



Intraracial and Intraethnic Microaggressions Experienced by Korean American Internationally and Transracially Adopted Persons

Karin J. Garber & Krystal K. Cashen

University of Massachusetts Amherst, Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences

Introduction

- Microaggressions can be described as, “Brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative... slights and insults towards people of color” (Sue et al., 2007a, p. 271).
- Much of the literature on microaggressions, racial discrimination, and prejudice have focused on intergroup relations and interracial conflict and differences (Marira & Mitra, 2013).
- Yet, different psychological experiences *within* racial/ethnic groups are equally as critical to study (Hall, 2005). Shifting the focus to intraracial will be more necessary as the U.S. population diversifies.
- One way individuals of the same race/ethnicity can have varying experiences is socialization (Hochschild & Weaver, 2007).
- Korean American internationally and transracially adopted individuals (ITAPs) with White parents can be socialized differently compared to other nonadopted Asian Americans (Lee, 2003). These differences may lead to variances in worldviews resulting in microaggressions.
- The current research developed a typology for the microaggressive experiences of Korean American ITAPs by their same race/ethnicity non adopted peers.

Method

- **Participants:** 8 Korean ITAPs (4 males, 4 females) between the ages of 27-38 who were adopted before the age of 2 years old and raised by White European American identified parents.
- Participants were a purposive sample chosen due to their ability to express these experiences in a meaningful way.
- Participants were recruited through individuals known to the researcher or referred through acquaintances.
- **Measure:** Modified questions from Sue et al. (2007b) microaggressions study. Participants were asked about: times they have felt invalidated or subtly discriminated against by others of their same race/ethnicity, ways they felt devalued due to their “expressions” of their Korean/Asian identities, stereotypical beliefs that other Koreans and Asians may have about Korean American adoptees, and times they have felt they did not “belong” with others of their same race/ethnicity. Basic details regarding the intensity and frequency of these events were also asked.
- **Procedure:** Focus groups via a tech-mediated method, Google Hangout, was used for data collection.
- Each focus group consisted of two sessions with the same 4 participants. All focus group sessions were audiotaped and lasted about 1.5 - 2 hours. Participants were compensated \$40.
- **1st Session:** Participants expanded upon their experiences with intraracial microaggressions with the first author as facilitator. Next, trained research assistants transcribed the interviews.

- **2nd Session:** Five weeks later, participants were provided with preliminary themes and asked to reflect on them for one week. The next week, feedback was gathered on the themes.
- **Data Analysis:** A thematic analysis coding process modified from Braun & Clarke’s (2006) paradigm was used. The steps include: (1) Become familiar with the data; (2) Extract intraracial/intraethnic microaggression codes; (3) Develop subthemes with data set and submit to focus groups for verification; (4) Finalize subthemes and create overarching themes; (5) Conduct a dependability audit; (6) Interpret the data and produce the report.

Results

- **Timeline:** Intraracial/intraethnic microaggressions tend to occur in young adulthood when ITAP moved away from home.
- **Frequency:** Occurred less often than interracial microaggressions.
- **Intensity:** Intraracial microaggressions were more intense than interracial microaggressions.
- 6 overarching themes and 16 subthemes were culled from the transcripts.



CONTEXTUAL MICROAGGRESSIONS: Physical Contexts; Cultural Contexts

I go to Korea, and everyone on every billboard in every show, in everything is supposed to be like me, but I don't look like them, and then there is like a similarity, as an outsider, I see where there's a certain way to put your make up on, there's a certain look that you have, there's a certain skin tone that you aim for...



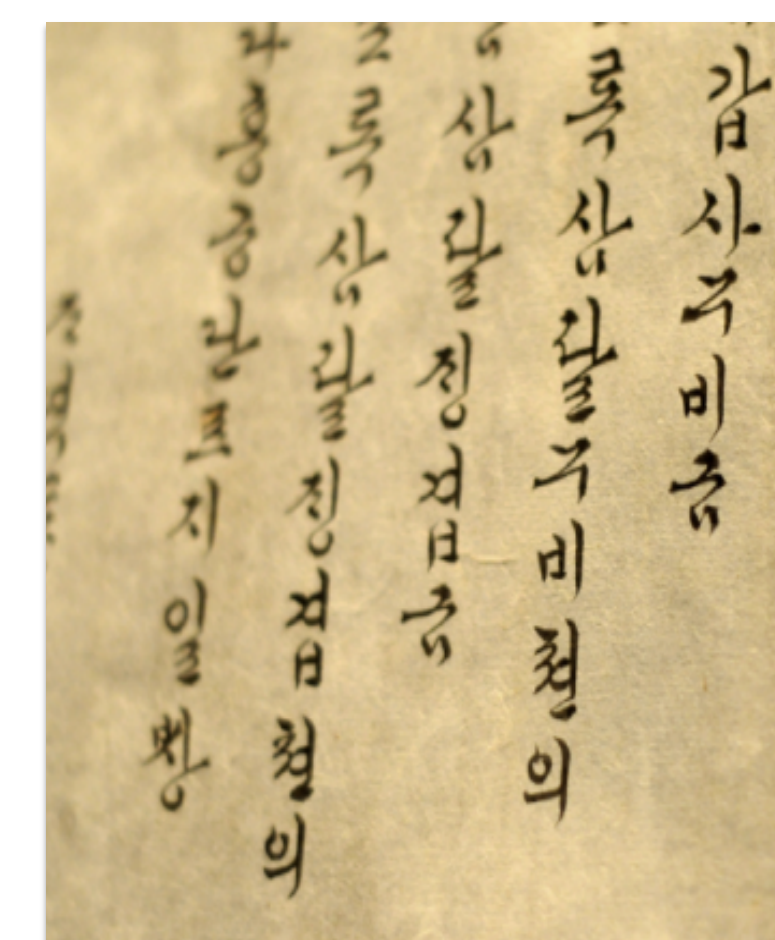
INFANTILIZING/PATERNALIZING: Instruction; Pity; Unwanted Mentoring

...I met a girl who was Korean American and I introduced myself. And she noticed behind me was a non-Korean name, a common American name and she said “Oh you must be adopted” and it looked like she felt sorry for me that I was adopted...So my friend felt lucky that she wasn't adopted...She felt sorry for us because we had to be adopted.



ADOPTION-SPECIFIC MICROAGGRESSIONS: Intrusive Questioning; Assumptions about Birth Parents

As soon as you're adopted...“Do you know your birth parents? Do you know your birth family?” “Do you have a relationship with your birth mother?”...Or “What age?” And then “Oh tell me about this birth family situation.” Which...should imply that they would think about the loss and sort of what it means to think about your relationship with your adoptive family and all that, but they don't. And...you can't really separate them but people don't know necessarily.



CULTURAL SCRIPTS: Traditions & Customs; Language; Occupation; Appearance & Gender Roles

I think my, in terms of how I've presented myself...dressing, hairstyle makeup whatever, has definitely changed, I think, since I started to be around more Korean...people...Especially when I started working at that organization, a lot of the women that I would work with would constantly give me like hints like “Oh I would never go out of my apartment without putting makeup on.” And of course this is at a time when I didn't want makeup and my hair was all spiky and crazy like, you know from this white suburban neighborhood...



RELATIONSHIPS: Family Dynamics, Roles, & Composition; Romantic Relationships & Friendships

...When they found out that I was transracially adopted they really wanted to know like about my dating life and really encouraged me to date another Asian or Asian American man um and were very dissatisfied with the fact that I was with a white man (laughs)... They kind of maybe....dismissed that actually a lot and were like “That's not a real relationship, you need date someone within our community...”



ASSUMPTIONS OF IDENTITY: Assumptions of Identification; Categorization; Invalidation of Identity

...I think there's a certain weird like expectation of authenticity particularly, I feel like I had a similar experience with the Asian American college group. I was like I'm not Asian enough for this. Like I don't kind of connect.

Discussion

...When White people are being racist I just am used to it...But when Asian people or Koreans...are racist or prejudicial towards me, there's all of that plus this feeling that I'm a disappointment to them...

- Themes highlight expectations, assumptions, behaviors, and environments that subtly express and reinforce what it means to be “Korean” or “Asian.”
- Themes relate to varying exposure and adherence to traditional Asian values of collectivism and conformity and differing racial and cultural socialization.
- Findings suggest while there is more than one way of being Korean/Asian, these multiple ways of being are not equally valued. It may be significant for groups in a changing society to recognize the evolving nature of identity and how it affects intragroup interactions.

Selected References

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