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Microaggressions Versus Blatant Discrimination and their Effects on Mental Health

Ian Lock



Background Literature

- Woodford and colleagues (2014) examined blatant forms of discrimination, like physical violence and threats, and compared them to everyday microaggressions such as unfair treatment, jokes/slurs, and other forms of subtle discrimination in the sexual minority (LGBTQ+).
- Nadal and colleagues (2012) examined the relationship between microaggressions and the mental health of people of color. The study found that there is a negative correlation between racial microaggressions and mental health.



Microaggression Theory

- Microaggression theory looks at the psychological dilemmas created for marginalized groups
- Microaggressions are derogatory slights/insults directed at members of an oppressed group.
 - (Sue et al., 2007)



Hypotheses

1. The more an individual suffers from microaggressions the higher their levels of anxiety.
2. Microinvalidations cause higher levels of depression compared to microassaults/microinsults
3. People of color report microassaults cause the highest level of anxiety versus microinsults/microinvalidations.
4. Higher perceived discrimination results in higher levels of depression.



Participants/Demographics

- Sixty-four undergraduate students from Chapman University participated on this study.
 - There were 5 males (7.8%), 58 females (90.6%), and 1 individual who did not disclose their gender identity (1.6%).
 - The mean age was 19.5 (SD = 3.5) years with a range of 18 – 46 years.
- Race/Ethnicity
 - 33 (51.6%) White/European American
 - 1 (1.6%) Black/African American
 - 10 (15.6%) Hispanic/Latino
 - 16 (25%) Asian American
 - 2 (3.1%) Other
 - 2 (3.1%) Multiracial



Additional Demographics

- The class standing distribution was freshman dominated
 - 37 (57.8%) freshman participants
 - 15 (23.4%) sophomore participants
 - 10 (15.6%) junior participants
 - 2 (3.1%) senior participants




Tools/Measures

- Depression and Anxiety was measured using the 21-item Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21) (Norton, 2007).
- Perceived discrimination was measured using the 20-item Perceived Discrimination Scale (Soto, Dawson-Andoh, & BeLue, 2011).
- The different kinds of microaggressions were measured using the Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale (REMS) (Nadal, 2011).
 - Subscales were created within the REMS



Procedures


- All participants were given a single survey to take in one sitting, containing all three of the previously listed scales
 - Individuals were recruited through Chapman University's undergraduate SONA system
 - They were able to take survey on their own time without supervision
 - They received SONA system credits for their participation in the study
 - If there were any questions, participants were able to contact the researchers through email.



H1: The more an individual suffers from microaggressions the higher their levels of anxiety


- REMS (M = 30.3, SD = 7.0)
- DASS (M = 4.7, SD = 5.1)
- $r = .28, p = .028$

- Hypothesis supported: Individuals who suffered from more microaggressions had higher levels of anxiety




H2: Microinvalidations cause higher levels of depression compared to microassaults/microinsults

- Scores on Depression section of DASS
 - Microinvalidations (M = 6.6, SD = 4.9)
 - Microassaults (M = 2.0, SD = 1.4)
 - Microinsults (M = 4.4, SD = 4.9)
- $F(4,59)=2.9, p = 0.029$
- Hypothesis supported: Individuals who suffered from microinvalidations reported the highest levels of depression, compared to microassaults/microinsults



H3: People of color will report that microassaults will cause the highest levels of anxiety versus microinsults/microinvalidations

- Scores on Depression section of DASS
 - Microinvalidations (M = 7.5, SD = 6.1)
 - Microassaults (M = 3.0, SD = 2.7)
 - Microinsults (M = 5.2, SD = 5.6)
- $F(4,25)=1.3, p = 0.29$
- Hypothesis not supported: People of Color did not report that microassaults caused the highest levels of anxiety, compared to microinsults/microinvalidations



H4: Higher perceived discrimination results in higher levels of depression

- PDS (M = 4.4, SD = 7.7)
- DASS (M = 4.6, SD = 4.7)
- $r = .21, p = 0.095$

- Hypothesis not supported: Higher perceived discrimination did NOT result in higher levels of depression



Discussion

- Two of the four hypotheses were supported
- Some limitations of the study included
 - Participant Diversity
 - Generalizability to a larger population
- Future research should focus on
 - Similar comparison to a more generalizable population



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Thank you!

Questions?