

Microaggressions and the Multiracial Experience*

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Abstract

Racial microaggressions are subtle statements or behaviors, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile or denigrating messages towards people of color. Previous racial microaggression research tends to focus exclusively on monoracial people of color, without examining experiences from multiracial persons. In Study 1 (N = 262), a quantitative approach was used to measure the frequencies and types of microaggressions multiracial people experience. In study 2 (N = 9), a qualitative focus group method and directed content analysis were used to identify, as well as elaborate the array of microaggressions that occurred in the participants' everyday lives. Results from both studies support and identify that multiracial people experience microaggressions that are both similar and unique to monoracial people of color.

Key words: microaggressions, multiracial, monoracism, discrimination

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing amount of academic literature that focuses on the concept of racial microaggressions, or “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color” (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007, p. 271). While racial microaggressions were originally conceived as “subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are ‘put downs’” (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Willis, 1978, p. 66), several authors have cited the various types of microaggressions that exist, as well as the effects such incidents have on individuals' mental health and everyday life (see Sue, 2010 for a review). There have been many studies which have explored the experiences of racial microaggressions from the perspectives of various racial and ethnic groups, including African Americans (Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008; Sue, Nadal, Capodilupo, Lin, Torino, & Rivera, 2008), Asian Americans (Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, & Torino, 2007), and Latino/a Americans (Rivera, Forquer, & Rangel, 2010).

There have also been studies which have found that racial microaggressions negatively affect experiences of students of color (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009), while other forms of microaggressions affect women (Capodilupo et al., 2010), lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons (Nadal, Wong, et al., 2011), and persons with disabilities (Keller & Galgay, 2010). One critique regarding the literature on microaggressions is that it focuses solely on one racial group at a time, without examining how intersectional identities impact one's experiences (Capodilupo et al., 2010). For example, when a young Asian woman is spoken to in a patronizing way by an older White male supervisor, is such treatment based on her race, her gender, her age, or some combination of all of these? Furthermore, a second critique is that the studies on racial microaggressions tend to focus exclusively on monoracial people of color, without considering multiracial persons' experiences with microaggressions (Johnston & Nadal, 2010), aligning with previous literature that cites the common trend to exclude multiracial people (Wijeyesinghe, 2001). Thus, because of this gap, the purpose of this paper is to examine microaggressions from a multiracial perspective.

Brief review of multiracial literature

The experiences of multiracial persons began to become visible with the legalization of interracial marriages in the US with the *Loving vs. Virginia* case in 1967.

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Increased media exposure of multiracial persons (e.g., Barack Obama, Tiger Woods) has led to a more inclusive view of multiracial people as having a “legitimate racial identity” (Rockquemore, Brunson, & Delgado, 2009, p. 14). The 2000 U.S. Census marked the first time that individuals were given the option of selecting one or more race category, estimating that 2.4% of the population (or 6.8 million people) identified with two races or more (U.S. Census, 2000). Some scholars have reported that multiracial people, as a collective group, are now the fastest growing minority group in the US (Shih & Sanchez, 2009) and others proposed that by the year 2050, one in five Americans can be identified as multiracial (Jackson, 2010; Lee & Bean, 2004). There have been several studies which have examined the everyday experiences of multiracial people, as well as the types of discrimination they experience. Previous literature have discussed common themes such as isolation and disapproval from extended family (e.g., Root, 1998), social isolation (Brown, 1995), a lack of social recognition (Nakashima, 1996), and exclusion from one’s neighborhood and community (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995). Jackson (2007) found that multiracial people describe their experiences with racism as being direct (e.g. being called an “Oreo” or the “N” word), or indirect (e.g. overhearing a joke about one of their racial groups). Finally, Root (2001) reported that multiracial individuals who are of mixed Asian/Black heritage experience more discrimination than others who are of mixed Asian/White heritage, while Brackett and colleagues (2006) revealed that multiracial Black/White students experienced more prejudice compared to their monoracial Black and monoracial White peers.

Johnston and Nadal (2010) proposed a theoretical taxonomy with five categories of microaggressions experienced by multiracial people. *Exclusion or Isolation* occurs when a multiracial person is made to feel excluded or isolated based on their mixed race (e.g., a biracial White/Black male is told “You aren’t Black enough” by his Black friends or family). *Exoticization and Objectification* transpires when a multiracial person is made to feel dehumanized or treated like an object (e.g., a biracial White/Asian female is constantly asked “What are you?”). *Assumption of Monoracial or Mistaken Identity* arises when a multiracial person is assumed or mistaken to be monoracial or a different racial group. For example, a biracial White/Latino person may overhear a joke about Latinos among White friends because they may not know he is also Latino. *Denial of Multiracial Reality* occurs when a multiracial person’s experiences are invalidated by monoracial people (e.g., someone is told that she should stop being so sensitive about race). Finally, *Pathologizing of Identity and Experiences* describes when a multiracial person’s identity or experiences are viewed as psychologically abnormal (e.g., a multiracial person is told that “she has issues” because she is mixed). While this taxonomy is derived from previous literature, it has yet to be empirically supported; thus, the current study used both quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine the types of microaggressions individuals experience based on their multiracial identities.

Research Questions

The following exploratory research questions were created to help conceptualize and guide both quantitative and qualitative research:

- 1) What type of microaggressions do multiracial people experience?
- 2) How are the microaggressions experienced by multiracial people similar and/or different than microaggressions experienced by monoracial people?

Study 1: A Quantitative Exploration of Multiracial People’s Experiences with Microaggressions

A quantitative study was employed to understand multiracial persons’ perceptions of microaggressions. Researchers conducted a secondary analysis of a previously used data set to compare the experiences between multiracial people with monoracial people of color (i.e., monoracial African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans) and monoracial Whites.

Participants

The sample consisted of 262 participants- 191 females (72.9%) and 71 males (27.1%). Participants ranged in age from 17 to 54 ($M = 20.56$, $SD = 4.427$). Ninety-one participants were Latina/os (34.7%), followed by 52 Black/ African Americans (19.8%), 45 White/European Americans (17.2%), 33 Multiracial persons (12.6%), and 31 Asian Americans/ Pacific Islanders (11.8%). In addition, 195 participants were born within the US (74.4%) and 67 were born abroad (25.6%); however, all but one currently resided in the US. Most of the participants ($n = 189$) had a high school diploma (72.1%), 36 had an Associate’s degree (13.7%), 29 had a Bachelor’s degree (11.1%), 7 had a Graduate Degree (2.7%), and 1 (0.4%) identified Middle/ Junior High School as one’s highest level of education.

Recruitment

Prior to data collection, approval was attained by the researchers’ Institutional Review Board. Over half of participants were recruited through introductory psychology classes from a large public college in a Northeastern metropolitan area; each was given research credit for their participation.

The remaining participants were obtained through the general community; recruitment emails were sent to various multicultural organizations (e.g., college student groups and professional networks) and links were posted on social network sites (e.g., facebook.com).

Measures

Demographic form. Participants completed an open-ended demographic form asking them to identify their gender, age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, occupation, highest educational level completed, place of birth, and year spent in the US. These answers were purposely open-ended, so that individuals could self-describe their identities. This decision was made because of the aforementioned literature which has critiqued forms or surveys that force people to “choose boxes” to be insensitive and microaggressive in nature.

Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale (REMS). The REMS is a 45-item scale consisting of statements regarding experiences with racial and ethnic microaggressions. Using a Likert scale, participants reported how often they had experienced a list of microaggressions in the past 6 months. Participants’ answers could range from 0 to 6; a score of “0” meant that the person has not experienced such an incident and a “6” indicated that she or he has experienced such an incident 6 times or more in the past 6 months. Example items included “Someone wanted to date me only because of my race” and “Someone assumed that I would not be intelligent because of my race.” Several items were reverse-scored, which meant that higher total scores equaled a greater amount of experiences with microaggressions. The REMS (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.928$) consists of six subscales: Assumptions of Inferiority ($\alpha = 0.894$), Second-Class Citizen and Assumptions of Criminality ($\alpha = 0.883$), Microinvalidations ($\alpha = 0.888$), Exoticization/Assumptions of Similarity ($\alpha = 0.852$), Environmental Microaggression ($\alpha = 0.850$), and Workplace/School Microaggressions ($\alpha = 0.850$). The REMS has been reported to have a moderate positive correlation with the Racism and Life Experiences Scale – Brief Version ($r = .464, N = 376, p < .001$, two tailed) and a strong positive correlation with the Daily Life Experiences – Frequency scale ($r = .746, N = 253, p < .001$, two tailed; Nadal, 2011).

Procedures

The measures in this study were administered online through www.SurveyMonkey.com. After completing an informed consent form, participants completed the demographic questionnaire, the REMS, and other measures not included in this study. Participants completed the survey packet in approximately 30-45 minutes. When the desired sample size was reached, a team of 3 researchers coded the open-ended data from the demographic sheet, categorizing answers into six categories: Black, Latino, Asian, White, Multiracial, and Other. Most answers were easily coded; for example, if a participant wrote “African American,” she/he would be placed in the “Black” category and if someone wrote “Asian/White,” she/he would be placed in the “multiracial” category. Many participants confused race and ethnicity, so the team of coders consensually agreed on where participants would be placed; for example, if someone wrote “Dominican” they would be placed in the Latino category. When there was doubt, the coders discussed each case (using context clues like ethnicity and place of birth) until they consensually agreed on choosing a category or placing them under “Other.” Because the purpose of this study was to examine multiracial persons’ experiences with microaggressions, the data was coded even further. Participants who identified as Black, Asian, or Latino were regrouped into “monoracial people of color” (or “monoracial POC”), while the White category was relabeled as “monoracial Whites” and the multiracial category remained the same. These classifications were utilized primarily because of the small sample size of multiracial people; however, because multiracial participants were classified as a collective group regardless of racial heritage, the researchers felt it would be appropriate to measure monoracial participants in the same manner.

Results

One-way ANOVAs were conducted to determine if racial makeup (i.e., whether one is monoracial White, monoracial POC, or multiracial) influenced differences in REMS average and subscale scores and DLE-F scores. ANOVAs indicated significant differences between groups in REMS average scores, $F(3,257) = 6.358, p < .005, \eta^2 = 0.07$; Subscale 1 (Assumptions of Inferiority) average, $F(3,257) = 4.971, p < .005, \eta^2 = 0.07$; Subscale 2 (Second-Class Citizen and Assumptions of Criminality) average $F(3,257) = 3.897, p < .005, \eta^2 = 0.07$; Subscale 4 (Exoticization and Assumptions of Similarity) average, $F(5,257) = 4.029, p < .005, \eta^2 = 0.07$; and Subscale 5 (Environmental Microaggressions) average, $F(5,255) = 6.174, p < .005, \eta^2 = 0.07$. Employing the Bonferroni corrected post-hoc t-test with an alpha level of $p < .05$, some significant differences were found. Multiracial people reported significantly higher scores (i.e., more microaggressions) than monoracial Whites on REMS average ($p = .00$), Subscale 1 ($p = .01$), Subscale 2 ($p = .01$), Subscale 5 ($p = .00$), and Subscale 6 ($p = .02$). Monoracial POC scored significantly higher than monoracial Whites on REMS average and Subscales 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6 ($p = .00$). No differences were found between multiracial people and monoracial POC on REMS average or subscale scores.

Study 2: Multiracial microaggressions: A qualitative exploration

A qualitative study was employed to examine multiracial individuals' personal accounts and interpretations of microaggressions. Using this mixed-method approach allows participants to share their "lived experiences" which would not be conveyed in a quantitative study.

Participants

There were three focus groups with a total of nine participants (8 women and 1 man). Four participants identified as Asian/White, three participants identified as Black/White, one participant identified as Black/Latina, and one participant identified as Black/Latino/White. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 34 years ($M = 25$, $SD = 6.04$). Participants were recruited using the same procedure in Study 1; there were 4 undergraduate students, 2 graduate students, and 3 working professionals.

Researchers

The research team was comprised of 2 undergraduate students, 8 graduate students, and 1 full-time assistant professor of psychology. The research team included one Asian male, two Asian females, three Black females, two White females, two Latina females, and one Black male; all identified as monoracial, although one identified as multiethnic. The principal investigator of this study has conducted qualitative research for over eleven years, and all research assistants were thoroughly trained on Consensual Qualitative Research and Directed Content Analysis prior to leading or observing focus groups. The research team also discussed their assumptions and biases before data collection. The reason for this step is to comply with standard procedures of qualitative research and to minimize such biases through all stages of the methodology and analysis (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997). The team discussed their bias of supporting Johnston and Nadal's (2010) theoretical taxonomy, while also discussing how their monoracial identities would impact dynamics with participants and analyses of the data.

Measures

Demographic form. Each participant completed an open-ended demographic form asking them to identify their age, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, occupation, highest level of education completed, place of birth, and years spent in the US

Interview questions. All focus groups followed a semi-structured interview guide with 12 open-ended questions and subsequent probing questions, based on previous qualitative microaggression studies (e.g., Capodilupo, et al., 2010; Nadal, et al., 2011; Sue, Bucceri, et al., 2007). For example, one question was "Think about a time when you may have been subtly discriminated against because of your mixed race. Describe the scenario as best as you can." Follow-up questions included, "How did you react in this situation?" "What do you perceive was the message that was being conveyed to you?" and "How did you feel after the event?" The remaining questions inquired about a number of topics (e.g., experiences with statements that were invalidating and subtly racist behaviors they experienced from monoracial people).

Procedure

Each focus group was conducted in a private room at the researchers' home institution in the Northeastern US between January and June 2010. One interviewer and two observers (each of various monoracial backgrounds) were present for each focus group. Each participant completed a consent form and a demographic form; they were also given a list of counseling resources in case they experienced any distress as a result of their participation. Participants were informed of audio recording, confidentiality, and the option to cease participation at any time. Each focus group session lasted between 60 to 90 minutes, and there were no time limits to answering questions. Observers took copious notes of the participants' verbal and/or nonverbal communication (e.g., smiling, head nods) and group dynamics (e.g., forming alliances, disagreements, etc.). At the end of each session, the interviewer and observers met to discuss their notes and perceptions of the group session, specifically noting nonverbal behaviors that would not be captured in a transcription of the session.

All focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by the research team; researchers' notes were added to the end of each transcript. Each participant's identity was kept confidential; only the participants' first initial was used during the transcribing process. The original audio files were stored in the principal investigator's external hard drive, and all other audio copies were destroyed. After transcribing all transcripts, data was analyzed using directed content analysis, which maintains the goal "to validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework or theory" (Hsieh & Shannon, 1281). The research team utilized the multiracial microaggressions categories proposed by Johnston and Nadal (2010) as coding outlines. Team members were also encouraged to create new categories of microaggressions or reformulate any of the proposed themes, based on the current data.

The directed content analysis followed the subsequent steps. First, each research member worked independently, read each transcript, and coded each statement into one of five domains (i.e., one of the five categories theorized by Johnston and Nadal, 2010). For example, they used a yellow highlighter to distinguish quotes that were applicable to one domain, and used an orange highlighter for another. If a statement did not fit one of the proposed domains, the researcher highlighted the statement with a different color and hypothesized new domains in which the quote would fit. After the individual coding process, the research team convened to discuss their analysis. If a statement was classified in more than one domain, the team members discussed the statement in question until they consensually agreed on the most appropriate coding domain. If consensus was not reached, the statement was deemed invalid and removed. If a researcher argued that a new domain should be created, the team discussed this until they reached consensus. Finally, after all statements were either grouped into the proposed domains, new domains, or removed altogether, the group reviewed the quotes under each domain to identify potential subthemes.

The original transcripts and the team's organized notes were then reviewed by an external auditor (a professor of psychology and expert on both microaggression and multiracial research) who worked independently from the team. Because of group conformity, group think, or researchers' individual biases, an auditor can be beneficial in minimizing bias in qualitative research (Hill et al., 1997). After reviewing the team's notes, the auditor provided thorough feedback and suggestions for the research team via email. The research team reconvened to review the feedback, discussed whether or not they agreed with the feedback, and made appropriate revisions which they resubmitted to the auditor. The auditor reviewed changes submitted by the team, offering final suggestions. The team agreed with this feedback, and a final document was created with examples that best illustrated each domain and subtheme.

Results

Six major domains emerged from the transcripts; three of these domains included subthemes. These domains included: 1) Exclusion or Isolation, 2) Exoticization and Objectification, 3) Assumption of Monoracial or Mistaken Identity, 4) Denial of Multiracial Reality and Experiences, 5) Pathologizing of Identity or Experiences, and 6) Microaggressions Based on Stereotypes. Five of these domains align with the original taxonomy of multiracial microaggressions proposed by Johnston and Nadal (2010). Pseudonyms and masked ethnicities are used to protect the identities of the participants.

Domain 1: Exclusion or Isolation

According to Johnston and Nadal (2010), a microaggression that excludes or isolates is demonstrated through three subthemes: a) Questioning authenticity, b) Endorsement of monoracial society and norms, and c) Second-class status and treatment of multiracial people. First, all of the participants described instances when individuals questioned whether they were authentically part of one of their racial groups. For example, Jennifer, a biracial Black/White woman shared:

I feel like a large, strong sensation of sort of like, am I measuring up as a Black person? And I'm sure there have been times when people have said to me... You know, "You're not really Black." I think White people tend to say that but I've heard that from Black people as well." Andrea, an Asian/White woman, described a similar experience with some White acquaintances:

They would always make comments about how my ex-boyfriend had an Asian fetish and I was just like, "You're saying this to my face, like I'm here are you kidding?" And they were like "Oh well, you're like not really Asian" and I'm like "Ok so by your definition what am I exactly?"

These experiences are just two of many examples where participants were told they "weren't [Asian/Black/Latino/White] enough."

Second, almost all of the participants reported experiences where they received messages that being monoracial is the norm. Tiffany, a biracial Latina/Black female explained, "When I sign up for research studies that are [for] Latino or African Americans only, I don't know, am considered one or the other? Do I go or do I not go?" Similarly, Isabella, a biracial Latina/Black woman stated: "College scholarships... There is always a Spanish one and a Black one. What about the biracial kids? Why we don't get a scholarship? Because you don't know if you can just pick one. Do you qualify?" In both of these cases, these individuals feel excluded because there were only options for monoracial people.

Third, participants shared experiences of being belittled or treated poorly due to their multiracial status, particularly by members of their own family. Tony, a biracial Asian/White male shared: "My grandmother actually... was not very happy my dad married an Asian. Once I referred to World War II and she said to me 'You're all Japs because of World War II!'" Tiffany (Latina/Black woman) revealed a similar story: My grandfather use to treat me differently, I guess because I'm dark skinned.

He treated me different from my cousins. Cause like if we were at the park, he would buy us all ice cream and I'd be like the last one to get ice cream and like I'd be the last. I'd also get the least amount of juice. In both of these instances, the participants were treated differently because they were multiracial; more specifically, they were treated differently because they weren't White or light-skinned.

Domain 2: Exoticization and Objectification

Johnston and Nadal (2010) proposed that exoticization and objectification microaggressions could be classified into three subthemes: a) Race on display, b) Sexual objectification, and c) Objectifying multiracial people as the "racialized ideal." First, participants reported how their unique phenotypes led them to be regularly questioned and feel forced to talk about their race. For example, Cathy, an Asian/White woman, shared: "People would stop me in the subway and ask me what I was. [One time] I found this couple staring at me funny. Eventually they come up to me and they're like, 'What mix are you?'" This experience of strangers asking multiracial people about their race was common among all of the participants. Participants also shared that they did not perceive their monoracial counterparts to encounter such incidents.

Second, multiracial participants across all groups reported being sexually objectified because of their phenotype and multiracial background. Marissa, a biracial Asian/White woman shared "Like every guy that has ever come up to me in a bar, ever, [would say] 'You're so exotic! You're like a hybrid!'" Jennifer described how she felt exoticized by both Black and White men, with the following quote demonstrating one of her experiences with Black men specifically: "[These] guys who were so proud to be Black like you know, [start] reaching to grab you and calling you light skinned, light skinned, light skinned..." This type of objectification was even reported by the only male participant. Tony (an Asian/White man) shared similar feelings: "For every girl that wanted to date me, it was because I was mixed race. They would actually be enticed and I would be exotic." All of the participants, regardless of their racial makeup or gender, experienced exoticization in a sexualized way. The women described their frustrated reactions in such situations, while the male participant indicated that it did not bother him.

Johnston and Nadal (2010) cited that multiracial people are often idealized as the "racialized ideal" or the "poster child" for positive race relations. In Cathy's aforementioned experience, she talks about how the couple reacted after they asked her about her racial background: "I told [them about my racial heritage], and they're like, 'Oh my God.'" And they were talking to each other and she says, 'We can have one of that!' That was disturbing." Rochelle (a multiracial Black/Latina/White woman) described a situation with her classmate:

My friend wrote a paper for English class, and we had to write about someone that was in our class. And so she wrote about me, and you know, and she had to describe me, "Her last name's [European], her first name is African American, and she speaks Spanish.

She's just such a melting pot!" Or something weird like that... And I was like wow.

Both Cathy and Rochelle reported having strong, negative reactions in these instances, despite that the enactors probably felt well-intended and non-offensive in their actions.

Category 3: Assumption of Monoracial Identity (or Mistaken Identity)

Multiracial people are often mistaken to be monoracial or a completely different race. Such experiences can feel invalidating because one's true identities are not being honored or recognized. Shannon, a Black/White woman, describes how people treat her differently depending on the situation: What is most interesting to me right now is just that ascribed identity, you know. It doesn't matter really what I am or how I experience myself, but it has so much to do with how I'm interacting with the world and sort of the messages I'm getting from the people around me. And again how that changes where I am geographically.

Several participants talked about how they are mistaken to be of a certain race or ethnicity that is completely different from their racial heritage. Andrea (who is Asian/White) explained:

When I moved to New York, then suddenly everyone was speaking Spanish to me. So for a while, it took a bit for me to make sense of what that was about... Whereas now, where I live in the city, it's predominantly Middle Eastern and so now I am getting a lot of people speaking to me in Arabic. And it's the same thing, I sort of, you know, I have my shield ready to go, I mean usually it's just like, oh I'm not Spanish or I'm not Hispanic... But I don't go into anything else. Similarly, Marissa who is Asian and White (Irish), shared: Everybody thinks I'm Russian. Ever since I moved here and it's really funny because like I'll walk to the grocery store. And this guy that's walking says, "Anytime you want to speak your Russian or practice your Russian, you come back in my store." I'm like "alright, bye." [She laughs]. And it just happens almost all the time. I was like "Oh my God."

All participants discussed various ways they "prepare" for these incidents.

Category 4: Denial of Multiracial Reality and Experiences

Johnston and Nadal (2010) describe examples of multiracial people who are denied an opportunity to choose their own identities, as well as multiracial individuals who are invalidated by others about their experiences with race. Cathy (Asian/White) discussed how her monoracial White friends invalidate her:

Like everyone with me is like “Oh [Cathy], just get over it, like come on.” And I’m like no, that’s really not cool and they just don’t take it to heart... But like day to day it’s like “Come on, you can’t be that offended, like you’re White.”

Similarly, Andrea shares how she feels misunderstood by monoracial individuals from both of her racial heritage groups, “I’ll try and speak to my Asian friends about it or my White friends about it or my mom about it. They kind of have no idea what I’m talking about.”

Participants shared how monoracial people did not understand some of the struggles that they faced, and how sometimes they appeared not to care.

Category 5: Pathologizing of Identity or Experiences

The final category identified in Johnston and Nadal’s (2010) taxonomy is the pathologizing of identity or experiences, which includes two subthemes: a) psychopathology and b) family pathology. These types of microaggressions occur when a multiracial person mixed-race or family is stereotyped as bizarre, abnormal or pathological. Psychopathology microaggressions can be demonstrated by Denise (an Asian/White female) who described the reaction she receives when people respond to her as if her very existence was bizarre. She said, “People are just looking at me like, that’s crazy, like, “You look like [this], your last name is [this], you’re claiming you’re [this]... like you’re all over the place.” Rochelle shared comparable sentiments: “Um, basically why don’t people understand? They think you’re going crazy. Like why am I the only one in the world that gets this?”

Family psychopathology can be exemplified by Cathy, who gets frustrated when people assume things about her parents’ relationship:

[This monoracial Asian woman] said she was disgusted by Asian women that just demean themselves by being with White men because they thought that it would move them upward in society and that it was appalling to her. She met my dad and didn’t date him because he was White. She had her own life and it just happened to be that way.

In all of these incidents, a message is sent that multiracial individuals and mixed race families negative or problematic.

Category 6: Microaggressions Based On Racial Stereotypes

While not found in the original taxonomy proposed by Johnston and Nadal (2010), the present study revealed that in addition to multiracial microaggressions, these individuals also experience microaggressions based on their phenotype or one of their racial groups. Previous research has found that African Americans are often assumed to be criminals while Asian Americans are presumed to be foreigners (Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007). Similar themes occurred with this sample; for example, Cathy (who is Asian/White) explained, “People from my block ask ‘Where are you from?’ I’m like ‘Los Angeles.’ ‘Um no, no really where are you from?’ I’m like ‘Los Angeles.’” Jennifer (who is Black/White) recalled:

I’ve even heard in college once there was a White guy who had a crush on me and his White friend was like “oh, you have a crush on [Jennifer]? I don’t trust her.” You know, I’m like “why” he didn’t know me, so why didn’t he trust me?

These and other examples reported by the participants provided evidence that multiracial people not only experience microaggressions based on their multiracial identity but also based on each individual race with which they identify and/or are perceived.

Discussion

Results from these two studies support that multiracial people experience microaggressions, extending the theoretical model of multiracial microaggressions proposed by Johnston and Nadal (2010). In the first study, the frequencies and types of microaggressions that multiracial people experience were quantitatively measured. Results indicated that the multiracial people experience potentially as many microaggressions than monoracial POC, as revealed by their similar scores on the REMS. Moreover, results support that both monoracial POC and multiracial people report significantly more microaggressions than monoracial Whites, suggesting that microaggressions impact both of these populations more than monoracial Whites. In the second study, participants were able to identify racial microaggressions in their own words, describing experiences that were blatant, conscious, and intentional, as well as microaggressions that were more subtle or unconscious. They were able to identify various microaggressions that occurred through interpersonal interactions, as well as environmental manifestations that they may notice in their everyday lives.

Participants' examples of microaggressions were both similar and different from monoracial people of color. First, like monoracial POC, multiracial people experience themes of feeling exoticized, being treated like a second-class citizen, or being assumed to be a foreigner. Second, participants' reactions to microaggressions aligned with previous literature that has cited the emotional and psychological consequences of microaggressions. Finally, similar to participants in prior studies, participants developed coping skills and strategies in order to prevent microaggressions (e.g., avoiding dating certain types of people) or to be prepared to respond to microaggressions when they occur (e.g., knowing how to respond to someone who assumes you speak a certain language). However, there are unique experiences that these multiracial individuals reported which have not emerged in previous microaggression literature with monoracial people of color. For instance, participants described being excluded or isolated by one's own family. One participant shared how she felt her grandfather favored her other cousins because of their lighter skin tones, monoracial identities, or both. Perhaps future research can explore how skin tone, social class, and other factors may induce microaggressions with family systems.

Other examples of microaggressions that may be somewhat unique to multiracial people include instances when individuals are "complimented" for being a "racialized ideal" or when multiracial people are assumed to be psychologically abnormal or from a bizarre or pathological family. These microaggressions and others like them are important to note because the enactor of such statements and behaviors are often monoracial people of color. While majority of microaggression literature has focused primarily on interactions between dominant groups (e.g., Whites, men, heterosexuals) and target groups (e.g., people of color, women, LGBT people), it may be important for future research to investigate ways that people from target groups can be microaggressive toward each other. Nadal, Issa, Griffin, Hamit, and Lyons (2010, p. 307) refer to this concept as a "cycle of microaggressions" in which "some individuals who enact microaggressions onto others may actually be the recipients of microaggressions themselves." Because monoracial people of color are victims of microaggressions and other forms of oppression, it may be difficult for them to recognize their own monoracial privilege and monoracist biases.

There are some limitations to be considered. For the first study, the sample was not balanced in terms of geographic location and education level, likely because most were recruited from an undergraduate population in the Northeast. In addition, since the researchers conducted a secondary analysis based on a previous data set used to measure racial microaggressions for all groups, multiracial persons were not effectively recruited. Third, because many participants confused race and ethnicity, the consensual coding process by the researchers may have impacted the accuracy of the participant's race. For example, place of birth or ethnicity may not accurately reflect a person's race. Yet, as aforementioned, the researchers chose this method instead of forcing participants to check a box, which has been cited as a microaggression itself.

For the second study, the sample size was small, with a total of 9 participants, which may not be representative of all multiracial people. Furthermore, although researchers discussed biases prior to conducting the study, researchers' life experiences may have influenced the analyses. Additionally, the use of a directed content analysis approach is a limitation, in that the data is approached from an informed position. Several steps were taken to account for this limitation, including the use of an external auditor and consensual agreement. Finally, focus group dynamics could have influenced participants' responses; however, this method was used so that participants could stimulate others to recall a myriad of experiences.

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