Microaggressions’ Associations with Well-Being in Academia
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Introduction
- Subtle racism and microaggressions (MA) are omitted from literature due to its perceived invalidity because of a lack of quantitative data (Sue et al., 2007). The lack of existing research led us to explore MAs on a college campus. MAs are verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or not, that communicate derogatory insults towards marginalized people (Sue et al., 2007).
- Current research shows that racial microaggressions negatively predict a lower self-esteem, and that microaggressions that occur in educational and workplace environments are particularly harmful to self-esteem. Individuals of various racial and ethnic minority groups experience racial microaggressions differently (Nadal et al., 2004).
- Beyond self-esteem, the existing literature lacks an in-depth look at microaggressions in college settings and mental well-being, such as levels of stress and feelings of belonging.

Research Question:
What are the associations between racial and ethnic microaggressions and students’ psychological well-being?

Hypothesis:
We hypothesize that the more racial and ethnic microaggressions someone experiences, the higher stress and lower feelings of self-esteem and belonging they will have.

Method
Participants: 181 undergraduate and graduate students
- Age Range: 19-33
- 71.2% Female, 28.8% Male
- Black: 9.1%
- Hispanic: 48.1%
- Asian: 38.5%
- Middle-Eastern: 3.7%
- Native-American: 0.5%
- Other: 5.5%

Procedure
This study was approved by the university IRB. Students attended an information session where they were given a brief definition of microaggressions. They completed a survey and were compensated.

Measures
- Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965).
- Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen et al., 1983).
- Basic Needs Scale (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Gagné, 2003).

Results Summary
- Linear regression analyses indicated that microaggressions do affect overall stress, belonging, and self-esteem. While all subsaspects of stress yielded significant results, particular subsaspects within belonging and self-esteem were not significant.
- Microaggressions related to inferiority, criminalization, work, and invalidation are negatively associated with students’ feelings of belonging. However, feelings of belonging were not significantly lowered by the exoticism and environment subsaspects.
- Students reported feeling significantly low levels of self-esteem while experiencing invalidation, exoticism, and work microaggressions. However, low self-esteem was not associated with the inferiority, criminalization, and environment subsaspects.

Discussion
Implications:
- Ethnic minorities are at a disadvantage compared to Caucasian students, because not only are they experiencing the same academic stressors, but they are also experiencing psychological stressors on an everyday basis.
- Students’ young ages makes them more susceptible to weakened well-beings due to simultaneous social and biological developments.
- Students’ ethnic and racial identities ought to be factored into how they behave/perform in school and everyday life.

Limitations:
- The distribution of races within the sample was uneven. Some minority groups had significantly less participants than others.
- Survey answers were based on the past 6 months, asking participants to recall memories that may have been weakened over time.
- Participants’ pre-existing knowledge may have made them either more or less sensitive to recognizing MAs.
- The setting, a predominantly white university in northern California, offered limited potential minority participants.
- We had to exclude a chunk of our data due to incomplete responses by participants.

Future Research:
- We suggest that future research should further investigate the differences of significance within Self-Esteem and Belonging and the MA subscales.
- Greater population diversity would yield even more significant results and perhaps new perspectives.

References