a lot of diversity* (4) to *no diversity* (1). Items on this scale include: "Consider the family members you knew when you were growing up," and "Consider the neighborhood you lived in growing up. If you moved residences as a child, consider the average racial makeup of the neighborhoods you lived in."

Experiences with Microaggressions. The Racial and Ethnic Microaggression Scale by Nadal (2011) is designed to assess perceived experiences with microaggression. We modified the time range to be consider to those events occurring on the campus of Andrews University during the last two semesters. It contains 45 items using a 5-Point Likert-like scale with a response set ranging from *I experienced this event 10 or more times in the past two semesters* (5) to *I did not experience this event in the past two semesters* (1). Examples of items on this list include: "Someone assumed that I was poor because of my race" (Assumption of Inferiority), "Someone avoided eye contact with me because of my race" (Second-Class Citizen and Assumptions of Criminality), "Someone told me that they "don't see color" (Microinvalidations), "Someone assumed that I speak similar languages to other people in my race" (Exoticization/Assumptions of Similarity), "I observed people of my race in prominent positions at my workplace or school"

(Environmental Representation), and "My opinion was overlooked in a group discussion because of my race" (Workplace and School Microaggressions). The reliability of the scale (Cronbach's alpha) was .912 for the overall model and subscales ranged from .783 to .873 (Nadal, 2011).

Demographic Variables.

Analytical Approach

The first step of our approach was to examine the distribution of subjects using a combination of box plots and violin plots. This visual depiction both summarizes the spread of data into three quartiles and reports the median scores, or the middle of the dataset using the boxplot and to represent the shape of the distribution using the violin plot.

Secondly, we used heat maps to examine the relationships between variables (well-being, religiosity, social dominance, and microaggressions). Heat maps enhance the correlation matrix by depicting stronger correlations in more saturated colors, and distinguishing positive (blue) and negative (red) correlations. This graphical representation of data provides a method of observing variable relationships by comparing shared variance vertically (columns) and horizontally (rows).

Lastly, we used Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) to find necessary components of sufficient paths that reliably mark membership of a category, which in this case is the experience of microaggressions. Because race, ethnicity, and gender (demographic aspects of identity) are fundamentally intersectional, using a line of regression or a "line of best fit" would not satisfy the nature of this exploratory study. Because intersectionality goes beyond finding one solution, QCA is an appropriate test to run in this study because it goes beyond a "line of best fit" and examines multiple paths that can lead to an outcome (the principle of equifinality).

In the QCA analysis, we first identify outcomes where a substantial proportion of subjects report the outcome. Next, we construct a truth table which consists of all the possible combinations of exogenous factors (in our study, the demographic identifiers). This involves the following steps:

(1) create a table with a row for each of the possible combinations of exogenous factors,

(2) count the number of cases that match the combination in each row,

(3) delete the rows where combinations don't exist and those below a frequency threshold (initially 2% of cases or 4 cases in this study) for the number of cases needed to consider a pattern to be well-represented,

(4) set a threshold percentage of cases that cases should match the outcome (initially 75%) in order to be considered consistent,

(5) compare consistency for each row to the threshold in order to mark that row as consistent or not consistent depending on whether it meets threshold or not, and

(6) summarize the remaining consistent rows using a minimization algorithm which finds the simplest pathways that cover all of the intersections that are consistent with the outcome.

Our approach to QCA excluded tests for necessity (Thiem, 2017) and only derived the parsimonious sufficiency solution as the intermediate and conservative solutions posit unobserved patterns as part of minimization (Baumgartner & Thiem, 2017). We used the enhanced Quine-McCloskey algorithm as implemented in the QCApro package (version 1.1-1) in R 3.4.4 to derive the sufficiency solution.

Results

Distributions and Correlations

The first step of our analysis was to assess the distribution of selected outcome variables. The following three microaggression subscales were selected for the statistical analysis: Microinvalidations, Exoticization/Assumptions of Similarity, and Environmental Representation. The rationale for this selection was due to the fact that these subscales were the had the strongest relationships among all the subscales analyzed. We used combination box and violin plots (Appendix A, Figures 1-3) to analyze the distribution of each outcome variable. Results showed that the interquartile, the middle 50% of scores, laid between the first (*I did not experience this event in the past two semesters*) and second (*I experienced this event 1-3 times in the past two semesters*) step for all scales except environmental for the white group. Generally, there were smaller ranges of scores for Whites than non-Whites. According to these results, there are lower levels of microaggression experienced for White subjects than for non-White subjects.

We then analyzed the correlations between well-being, religiosity, social dominance, and microaggressions using Pearson's *r* shown in Figure 4. The first interesting finding was between well-being and intrinsic religious orientation. There were relatively strong correlations reported for non-White subjects (r=0.52, p<0.001), as compared to the significantly weaker correlations for White subjects (r=0.12, p<0.01). Similarly, there were stronger correlations between each of the microaggression subscales and the other microaggression subscales (Mean correlation size=0.32) for nonwhite subjects as compared the between microaggression correlations (Mean correlation size=0.19) observed in white subjects. The correlation analysis found that no individual type of microaggression accounts for unique variance in well-being.

Qualitative Comparative Analysis

While the overall rates of microaggressions were low, most subjects experienced at least one microaggression. 46% of subjects reported at least 1-3 microaggressions classified as

assumptions of inferiority. 29% of subjects reported at least 1-3 microaggressions classified as

second-class citizen and assumptions of criminality. 70% of subjects reported at least 1-3

microaggressions classified as *microinvalidations.* 80% of subjects reported at least 1-3

microaggressions classified as *exoticization/assumptions of similarity.* 85% of subjects reported

at least 1-3 experiences classified as *environmental representation* (the only subscale defined as

the absence of microaggressions). Finally, 38% of subjects reported at least 1-3 microaggressions

classified as *workplace and school microaggressions.*

In building the truth table (Table 2), the following three calibrated subscales (at least one

reported microaggression in that category = 1; no reported microaggressions in that category = 0)

were included as the outcomes: microinvalidations, exoticism, and environmental (reversed).

The following demographic characteristics were selected as exogenous factors: male, White,

Black, Latino/Latina, and Asian. Approximately 9 rows remained after removing unobserved

combinations of exogenous factors and rows with fewer than 4 cases from the original 32 rows,

resulting in low diversity (11%). Three of the 9 rows included males. The largest group of cases

(n=35) was White females. Of these, 46% experienced microinvalidations, 60% experienced

exoticism, and 86% experienced environmental representation. The smallest group of cases

(n=4) was Black males. Of these cases, 75% experienced microinvalidations, 100% experienced

exoticism, and 75% experienced environmental. Black females had the highest proportions

overall across all three outcomes (95%, n=19). The smallest proportion of consistent cases for

microinvalidations was 46% for White females (n=35). The smallest proportion of consistent

cases for exoticism was 62% for White males (n=13). And finally, the smallest proportion of

consistent cases for environmental was 70% female Latinas (n=10).

Profiles Consistent with Microinvalidations. The minimization algorithm (Table 3)

reported two sufficient pathways consistent with microinvalidations as an outcome:

Latino/Latina or non-White and non-Asian. The Latino/Latina set accounts for 22% of the cases

reporting microinvalidations; 82% of the Latino/Latina cases report microinvalidations. The non-

White and non-Asian set accounts for 40% of the cases reporting microinvalidations; 86% of the

of the non-White or non-Asian cases report microinvalidations. Overall, the model covered a

small majority of cases that reported microinvalidations—52% of subjects who reported

microinvalidations fit one of the profiles in this model. The model was also highly consistent

with the data—86% of the cases that fit the profiles in the model report experiencing at least one

microinvalidation event.

Profiles Consistent with Exoticization. Three sufficient pathways were found for

exoticization/assumption of inferiority (Table 4): Asian, Black, or Latino/Latina. The Asian set

accounts for 30% of the cases reporting exoticization, 92% of the Asian cases report

exoticization. The Black set account for 22% of the cases of the cases reporting exoticization,

96% of the Black cases report exoticization. The Latino/Latina set accounts for 21% of the cases

reporting exoticization, 89% of the Latino/Latina cases report exoticization. The model was also

highly consistent with the data—86% of the cases that fit the profiles in the model report

experiences of at least one exoticization event.

Profiles Consistent with Environmental Representation. Two sufficient pathways

were found for environmental representation (Table 5): non-Latino/Latina and White. The non-

Latino/Latina set accounts for 82% of the cases reporting environmental, 87% of the non-

Latino/Latina cases report environmental. The White set accounts for 46% of the cases reporting

environmental, 89% of the White cases report environmental. Finally, 90% of subjects with

reports of environmental microaggressions are explained by this model and 86% of non-Latino/Latino/White cases have the outcome.

Discussion

The nature of this project was an exploratory study aimed at analyzing correlations between well-being, religiosity, social dominance, and microaggressions, as well as examining the particular demographic intersection that lead to microaggression experiences. There were weak correlations across all variables, which I theorize is due to the fact that because there are only certain intersections that experience certain microaggressions, there isn't only one true path. Moreover, correlations assume one true path and will show equifinality as noise. According to these results, there are low levels of microaggressions on this campus. I attribute these findings to the fact that Andrews University is a racially and ethnically-diverse religious institution and that, generally speaking, non-White students will not encounter denigrating messages targeted at them due to the Christian values of the institution. Furthermore, the fact that there were smaller ranges of scores for Whites than non-whites is due to the lack of variance for White subjects. Non-White subjects reported more varied scores, resulting in a wider range as depicted in Figures 1-3.

The correlations for microaggression subscales for non-Whites points to an interesting finding—that microaggressions are not experienced in isolated instances. Rather, non-White students that report instances are microaggressions are likely going to report grouped experienced of microaggression due to its systemic nature, as shown in Appendix B. On the other hand, White students are likely going to report isolated instances due to the fact that it is not a systemic issue for the dominant group. Additionally, strong correlations between well-being and intrinsic religious orientation suggest that non-White individuals rely more on religion

for their overall well-being in order to counteract the adversity in their lives, which compliments the previous findings in this study that non-Whites experience report higher rates of microaggressions than their white counterparts. The failure for microaggressions to account for substantial variance in well-being could be caused by the overall low levels of microaggressions and by intersections experiencing different kinds of microaggressions. More consistency for microaggression reports is needed in order for it to be considered a robust, reliable factor to well-being.

The low diversity of patterns in the QCA analysis occurred for two reasons: a lack of observations, and because not all exogenous combinations actually exist in the sample. Regarding the first explanation, the relatively small sample size restricted the amount of observations to occur. With a larger sample, the amount of observations would similarly increase. Interestingly, females reported less likelihood of experiencing microaggressions than males, possibly suggesting that females may be less inclined to identify a microaggression when faced with one, or that perpetrators are less inclined to target non-White female students. White males reported the highest proportion consistency in environmental representations (86%). This is because White males observe high levels of representation in their environmental, correlating with higher scores in this subscale. Black males had the highest percentage of microaggression experiences across all three subscales, providing valuable insight into what kinds of groups are most at risks for this occurrence. If Black males are more at risk than other ethnic groups, than providing social support and education could better prepare students against these kinds of attacks.

Lastly, the QCA pathways provide a valuable understanding of which groups are experiences what kind of microaggressions. Overall, 86% of Latino/Latina/non-White/non-Asian

subjects experience microinvalidations. This means that Latinos/Latino students and Black

students are especially subject to hearing responses such as "I don't see color", "People of color

do not experience racism anymore", and "People of all racial groups experience the same

obstacles" which are statements that inherently invalidate a minorities' cultural identify by

ignoring their experience with systemic oppression. Additionally, 86% of

Asian/Black/Latino/Latina subjects experience exoticization. Understanding that generally all

minority groups face this type of microaggression, faculty and staff can better educate students to

avoid using statements of exoticization targeted towards minorities groups so to lower this

occurrence across campus. Finally, while there were high reports of representation for White

subjects, Latino/Latina subjects reported no instances of environmental representation. This

means that no Latino/Latino subject reported observing prominent positions at their workplace or

school. These results expose a major problem of representation on Andrews campus with the

Latino/Latina community. This lack of representation could consequently lead to further

marginalization and devaluing of one's culture and identity. As an Adventist institution,

Andrews University stands by the value of equality of all people groups. A serious re-

examination of representation among faculty and staff could significantly improve the

experiences of students within this marginalized group in making space for leaders to strive and

succeed whose faces look like their own.

   This research could be further expounded by including a larger sample size to increase

the amount of intersectionality possible. Additionally, further data on representation questions

could lead to significant results regarding the effects that lack of representation has on students
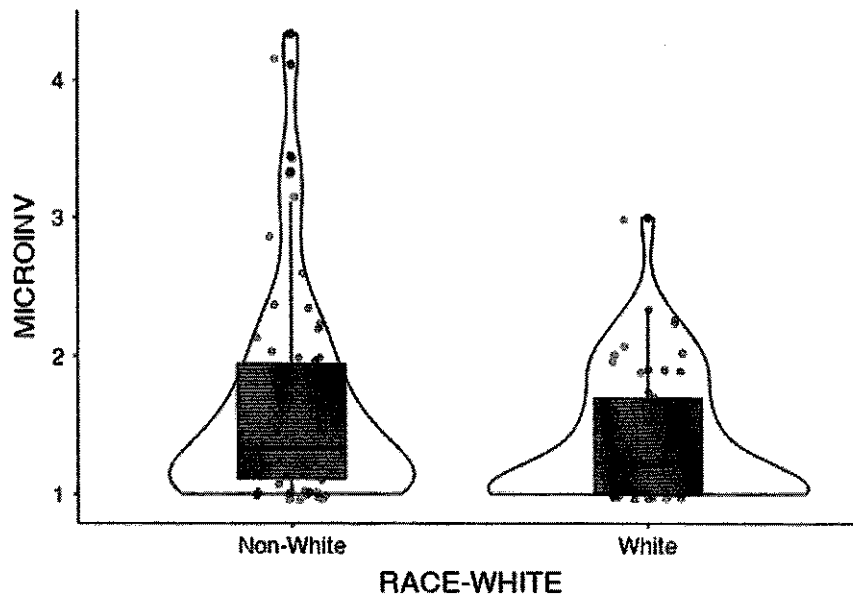
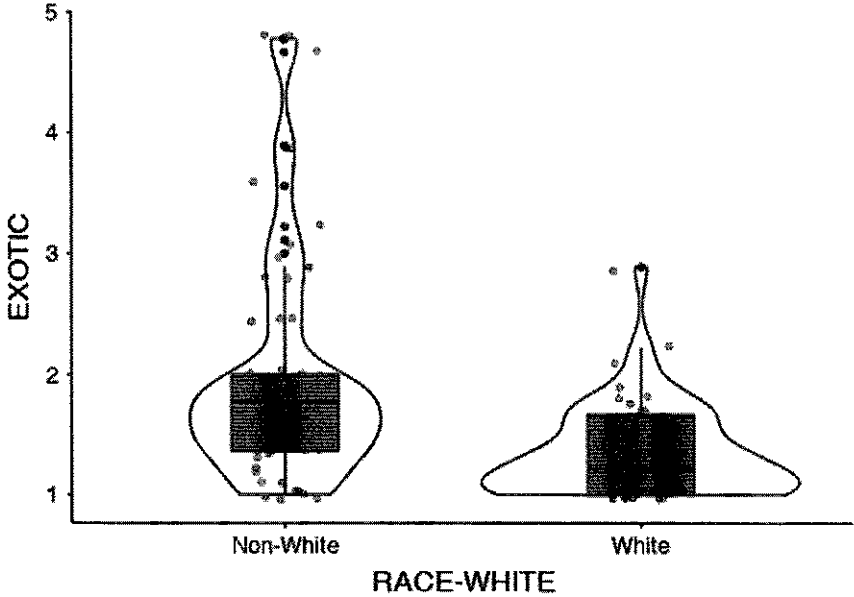within an educational system.

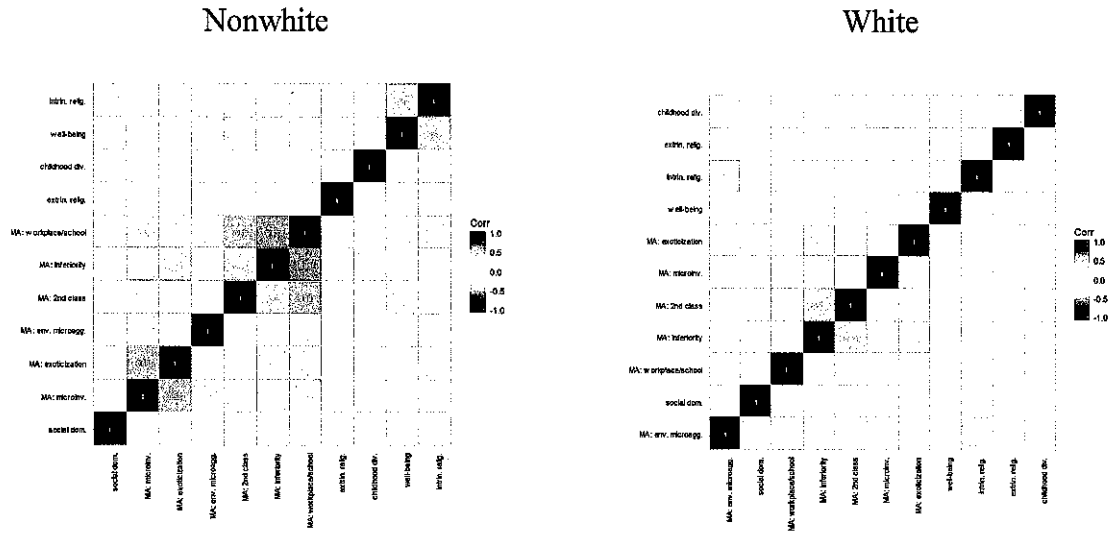Figure 1. Distribution Box Plot

Figure 3. Distribution Box Plot

Nonwhite   White

Figure 4. Heat Map Correlations

Table 2. Truth Table for Microinvalidations, Exoticization, and Representation

| | | | | | | | | Consistency | | | |
| Exogenous Factors | | | | | Cases Consistent with Outcome? | | | Proportion of Consistent Cases | | | |
MALE	WHITE	BLACK	LATINX	ASIAN	MICROINV	EXOTIC	REPR	MICROINV	EXOTIC	ENVMICAGG	n
0	0	0	0	0	Y	N	Y	0.800	0.700	0.800	10
0	0	0	0	1	N	Y	Y	0.722	0.889	0.778	18
0	0	0	1	0	Y	Y	N	0.800	0.900	0.700	10
0	0	1	0	0	Y	Y	Y	0.947	0.947	0.947	19
0	1	0	0	0	N	N	Y	0.457	0.600	0.857	35
0	1	0	1	0	Y	Y	Y	0.778	0.889	0.889	9
1	0	0	0	1	N	Y	Y	0.692	1.000	0.769	13
1	0	1	0	0	Y	Y	Y	0.750	1.000	0.750	4
1	1	0	0	0	N	N	Y	0.615	0.615	1.000	13

Outcomes were subscales from the Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions scale: MICROINV, microinvalidations; EXOTIC, exoticization/assumptions of similarity; REPR, environmental representation; Exogenous factors were demographic categories: LATINX; Latino/Latina; n, number of cases.

Table 3. QCA solution with microinvalidations as an outcome.

Sufficient pathways consistent with outcome	Consistency	Raw coverage	Unique coverage
Latino/Latina	0.821	0.223	0.107
Non-White or non-Asian (lowercase)	0.857	0.408	0.291
Overall	0.855	0.515	--

Table 4. QCA with exoticization/assumptions of inferiority as an outcome.

Sufficient pathways consistent with outcome	Consistency	Raw coverage	Unique coverage
Asian	0.923	0.305	0.228
Black	0.963	0.220	0.186
Latino/Latina	0.893	0.212	0.169
Overall	0.855	0.515	--

Table 5. QCA solution with environmental microaggressions as an outcome.

Sufficient pathways consistent with outcome	Consistency	Raw coverage	Unique coverage
Not Latino/Latina	0.866	0.824	0.440
White	0.891	0.456	0.072
Overall	0.862	0.896	--

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