

Perceptions of Racial Microaggressions' Impact on Undergraduate College Campuses

Arlyn Madsen-Bond

Scripps College

Abstract

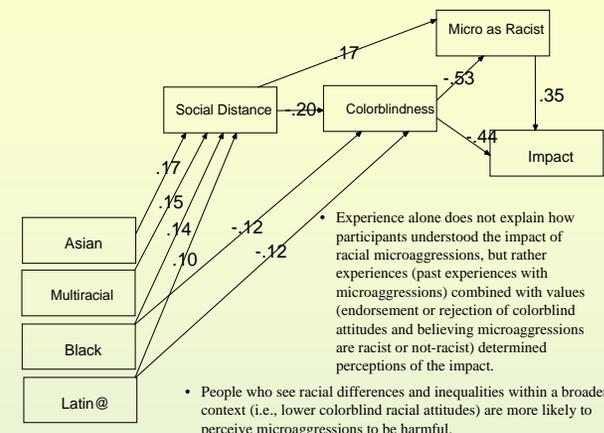
Racial microaggressions are daily interactions that either consciously or unconsciously communicate hostile slights. Microaggressions have been shown to have a deleterious effect on targets of the aggression, including decreased academic performance and graduation rates (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). However, little is known about perceptions of racial microaggressions on college campuses. In the current study, a path analysis was used to investigate the effect of past experience with microaggressions (i.e., social distance from microaggressions) and beliefs that race does not influence experience (i.e., colorblind racial attitudes) on perceptions of the impact of microaggressions on undergraduate college campuses. As hypothesized, (a) social distance from microaggressions was found to influence participants' colorblind racial attitudes and whether they labeled microaggressions as racist; (b) colorblind racial attitudes affected whether participants labeled microaggressions as racist and classified their impact as negative; and (c) labeling microaggressions as racist influenced perceptions of the impact of microaggressions. Social distance from microaggressions, participants' race and their past and current experiences with diversity were found to affect perceptions of the impact of racial microaggressions when mediated through colorblind racial attitudes. Better understanding the factors that shape perceptions is important in order to figure out how to make the impact of racial microaggressions more visible, which could contribute to diminishing their negative impact.

Introduction

- Racism often manifests in subtle ways, such as through racial microaggressions, which are everyday interactions that convey hostile messages.
- Racial microaggressions have negative consequences for both perpetrators and targets of the aggression, which are expressed through the difficulty of deciphering their message and deciding on an appropriate response, as well as by serving as a constant reminder to people of color of racial inequality.
- Sue et al (2007) explained that the power of microaggressions lies in their invisibility. The current study sought to deconstruct the invisibility of microaggressions by investigating college students' perceptions of different types of racial microaggressions on college campuses.

Methodology

- Two-group between-group design
- Path analysis
- 386 college students:
 - 14.51% Asian/Pacific Islander, 6.22% Black/African American, 75.65% Caucasian/White (not-Latin@), 11.40% Latin@, 2.07% Middle Eastern, 1.55% Native American or Alaskan Native, and 2.59% as other.
- Colorblind Racial Attitudes Scale (Neville et al., 2000)
 - E.g., "Racism is a major problem in the U.S."
- Social Distance from Microaggressions Scale
 - E.g., "A professor has denied holding any race biases or stereotypes"
- Labeling Microaggressions as Racist Scale
 - E.g., "An Asian student is asked by a White student why he/she is so quiet"
- Impact of Microaggressions Scale
 - E.g., "A Latina student, Maria, passed a White professor, Sophie, in the hallway. As Maria walked by, Sophie exclaimed "Oh, I should have locked the door. My computer is in there." When Maria got back to her room, she was really upset. She spent a lot of time vacillating over whether her presence specifically made Sophie think about the possibility of being robbed or if it was just a coincidence. Regardless, this specific incident and other similar ones made her feel like an outsider within her college."



- Experience alone does not explain how participants understood the impact of racial microaggressions, but rather experiences (past experiences with microaggressions) combined with values (endorsement or rejection of colorblind attitudes and believing microaggressions are racist or not-racist) determined perceptions of the impact.
- People who see racial differences and inequalities within a broader context (i.e., lower colorblind racial attitudes) are more likely to perceive microaggressions to be harmful.
- People who believe microaggressions to be racist are more likely to understand them as having a negative impact.
- Participants of color were not more likely than their White peers to think microaggressions have a detrimental impact.

Discussion

- Sue (2010) explains that "as long as microaggressions remain hidden, invisible, unspoken, and excused as innocent slights with minimal harm, we will continue to insult, demean, alienate, and oppress the marginalized groups" (p. 19).
- Three places to raise awareness from the model
 - Enhance ability to identify when a microaggression occurred.
 - Increase understandings of how race influences experiences.
 - Enhance understandings of the role of race and racism in microaggressions.
- Important to intervene with faculty, staff, administrators, & students of all races.

References

- Neville, H.A., Lilly, R.L., Duran, G., Lee, R., & Browne, L. (2000) Construction and initial validation of the Color Blind Racial Attitudes Scale (CoBRAS). *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 47*, 59-70.
- Solórzano, D., & Yosso, T. (2001). Critical race theory, racial microaggressions, and campus racial climate: The experiences of African American college students. *Journal of Negro Education, 69*, 60-73.
- Sue, D.W. (2010). *Microaggressions in everyday life: Race, gender, and sexual orientation*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Sue, D.W., Bucceri, J.M., Lin, A.I., Nadal, K.L., & Torino, G.C. (2007) Racial microaggressions and the Asian American experience. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 13*, 72-81.

Acknowledgements

This work was part of my Senior Honors Thesis at Scripps College. Thank you to Dr. Sheila Walker and Dr. Jennifer Groscup, my thesis advisors. Correspondence for this poster should be sent to Arlyn Madsen-Bond, 61 Dudley St., Cambridge, MA 02140; amadsen@gmail.com

Results

Variable	Direct	Indirect	Total
Social Distance	.035	.189**	.223**
Colorblindness	-.440**	-.187**	-.627**
Micro as Racist	.354**	.000	.354**
Black	.005	.177**	.122*
Latin@	-.002	.086*	.084
Asian	-.033	.066*	.033
Multiracial	.032	.046	.078

Table 1: Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects on Perceptions of Microaggressions' Impact; Note: * p <.05, ** p <.01