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Coping with racial battle fatigue: differences and similarities for African American and Mexican American College Students

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ABSTRACT

Student of Color often reference racial microaggressions when asked to describe their post-secondary experience. The racial battle fatigue framework assists in understanding the cumulative, negative effect of racial microaggressions on psychological, behavioral, and physiological outcomes. This paper assesses the racial battle fatigue framework for African American and Mexican American college students and the impact of coping on racial stress. Results demonstrate that racial microaggressions negatively impact stress responses for African American and Mexican Americans differently, but coping may help alleviate the impact of racial battle fatigue. Universities can address racial microaggressions and negative health outcomes by educating campus constituents about racial microaggressions, addressing Whiteness, and providing education about adaptive coping strategies.

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Introduction

There is a dearth of research on the how Students of Color respond and react to race-related stress on campuses compared to research in the health sciences field that often focuses on community and family situations (Harrell 2000; Williams, Neighbors, and Jackson 2003). While we know a great deal about the usefulness of identity development with coping with racism and discrimination, little is known about their physiological, behavioral, and physiological stress responses in higher education (Smith, Allen, and Danley 2007b). Students of Color often thrive in higher education (Harper 2012), but they have to divert energy from academic endeavors to responding to and coping with racial microaggressions that results in varying degrees of racial battle fatigue (RBF) (Brondolo, Gallo, and Myers 2009; Franklin, Smith, and Hung 2014; Smith 2004, 2009a, 2009b; Smith, Yosso, and Solórzano 2007b; Smith, Hung, and Franklin 2011; Yosso et al. 2009).

RBF has been a conceptual model supported by health psychology and higher education literature to explain the relationship between racist environments, structural racism, White supremacy, and perceived health outcomes for historically underrepresented groups (Smith 2004, 2009a, 2009b; Smith et al. 2007b). The objective of this

paper is to use a stacked structural equation modeling (SEM) approach to compare the psychological, physiological, behavioral, and racial microaggressions components of RBF for African American and Mexican American students. Additionally, this paper seeks to understand how coping mediates the relationship between racial microaggressions and stress responses of RBF. A stacked model was used to enable a comparison between groups since groups may not respond to racism similarly or adopt the same coping strategies. This paper asks the following questions:

- (1) What are the differences in RBF among African American and Mexican American/Latino students?
- (2) Which coping strategies are most utilized by African American and Mexican American/Latino students to combat RBF?

Why a need to study racial battle fatigue in higher education

The academic stress that comes with reading large amounts of material and critically analyzing the information in papers or in class discussions is normal and is often expected. In addition to the academic stressors that come with a college degree, People of Color on college campuses are, and have been, reporting that campuses are generally racially hostile to their presence in and outside of the classroom (Swim et al. 2003). Swim and scholars (2003) found that on a predominantly White campus, African American students reported verbal prejudicial expressions, poor service, staring, and difficult exchanges with White individuals. About one-third of the incidents occurred in public and institutional settings and the majority of the perpetrators were European American (Swim et al. 2003). Higher education scholars have historically been concerned with retention and persistence of students, particularly White Students. Their analyses often did not consider the experiences of Students of Color and unhealthy campus racial climate for Students of Color (Astin 1993; Pascarella and Terenzini 1980; Tinto 1993). Little is mentioned about institutionalized racism and its impact on historically underrepresented groups. As a result, many of the findings of studies using these frameworks were less relevant for Students of Color and hardly reflect what scholars know today about campus racial climates and cultures (Hurtado 1992, 1994; Museus and Jayakumar 2012). In order to adequately respond to the needs of students, higher education institutions need to know how racism impacts groups of students differently and the particular coping mechanisms that may help combat racial battle fatigue.

While this study takes place in the United States, we must be reminded that racism and its impact is not exclusive to the US (Gillborn 2006). White supremacy and racism occur across the world in K-20+ educational contexts and outside of education (Lee, Jon, and Byun 2017). The Racism may look different in various countries, but outcomes are similar in the form negative educational outcomes and/or negative health outcome (Wallace, Nazroo, and Bécarea 2016). While the findings in this study at situated in the US, they may be representative of the experiences and outcomes of minoritized students in other countries.

Literature

Racial microaggressions

Numerous studies have investigated the relationship of the racial climate on college campuses and racial microaggressions. Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) defined the campus racial climate as the overall racial environment of the college campus. Unlike a general campus climate, numerous studies have found that there are racial differences in the perceptions of campus climate (Ancis, Sedlacek, and Mohr 2000; Hurtado 1992; Pfeifer and Schneider 1974). Students of Color are more likely to report negative climates, especially academic climates (Hurtado 1994; Hurtado and Carter 1997). Therefore, the term ‘campus racial climate’ is more relevant to the experiences of Students of Color than the general campus climate because there is a racialized component to their post-secondary experience (Hurtado 1992). When referring to the overall college campus environment, it is important to note that there are multiple components that exist in and outside the classroom. The campus racial climate has an effect on student persistence, access, graduation, and transfer of students. They further state that a positive campus racial climate includes at least the four following elements as previously reported by other scholars (Carroll 1998; Guinier, Fine, and Balin 1997; Hurtado et al. 1998): a) the inclusion of underrepresented students, faculty, and administrators; b) a curriculum with an underlying historical context of People of Color; c) programs that encourage the recruitment, retention, and graduation of Students of Color; and d) a university commitment to a racially diverse college campus (p. 62).

Similar to Sue’s (2010) definition, Solórzano, Allen, and Carroll (2002) state racial microaggressions are ‘layered’ in that they attack ‘one’s race, gender, class, sexuality, language, immigration status, phenotype, accent or surname’ (17). Racial microaggressions, whether intended or not, present a specific image to historically underrepresented and marginalized groups that they are not welcome. Solórzano and authors (2000) found that many African American students stated that they felt ‘invisible’ in the classroom and that professors appeared to be less interested in their concerns as a result of racial microaggressions. Not only have African Americans reported invisibility, so have Asian American students (Sue et al. 2007). Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) found that racial microaggressions made students feel ‘personally diminished.’ It is important to note that these racial microaggressions may not be the ‘gross and obvious,’ but rather are subtle ‘miniassaults’ of discrimination (Pierce 1974, 516). As a result of their experiences, African American students felt unwanted in the classroom and in non-classroom settings. They were negatively affected in both the academic and social settings of the university. The experience of racial microaggressions exhausted the students; therefore, they felt they could not perform well academically. The students reported a fully frontal or overtly hostile campus climate.

Racial battle fatigue

Smith (2009b) asserts that racial battle fatigue occurs over time in response to daily racial microaggressions. Psychological stress responses may include frustration, anger, resentment, or fear. Physiological stress responses may include headaches, a pounding heart, high blood pressure, or sleep disturbances. Finally, behavioral responses to racial

battle fatigue may be stereotype threat, impatience, increased use of alcohol or drugs, or poor school performance due to academic disidentification. Racial battle fatigue is unlike typical occupational or academic stress in that it 'is a response to the distressing mental/emotional conditions that result from facing racism daily' (Smith 2004, 180). As a result, People of Color are continually spent in response to preparing and coping against everyday racial microaggressions. The long-term exposure to racial microaggressions from the time of childhood makes the health side effects of racial battle fatigue physically, psychologically, and emotionally detrimental.

The responses to racial battle fatigue make predominantly White settings where racial microaggressions occur particularly hostile and uncomfortable places for People of Color (Smith 2004, 2009a, 2009b). The stress associated with the process of being a student and attaining a higher education degree is compounded by additional racism-related stress for historically minoritized students. Though People of Color have experienced racial microaggressions most of their life the added stress of a higher education institution may be overwhelming for some individuals. Communities and housing are still largely segregated, and a college campus may be the first time in which a student of color is continually in contact with White students. Therefore, a college campus may be their first experience with continual racial microaggressions. Therefore, strategies and coping techniques that People of Color employed in their home communities may not be adequate to handle the discrimination that occurs on predominantly White campuses.

Coping

Although racism on campus can take a toll on Students of Color, they continue to persist in higher education and graduate (Truong & Museus 2012). Coping with racism can play a critical role in the experiences of student of color on historically White campuses. When studying racism-related stress and resulting racial battle fatigue it is critically important to investigate buffers or defenses that attenuate the harmful impact of stress on both mental and physical health. According to Lazarus (1990), coping mediates the relationship between a stressor and the experience of stress. Coping is the mechanism by which individuals understand, reframe, or react to events. How an individual copes with racialized events can regulate whether the person is stressed by the experience.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) proposed a phenomenological model of stress that consists of cognitive processes. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) state 'psychological stress is a particular relation between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being' (19). As a result, they conceptualize coping as set of flexible responses to a specific situation and argue that coping is meant to be evaluated within a specific context, and in response to a specific stressful situation. First, an individual establishes whether an event is stressful or non-threatening and then he or she assesses available coping responses in relation to the potential efficacy given the situation (Lazarus and Folkman 1984). Kessler (1979) found a historically underrepresented group status has been shown to limit one's access to coping resources. Research has demonstrated that dealing with racism-related stress requires distinctive responses compared to those dealing with general life stress (Clark et al. 1999; Feagin and Sikes 1994). Furthermore, coping is not uniform across

racial/ethnic groups (Feagin and Sikes 1994). Individuals who infer experiences as stressful and those that are unable to implement proper coping responses suffer from poor long-term mental and physical health (Williams, Spencer, and Jackson 1999; Williams et al. 1997). Engagement coping or an attempt at gaining either primary or secondary control over a stressful situation is a type of coping strategy often cited in racism literature (Brondolo, Gallo, and Myers 2009; Harrell 2000; Wei, Ku, and Liao 2011). Changing the stressful situation is referred to as primary control coping and secondary control coping refers to adapting to stressful events (Crocker et al. 2000). Coping responses that do not attenuate stress experienced are considered maladaptive, while those that mitigate the effects of stress are referred to as adaptive coping strategies (Clark et al. 1999).

Methods

To begin investigating a quantitative measure of RBF for African American and Mexican American students, the author reviewed multiple literature bases, related concepts, and previously developed scales in higher education and health psychology. A great deal of the relevant literature pertaining to the conceptual framework of RBF was already defined and readily available (Smith 2004, 2009a, 2009b; Smith et al. 2007b; Smith, Hung, and Franklin 2011).

The author used prior literature in higher education, health psychology, and sociology to develop items for a questionnaire. The possible variables for each construct in the model that were later entered into a factor analysis. Initially, there were a possible 103 items for measuring campus racial climate, race-related stress responses, racial microaggressions, and coping. There were 11 campus racial climate items, 6 racial microaggressions items, 17 psychological items, 23 behavioral items, 21 physiological items, and 29 coping items. Each item consisted of five response options: (1) Never; (2) Almost never; (3) Sometimes; (4) Fairly often; (5) Very often.

An exploratory factor analysis (Tabachnick and Fidell 2001) was conducted with each of the theorized components of racial battle fatigue, campus racial climate, and coping. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) index was used to investigate sampling adequacy, which measures item partial correlations. A KMO value of at least 0.50 signals that is appropriate to continue with a factor analysis. Item loadings less than 0.50 on any factor or items that fail to load uniquely (i.e., cross-loadings > 0.20) on a factor were eliminated (Worthington and Whittaker 2006). After the exploratory factor analysis was completed, a confirmatory factor analysis was completed. Fit indices were reported for the CFA. A stacked SEM model was tested using MPlus 7.2. A stacked SEM model allows for direct comparisons of groups that would otherwise not be possible with a similar model ran separately for each group. The SEM model allowed for comparisons of how coping mediated racial microaggressions. Additionally, mean responses of coping were investigated.

Data

The data for this study were collected in one cycle from November 2011 through December 2012. The study included former and current undergraduate students. Initially, personal network sampling in which participation was elicited from professors

and colleagues in other universities and national organizations to administer paper questionnaires to their courses, student organizations, and organizational members. To increase the sample size and variability of the sample, an online questionnaire using the online questionnaire software, SurveyMonkey.com was employed. The questionnaire asked participants for many demographic variables such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion and level of education. A total of 1,261 undergraduate and graduate students from universities across the US completed the questionnaire. After data were cleaned, 399 completed questionnaires from current undergraduate and graduate African American and Mexican American students were utilized for the analysis.

Demographics

Table 1 provides sample demographic information of the participants. The majority of the sample is female (58.9%, $n = 235$). The sample skews African American with 239 responses (59.9%). For the purposes of final analyses, Mexican American and Other Latino/Hispanic students were combined (limitations will be explained in chapter 5), but the majority of Latino students were Mexican American (26%, $n = 103$). The majority of the sample identifies as heterosexual (93.3%) and more than three-quarters of the sample did not identify as multiracial. Over 75% of the sample attends or attended a public 4-year institution. Over a quarter of the sample worked more than 20 h a week while an undergraduate.

Independent variable: racial microaggressions and campus racial climate

The independent variable in the proposed SEM model is a racial microaggressions latent construct. The racial microaggressions construct had the possibility of being made up of six observed variables for African American students: Because of your racial/ethnic background... a) you are treated with less respect than other people, b) you receive poorer service than other people, c) people act as if they think you are not smart, d) people act as if they are afraid of you, e) people act as if they think you are dishonest, and f) you have experiences you think are racially discriminatory in nature.

The second independent variable in the model is perceptions of campus racial climate. The climate of an institution can shape the experience of students and factor into the racial battle fatigue of students (2009a). The perceptions of campus racial climate construct were made up of various observed variables depending on the racial/ethnic group. Generally, these questions asked about how White faculty, staff, and students treated the participants and in which ways participants may have been discriminated against on campus or their perceptions.

Dependent variables: stress responses

In the racial battle fatigue framework, psychological, physiological, and behavioral stress responses are as a result of racial microaggressions. The dependent variables in the model are the three types of stress responses. The psychological stress responses latent variable had a possibility of up to 17 variables that included frustration, defenselessness, mood changes, worrying, etc. The physiological stress responses latent variable had

Table 1. Sample demographic information.

| | n | Percent |
|--|-----|---------|
| Gender | | |
| Female | 235 | 58.9 |
| Male | 174 | 41.1 |
| Ethnicity | | |
| African American, non Latino | 239 | 59.9 |
| Mexican American | 103 | 26 |
| Other Latino | 57 | 14.3 |
| Sexual Orientation | | |
| Heterosexual | 372 | 93.3 |
| Gay | 8 | 2 |
| Lesbian | 1 | 0 |
| Bisexual | 6 | 1.5 |
| Queer | 2 | 0 |
| Multiracial | | |
| No | 301 | 76.2 |
| Yes | 94 | 23.8 |
| Institutional Type | | |
| Public 4 year | 301 | 76.8 |
| Private 4 year (non profit) | 73 | 19.6 |
| Private 4 year (for profit) | 18 | 4.6 |
| Level of Education Intended to Complete | | |
| Some college | 26 | 6.6 |
| Bachelor | 58 | 14.7 |
| Some graduate | 38 | 9.6 |
| Graduate | 272 | 69 |
| Educational Standing | | |
| Undergraduate | 223 | 55.9 |
| Graduate | 82 | 20.5 |
| No longer in college | 94 | 23.5 |
| Hour working while attending college | | |
| 0 | 77 | 19.4 |
| 1 to 5 | 16 | 4 |
| 6 to 10 | 59 | 14.9 |
| 11 to 15 | 53 | 13.4 |
| 16 to 20 | 87 | 21.9 |
| More than 20 | 105 | 26.4 |
| Approximate undergraduate GPA (on a 4.0 scale)? | | |
| A or A+ | 28 | 7.1 |
| A- | 50 | 12.6 |
| B+ | 83 | 20.9 |
| B | 88 | 22.2 |
| B- | 73 | 18.4 |
| C+ | 44 | 11.1 |
| C | 25 | 6.3 |
| D | 6 | 1.5 |
| Approximate combined household income before taxes last year | | |
| Less than \$20,000 | 93 | 24 |
| \$20,000 to \$29,999 | 38 | 9.8 |
| \$30,000 to \$39,999 | 40 | 10.3 |
| \$40,000 to \$59,999 | 68 | 17.6 |
| \$60,000 to \$79,999 | 50 | 12.9 |
| \$80,000 to \$99,999 | 27 | 7 |
| \$100,000 to \$199,999 | 50 | 12.9 |
| More than \$200,000 | 21 | 5.4 |
| Student groups on campus, other than a sorority or fraternity? | | |
| No | 134 | 33.8 |
| Yes | 263 | 66.2 |

a possibility of up to 21 observed variables that included muscle aches, being frequently ill, back pains, sleep disturbances, etc. Finally, the behavioral stress responses latent variable had the possibility of up to 23 variables that included becoming inpatient, procrastination, exhibiting nervous habits, feeling you did not perform as well as you could have on tests, etc.

Mediating variable: coping

Coping is important when experiencing a stressor and research demonstrates that students cope in various ways depending on the situation and student themselves. Therefore, coping was added as a mediating variable to investigate how racial microaggressions mediate the stress responses of racial battle fatigue. The coping latent variable had the possibility of being made up of 29 variables such as, I concentrated my efforts on doing something about the situation I was in, I received emotional support from others, I took action to try to make the situation better, etc.

Results

Factor analysis

Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were conducted on the items. Each of the items had to meet minimum factor loadings of 0.50 initially and with each subsequent factor analysis, I slowly upped the cutoff factor loading to 0.700. This resulted in final factors seen in [Table 2](#) with a total of 26 items across all six latent factors. Cronbach's alphas of each of the factors were above 0.95 indicating high internal consistency or that they were highly related. Confirmatory factor analyses demonstrate that some constructs are stronger than others. The RMSEA of many of the constructs indicate poor fit, but this could be due to a small sample size. In addition, Kenny, Kaniskan, and McCoach (2014) state that it might not even be worthwhile to compute the RMSEA for models with low degrees of freedom, which many of the latent constructs have in this confirmatory factor analysis. Hu and Bentler (1999) though recommend reporting the RMSEA, SRMR, and CFI and letting readers choose which fit indices to use when analyzing models. While the RMSEA is adequate to poor, the CFI and SRMR demonstrate very good fit of each of the latent constructs.

Stacked SEM model

A stacked model was constructed using data from African American and Mexican American/Other Latino students. [Table 3](#) shows that the model had good fit. The Chi-Square was 1138.271 and was significant at $p < 0.000$ indicating good fit. The RMSEA was 0.065, which indicates fairly good model fit.

The CFI indicates very good model fit as it is near 0.95. The SRMR of 0.068 is between good and acceptable (Hu and Bentler 1999; Worthington and Whittaker 2006). Since the fit indices indicate the proposed model is good to adequate (Worthington and Whittaker 2006), the results are interpreted below.

Table 2. Standardized factor loading.

| Factor and Variables | Factor Loadings | |
|-------------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| | African American | Mexican American |
| Perceptions of Campus Climate | | |
| Insensitivity | 0.791 | 0.773 |
| Mistreatment | 0.769 | 0.745 |
| Excluded | 0.781 | 0.793 |
| Witnessed Discrimination | 0.772 | 0.757 |
| Racial Microaggressions | | |
| Respect | 0.829 | 0.910 |
| Poor Service | 0.812 | 0.870 |
| Not Smart | 0.866 | 0.859 |
| Dishonest | 0.742 | 0.745 |
| Racially Discriminatory | 0.849 | 0.804 |
| Psychological | | |
| Frustrated | 0.825 | 0.844 |
| Defensive | 0.799 | 0.742 |
| More aware of racism | 0.793 | 0.828 |
| Irritable | 0.930 | 0.912 |
| Mood Changes | 0.891 | 0.881 |
| Agitated | 0.917 | 0.893 |
| Physiological | | |
| Rapid Heart Beats | 0.708 | 0.753 |
| Muscle Pain | 0.757 | 0.709 |
| Sleep Disturbances | 0.757 | 0.785 |
| Pain Joint | 0.781 | 0.739 |
| Behavioral | | |
| Ate more or Less | 0.841 | 0.878 |
| Sleep disturbances | 0.949 | 0.941 |
| Procrastinated | 0.827 | 0.877 |
| Coping | | |
| Emotional support | 0.833 | 0.922 |
| Comfort from Others | 0.893 | 0.935 |
| Advice from friends | 0.859 | 0.861 |
| Sought advice | 0.812 | 0.800 |

Figures 1 and 2 demonstrate the visual representation of the model with the path coefficients of each group. As seen in the model, racial battle fatigue and coping operate differently for African Americans and Mexican American students.

Overall, the path coefficients for each group are very similar. As expected, there is a strong correlation between perceptions of campus racial climate and racial microaggressions for each group with correlations of 0.772 and 0.867 for African Americana and Mexican American students, respectively. This indicates that the perceptions of campus racial climate and racial microaggressions are highly related and that one may impact the other. This is particularly important to further understand how campus climate manifests itself and how university administrators can address hostile climates. Furthermore, the relationship between racial microaggressions and coping was strong

Table 3. Model fit results.

| | Model Fit | | | | |
|-------|-----------|----------|-------|------|-------|
| | N | χ^2 | RMSEA | CFI | SRMR |
| Model | 399 | 1138.271 | 0.065 | 0.94 | 0.068 |

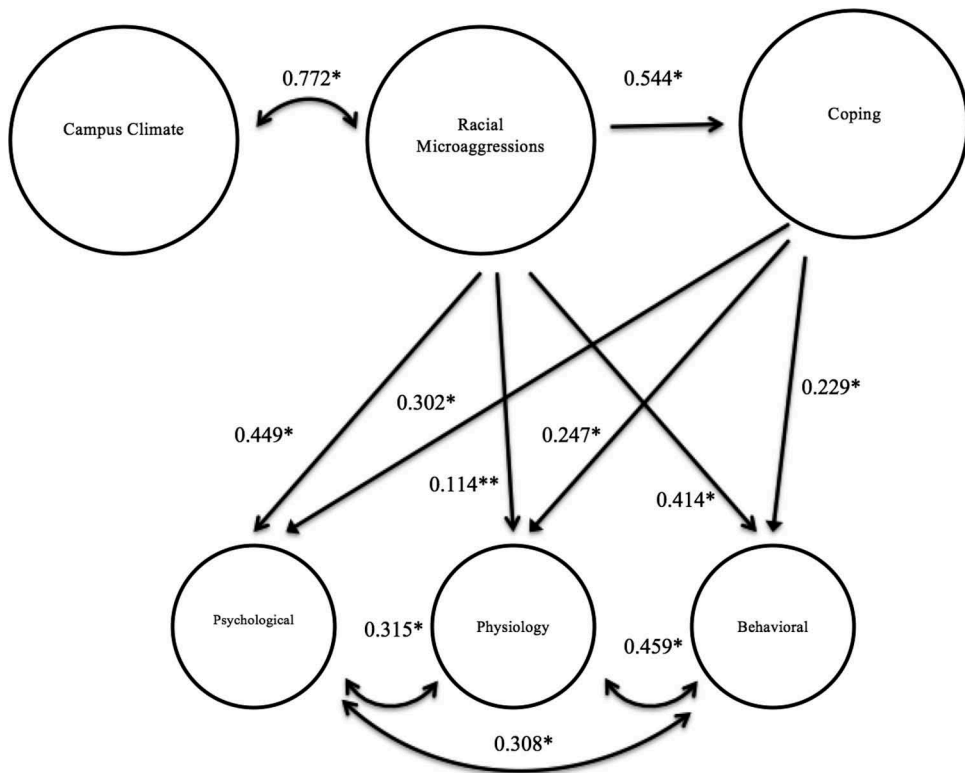


Figure 1. Racial battle fatigue model for African American Students.

* Path statistically significant $p < 0.05$

** Path not statistically significant $p > 0.05$

for each group with a path coefficient of 0.544 for African American and 0.496 for Mexican American/Latino students. Prior to accounting for coping, both models demonstrate a relationship among the components of racial battle fatigue.

For African American students, the relationship between racial microaggressions and psychological ($\beta = 0.449$, $p < 0.05$) and behavioral stress ($\beta = 0.414$, $p < 0.05$) responses was significant. The path from racial microaggressions to physiological stress was not significant ($\beta = 0.114$, $p < 0.05$) and the path was significantly lower than the other direct effects. This finding suggests that experiences with racial microaggressions did not predict physiological stress for African American students, while psychological and behavioral stress was impacted by racial microaggressions.

For Mexican American students, racial microaggressions predict a little more of psychological stress ($\beta = 0.540$, $p < 0.05$) than for African Americans, but this difference is not large. The relationship between racial microaggressions and behavioral stress responses was significant ($\beta = 0.365$, $p < 0.05$) and the direct effect was slightly lower for Mexican American and Latino students. The effect of racial microaggressions on the physiological stress responses was significant for Mexican American students ($\beta = 0.420$, $p < 0.05$). These findings indicate that racial microaggressions predict stressors for Mexican American and Latino students. The findings above are not representative

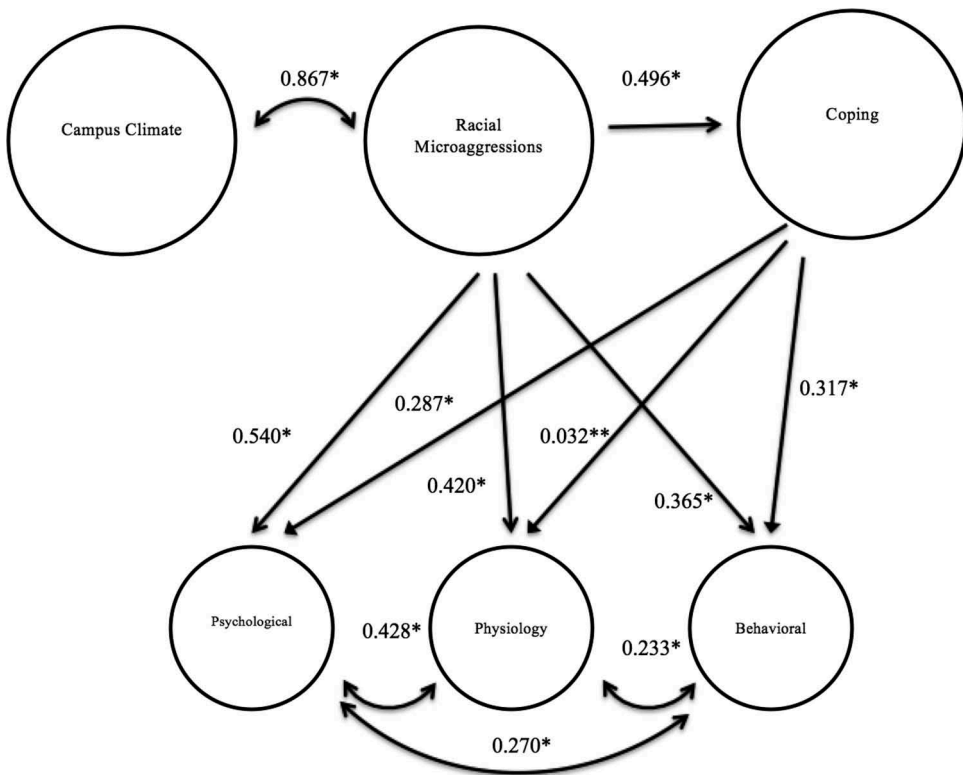


Figure 2. Racial battle fatigue model for Mexican American/Other Latino students.

* Path statistically significant $p < 0.05$

** Path not statistically significant $p > 0.05$

of the full model because coping is not accounted for in these results. When investigating how coping mediates the relationship between racial microaggressions and stressors in the racial battle fatigue framework, interesting findings are present.

Coping results

To investigate coping the SEM model and descriptive statistics were explored. The coping items that made up the factor included: a) I received emotional support from others, b) I received comfort and understanding from someone, c) I tried getting advice or helping from other people about what to do, and d) I sought help and advice from other people. Many of these variables could also be thought of a social support network that helps students to cope. Social support networks can act as coping mechanisms, and students often seek more formal social support networks like MEChA and Black Student Union.

After accounting for coping by way of mediation of racial microaggressions through coping mechanisms to predict stress responses, differences exist that demonstrate that coping may help mediate the effects of racial microaggressions. Almost all of the effects of racial microaggressions were lessened after accounting for coping.

Many of the differences were very large. For African Americans, both psychological ($\beta = 0.302$, $p < 0.05$) and behavioral stress ($\beta = 0.229$, $p < 0.05$) responses were partially mediated by coping. After accounting for coping, the effect of racial microaggressions on physiological stress was significant ($\beta = 0.247$, $p < 0.05$). The effect of racial microaggressions on psychological ($\beta = 0.287$, $p < 0.05$) and behavioral ($\beta = 0.317$, $p < 0.05$) stress for Mexican Americans was also partially mediated by coping. The effect of racial microaggressions on physiological stress responses was completely mediated by coping as indicated by the non-significant path ($\beta = 0.032$, $p < 0.05$).

Overall, one of the most common ways of coping with racial microaggressions was 'I accepted the reality of the fact that it happened.' The second most common coping strategy for all students was 'I received emotional support from others.' For African American students, turning to religion and spirituality and receiving emotional support from others were the most common coping strategies. For Mexican Americans, a student, turning to work or other activities along with receiving comfort from others was the most common coping strategy. When comparing males to females, males generally had lower means for coping strategies than females. In some cases, male participants exhibited larger means but this was only for a few coping strategies like making fun of the situation. As with the larger African American group, the females specifically turned to religion to cope with racial microaggressions. While African American males also turned to religion or spirituality, they also stated they tried to take action to make the situation better. African American females took action too, but not with a mean that was as high as with African American males. Female Mexican Americans did something to think about it less and received emotional support from others to cope with racial microaggressions. For Mexican American males, they turned to other activities to think about the racial microaggressions less and they also received emotional support from others.

Discussion

Reflective of the literature, findings demonstrated that there is a strong correlation between perceptions of campus racial climate and racial microaggressions (Allen & Solórzano 2002; Harper and Hurtado 2007; Museus and Jayakumar 2012; Solórzano, Allen, and Carroll 2002). This result is expected as racial microaggressions create perceptions of hostile campus climates for those that are on the receiving end of racial microaggressions. The SEM model established that there is a relationship between racial microaggressions and the stress responses of the racial battle fatigue framework. For African American students, racial microaggressions contributed to psychological and behavioral stress responses, but the relationship was not significant for physiological stress. The significant relationship between racial microaggressions and psychological and behavioral stress responses is well-supported in the literature (Carter 2007; Clark et al. 1999). Other literature has demonstrated that there is a significant relationship between racial microaggressions and physiological stress responses (Clark et al. 1999; Krieger 2003; Kreiger & Sidney 1996), but this sample did not exhibit similar characteristics. It is possible that the measure of physiological stress was not precise enough to capture physiological stress or it may be the case that participants were not able to

remember or notice how they reacted physiologically. The results do indicate that racial microaggressions do take a toll on African American participants psychologically and alter their behavior on college campuses. Prior research has not demonstrated these findings with college students utilizing the racial battle fatigue framework.

In the model for Latino/a students, the relationship between racial microaggressions and the three stress responses was significant. Psychological and behavioral stress responses were impacted to a greater degree than physiological stress responses. The relationship between subtle racism and psychological stress is supported for Latinos and Mexican American students. Furthermore, research demonstrates that the behaviors of Latinos and Mexican American students can be impacted by experiences of racism. Scholars have linked perceived discrimination with increased stress and depression for Latinos (Greene, Way, and Pahl 2006; Moradi and Risco 2006). Hurtado and Carter (1997) demonstrated that experiences with perceived racism impacted the psychological well-being for Latino students and as a result their sense of belonging to an institution. Prior research has also established how Latina/o students report feeling less comfortable than White peers on college campuses (Hurtado and Carter 1997). Reynolds, Sneva, and Beehler (2010) showed how race-based stress negatively impacted the academic motivation of Latina/o and African American students who were members of student organizations like MEChA and the Black Student Union. It is argued that students in racial/ethnic organizations provide social support against negative aspects of campus life that is not provided to other African American and Latinos students who are not members of such organizations. Reynolds and fellow authors (2010) demonstrated that these organizations only provide a limited buffer. If these students are struggling with the effects of racial microaggressions, it could be argued that it may be even worse for non-members of racial/ethnic organizations. Reynolds, Sneva, and Beehler (2010) appears to support the findings of this paper that race-based stress negatively impacts Students of Color. The direct effect of racial microaggressions predicting physiological stress was less than the other direct effects, but research demonstrates that the physiology of a person can be impacted by racism (Brondolo, Gallo, and Myers 2009).

Coping with stress is important for alleviating the negative results of stressors on the mind and body (Lazarus and Folkman 1984). After accounting for adaptive coping strategies, the findings of this study demonstrate that coping can alleviate some of the negative impacts of racial microaggressions in the racial battle fatigue framework. For African American students, coping resulted in a reduction of the effect of racial microaggressions on psychological and behavioral stressors. Before accounting for coping, the relationship between racial microaggressions and physiological stress was not significant. After accounting for coping, physiological stress was significant. The non-significant path prior to accounting for coping suggests that there is not a relationship between racial microaggressions and physiological stress, but we know from previous that an association exists (Clark et al. 1999). Experiences with overt and subtle racism can cause physiological reactions or participants (Krieger 2003; Krieger and Sidney 1996; Williams and Neighbors 2001). It may be the case that participants did not recognize possible physiological stressors in the questionnaire. Sometimes, younger people do not pay attention to their health as much as older individual who typically have more negative health experiences as they age. Additionally, older individuals typically see physicians more often as they can afford health insurance and they

require health checkups. Therefore, the participants in this study may not even be aware of possible health conditions or physiological stress responses or physical conditions are not even considered as being a problem. It might also be the case that participants did not experience any of the physiological stressors on the questionnaire. Finally, measuring physiological stress can be very difficult and identify and therefore, that might be why a relationship was not present prior to accounting for racial microaggressions.

For Mexican American and Latina/o students, racial microaggressions had a significant relationship to psychological, physiological, and behavioral stress responses prior to accounting for coping mechanisms. After accounting for coping, psychological and behavioral stress was still significant, but the effect on psychological stress was substantially lower indicating partial mediation. The direct effect of behavioral stress after accounting for coping was only slightly lower indicating that coping partially mediated the impact of racial microaggressions. The difference though was not that large when comparing the before and after impact on behavioral stressors. When investigating the impact of racial microaggressions on physiological stress prior to coping, a large direct effect is present indicating that there is a toll on a person's body as a result of racial microaggressions. After accounting for coping, physiological stress is not significant indicating that coping fully mediated the relationship between racial microaggressions and physiological stressors. While this seems very promising, it should also be taken with caution because there might be physiological responses not on the questionnaire or included in the factor that are impacted by racial microaggressions.

These findings are interesting because it suggests that racial microaggressions impact Students of Color differently. This finding is similar to previous research that different groups experience some common racial microaggressions and other microaggressions that are specific to a certain group such as gendered microaggressions or microaggressions attacking a person's language. Additionally, the results are interesting because coping differs for African American and Mexican American students when experiencing racial microaggressions. This speaks to the need for universities to consider the needs of all of their student populations. Though it may be easier and/or cheaper, there is not a one size fits all policy or program.

Implications for the health of students and campus constituents

The health of students on campuses can be impacted in numerous ways. Scholarship discusses health of students in terms of physical and mental health. Often the health of students can be impacted by the choices of the individuals and environmental factors. While health is generally conceived of as relating to what individuals eat and how active a person is, environmental factors can contribute to the health of students. Environmental factors in higher education settings are often located within the campus ecology literature. While there are limitations to the campus ecology literature (Cabrera, Watson, and Franklin 2016; Renn 2003), it is useful when thinking about health of students can be negatively impacted by hostile campus racial climates. Furthermore, Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological systems theory is useful when conceptualizing how an individual act or group of racist activities can have a ripple effect across campus negatively impacting perception of the campus racial climate. This study highlighted

that African American and Mexican American/Latino students described their campus climates as less than welcoming. When investigating how racial microaggressions impact the psychological, physiological, and behavioral stress responses, a relationship exists. Specifically, more experiences with racial microaggressions predict more experiences with stressors that include physiological, psychological, and behavioral stress responses. The relationship varies for African American and Mexican American/Latino students, especially with physiological variables, but the relationship still exists for psychological and behavioral stressors. The entirety of the model encompasses and accounts for the racial battle fatigue framework that was informed by research in health psychology and social psychology.

Within the racial battle fatigue framework, racial microaggressions theoretically impact three types of stressors. This study found that there is an association among racial battle fatigue components that were only previously theorized. Additionally, this paper demonstrates that coping mechanisms may contribute to alleviating the impact of racial battle fatigue.

Implications for health of Students of Color and fellow campus constituents are numerous if universities do not proactively address racial microaggressions. While this paper did find a relationship in the racial battle fatigue model, coping mechanisms did not fully mediate the impacts of racial battle fatigue. Therefore, it is the case that Students of Color will still be impacted to some degree by racial microaggressions. This calls for students to be better equipped with coping mechanisms and strategies to combat racial microaggressions, as racism and color-blindness is entrenched in higher education systems (Feagin 2010).

Implications for higher education

The findings of this paper suggest that racial battle fatigue and racial microaggressions should be taken seriously and addressed by higher education practitioners and incorporated into future analyses of researchers. In addition, the findings demonstrate that African American and Mexican American students likely have a very different post-secondary experience than their White peers. The findings of this study coupled with previous literature demonstrate post-secondary institutions need to seriously challenge the dominant narrative about post-racialism. These disturbances in the educational journey of students have the potential to lead to negative academic and health outcomes (Harper 2012; Johnson et al. 2007). Despite hostile campus, racial climates and constant racism, African American and Mexican American/Latino students persist and graduate from colleges and universities, but their pathway is consistently interrupted and barriers are constructed (Harper 2012). Too often, African American and Latino students are blamed for poor academic outcomes while universities receive little to no blame. Instead, universities need to be held accountable for their hostile and unhealthy environments that are rife with racial microaggressions. Since administrators are admitting students and asking them to spend valuable resources at the institutions, those same administrators and universities need to provide healthy living and learning environments for all students. There is not enough critical inspection of institutional values and the culture of universities that largely ignore racial microaggressions.

The problems analyzed and found in this study is with the culture of higher education that enables racial microaggressions and resulting racial battle fatigue to persist and go unchallenged (Museus and Jayakumar 2012). Historically underrepresented Students of Color are being admitted to colleges and universities across the country and they are being placed in racially toxic environments. Universities are not meeting their own self-proclaimed standards of providing a safe and welcoming environment (see any university mission statement). The health of students as a result of racism on campus and feelings of exclusions often go unaddressed by campus leaders that may have the ability and resources to address the climate and culture of their institutions.

Prior research has demonstrated that stress negatively impacts the academic outcomes for all students, regardless of race, ethnicity, class, and other factors (Johnson et al. 2007). African American and Latino students and fellow students from historically underrepresented groups face additional hurdles within post-secondary settings that can impede their academic progress and success. This is not to say that all African Americans and Latinos have the same experience on post-secondary campuses, but too often they encounter barriers that their White peers do not face and universities do not recognize especially when implementing policies and programs meant for the larger campus and/or more targeted programs for Students of Color (Harper, Patton, and Wooden 2009). First, institutions need to create opportunities to disrupt Whiteness that way White students, faculty, and staff are more aware of their privilege. Second, universities need to address the immediate needs of Students of Color as the universities try to address hostile climates.

Programs are often created with the dominant student population in mind without little regard for the experiences of Students of Color (Museus and Jayakumar 2012). A color-blind approach to campus programming and policies are harmful and unrewarding for Students of Color because they have dissimilar academic and social experiences on campuses that are often rooted in racism and discrimination (Bonilla-Silva 2010; Leonardo and Porter 2010). Higher education practitioners can utilize the findings of this study along with other campus racial climate research to create race-conscious programs for Students of Color, but also programs for White students that help address and dispel prevailing negative stereotypes of Students of Color that lead to racial microaggressions and resulting racial battle fatigue. University policymakers should create opportunities for Whiteness to be disrupted (Cabrera, Watson, and Franklin 2016). Universities should encourage and develop more moments in which White students can participate in race-conscious programming. Therefore, this might look like disrupted White physical spaces, intergroup dialogues in which there is open dialogue free from racism, but periods of frustration due to unlearning racism. Additionally, professors can make sure that their classrooms are not overtaken by White voices (Applebaum 2008). Universities can utilize best practices to help Whites grapple and learn about their privilege (Cabrera, Franklin, and Watson 2017). Therefore, universities should provide opportunities in class and outside of class that encourages White students to learn about White privilege and how subtle racist actions may negatively impact the climate of the institution and their fellow students.

For institutions of higher education, findings may help when administrators implement programs and policies that help address racial microaggressions and the race-related health

of Students of Color. Prior institutional policy interventions on campuses have generally not considered the racial health of students. Instead, policies directed toward People of Color have focused on access. Universities have been interested on getting Students of Color on campus, but they have not provided as much focus on making sure Students of Color stay and feel welcomed. Institutional policies and programs that address the health of students due to racism would not only be something that may attract students, but it may improve the academic outcomes of Students of Color and perhaps their overall experience (Johnson et al. 2007). In the short term, such policies and programs may improve the everyday experiences of all students and in the long term, such programs may assist in addressing the perceived hostile culture of higher education institutions toward historically underrepresented students. A single program or institutional policy by itself will not address the climate and culture of higher education institutions, but a number of targeted policies that actually improve the post-secondary experience for Students of Color would be welcomed and is needed. The racialized experiences of People of Color on campuses is multifaceted and health is only single component of possible outcomes in college, but it is an important outcome that can impact a person for the rest of their life.

It is apparent that racism on campus is not disappearing anytime in the near future and college campuses should actively address the needs of all students. While universities need to address White racism, they also need to confront the everyday racism and its impact. Therefore, universities should have counselors that are trained to assist and help students, faculty, and staff that have been impacted by racism on campus. Race-conscious counselors and programs should address racial battle fatigue, and racial microaggressions and provide constituents suggestions about coping strategies and other strategies to resolve the situation with administrators at the university. Counselors should be trained to identify situations in which racial stress may be amplified and how to proactively address such situations. Institutions are taking steps to educate students about racial microaggressions and hire counselors that focus on racial microaggressions and racial battle fatigue. These suggestions require a shift in the university culture that will not be easy but is needed if universities actually care about the students they are enrolling and hope to graduate.

Conclusion

The findings in this paper provide an important examination of racial battle fatigue from a quantitative perspective. The analysis incorporates and accounts for more than just racial microaggressions. This study makes the connection of racial microaggressions to self-perceived stress responses by utilizing the racial battle fatigue framework. The stressors that comprise racial battle fatigue have very real health consequences for African American and Mexican American students on college campuses. Racial battle fatigue is a framework that incorporates diverse research literatures of human behavior, social conditions, and health, which is not often done by post-secondary scholars. African American and Mexican American students experience the everyday stressors that are associated with being a university student, but their everyday experience is compounded by endless racism and discrimination that occurs far too often on college campuses (Harper and Hurtado 2007). The growing body of literature on racial microaggressions and racial battle fatigue for Students of Color provides a significant perspective for practitioners, researchers, administrators, and students.

The racial battle fatigue framework is an important and promising model to empirically study stress for People of Color in higher education and in society at large. This study provides a foundation for future research to assess racial battle fatigue for students, faculty, staff, administrators, and people in a variety of settings, as well as comparing results within and across groups. The opportunity to attend post-secondary institutions is not enough to guarantee the success of Students of Color. Higher education administrators and practitioners need to create welcoming environments campus environments free of racial microaggressions. It can be helpful for individuals that experience racial microaggressions and resulting racial battle fatigue to understand, assess, and name their experiences with racism and discrimination. While it is also important to understand consequences of racism such as racial battle fatigue, it is also crucial to adopt adaptive coping strategies to combat the pervasiveness of racism. Understanding the possible stress responses for African American students that live and work in racist environments, stressful post-secondary environments can be used to not only improve coping strategies but also in understanding the ‘post-racial’ structural racism that permeates higher education institutions.

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