

Minority Males and Graduate Education: Confronting Microaggressions in Counsellor Education Programs

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Abstract: *Microaggressions are intentional or unintentional exchanges that communicate hostile, derogatory, negative slights and insults to people of colour. Microaggressions are prevalent on college campuses across the United States. This article explores the impact of microaggressions on minority male graduate students in counsellor education programs. The article further discusses how institutions and counsellor education programs must address racial stereotypes through cultural competency training and hiring diverse faculty and staff. A quantitative design was employed to understand minority males' perceptions of microaggressions. The sample of the study consisted of (n=99) participants comprised of Asian (n=30), Hispanic (n=33), and Black (n=36) male degree recipients from counsellor education programs. The data were collected using the Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale (REMS), while a one-way ANOVA was used to examine the impact of*

microaggressions. The study revealed a difference in perceived microaggressions between Asian, Hispanic, and Black students in counsellor education programs.

Keywords: Microaggressions, Minority Students, Graduate Education, Counselor Education Programs, Male students.

1. Introduction

Predominantly white institutions (PWI) have never been more diverse, but that does not mean minorities feel safe and welcomed on their campuses (Fry, 2009). Students, particularly minority males, continue to endure psychologically damaging racism on predominantly white campuses, creating an environment where they struggle to graduate and are unsure who to turn to for assistance. Racial prejudice experiences are not only the normality on college campuses but in the United States as a whole (Sellers & Shelton, 2003). It is an expected probability that males are more likely to be exposed to a discriminatory act. According to Pérez et al. (2008), as compared to females and other minority groups, Black and Hispanic males are more likely to report encounters of perceived discrimination. Based on societal events involving Black males, law enforcement, and criminal justice, an increase of research recognizes that individuals' attitudes stem from negative beliefs (Ramirez, 2015). This is apparent by the recent murders of George Floyd and Ahmaud Arbery and the Black Lives Matter protests on racial profiling and police brutality (Maiden et al., 2020).

Microaggressions are intentional or unintentional brief exchanges that communicate hostile, derogatory, negative slights, and insults that result in harmful or unpleasant psychological influence on an individual or group (Sue et al., 2007). This contemporary approach to discrimination is implicit and continuously promotes inferiority among individuals who do not represent the majority population. For minority males who pursue graduate education, the debilitating microaggression stressors are associated with adverse mental health outcomes and overall well-being. Additionally, microaggressions adversely impact students' academic self-concept needed to effectively navigate graduate education and degree attainment (Maiden et al., 2020). Because graduate programs are small in capacity, impediments created by microaggressions may be worsened for minority males who lack a supportive social network (Nichols, 2016).

The article examines the impact of microaggressions for minority males in counsellor education programs. The article discusses the experiences of racial microaggressions for minority males in counsellor education programs at PWIs. Maiden et al. (2020) stated that understanding what impacts the growth and advancement of minority males are essential

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to the field of counselling. Therefore, this article explores the effect of microaggressions on minority male graduate students in counsellor education programs.

2. Theoretical Framework

The examination of microaggression within the critical race theory (CRT) context explains a natural fit between them (Patterson, 2017). CRT provides a theoretical framework for understanding this study's interpersonal context from minority males' perspectives. The CRT examination of racial microaggressions looks at the roles of race and racism in the experiences of minorities. The CRT analysis underscores how race mediates how people of colour experience subordination through social and institutional racism. There is little doubt that overt racism exists in American society. However, the subtle racism often goes unnoticed and racial microaggressions quietly vilify people of colour (Pittman, 2012).

Within the educational setting, CRT seeks to explain the experiences of minorities and scrutinize whiteness, the assumption minority identity is an oppressed identity. Allen et al. (2013) explored racial microaggressions through the lens of the educational setting. The researchers examined the shared experiences of racial microaggressions experienced by minority males to their self-esteem and racial identity development. Utilizing the CRT framework, Allen et al. (2013) concluded that minority males experience high levels of microaggressions in institutional settings. Students of colour, specifically males, often feel isolated on college campuses, especially true for males pursuing graduate degrees. The constant unequal distribution of resources and opportunities that provide advantages to their White counterparts result in negative college setting experiences and influence their overall wellness and identity formation as they journey through their educational careers (Mizelle et al., 2020).

2.1 Identifying Microaggressions

Sue et al. (2007) investigated several microaggressions and posited three distinct categories: microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations. Microassaults are conscious, deliberate, and either subtle or explicit biased attitudes, beliefs, or behaviours towards persons of colour (Sue, 2010). The microaggression here would be, "You should do med school back in Mexico because I don't think people like you can succeed here." This microaggression message is that Hispanic people cannot be successful in America (Sue et al., 2007). Microinsults are "characterized by communications that convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person's racial heritage or identity" and can be verbal or nonverbal (Sue et al., 2007, p. 274). Microinsults typically occur unconsciously by the offender. This microaggression may be challenging to recognize because it may happen consciously or unconsciously, and harm caused to the targeted individual can be intentional or unintentional. The microaggression here would be, "You are the first Black person I have had in my bio classes; it must be hard being an athlete and a biology major." This microaggression message is that African Americans are only in school for athletics (Sue et al., 2007).

Microinvalidations are characterized as communications that deliberately exclude or express indifference to the psychological thoughts or feelings of a person of colour (Sue et al., 2007). These assertions may not be intended to cause harm; nevertheless, they negate the experience or racial reality of the minorities. The microaggression here would be, "Race is not an issue in our department; students just need to take better advantage of the resources on campus." The message of this microaggression is that students' racial experiences do not matter. (Sue et al., 2007). The underlying premise is these experiences can have long-term effects when minorities find themselves repeatedly in situations of microaggressions and are unable to find validation for their perceptions (Maiden et al., 2020).

2.2 The Effect of Microaggressions on Minority Males

Mental health for graduate students of colour is a topic that is often overlooked. The effect of racial microaggressions has vast implications for minority males' mental health and well-being. Minority males are more likely to experience various microaggressions

throughout life. Linder et al. (2015) revealed that males experience racial microaggressions at universities, including allegations of oversensitivity to white students' denial of racism and ascription of intelligence. This implies that minority males must strive to maintain a good self-concept while negotiating the conflicts arising from disparaging perceptions of their intellect and their group of origin (Solorzano et al., 2000).

Research on microaggressions has revealed substantial evidence that they lead to elevated levels of depression and trauma among minority males. In a sample of 405 students at an undergraduate university, Torino (2017) found that depressive symptoms were linked to the relationship between racial microaggressions and thoughts of suicide. The racial microaggressions in both academic and social settings have consequences, the most obvious of which are the resulting hostile racial climate and minority students' struggles with feelings of self-doubt and frustration and isolation (Solorzano et al., 2000).

2.3 Graduate Education and Microaggressions

Graduate students of colour who experience racial microaggressions with the pressure and demands of graduate school are at greater risk of having mental health problems. This, in turn, might affect the retention and completion of their graduate degrees (Gomez et al., 2011). Clark et al. (2012) stated that minority graduate students experienced (1) higher rates of microaggressions on campus, (2) decreased sense of belongingness, and (3) higher emotional distress rates. Similarly, in a study of 145 graduate students of colour in psychology programs, Ortiz-Frontera (2013) revealed a significant difference in racial microaggressions experienced by race. The data showed that African American participants experience more racial microaggressions, followed by Asians and Hispanics.

Forrest-Bank (2015) investigated the differences in microaggression experiences among a sample of 409 Asian, Hispanic, African American, and White students. The study revealed that young adult experiences in all the non-White groups were significantly higher for microaggression than their White counterpart. The study also revealed that African Americans experienced the highest microaggression rate, followed by Hispanics and Asians (Forrest-Bank, 2015). Both studies affirm that graduate students of colour experiencing racial microaggressions can result in students feeling isolated, doubting their abilities, and feeling disconnected from the academic community (Maiden et al., 2020).

2.4 Stereotypes of Minority Males

The research on minority students' racialized experiences has focused on documenting difficulties linked with the stereotypes they encounter. Stereotypes are defined as "beliefs about the characteristics, attributes, and behaviours of members of certain groups" (Hilton & Von Hippel, 1996, p. 240). Minority males often battle internal and external pressures related to their academic ability and college performance due to racialized stereotypes. Thus, stereotypes subject minority males to social, psychological, and institutional factors that hinder their intellectual ability and potential (Steele, 2010). Conclusively, these stereotypes contribute to lower academic performance levels and student engagement among minority males in college (Steele, 2010).

The term stereotype threat refers to being at risk of confirming, as a self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one's social group (Steele & Aronson, 1995). In several studies, Steele & Aronson (1995) noted that minority first-year college students and sophomores performed more poorly on standardized tests than White students when their race was emphasized. When the race was not emphasized, however, minority students performed better and equivalently with White students. The results illustrated that awareness could harm academic contexts' performance that one's performance might be viewed through the lens of racial stereotypes. The consequences of stereotype threat can contribute to minority males' educational and social inequality. The adverse outcomes include limiting domains of study students wish to pursue, not valuing an area of study, and narrowing students' career options.

3. Methodology

The study's purpose was to examine the impact of microaggressions for minority males in counselling education programs. A quantitative design was employed to understand minority males' perceptions of microaggressions. The study compared the difference in perceived microaggressions between Asian, Hispanic, and Black male graduate students.

3.1 Research Question and Hypothesis

The following were the study's research question and hypotheses:

- Research Question: Is there a difference in perceived microaggressions between Asian, Hispanic, and Black male students in counsellor education programs?
- Null Hypothesis: There is no statistically significant difference in perceived microaggressions between Asian, Hispanic, and Black male students in counsellor education programs.
- Alternative Hypothesis: There is a statistically significant difference in perceived microaggressions between Asian, Hispanic, and Black students in counsellor education programs.

3.2 Subjects

The sample of the study consisted of (n=99) participants comprised of Asian (n=30), Hispanic (n=33), and Black (n=36) male degree recipients from counsellor education programs. Prior to data collection, approval was attained by the researcher's Institutional Review Board. The subjects were recruited from the following associations: American Counseling Association (ACA), National Board of Certified Counselors (NBCC), American Psychological Association (APA), Asian American Psychological Association (AAPA), Asian Counseling and Referral Service (ACRS), National Latino Behavioral Health Association (NLBHA), National Latina/o Psychological Association (NLPA), Association of Hispanic Mental Health Professionals (AHMHP), Association of Black Psychologists (ABP), National Black Counseling Psychologists, and the Society for Psychological Study of Culture, Ethnicity, and Race. The associations were selected because they are the catalyst that brings together counseling professionals.

3.3 Instrumentation

The data in the study were collected using the Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale (REMS). The REMS was developed by Nadal (2011) and was used in a series of studies of microaggressions by focusing on people of colour. The REMS was developed to assess individuals' types of racial microaggressions in their everyday lives (Nadal, 2011). The scale identifies 45 microaggression items and categorized them into six key subscales:

1. Assumptions of Inferiority
2. Second-Class Citizen and Assumption of Criminality
3. Microinvalidations
4. Exoticization and Assumptions of Similarity
5. Environmental Microaggressions
6. Workplace and School Microaggressions

The items were scored by placing a "0" or "1" next to each microaggression incident. The instructions ask participants to think about their experiences with race and the frequency of which the events have occurred within the past six months.

3.4 Reliability of the Instrument

The REMS is the most widely used instrument to measure subtle statements and behaviours that unconsciously communicate discriminatory comments to people of colour. Regarding reliability, REMS produced a coefficient of alpha of .882, with each subscale eliciting a coefficient alpha well above .70. Evidence of reliability through satisfactory internal consistency supports REMS as a sufficient measure. Additionally, the

overall scale and the subscales support recent literature of minority experiences and everyday occurrences related to race (Nadel, 2011).

4. Results and Findings

The one-way ANOVA was utilized for comparisons between groups (Asian, Hispanic, and Black males). The One-way ANOVA reported a significance level for Subscales 1, 2, 3, and 6 ($p=.000, .043, .005, .024$ consecutively) are below .005. Therefore, there is a statistically significant difference in the mean of the groups. The alternative hypothesis was accepted, and the null hypothesis was rejected for these subscales. Subscale 1 (Assumptions of Inferiority) average, [$F(2, 96) = 10.57, p < .005$]. Subscale 2 (Second-Class Citizen and Assumptions of Criminality) average [$F(2, 96) = 3.26, p < .043$]. Subscale 3 (Microinvalidations) average, [$F(2, 96) = 5.62, p < .005$]. Subscale 6 (Workplace and School Microaggressions) average [$F(2, 96) = 3.85, p < .05$]. Subscales 4 and 5 were not significantly different, the null hypothesis accepted (See Table 1).

The significant differences between races were as follow:

- In Subscale 1 (Assumptions of Inferiority), it appears that there is a significant difference between Asians, Hispanics, and Blacks ($p < .005$). There is a significant difference in Assumptions of Inferiority between Hispanics and Asians but not between Hispanics and Blacks. The same held true for Blacks.
- In subscale 2 (Second-Class Citizen and Assumptions of Criminality), there is no significant difference between Asian and Hispanics, but a significant difference between Asian and Blacks. ($p=.013$). There is no significant difference between Hispanics, Blacks, and Asians. Blacks indicated significant differences between Asians but not Hispanics ($p=0.13$).
- In subscale 3 (Microinvalidations), no significant differences between Asians and Hispanics, but significant difference between Asian and Blacks ($p=.003$). No significance between Hispanics and Asians, but significance between Hispanics and Blacks. Blacks suggested significant differences between Asians and Hispanics.
- Subscale 4 (Exoticization and Assumptions of Similarity) and Subscale 5 (Environmental Microaggressions) indicated no significant difference between all racial groups ($p > 0.5$) on REMS average or subscale scores.
- Subscale 6: (Workplace and School Microaggressions) revealed no significant differences between Asians and Hispanics, but Asians and Hispanics revealed significant differences with Blacks, and Black revealed significant differences with Asians and Hispanics on REMS average or subscale scores ($p=.006, 0.25$).

Table 1. Scores of Subjects by Subscales

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Subscale 1	Between Groups	1.593	2	.796	10.576	.000
	Within Groups	7.228	96	.075		
	Total	8.820	98			
Subscale 2	Between Groups	.519	2	.260	3.260	.043
	Within Groups	7.643	96	.080		
	Total	8.162	98			
Subscale 3	Between Groups	.905	2	.452	5.620	.005
	Within Groups	7.725	96	.080		
	Total	8.630	98			
Subscale 4	Between Groups	.147	2	.073	1.078	.344

	Within Groups	6.529	96	.068		
	Total	6.675	98			
Subscale 5	Between Groups	.325	2	.163	1.868	.160
	Within Groups	8.362	96	.087		
	Total	8.687	98			
Subscale 6	Between Groups	.796	2	.398	3.859	.024
	Within Groups	9.896	96	.103		
	Total	10.692	98			

4.1 Implications for Counselor Education Programs

A key component in battling microaggressions in graduate counselling programs is the selection of faculty. Counsellor Education programs must actively recruit, hire, and maintain minority faculty, specifically minority males. Minority faculty are needed to educate students of colour on managing microaggressions and supporting them throughout their graduate career. Minority males are resistant to seek out support when feeling emotional distress. Therefore, it is vital to engage in intrusive practices to increase the likelihood that minority males will take advantage of this support to handle microaggressions successfully (Maiden et al., 2020).

Counsellor Education programs should provide opportunities for minority males to receive mentorship. Mentorship could validate experiences of racial microaggressions in the graduate program and operate as a source for advice. Numerous studies have shown that mentoring is an effective way to retain and promote African American males' advancement. Hernández et al. (2010) validated the importance of mentoring to combat racial microaggressions. The authors examined adaptive responses that mental health professionals of colour use to cope with racial microaggressions. Through mentorship, African American males could voice and share their interest in addressing microaggressions' challenges.

4.2 Institutional Microaggressions Training

Given the increasing number of minority males who enrol in graduated education at PWIs (Strayhorn, 2014), these higher learning institutions must provide institutional support and create a more inclusive environment for these students. Institutional training must be required to create awareness surrounding the common occurrences of microaggressions. PWIs must provide training for staff and students in handling racial microaggressions. Universities must offer comprehensive multicultural education and training to staff and students to address racial microaggressions and reduce their ongoing presence directly (Lewis et al., 2012).

It is essential that college professors must be culturally competent. Institutions must offer training and seminars for all professors on tools for facilitating productive, respectful discussions about race and racial microaggressions in their classrooms and effectively mitigating the prevalence and effects of microaggressions. PWIs that are genuinely committed to diversity and inclusiveness must demonstrate that they value minority males by creating and developing a climate wherein these students' cultures and heritage are inherently accepted and respected (Strayhorn & DeVita, 2010).

5. Conclusion and Recommendation for Practice

Minority males often feel isolated on college campuses. This is especially true for those who pursue graduate education. Minority males in graduate counselling programs have their position or competence assumed to be lower or different from their identity. They should be able to work towards their academic and professional goals without experiencing microaggressions within their institutions. Additionally, counselling

programs should become aware of the challenges that men of colour experience in their academic and personal lives (Mizelle et al., 2020). Therefore, it is expedient that Universities must be committed to providing resources and training to ending microaggressions. Most universities and colleges recognize the importance of diversity outreach and engagement but often fail in reconciling its importance and associated implications for organizational decision-making (Price et al., 2005). Universities can no longer be passive in the fight to end racial microaggression; they must insist on changing their campuses' culture. The elimination of microaggressions will require university leaders, faculty, staff, and students passionate about eradicating racial disparities and injustices (Levchak, 2013).

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