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What About Us? A Quantitative Analysis of Microaggressions in Community Colleges

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The mentor and any other committee members who wish to review revisions will sign and date this document only when revisions have been completed. Please return this form to Ann Rodrigues, where it will be placed in the candidate's file and submit a copy with your final dissertation to be bound as page number two.

Dedication

Mis padres siempre dijeron que la educación es la única manera para salir adelante. I would like to thank my parents for instilling in us that we could achieve anything we work towards. This is a small token of my appreciation for all the hard work and sacrifices that you made for us. May we continue to grow as individuals and celebrate the opportunities that education provides for us.

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Abstract

Microaggressions have been studied in higher-education institutions, professional work environments, and ordinary life. However, most research studies on microaggressions in higher education focus on the experiences of college students at four-year institutions, exposing a gap in the literature on microaggressions in two-year community colleges. Research has shown that community college students' collegiate experiences differ from those of students at more "traditional" college settings, based on factors such as cost of attendance, flexibility, and campus life. The increasing diversity of student demographics in community colleges suggests a greater likelihood for microaggressions to arise within these institutions. Thus, a quantitative approach was used to investigate the prevalence of microaggressions within community colleges, along with other related objectives. A national survey revealed a statistically significant relationship between community college students' race and the extent to which they experience microaggressions. The findings also offer greater insight into the experiences of microaggressions among community college students. The study concludes with a discussion on contributions, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Keywords: Microaggressions, prevalence, community colleges, higher-education institutions

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The United States has a history of racism and discrimination in higher education. Specifically, from the beginning of the Reformation period (1636) to the start of the classical denominational colleges (1820), colleges mostly served White males in the areas of theology, agriculture, science, arithmetic, and liberal arts (Geiger, 2016). Women and African Americans were not admitted into colleges until the 1830s (Geiger, 2016). Even though the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1962 made it possible for African Americans to pursue higher education, colleges were segregated well into the 1970s despite the passage of landmark legislation such as *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Today, the student demographics of higher-education institutions have changed considerably. There are more women, people of color, and people of low socio-economic backgrounds in higher education than ever before. For instance, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), from fall 2007 to fall 2019, the percentage of Hispanic students attending public four-year postsecondary institutions rose from 9.3% to 20%, respectively (NCES, 2009, 2021). Similar demographic changes have occurred amongst students of color in both for-profit and non-profit private higher-education institutions (NCES, 2009, 2021). However, despite these advancements, Black and Hispanic students face significant challenges in obtaining college degrees.

First, there is a wide disparity between the college completion rates of White and Asian students versus Black and Hispanic students. For example, in 2017, the National Student Clearinghouse reported that the six-year completion rates of Black and White students at public four-year institutions was 45.9% and 67.2%, respectively (Shapiro et al., 2017). This represents a graduation gap of more than 20%. Additionally, figures show that Black and Hispanic students

have the lowest percentages of retention and are less likely to return to the same school following their first year of undergraduate education (NCES, 2020). For instance, in fall 2017, college retention rates for Black and Hispanic students were 52.5% and 59.6%, respectively, whereas for Asian and White students they were 73.4% and 62.6% (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2018). Lastly, on average, Black and low-income students are more likely to borrow student loans from the federal government to pay for college, which imposes a significant financial burden on students once they enter repayment on those loans (Huelsman, 2015). This financial burden has been linked to poorer health outcomes, less overall satisfaction with life, and fewer credit opportunities for borrowers (Padgett-Walsh, 2021). These figures demonstrate that although despite higher percentages of Black and Hispanic students in American colleges and universities, these groups of students are vastly underperforming in college. Thus, higher-education leaders must continue to assess their student bodies and implement initiatives that support underperforming students.

However, two-year community colleges have received little scrutiny in these respects. A review of enrollment trends from 2001 to 2017 revealed that students of color were also enrolling in community colleges at higher rates (American Association of Community Colleges, 2019). For instance, during this period, the number of Hispanic students enrolled in community college nationwide rose from 13.9% to 24.9%; however, the White student population enrolled in community college during this period dropped from 60% to 46.2% (American Association of Community Colleges, 2019). Additionally, students of color have outnumbered White students at community college since 2013. Federal higher-education initiatives such as the America's College Promise Act (ACPA) will also encourage low-income students to enroll in community college for free. Given the increased diversity in community colleges, it is reasonable to predict

an increased risk of racism or other forms of racial tensions at these institutions. Therefore, research is needed to examine contemporary forms of racism and discrimination in community college settings, given their increasing enrollment of students from underrepresented racial groups.

Racial Microaggressions

A prevalent form of discrimination that has gained research attention in recent years is the study of racial microaggressions (RMs) or microaggressions (MAs). Microaggressions are defined as subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) that send denigrating messages to recipients on the basis of their group membership—such as race, gender, or socioeconomic status—often automatically and unconsciously (Sue et al., 2007). Although research has demonstrated that MAs can target various demographics, this study is interested in examining how race influences the MAs experienced by students in community college settings, and whether these experiences effect their stress and sense of belonging.

After the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed, racism in the United States transitioned from overt, institutionalized forms of racial hatred and bigotry to more ambiguous, covert, and nebulous forms of racism (Sue et al., 2007). These forms of racism have been found to disproportionately impact people of color, and they manifest in various aspects of society such as healthcare, education, and employment (Blithe & Elliott, 2019; Constantine, 2007; Palmer & Maramba, 2015). Nonetheless, these forms of racism have been overshadowed by a resurgence of old-fashioned racism caused by the racist, anti-immigrant, and sexist rhetoric spread by President Donald J. Trump (Horowitz et al., 2019; Williamson & Gelfand, 2019). Despite these developments, literature on MAs continues expanding into new settings and offering deeper insights into the experiences of people of color.

Since the term “racial microaggressions” was coined in 1974 by psychiatrist Chester Pierce, several types of MAs and MA-related phenomena have emerged in the literature; the extent of this research will be covered in the second chapter of this study. All types of MA interactions contain a “metacommunication” or hidden message that reveals a biased belief or attitude held by the perpetrator toward the victim (Sue, 2021).

Microaggressions manifest in everyday life. A person may unconsciously clutch a valuable belonging or cross the street to avoid an approaching person based on the assumption that the person is violent and/or a criminal because of their physical appearance. The same assumption is used by salespersons, tradesmen, restaurant employees and others to refuse, deny, or deliver a different quality of service to people of color. Furthermore, MAs are exchanged through verbal, nonverbal, and visual forms of communication (Sue et al., 2007). For instance, a person of Chinese descent may be told, “You speak English well,” a female executive may be asked, “How did you obtain that position?” or a person who identifies as homosexual may be told, “You don’t seem gay” (Sue, 2021). These messages have the potential of sabotaging relationships from the start.

Furthermore, MAs establish White superiority by setting people of color apart from White people and subtly communicating that people of color are deficient or inferior to White people. Research has linked MAs to engendering stereotypes and prejudice. For instance, commonly asked questions by perpetrators of MAs are “What are you?” and “Are you Black?” (Skinner-Dorkenoo et al., 2021). These questions force the victim of the MA to disclose their racial or ethnic identity. In turn, the perpetrator of the MA, often instantaneously, may unconsciously formulate an opinion of the victim based on their individual experiences and biases with people of that race or ethnicity.

In higher education, MAs create a hostile learning environment in the classroom and undermine a student's ability to succeed academically. For instance, researchers found that across three community colleges, MAs occurred in 17 of the 60 classrooms observed. Additionally, faculty were more likely to display MAs toward students of color than toward other students. This shows that a classroom's power dynamics may impact the MAs that students of color experience in college classrooms (Casanova et al., 2015). Common examples of MAs in higher education include repeated mispronunciation of student names by professors, setting low expectations for students of diverse backgrounds, and/or ignoring women during class discussion (Portman et al., 2013). Repeated dismissal, alienation, and invalidation (even in these subtle forms) reinforce differences in power and privilege while perpetuating racism and discrimination (Dastagir, 2018). Research also shows that students who experience MAs in school have elevated levels of anxiety, anger, and stress, which may increase rates of depression and illness. Specifically, Huynh (2012) found that anger plays a role in explaining the effect of MAs on depressive and somatic symptoms: Microaggressions are believed to evoke an angry emotional state because the ambiguity of the situation requires more cognitive processing to realize that one is being slighted. Hyunh (2012) also demonstrated that MAs are psychologically taxing interactions, and that it is important to consider both the frequency and reactive components of MAs. Therefore, MAs may contribute to mental health challenges that diminish student engagement in class and lower their academic achievement (Casanova et al., 2015).

Research Questions

Microaggressions have been studied in higher-education institutions, professional work environments, and ordinary life. However, most research studies on MAs in higher education focus on the experiences of college students at four-year institutions, exposing a gap in the literature on MAs in two-year community colleges. Research has shown that community college students' collegiate experiences differ from those of students at more "traditional" college settings, based on factors such as cost of attendance, flexibility, and campus life (Pannoni, 2015).

Perhaps most importantly, the institutional mission and program objectives of community colleges vary considerably from those of traditional four-year institutions. Despite serving as alternative routes to four-year institutions through transfer agreements, community colleges also tailor their program offerings to meet local workforce needs. Workforce demands often require terminal degrees that prepare students for immediate entry into the labor force (Baime & Baum, 2016).

Furthermore, the student demographics of community colleges are also more diverse than traditional four-year institutions. For instance, students of color account for more than half of the student body enrolled in public two-year institutions nationwide (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). Additionally, students in community college also vary based on age group, enrollment status, and college choice. In particular, a higher percentage of community college students attend school part-time (American Association of Community Colleges, 2019). Given these differences, further research is needed in this area of interest to highlight the inequalities that students of color in community college experience with MAs.

Additionally, the few research studies that have examined MAs in community colleges used a qualitative research design. Qualitative studies are ideal for establishing that a problem

exists and expanding our theoretical understanding of how these problems manifest in people's lived experiences, but they do not tell us whether and how these problems affect the broader community. A quantitative approach to this problem will allow me to examine whether this problem is occurring among a larger population of community colleges. Thus, the purpose of this study is to (a) investigate the prevalence of MAs within community colleges, particularly across student race groups; (b) examine the influence of experienced MAs on stress and sense of belonging; and (c) analyze the relationship between MAs, stress, and sense of belonging within these institutions. Specifically, this study is guided by the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What is the prevalence of microaggressions experienced by students in two-year community colleges, and do these experiences vary based on race?

Research Question 2: Are there differences in stress and sense of belonging among students attending two-year community colleges?

Research Question 3: Do microaggressions mediate the relationship between race and the stress and sense of belonging that students experience in two-year community colleges?

I answered these questions by administering a survey to community college students nationwide. Below are the hypotheses for this study, the rationale for which will be covered in Chapter 2 of my dissertation:

Hypothesis 1: Relative to students from a racial majority demographic group, students from a racial minority demographic group will experience more microaggressions in a community college, on average.

Hypothesis 2: Relative to students from a racial majority demographic group, students from racial minority demographic groups will report *(H2a)* higher levels of stress and *(H2b)* lower levels of sense of belonging in a community college, on average.

Hypothesis 3: Microaggressions will have a mediating effect between race and the stress (*H3a*) and sense of belonging (*H3b*) that students experience in community colleges.

The results of this study indicated strong evidence that community colleges students are experiencing MAs at varying levels based on their race. Survey responses also showed that students are experiencing varying levels of stress and sense of belonging in their institutions; however, these differences were not significant. Lastly, the data revealed that race does not play a significant role in contributing to the stress or sense of belonging that students experience when encountering MAs.

Significance of the Study

Race relations in the United States have worsened since 2016 (Horowitz et al., 2019). In 2019, the Pew Research Center revealed that 58% of Americans felt that race relations in the U.S. are bad, and approximately two thirds said that it is now more common for people to express racist views (Horowitz et al., 2019). Many prestigious organizations believe this sentiment was motivated by the anti-immigrant, racist, and sexist rhetoric linked to President Donald J. Trump (Horowitz et al., 2019; Williamson & Gelfand, 2019). Since then, several events have worsened race relations, including a global health crisis in COVID-19, a divided democracy in Washington D.C., police negligence, and gun violence. In 2022, the Supreme Court ruled to end race-conscious admissions decisions for colleges and universities, which triggered states like Florida, Texas, Utah, and Arizona to ban diversity, equity, and inclusion departments in higher education (Adams & Chiwaya, 2024). Most recently, state legislatures are passing laws that prohibit the teaching of critical race theory (CRT), the foundation of RM literature (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 2024; Pierce, 1975).

These bad policies create obstacles for scholars seeking to conduct research on MAs in higher education and leave community college students at a distinct disadvantage due to the limited research available within these institutions. Existing research on community colleges indicates that their student bodies have become more diverse within the last two decades (American Association of Community Colleges, 2019). Specifically, students of color represent more than half of the student body enrolled in community colleges nationwide (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). Factors that have contributed to this influx of community college admissions are affordability, flexibility, and academic opportunities (American Association of Community Colleges, 2019; Barrington, 2022; Chen, 2022). Literature on MAs within this population shows that Black and Hispanic students are frequently the victims of these exchanges, and the adverse outcomes of these messages are underexplored (Ackerman-Barger et al., 2020; Casanova et al., 2015; Keel et al., 2017; Keum et al., 2018; Harwood et al., 2012; Lewis & Neville, 2015; Torres-Harding et al., 2012).

Nonetheless, the current literature is mostly qualitative in nature with the exception of one study that uses a mixed method approach (Casanova et al., 2015; Casanova et al., 2018; Garcia-Louis et al., 2020; Willis, 2016). Qualitative studies are great for establishing that a problem exists, and expanding our theorteical understanding of how these problems manifest in people's lived experiences, but they do not tell us whether and how these problems affect the broader community. As a result, this study will reveal the prevalence of MAs among community colleges nationwide and aims to address overt and subtle forms of racism within these institutions.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I argued that subtle and contemporary forms of racism should be examined in two-year community colleges because more students of color are attending these institutions than ever before. I identified a population of interest within the study of MAs that has not been studied extensively. A brief description of the term "microaggressions" was provided, supplemented with examples of how these interactions transpire in everyday life and classroom learning environments. The research questions and significance of this study were also discussed. The next chapter will review the existing body of literature on the study of MAs, discuss the current gaps in scholarly research on this topic, and present the conceptual framework that guided this study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I posit that MAs ought to be examined in community colleges settings using a quantitative approach to fill a necessary gap in the literature on RMs. Doing so may enable new recommendations for higher-education leaders on how to improve their campus climates and the educational experiences of community college students. First, I will discuss the historical foundations of RMs, after which I will present two theoretical frameworks that will inform my measurement of RMs for this study. I will then give an overview of the research conducted on RMs in higher education. Last, I will conclude with the hypotheses that will guide the methodological and analytical approach for this study.

Historical Foundations of Racial Microaggressions

The literature of RMs begins with psychiatrist Chester Pierce's work on CRT and aversive racism in his book *Psychiatric Problems of a Black Minority*. Here he explains that to combat racism, "One must not look for the gross and obvious; the subtle and cumulative mini assaults is the substance of today's racism" (Pierce, 1974, p. 516). Furthermore, Pierce describes the perplexing nature of MAs, whose impacts are externally incalculable because only the victim interprets their effect (Pierce, 1974). For instance, a study conducted on MAs in the residence halls of predominantly White institutions (PWIs) found that a Latina undergraduate student became upset and censored herself among her White peers after one of them nicknamed her "Tacos" (Harwood et al., 2012). Students have also documented instances when these interactions had no significant impact on their educational or personal development (Rice, 2020). Thus, Pierce asserts that people of color must learn to recognize MAs and develop coping skills to respond to these encounters effectively in their daily lives (Pierce, 1974).

After Pierce coined the term "racial microaggressions," research on this term came to a halt (Pierce, 1974; Pierce et al., 1978). In fact, the next journal article that examined RMs on a group of people was not published until 1998 (Solorzano, 1998). Instead, researchers studied other forms of subtle and comtemporary forms of racism such as symbolic racism, racial ambivalence, and aversive racism (Dovidio et al., 2002; McConahay, 1983; McConahay & Hough Jr, 1976). According to McConahay and Hough Jr (1976), symbolic racism is an expression of old-fashioned racism that varies along two dimensions: attitudinal and behavioral (McConahay & Hough Jr, 1976). Symbolically racist attitudes are moral assertions that cause people to preceive how Black people should act, what they deserve, and whether they are treated equitably (McConahay & Hough Jr, 1976). Symbolically racist behaviors are actions that serve to maintain the racist status quo but can be jusitified on a nonracial basis; examples include voting against Black candidates, opposing affirmative action programs, and opposing desegregation in housing and education (McConahay & Hough Jr, 1976). In 1983, John B. McConahay described White people's mixed attitudes and behaviors toward Black people as "racial ambivalence" (McConahay, 1983). In the next section, I will discuss how these topics were used to revitalize the study of RMs in 2007.

This literature set the foundation for research on RMs by providing the following recommendations. Most importantly, scholars suggested that ambiguous, subtle, and nebulous forms of racism could be measured with variables such as sympathetic identification with Black people and political party identification (McConahay & Hough Jr, 1976). Additionally, scales were proposed to measure the racial attitudes of White Americans toward Black people (McConahay, 1983). Lastly, researchers sucessffuly demonstrated that well-known psychology experiments and/or manipulation of study designs could be used to measure unintentional forms

of racism in employment, college admissions decisions, and professional settings (Dovidio et al., 2002). Collectively, these studies demonstrated (a) that subtle and unintentional forms of racism are perpetuated within various segments of society and (b) that these forms of racism can be measured using innovative research methods.

Taxonomy of Microaggressions

In 2007, Derald Wing Sue and colleagues revitalized research on RMs by integrating the concepts of modern racism, symbolic racism, and aversive racism to create the modern definition of RMs and propose a Taxonomy of Microaggressions (Dovidio et al., 2002; Katz & Hass, 1988; McConahay & Hough Jr, 1976; Sue et al., 2007). Specifically, the researchers theorized that political party identification is a strong indicator of contemporary forms of racism such as modern racism, symbolic racism, and aversive racism. The scholars also reviewed the existing literature on subtle and contemporary forms of racism and determined that the term "racial microaggressions" most aptly described these occurrences. However, because there were no classifications or frameworks on this topic, the scholars used dozens of personal narratives and empirical studies to propose a classification of MAs (Sue et al., 2007). An in-depth description of this taxonomy will be discussed next.

The scholars proposed that RMs could be classified into three categories: microinsults, microassaults, and microinvalidations (Sue et al., 2007). Microinsults are subtle snubs that convey a hidden insulting message to a person of color through verbal or nonverbal forms of communication. By contrast, microassaults are explicit racial derogations meant to hurt a person through violent verbal or nonverbal attacks such as name-calling, avoidant behavior, and purposeful discriminatory actions. Furthermore, microinvalidations are exchanges that negate or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, and experiential realities of people of color. The

most important distinction among these categories is that microinsults and microinvalidations are often unconscious, whereas microassaults are often blatant and conscious exchanges directed toward people of a minority group. Moreover, the scholars suggested that these categories funnel into a macro-level MA class they term "environmental microaggressions." Environmental microaggressions occur when multiple forms of MAs are exhibited within an institution such as a private, public, or nonprofit business (Sue et al., 2007). Lastly, the scholars provide several characterizations of each MA category that have emerged through personal narratives and research literature. An explanation of these characterizations will be provided next.

First, microassaults are relics of old-fashioned racism that attack people at an individual (micro) level (Sue et al., 2007). A common example of this is when a person refers to a student of color as "colored" or "oriental" (Sue et al., 2007). These exchanges also occur when marginalized populations of students are verbally and/or nonverbally mocked or degraded by faculty and peers about their race, ethnicity, accents, academic preparation, or parental support (Ellis et al., 2019; Sue et al., 2007). Additionally, microassaults may be expressed through visual signs that have racial connotations, such as swastikas and political campaign material expressing hostility toward migrant populations. The most recent political campaign prop is the red "Make America Great Again" hat worn and popularized by President Trump during the 2016 presidential election. Also, racial slurs may be written in shared spaces, such as residence halls (Harwood et al., 2012). However, microassaults are generally less common due to their explicit nature (Ellis et al., 2019; Nadal et al., 2014; Offerman et al., 2012; Sue et al., 2007). Thus, a significant percentage of research studies conducted on MAs examine the categories of microinsults and microinvalidations, which will be discussed in the following (Boysen, 2012;

Capodilupo et al., 2010; Casanova et al., 2018; Constantine, 2007; Garcia-Louis, 2020; Nadal et al., 2014; Sue et al., 2007).

Furthermore, Sue and colleagues propose the following characterizations as microinsults: ascription of intelligence, second-class citizen, pathologizing cultural values/communication, styles, and assumption of criminal status. For example, a student who ascribes a level of intelligence to a particular race or ethnicity might say to a student of color "you are so articulate," which conveys the message that they have set a low standard of intelligence for that group of people (Sue et al., 2007). Similar examples were found in studies conducted on microinsults in community colleges in 2015 and 2018 (Casanova et al., 2015; Casanova et al. 2018). Nonverbal cues that treat people of color as second-class citizens include when a person of color is mistaken for a service worker or when a taxicab passes a person of color and instead picks up a White passenger (Sue et al., 2007). These examples perpetuate the stigmas that people of color do not occupy high-status positions and are likely to cause trouble (Sue et al., 2007). Additionally, people of color may feel upset when their values or communication styles are targeted (Sue et al., 2007). For instance, a White student may ask a Black student, "Why are you so loud?" or an Asian student may be asked, "Why are you so quiet?" which conveys that the person must assimilate to the dominant culture (Sue et al. 2007). The same characterization applies when a person of color's concerns or opinions are repeatedly dismissed when they mention race or culture in a professional or collegiate setting (Garcia-Louis, 2020; Huynh, 2012; Nadal et al., 2014; Sue et al., 2007). Thus, even though context matters in all of these encounters, the premise is that such repeated exchanges cause people of color to feel attacked or disrespected.

Lastly, Sue and colleagues provide the following characterizations as microinvalidations: alien in own land, color blindness, myth of meritocracy, and denial of individual racism. The most common example of alien in own land is when a professor or student asks a student of color, "Where are you from?" or says, "You speak good English" (Sue et al., 2007). These messages convey that the person is a foreigner without having knowledge of their citizenship. Similar examples were found in collegiate research on Asian American and Latin American students (Huynh, 2012; Nadal et al., 2014; Guzman-Louis, 2020). Microinvalidations also occur when a person is in denial of their individual racism, such as when a person says, "I'm not racist, I have plenty of Black friends" (Sue et al., 2007), which presumes that they are not susceptible to racist thoughts or behaviors simply because they associate with people of color—even as they may be exhibiting subtle racism toward those they claim as friends (Sue et al., 2007). The myth of meritocracy refers to statements that suggest race does not play a significant role in life success (Sue et al., 2007). A common example of this MA is when a person says, "I believe the most qualified person should get the job" (Sue et al., 2007). The principle of this statement is true; however, research has found that White candidates are more likely to be given the "benefit of the doubt" in admissions decisions than Black candidates (Dovidio et al., 2002). Lastly, color blindness occurs when a person says that they do not see color or race (Sue et al., 2007). This is another statement that "looks good on paper," but it denies the lived experiences of racial and ethnic minorities (Sue et al., 2007). As a result, these racial slights perpetuate racism by alienating people of color and dismissing the inequities that exist within society because of race (Sue et al., 2007).

Recent Extensions to Sue et al.'s (2007) Microaggression Taxonomy

Since their inception, these RM classifications have been supported and replicated across several studies interested in examining the experiences and effects of RMs in higher education (Guzman et al., 2010; Nadal et al., 2014; Panter et al., 2008; Watkins et al., 2010). Recently, Williams et al. (2021) reviewed quantitative and qualitative literature on MA taxonomies to expand the original taxonomy proposed by Sue et al. (2007); they found that the categories of MAs were mostly consistent with Sue et al.'s taxonomy. However, the following new themes emerged in their research: tokenism, connecting through stereotypes, exoticization and eroticization, avoidance and distancing, and environmental attacks (Williams et al., 2021). I will provide a brief description of these classifications next.

Tokenism refers to the act of including a person of color into a group or environment to promote the illusion of inclusivity (Williams et al., 2021). For instance, a student in one study reported that the overseer of a study abroad program told her that she wanted the student to be a part of the group because she needed diversity (Mills, 2020). In another example, a panel organizer was advised by a program committee that they would not approve his panel unless he added a female panelist (Jaschik, 2007). The program committee was enforcing a rule that the organization set to promote gender diversity, but the panel organizer was stunned and felt uncomfortable reaching out to a female colleague for this purpose (Jaschick, 2007). Furthermore, when the panel orgnizer submitted a name and institution to the program committee, the committee approved the panel without any consideration of the female panelist's academic and professional background (Jaschick, 2007), revealing that the institution's policies are disingenuous.

Connecting through stereotypes is another common RM theme. Many people of color have documented instances when others have tried to communicate or connect with them through stereotyped speech or behavior (Williams et al., 2021). For instance, a Hispanic male may be asked to teach his friends Spanish words, or a South Asian person may be asked what to order at an Indian restaurant (William et al., 2021). These comments are offensive because the victim may not speak Spanish or may not be Indian.

People of color often report feeling exoticization and eroticization as well. For example, Black respondents have documented feeling eroticized when a person tries to touch, or points toward, their hair (Williams et al., 2021). Studies have also documented that Latin American women and Asian American women often feel exoticized by male counterparts in work and school (Nadal et al., 2014; Williams et al., 2021). For instance, an Asian American college student reported that "she is frequently approached by White men who are very forthcoming with their 'Asian fetishes' of subservience and pleasing them sexually" (Sue et al., 2007b, p. 76). Another student believed that Asian women are subjugated to roles of sexual objects, domestic servants, and exotic images of geishas that equate their identities to passive companions for White men (Sue et al., 2007b). As a result, subtle comments such as these create hostile environments for women of these ethnic backgrounds.

Avoidance and distancing encompasses ways of avoiding close contact with people of color (William et al., 2021). In a predonimately White institution, a person of color may be excluded from conversations amongst peers, or their peers may choose to sit away from the person. This behavior creates resentment for the individual and further alienates them from their environment.

The last themes that emerged were environmental exclusion and environmental attacks. These types of MAs occur on a systemic and environmental level, such as a college campus or professional job setting. An example of an environmental attack would be a Confederate statue or administrative building named after a slave owner on a college campus (Williams et al., 2021). It is clear that Sue et al.'s original Taxonomy of Microagressionss has flourished and been enriched with new themes to study these forms of racism in our daily lives.

Furthermore, several scales have been developed using Sue et al.'s Taxonomy of Microaggressions (Huynh, 2012; Keum et al., 2018; Lewis & Neville, 2015; Nadal, 2011; Torres-Harding et al., 2012). Three of these scales were developed to measure MAs in specific marginalized populations such as Asian American and Latin American youth as well as Black and Asian American women (Huynh, 2012; Keum et al., 2018; Lewis & Neville, 2015). Two of these scales are amendable to several demographics (Nadal, 2011; Torres-Harding et al., 2012). However, only one of these scales, developed by Torres-Harding and colleagues (2012), measures both the occurrence (i.e., how often a person experiences RMs) and the distress elicited by the incident (i.e., how much the incident caused him or her to feel stressed or upset). This is the scale I have used for my study, and a more detailed description of it will be provided in Chapter 3.

Microaggressions in Higher Education

Research on RMs began predominantly within the field of psychology (Sue et al., 2007). As studies continued to recognize new elements of subtle contemporary racism, researchers have tested findings in other areas of society, such as medicine, higher education, and the workplace (Blithe & Elliott, 2019; Constantine, 2007; Palmer & Maramba, 2015). The individuals who encounter these forms of discrimination are marginalized populations of people such as African

Americans, women, and Latin Americans (Constantine & Sue, 2007; Capodilupo et al., 2010; Nadal et al., 2014). These relationships have been examined using qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods approaches (Harwood et al., 2012; Nadal et al., 2011; Proctor et al., 2018). The next paragraphs will discuss the research that has emerged within the context of higher education.

Who Experiences Microaggressions?

Research shows that people of color at various rungs on the university ladder are most likely to experience MAs (Blithe & Elliott, 2019; Guzman et al., 2010; Nadal et al., 2014; Pittman, 2012). Beginning with students, studies have shown that Black, Hispanic, and Asian American students experience these forms of racism the most (Harwood et al., 2012; Nadal et al., 2014; Palmer & Maramba, 2015; Rice, 2020; Watkins et al., 2010). For instance, one study examined the relationship between MAs and race and ethnicity among graduate students of school psychology, finding that Black male students were more likely than other students to experience microinsults and microinvalidations (Proctor et al., 2018). The same disparities have been found among Black and Hispanic student populations in studies that examined MAs in predominantly White institutions, predominantly Hispanic-serving institutions, and a historically Black university (Casanova et al., 2015; Harwood et al., 2012; Palmer & Maramba, 2015; Watkins et al., 2010).

Additionally, existing studies show that people of color experience MAs after graduation when they assume administration and faculty roles at higher-education institutions (Guzman et al., 2010; Payton et al., 2018; Pittman, 2012). For instance, a study highlighted that in a predominantly White institution, departments were confining African American faculty to race-specific roles and expectations (Pittman, 2012). Specifically, African American faculty

were expected to teach and research racial scholarship, which was often marginalized (Pittman, 2012). The study also revealed that White faculty and White students were frequently the perpetrators of the MAs (Pittman, 2012), a finding corroborated by other studies of higher education (Casanova et al., 2015; Harwood et al., 2012; Palmer & Maramba, 2015; Watkins et al., 2010). Thus, collectively, the data suggest that MAs permeate and persist throughout higher-education institutions in America.

Futhermore, existing literature has demonstrated that the types of MAs that students experience in higher education may vary based on demographic characteristics such as race, gender, age, ethnicity, and educational level (Capodilupo et al., 2010; Constantine, 2007; Nadal et al., 2014). In fact, a study examined the role that demographic and sociopolitical factors play in experiences of discrimination among Latin Americans in the context of MAs. The study found that Latina women were more likely than Latino men to experience workplace and school MAs (Nadal et al., 2014). The study also highlighted that people of the same race and/or ethnicity will experience different MAs based on their skin color, gender, age, and/or educational level (Nadal et al., 2014). Specifically, a light-skinned person of Dominican Republic descent had a different experience with MAs than a dark-skinned person of Dominican Republic descent (Nadal et al., 2014). Similar patterns have been found among Black, Asian American, and other marginalized student populations at higher-education institutions (Proctor et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2020; Rice, 2020; Lewis et al., 2021). For instance, one study examined the relationship between various dependent and independent variables related to experiences of MAs amongst science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) majors (Lee et al., 2020). The study revealed that Black men and women experienced the highest frequency of MAs at all three levels—campus, academic, and peer—which constituted the dependent variables (Lee et al., 2020). The figures

also show that Asian, Latinx, and other race student populations experienced MAs at different rates based on dependent variables such as campus level, academic level, and peer level (Lee et al., 2020). Thus, existing research on this topic suggests that the prevalence of MAs within higher-education institutions is underestimated.

What Do Microaggressions Lead To?

Whereas early research focused on predictors of experienced MAs, the literature has more recently shifted the focus to assessing outcomes of MAs (Ackerman-Barger et al., 2020; Casanova et al., 2018; Nadal et al., 2014b; Payton et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2011). Existing data shows that MAs have a significant impact on the mental health and educational outcomes of students of color (Ackerman-Barger et al., 2020; Casanova et al., 2018; Nadal et al., 2014b; Payton et al., 2018). For instance, one study found a negative correlation between RMs and self-esteem, indicating that students who experience frequent MAs at school or in the workplace may develop low self-esteem (Nadal et al., 2014b). Furthermore, students have reported feeling discounted, isolated, devalued, intellectually inferior, anxiety, underrepresented, and a lack of concentration as a result of their experiences with MAs (Ackerman-Barger et al., 2020). Microaggressions have also been linked with increased psychological, physiological, and emotional/behaviorial stress responses among students of color (Smith et al., 2011). Examples of these stress responses include hopelessness, chest pains, and/or stereotype threat (Smith et al., 2011). As a result, these mental health challenges cause student achievement to plummet (Ackerman-Barger et al., 2020; Casanova et al., 2018). For instance, students typically responded to MAs with disengagment in class and assumptions of their own academic inferiority (Ackerman-Barger et al., 2020; Casanova et al., 2018; Keels et al., 2017).

Based on the information presented, the study of MAs within the field of higher education is advancing, and their detrimental impacts are being captured by researchers nationwide. However, further research is still needed across the board. The next section of this chapter will discuss an area within higher education in urgent need of close attention: community college institutions.

Microaggressions in Community College Institutions

As mentioned in Chapter 1, two-year community colleges are an area that has not been examined extensively within the study of MAs. Community colleges account for a significant percentage of the student body within higher-education institutions in New Jersey (New Jersey IPEDS, 2020). Students of color also account for more than half of the student body enrolled in public two-year institutions nationwide (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). Soon, federal initiatives such as the America's College Promise Act (ACPA) will encourage low-income students to enroll in community college for free (Startz, 2021). Therefore, it has become increasingly important to conduct further research on MAs in community colleges, as these institutions often serve as pipelines to traditional four-year institutions.

There are several characteristics that prevent generalizing research findings about MAs from four-year institutions to community colleges. Most notably, the institutional mission and program objectives of community colleges vary considerably from those of traditional four-year institutions (Baime & Baum, 2016). Despite serving as alternative routes to four-year institutions through transfer agreements, community colleges also tailor their program offerings to meet local workforce needs (Baime & Baum, 2016). Figures show that these demands often require terminal degrees that prepare students for immediate entry into the labor force (Baime & Baum, 2016). In addition, the student demographics of community college are also different. Besides

the racial demographics of community colleges described earlier, students in community college also vary based on age group, enrollment status, and college choice (American Association of Community Colleges, 2019). For instance, at a national level, a higher percentage of community college students attend school part-time (American Association of Community Colleges, 2019). Therefore, further research is needed within this population of students to capture their educational and/or social experiences as they relate to MAs.

Nevertheless, the few studies that have been conducted on MAs in community colleges have been qualitative studies. Qualitative research is beneficial when one wants to understand a phenomenon holistically from the perspective of people (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For instance, Casanova et al. (2018) found that faculty exhibited MAs toward students in 45 out of 51 observations (Casanova et al., 2018). However, research findings from qualitative studies may not necessarily generalize to the broader community due to their small sample sizes (Rahman, 2017). Microaggression theory is also based largely on MA victims' self-reporting of incidents (Keum et al., 2018; Lewis & Neville, 2015; Lilienfeld, 2017; Nadal, 2011; Sue et al., 2007; Torres-Harding et al., 2012), which exposes these findings to the possibility of responder bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Rahman, 2017). These were key limitations noted in several articles (Capodilupo et al., 2010; Lilienfeld, 2017; Nadal, 2011; Sue et al., 2007). A quantitative approach to this problem addresses these limitations and may provide recommendations that reduce MAs in community college (Rahman, 2017). The following section will discuss the research conducted on MAs in community college.

Relevant Research on Microaggressions in Community Colleges

Most research shows that the MAs that students experience in community college will vary based on their race (Casanova et al., 2015; Casanova et al., 2018; Garcia-Louis et al., 2020;

Willis, 2016). More specifically, studies have found that among community college populations, Black and Hispanic students experience the most MAs (Casanova et al., 2015; Casanova et al., 2018; Garcia-Louis et al., 2020; Willis, 2016). According to Willis (2016), these students may even experience these forms of racism while studying abroad through international programs within their institution (Willis, 2016).

Community college faculty and administrators are frequently the prepetrators of these interactions (Casanova et al., 2015; Casanova et al., 2018; Garcia-Louis et al., 2020). For instance, one study found that community college instructors were frequently the offenders during classroom observations of MAs (Casanova et al., 2015). These results findings were replicated by studies conducted in 2018 and 2020 (Casanova et al., 2018; Garcia-Louis et al., 2020). However, in 2020, researchers also found that these forms of racism can trickle from the top of the organizational chart (Garcia-Louis et al., 2020). For example, during a discussion about allocating resources, a senior administrator from a predominantly Hispanic serving community college stated, "I don't necessarily see a difference between… the Latino and the non-Latino population; underprepared is underprepared" (Garcia-Louis et al., 2020, p. 2391). This is an example of a microinvalidation, as it negates the experiential reality of the Latino population (Sue et al., 2007).

Lastly, preliminary research on this target population shows that MAs will also vary based on type and setting (Casanova et al., 2015; Casanova et al., 2018; Garcia-Louis et al., 2020). Casanova and colleagues (2015) identified four dominant types of MAs during classroom observations: intelligence-related, cultural/racial, gendered, and intersectional (Casanova et al., 2015). These MAs were also displayed by faculty and administrators in 2018 and 2020 (Casanova et al., 2018; Garcia-Louis et al., 2020). More specifically, administrators felt that

Latino males fail to ask for assistance because of their machismo (Garcia-Louis et al., 2020). In fact, in a discussion about Latino males, an instructor stated that he tells his students that reading a book is "hard work" because to Latino males "hard work is physical work" (Garcia-Louis et al., 2020). While this comment may be characterized as a held preconceived notion by the instructor, these comments disparaged his students based on their race, which is the principle behind MA theory. Additionally, the participants countered these arguments by noting unavailability and understaffed tutoring services as reasons for failing to ask for assistance (Garcia-Louis et al., 2020).

Additionally, preliminary data shows that the number of MAs a student experiences may vary based on the course they are enrolled in. For instance, a study reported that "[microaggressions] were observed in 41.2% of all remedial classes, compared to [microaggressions] observed only in 24.1% of all general education courses and 21.4% of all vocational classrooms" (Casanova et al., 2015, pp. 155-156). A subsequent study found that 59% of the MAs observed were intelligence-demeaning and questioned the students' ability to be successful college students and occurred most often during teacher-centered instruction (Casanova et al., 2018).

Based on the information provided, this study may help advance the literature on MAs in community colleges through its quantitative lens. The current data shows that these forms of racism are happening in these institutions. We must determine to what extent these events are happening, what factors cause these events to occur, and how these events impact students. The next section will discuss my predictions for this study.

Hypotheses

The literature reviewed above demonstrates that MAs are occurring at multiple levels of higher education. The following themes emerge when analyzing the landscape of MAs in community colleges: (a) a higher percentage of Black and Hispanic students attend community colleges; (b) the mental health and academic outcomes of victims of MAs in community colleges is underexamined, particularly in students; and (c) race may play a significant role in the MAs that students experience in community colleges. This section will utilize these themes to propose three theoretical predictions for this study.

Primarily, literature suggests that Black and Hispanic people are more likely to experience MAs (Casanova et al., 2015; Constantine, 2007; Dovidio et al., 2002; Nadal et al., 2014; Nadal et al., 2014b; Pittman, 2012; Proctor et al., 2018). In institutions where more than half of the student body identifies with one of these demographics, it is feasible that a high percentage of the student body within these demographics are experiencing MAs (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). For instance, studies have shown that a high percentage of Black and Hispanic students attending predominately Hispanic serving and historically Black universities and colleges (HBCUs) will experience MAs within their institutions (Casanova et al., 2015; Casanova et al., 2018; Palmer & Maramba, 2015; Solorzano, 1998). Therefore, research suggests that MAs are happening at all collegiate levels and institution types. If these incidents are occurring at an alarming rate within community colleges, higher-education leaders must know their extent in order to address the problem. Thus, the first prediction that I propose is the following:

Hypothesis 1: Relative to students from a racial majority demographic group, students from racial minority demographic groups will experience more MAs in a community college, on average.

Furthermore, research has demonstrated that students who experience higher levels of MAs may develop stress, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and lower academic achievement (Casanova et al., 2015; Casanova et al., 2018; Huynh, 2011; Keels et al., 2017; Nadal et al., 2014b). These outcomes coupled, with the intensity of college course work, may create roadblocks to students' completion of their degrees and/or transfers to four-year institutions. Determining how these events affect students' mental health and academic achievement is pivotal to providing support services for these students to grow. Given this information, this study theorizes that students who experience higher levels of MAs in community colleges may report higher levels of stress and low levels of sense of belonging, hence my second prediction below.

Hypothesis 2: Relative to students from a racial majority demographic group, students from racial minority demographic groups will report *(H2a)* higher levels of stress and *(H2b)* lower levels of sense of belonging in a community college, on average.

Lastly, scholars have demonstrated the intersectionality of MAs across various studies in higher education (Lee et al., 2020; Lewis et al., 2021; Nadal et al., 2014; Proctor et al., 2018; Rice, 2020). This shows that people of the same race and/or ethnicity may experience different type(s) of MAs based on socioeconomic and sociopolitcal factors such as gender, income level, age, sexual preference, and academic level. For this reason, scholars have expanded their research to study specific groups of people such as Mexican American students, Black women, Latino men, and miniorites in STEM education (Garcia-Louis et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2020;

Lewis & Neville, 2015; Solorzano, 1998). However, the overwhelming theme that emerges in these studies is that race and ethncity has a signifiant impact on the MAs students experience in higher education. More specifically, literature from traditional four-year institutions suggests that Black and Hispanic students are more likely to experience MAs in higher education (Watkins et al., 2010; Harwood et al., 2012; Nadal et al., 2014b; Palmer & Maramba, 2015; Mills, 2020; Lewis et al., 2021). Nonetheless, such analysis has not been conducted in community college settings. Given the increased diversity of Black and Hispanic students in these institutions, it is crucial to analyze whether microaggresssions have a mediating effect between race and the stress and sense of belonging that students experience in community colleges. Therefore, I propose the final hypothesis below.

Hypothesis 3: Microaggressions will have a mediating effect between race and the stress (*H3a*) and sense of belonging (*H3b*) that students experience in community colleges.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I argued that community colleges are overlooked within the study of RMs. I provided a historical review of the foundations of RMs. A conceptual framework was proposed to measure these incidents within community colleges across the United States. I also discussed how RMs permeate and persist in traditional four-year institutions and community colleges. Additionally, hypothetical predictions for this study were provided. In the next chapter, I will present the methodology and analytical approach used to test my hypotheses.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the purpose of this study was to (a) investigate the prevalence of MAs within community colleges, particularly across student race groups; (b) examine the influence of experienced MAs on stress and sense of belonging; and (c) analyze the relationship between MAs, stress, and sense of belonging within these institutions. This chapter will discuss the methodological design for this study. I will start with a reiteration of the research questions and hypotheses.

Research Question 1: What is the prevalence of microaggressions experienced by students in two-year community colleges, and do these experiences vary based on race?

Hypothesis 1: Relative to students from a racial majority demographic group, students from a racial minority demographic group will experience more microaggressions in a community college, on average.

Research Question 2: Are there differences in stress and sense of belonging among students attending two-year community colleges?

Hypothesis 2: Relative to students from a racial majority demographic group, students from racial minority demographic groups will report *(H2a)* higher levels of stress and *(H2b)* lower levels of sense of belonging in a community college, on average.

Research Question 3: Do microaggressions mediate the relationship between race and the stress and sense of belonging that students experience in two-year community colleges?

Hypothesis 3: Microaggressions will have a mediating effect between race and the stress (*H3a*) and sense of belonging (*H3b*) that students experience in community colleges.

Description of Population of Interest

The target population of this study were students attending two-year community colleges within the United States. This approach was to gather a sample of participants representative of more than one institution, state, or region. Existing literature on this target population has studied these interactions only within one to three college campuses and solely from a qualitative perspective (Casanova et al., 2015; Casanova et al., 2018; Garcia-Louis et al., 2020; Willis, 2016). This approach would help identify whether this problem persists at a national level within community colleges.

Preface on Data Collection Methods

I would like to preface this section by highlighting that the following is the result of a pivot in participant recruiting strategies. The original study framework was designed to contact representatives from 50 community colleges located throughout the nation and ask their permission to distribute the survey to their student body. The original framework was approved by Seton Hall's IRB in Spring 2023. Unfortunately, several attempts to contact these representatives through e-mail and telephone were unsuccessful. I believe this was largely due to timing in the academic year (between April and July) and also the sensitivity surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.

Participants

Based on the goals of this study, I sought to recruit a sample of students that would be representative of the demographics of community colleges nationwide. For instance, in 2021, the enrollment percentages by race for public two-year institutions were as follows: 48% White, 27% Hispanic, 13% Black, 6% Asian, 4% two or more races, 1% American Indian/Alaska Native, and 1% Pacific Islander (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024). A

representative sample of participants provides me with a degree of confidence to claim that the study's findings accurately reflect the broader population. Additionally, there were seven race categories used for this study, which were adopted from the reporting demographics in NCES. The inclusion criteria for this study were community college students ages 18 and over. Given the diversity of age groups within community college, participants also had to indicate their time status (full-time, part-time, or not enrolled) and first-year status (yes/no) in college. This was influenced by the limitation noted in Proctor et al. (2018), where failure to control the age group produced responses that did not pertain to their target audience of graduate students. Furthermore, the sample size was determined using the G*Power statistical tool (Faul et al., 2007), which allows researchers to compute statistical power analyses for various tests, including *t* tests and *F* tests. A power analysis, using the analysis of variance (ANOVA): fixed-effects omnibus one-way statistical test, revealed that I would need a total sample size of 343. The power analysis was run with an alpha level of .05, a power of .95, and .25 (medium) effect size. The following section will discuss the sampling and administration plan for this study.

Procedures

Based on the goals of this study, I used stratified sampling to obtain a sample of participants attending community colleges across the nation. This approach was used to ensure that the sample population contained a representative number of participants based on gender and racial demographics (Fowler Jr, 2009). The sample was collected using the Prolific website. Prolific is a fast, reliable, and large-scale data collection website that connects researchers with participants around the world. The website contains more than 30,000 researchers and 120,000 active participants from 38 different countries (Prolific, 2023). Prolific offers high-quality recruitment services at a reasonable cost, and explicitly informs participants that they are

involved in research. The website is known for its detailed guidelines on the treatment of subjects and boasts a user-friendly interface that resonates well with researchers. Prolific has been used by thousands of researchers in various disciplines such as economics, psychology, and food science (Palan & Schitter, 2018). There are many ways to design a survey on Prolific; however, for the purpose of this study, I created a general invitation that routed participants to the anonymous survey that I designed in Qualtrics. The items in the survey are included in Appendix A. Furthermore, Prolific contains an extensive list of filters that researchers can use to target a specific audience. For this study, I created two general invitations in Prolific to recruit community college students. The first invitation was directed to all White participants on the website listed with their current education level as technical/community college. The second invitation was directed to all non-White participants on the website listed under the same education level as above. This approach was adopted to ensure adequate representation of each racial group within the sample. Additionally, these invitations were also directed to collect responses from a balanced ratio of males and females because women are overrepresented in the Prolific sampling pool (Prolific, 2024). An in-depth description of the sample population's characteristics will be provided in the next chapter.

Additionally, participants were paid $3.00 for their participation in this study. The average time that it took participants to complete this survey was approximately 6 minutes, which would equate to an average of $30 per hour. This compensation was fair and aligned with Prolific's compensation policy of at least $8 per hour (Prolific, 2023). Case-wise deletion was used to remove survey responses that did not provide demographic information such as race or gender, failed to complete the survey, or answered more than one item in a scale with "Don't Know." Overall, this study received 321 applicable responses out of 339 surveys distributed.

Finally, the administration window for this survey was open from November 2023 to January 2024. Surveys were distributed to participants on Prolific incrementally based on survey completion and available funds for participant payments. The first round of surveys was released to 20 participants on 11/30/2023. Once those responses were received, the surveys were then extended to 70 more participants on 12/3/2023. Subsequently, the surveys were extended to 200 more participants on 12/14/2023. Once those responses were received, the surveys were then extended to 40 more applicants on 12/27/2023. After these surveys were collected, a preliminary analysis of data revealed missing responses from one of the participant groups. Thus, the survey was extended to 9 more White participants to have 160 White participants and 160 non-White participants.

Measures

The current study used a survey that was adopted from Torres-Harding et al.'s (2012) Racial Microaggressions Scale (RMAS) to examine MAs within community colleges. The RMAS was developed to measure both the occurrence (i.e., how often a person experiences RMs) and the distress elicited by RMs (i.e., how much the incident caused them to feel stressed or upset) (Torres-Harding et al., 2012). Specifically, the researchers developed a 32 item Likert-type scale that incorporated Sue et al.'s Taxonomy of Microaggressions (2007). For each item, respondents answered how often they experienced a particular MA using a five-point Likert-type scale (0 = never, 1 = almost never, 2 = sometimes, 3 = fairly often, 4 = often) (Torres-Harding et al., 2012). Items 4 and 12 were added to the survey to gather more knowledge from participants regarding their experiences with Foreigner and Sexualization MAs. Furthermore, the scale measures the following MA factors (Torres-Harding et al., 2012, p 156):

a) *Invisibility*: Being treated as if one is of lower status, not visible, not seen as a "real" person, and being dismissed or devalued. For example, item 40: "I am treated like a second-class citizen because of my race."

b) *Criminality*: Being treated as if one is aggressive, dangerous, or a criminal. For example, item 16: "Others assume that I will behave aggressively because of my race."

c) *Low-Achieving/Undesirable Culture*: Being treated as if people from one's racial background are interchangeable, uniformly incompetent, incapable, low achieving, and dysfunctional, and as if successes are due to unfair entitlements and special treatment. For example, item 23: "Other people act as if all people of my race are alike."

d) *Sexualization*: Being treated in an overly sexual manner and being subject to sexual stereotypes. For example, item 21: "Other people hold sexual stereotypes about me because of my racial background."

e) *Foreigner/Not Belonging*: Being made to feel as if one is not a "true" American or does not really belong because of one's racial background. For example, item 4: "Other people often ask me where I am from, suggesting that I don't belong."

f) *Environmental Invalidations*: Negative perceptions that derive from observing that visible or powerful roles in one's community do not include people from one's own racial background. For example, item 42: "When I interact with authority figures, they are usually of a different racial background."

Additionally, the RMAS includes three subscales called the Schedule of Racist Events (SRE) that was developed in 1996 (Landrine & Klonoff, 1996). The SRE is used to assess specific, negative life events, and race-related stressors that occur to African Americans. The

frequency of these events is captured at three separate periods. Those periods are within the past year, within one's entire lifetime, and for the appraisal of the stressfulness of each event. Respectively, these subscales are labeled "Recent Racist Events," "Lifetime Racist Events," and "Appraised Racist Events." Originally, the SRE consisted of 18 scale items that contained the phrase "because you are Black" (Landrine & Klonoff, 1996). However, the RMAS was modified to "because of your race" to be applicable more generally to people of color (Torres-Harding et al., 2012). Each item is answered on a six-point Likert-type scale that ranges from 1 (the event never happened to me) to 6 (the event happens almost all the time) (Landrine & Klonoff, 1996).

Furthermore, Torres-Harding et al. (2012) noted that the RMAS passed all statistical requirements for internal consistency, convergent validity, and concurrent validity. First, the Cronbach's alphas for the six scales were as follows: Invisibility (.89), Criminality (.85), Low-Achieving/Undesirable Culture (.87), Sexualization (.83), Foreigner/Not Belonging (.78), and Environmental Invalidations (.81). Internal consistency is met when Cronbach's alpha is higher than 0.7. Additionally, Pearson correlation coefficients were computed between the RMAS factor scores and the subscales of the SRE. The results showed that the experiences of RMs as measured by the RMAS were found to be positively correlated with racist life events as measured by the SRE. Lastly, the researchers examined the results of between people of color and White people to examine the concurrent validity of the scale. A series of *t* tests showed that people of color reported higher scores than White people in each of the scales. A complete layout of the survey items for this scale is included in Appendix A. However, for the purposes of this study, my survey used the original RMAS scale factors and included the subscale items for Recent Racist Events and Appraised Racist Events. I excluded items from the Lifetime Racist

Events subscale to ensure that participants focused solely on the most recent events related to their collegiate experience.

Moreover, this study adopted 14 items that were used by Cohen et al. (1983) to measure the degree to which situations in one's life are appraised as stressful. These items were designed to capture how unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overloading a participant found a situation to be. This measure was designed to be used in various stress environments and populations. The scores are obtained by reversing the scores of the positively stated items (4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 13) and then summing across all 14 items. For these items, respondents answered using a five-point Likert-type scale (0 = never, 1 = almost never, 2 = sometimes, 3 = fairly often, 4 = very often). A complete list of these items is provided in Appendix A.

Lastly, this study adopted six items used by Pedler et al. (2021) to measure the sense of belonging of college students. Sense of belonging in higher education is described as students' subjective feelings of connection and integration with their institution and campus community. Research shows that students who have a strong sense of belonging have more academic self-confidence, higher motivation, and higher levels of academic engagement and achievement. By contrast, students who experience feelings of alienation on campus or struggle to integrate with their community are more likely to discontinue their studies. Pedler et al. (2021) developed these items using the Sense of Belonging Index that the Programme for International Student Assessment used in 2003. For this study, the word "university" in these items was replaced with "my college" for use with community college students. Respondents answered these items using a six-point Likert-type scale (5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree, 0 = don't know). A complete list of these items is provided in Appendix A.

Planned Analyses

Next, I will discuss the statistical tests that will be performed to test the research hypotheses in sequential order.

Primarily, Hypothesis 1 asserts that community college students from a racial minority demographic will experience more MAs in a community college than students from a racial majority demographic, on average. Because I will be comparing the differences between more than two student demographics, the ANOVA test will be used to perform this analysis (Nolan & Heinzen, 2011). I will enter race as my independent variable in the analysis and the average scores of the scale as my dependent variable. Hypothesis 1 would be supported if the mean for a racial minority demographic is significantly higher than the mean for the majority demographic (Nolan & Heinzen, 2011).

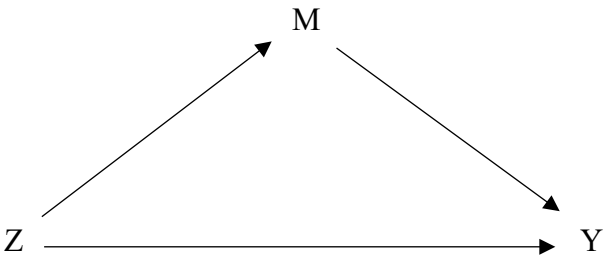
Furthermore, Hypothesis 2 claims that on average, students from racial minority demographic groups will report higher levels of stress due to experienced MAs on a community college campus compared to students from racial majority demographic groups. I will test this hypothesis using the ANOVA test to compare the differences in stress between groups. I will enter race as my independent variable in the analysis and stress/sense of belonging as my dependent variable. Hypothesis 2 would be supported if the mean for a racial minority demographic differs significantly from the group mean (Nolan & Heinzen, 2011).

Lastly, Hypotheses 3a and 3b assert that MAs will mediate the relationship between race and the stress (*H3a*) and sense of belonging (*H3b*) that students experience in community colleges. This research question will be tested using mediation analysis. The purpose of mediation analysis is to test whether the relationship between an independent variable and dependent variable is explained by the influence of a third variable, which is known as a

mediator variable (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Moran, 2024). Additionally, this analysis helps us understand how or why a relationship is occurring. Based on this assumption, I will create path diagrams with race as my independent variable. In each diagram, stress (*H3a)* and sense of belonging (*H3b)* are the outcome variables, and MAs are the mediators. A three-variable path diagram with mediator *M* is provided below (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Moran, 2024):

Figure 1

Three-Variable Path Diagram with Mediator M



Note. This figure displays the pathways from variable Z to variable Y through intercept M. *(Reproduced with permission from Baron, R. M., & Kenny, D. A. (1986). The moderator-mediator variable distinction in social psychological research: Conceptual, strategic, and statistical considerations. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 51, 1173-1182.*

Furthermore, this analysis was performed using Baron and Kenny's (1986) strategy for testing mediation hypotheses, which posits that there are two paths to the dependent variable: (1) the independent variable must predict the dependent variable, and (2) the independent variable must predict the mediator (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Moran, 2024). This process is measured through a series of regressions. These regressions must indicate whether the independent variable predicts both the dependent and mediator variables, and whether the independent variable and mediator predict the dependent variable (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Moran, 2024). There are two possible outcomes that support mediation for this test: complete mediation or partial mediation. Thus, Hypothesis 3 will be supported if the independent variable (race) no longer influences the dependent variable (stress or sense of belonging) after the mediator (MAs) have been controlled,

or if the independent variable's influence on the dependent variable is reduced after the mediator is controlled.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented the methodological design for this study. I discussed the survey that was used to gather data for analysis. The population of interest was described, as too were the sampling plan and administration plan. I also presented the statistical tests that will be used to answer the research questions for this study. In the next chapter, I will provide the results of the survey and report whether the research hypotheses were supported.

CHAPTER 4: DATA INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

Expanding on the discussions from the prior chapter, the purpose of this study was to (a) investigate the prevalence of MAs within community colleges, particularly across race groups; (b) examine the influence of experienced MAs on stress and sense of belonging; and (c) analyze the relationship between MAs, stress, and sense of belonging within these institutions. This chapter will discuss the data results and highlight the insights drawn from the findings. I will start with a reiteration of the research questions and hypotheses.

Research Question 1: What is the prevalence of microaggressions experienced by students in two-year community colleges, and do these experiences vary based on race?

Hypothesis 1: Relative to students from a racial majority demographic group, students from a racial minority demographic group will experience more microaggressions in a community college, on average.

Research Question 2: Are there differences in stress and sense of belonging among students attending two-year community colleges.

Hypothesis 2: Relative to students from a racial majority demographic group, students from racial minority demographic groups will report (*H2a*) higher levels of stress and (*H2b*) lower levels of sense of belonging in a community college, on average.

Research Question 3: Do microaggressions mediate the relationship between race and the stress and sense of belonging that students experience in two-year community colleges?

Hypothesis 3: Microaggressions will have a mediating effect between race and the stress (*H3a*) and sense of belonging (*H3b*) that students experience in community colleges.

Table 1. Frequency and percentages of demographic and study-related variables.

Race			Gender			Age		
White or Caucasian	158	49%	Male	153	48%	18–24 (Under 25)	141	44%
Black or African-American	48	15%	Female	155	48%	25 to 34	120	37%
Latino or Hispanic	61	19%	Other	13	4%	35 and Over	60	19%
Asian	22	7%						
Two or More	28	9%						
American Indian/Alaska Native	2	1%						
Pacific Islander and Unknown	2	1%						
Observations	321	100%	Observations	321	100%	Observations	321	100%

Enrollment Status			First Year			State		
Full-time	180	56%	Yes	91	28%	Northeast	43	13%
Part-time	134	42%	No	230	72%	Midwest	54	17%
Not enrolled at this time	7	2%				South	132	41%
						West	90	28%
						Unknown	2	1%
Observations	321	100%	Observations	321	100%		321	100%

Participants

The online survey was completed by 347 participants, although only 321 responses were included for data analysis. Responses were excluded because participants did not provide their race (9) or gender (1), or answered "Don't Know" for two or more items in a scale (16). Including these missing responses in the analysis would have skewed the results of the data. However, Table 1 shows the demographic and descriptive statistics of the study sample. Notably, the sample is representative of the student population in public two-year community colleges across all race categories, with exception to the Latino or Hispanic student demographic. The Latino or Hispanic demographic makes up only 19% of the sample, whereas the national average for public two-year community colleges is 27% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024). Below are the enrollment percentages by race for public two-year institutions: 48% White, 27%

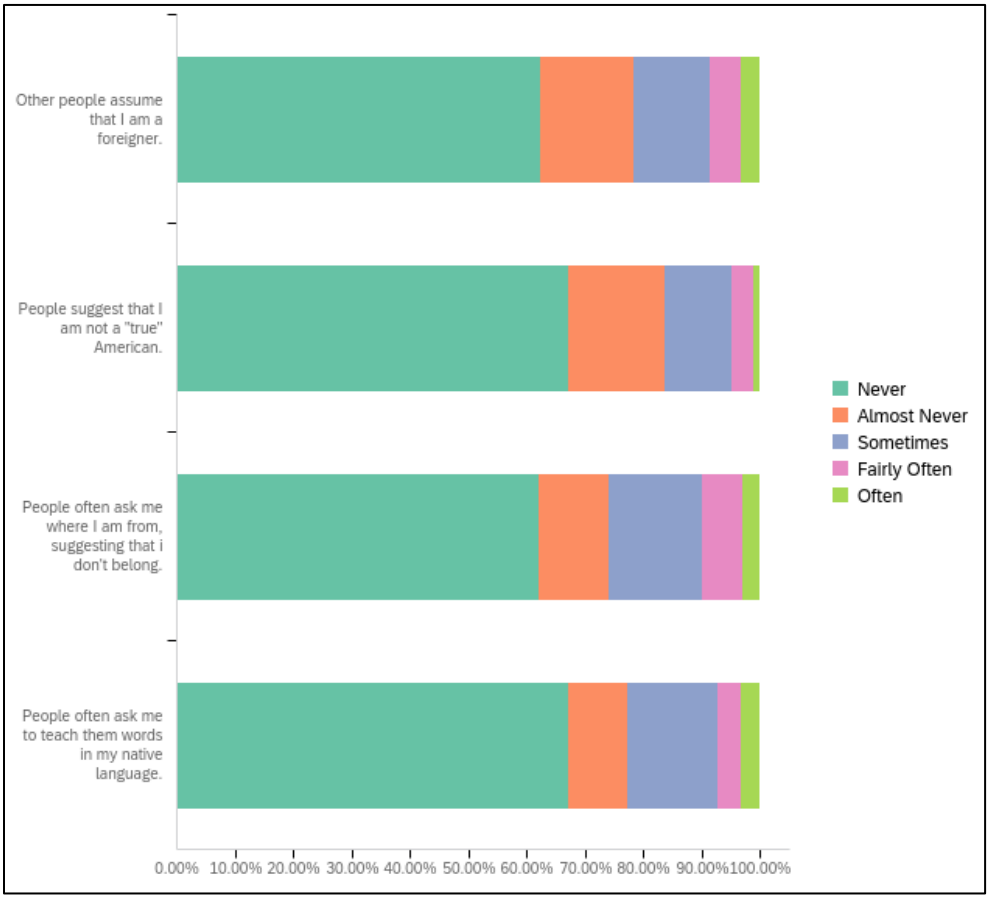
Hispanic, 13% Black, 6% Asian, 4% two or more races, 1% American Indian/Alaska Native, and 1% Pacific Islander (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024). Additionally, participants ranged from ages 18 to 66 years of age, with 81% of the sample being under 35; the national averages for students under 35 attending public two-year community colleges full-time and part-time were 94% and 85%, respectively (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024). Despite the discrepancy, these groups of students nonetheless account for more than two-thirds of the sample. Furthermore, Table 1 presents a balanced representation of gender including 48% male, 48% female, and 4% other. This balanced distribution was obtained deliberately using Prolific's balanced-sample option because the sampling pool on the website overrepresents women (Prolific, 2024). However, females account for more than half of the students enrolled in public two-year community colleges nationwide (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). In addition, the sample comprises of respondents who were enrolled full-time (56%) and part-time (42%), which is comparable to the national average of 56% full-time and 43% part-time for this population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Lastly, Table 1 includes the descriptive statistics for first-year status and the summary of geographical locations within the United States. First-year status was used to determine the percentage of participants who were enrolled in their first year of college. First-year students represented 28% of the sample, which is comparable to the enrollment figures nationwide: In 2022, first-year students accounted for 17% of the 4,519,800 students enrolled in public two-year community colleges (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Geographical locations were captured to increase generalizability of study findings; Table 1 shows the distributions per region in the United States. Notably, the most survey responses were received from participants located in the South.

Survey Measures

As mentioned in Chapter 3, this study administered an online survey that adopted scales from multiple studies to measure the prevalence of MAs, assess the perceived stress levels among community college students, and evaluate their sense of belonging within the institution. As a result, there are eight indices for this study. This section will discuss the results of each survey measure. I will start by presenting the results of the RMAS, which has the following indices: Foreigner, Criminality, Sexualization, Low-Achieving, Invisibility, and Environmental Invalidations.

Figure 2

Foreigner Index



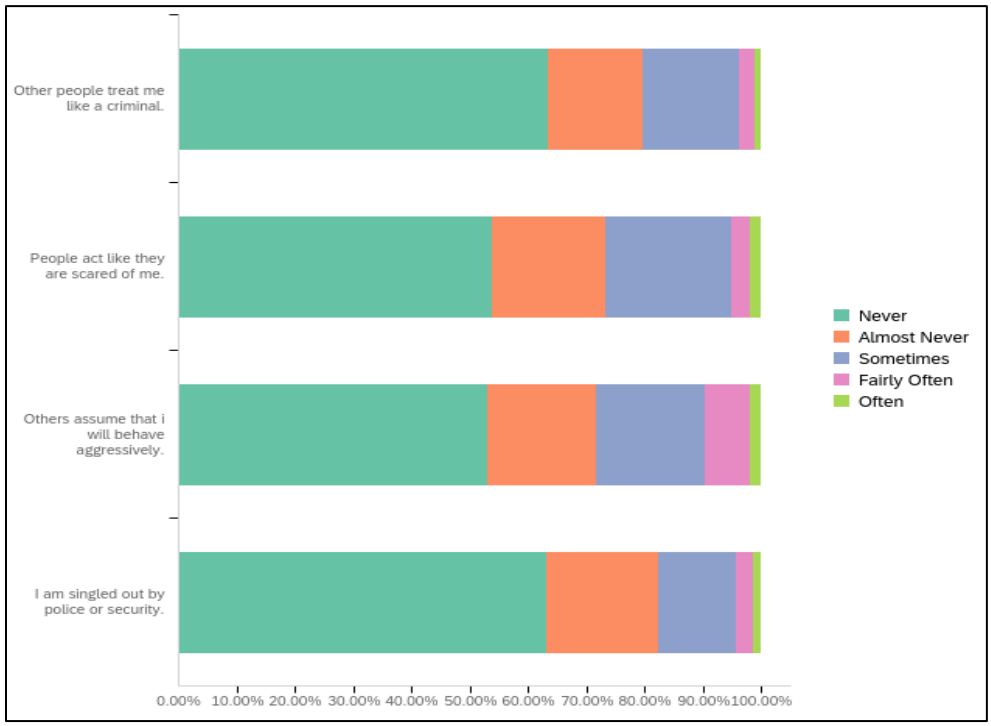
Note. This figure shows the survey results on Foreigner related microaggressions among community college students, based on a sample of 321 (*adapted and reproduced with permission*

from Torres-Harding, S. R., Andrade, A. L., & Romero Diaz, C. E. (2012). The Racial Microaggressions Scale (RMAS): A new scale to measure experiences of racial microaggressions in people of color. Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 18(2), 153–164.

Figure 2 presents the results for the Foreigner Index. The Foreigner Index comprises four items that ask respondents how often they experienced MAs that made them feel like they didn't belong because of their racial background (Torres-Harding et al., 2012). This figure shows that at least 30% of the sample has experienced MAs that made them feel like a foreigner or not a "true" American. The most frequently reported Foreigner MA was "People often ask me where I am from, suggesting that I don't belong," which received the response "Sometimes" from 16% of the sample. For this index, the mean was .65 along with a standard deviation of .87. This shows that the average score for the Foreigner Index fell between "Never" and "Almost Never."

Figure 3

Criminality Index



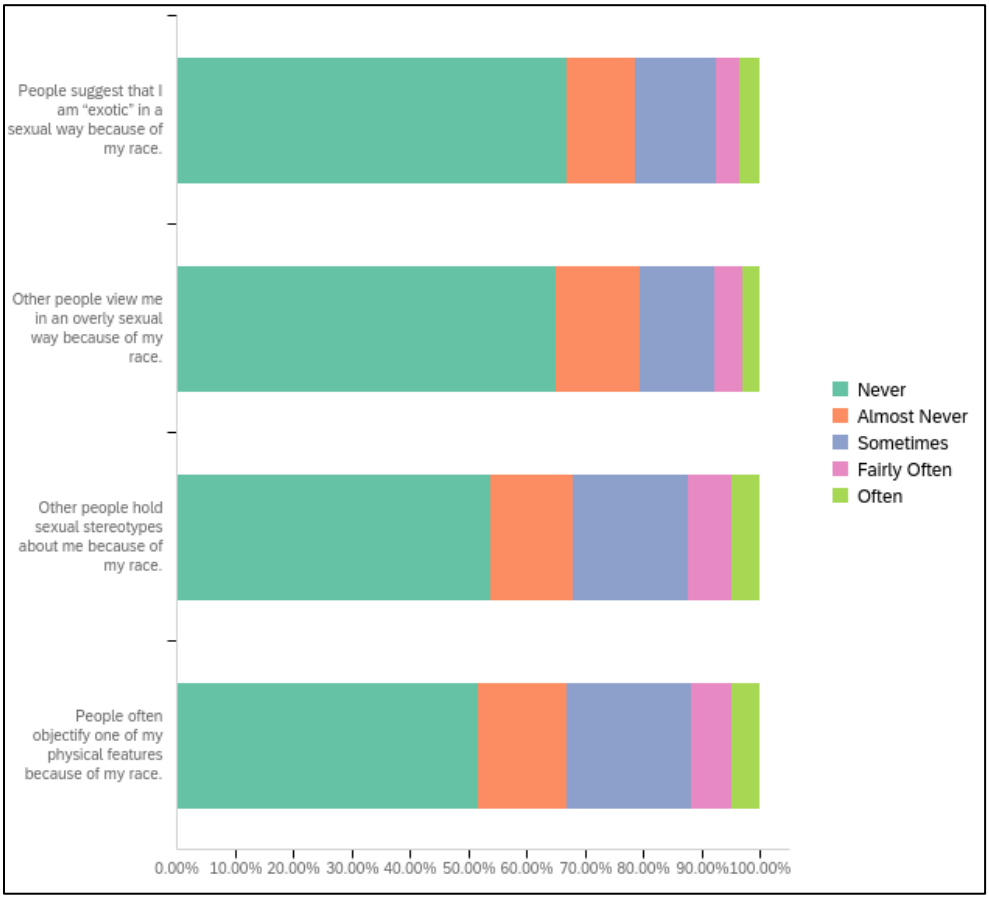
Note. This figure shows the survey results on Criminality related microaggressions among community college students, based on a sample of 321 (*adapted and reproduced with permission from Torres-Harding, S. R., Andrade, A. L., & Romero Diaz, C. E. (2012). The Racial*

Microaggressions Scale (RMAS): A new scale to measure experiences of racial microaggressions in people of color. Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 18(2), 153–164.

The preceding figure presents the results for the Criminality Index. The Criminality Index comprises four items that ask respondents how often they experienced MAs where they were presumed to be a criminal, dangerous, or deviant because of their race (Torres-Harding et al., 2012). The important distinction in Figure 3 is that in two of the survey items about half of the sample responded that they experienced these forms of MAs. This is an indication that regardless of whether it is due to intentional, unintentional, or subconscious bias, there are instances where community college students perceived that they were viewed as a threat or danger to others because of their racial background. Overall, the average score for this index was .70 with a standard deviation of .85. This indicates that the average score for this index fell between the response "Never" and "Almost Never."

Figure 4

Sexualization Index



Note. This figure shows the survey results on Sexualization related microaggressions among community college students, based on a sample of 321 (*adapted and reproduced with permission from Torres-Harding, S. R., Andrade, A. L., & Romero Diaz, C. E. (2012). The Racial Microaggressions Scale (RMAS): A new scale to measure experiences of racial microaggressions in people of color. Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 18(2), 153–164.*

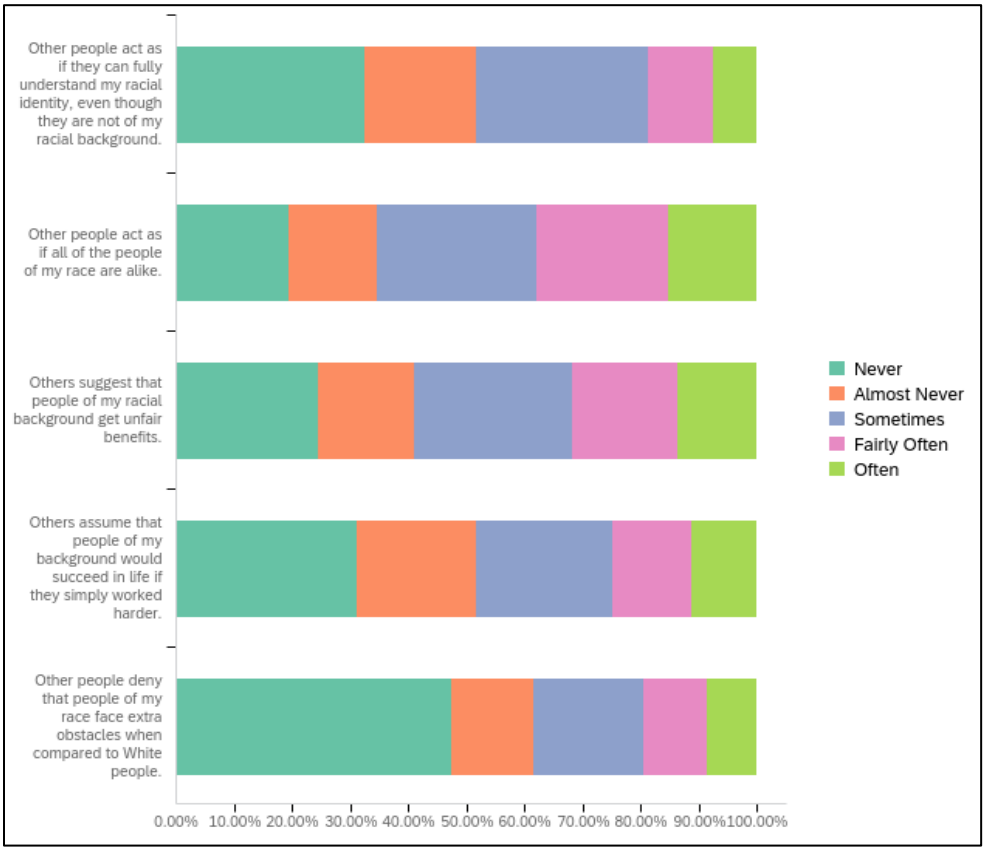
Figure 4 presents the results for the Sexualization Index. The Sexualization Index includes four items that ask respondents how often they have experienced RMs of a sexual nature. These results are consistent with the balanced ratio of males to females in the sample. Notably, more than 30% of respondents reported experiencing items 9 and 10, while close to half of the sample encountered items 11 and 12; the latter two instances involve demonstrating preconceived notions about a person's sexuality because of their race and objectifying their

physical features (Torres-Harding et al., 2012). For this index, the mean was .80, including a standard deviation of 1.01. This shows that the average response for the Sexualization Index fell between “Never” and “Almost Never.”

Next, I will present the results that were received for the Low-Achieving or Undesirable Culture Index. Microaggressions of this nature imply that one’s racial background is interchangeable, uniformly incompetent, incapable, low-achieving, or dysfunctional, and they assume that successes are due to unfair entitlements or special treatment (Torres-Harding et al., 2012). This survey section consists of nine items divided into two sections to reduce survey burnout. The findings for the first five items are presented in Figure 5a below.

Figure 5a

Low-Achieving/Undesirable Culture Index



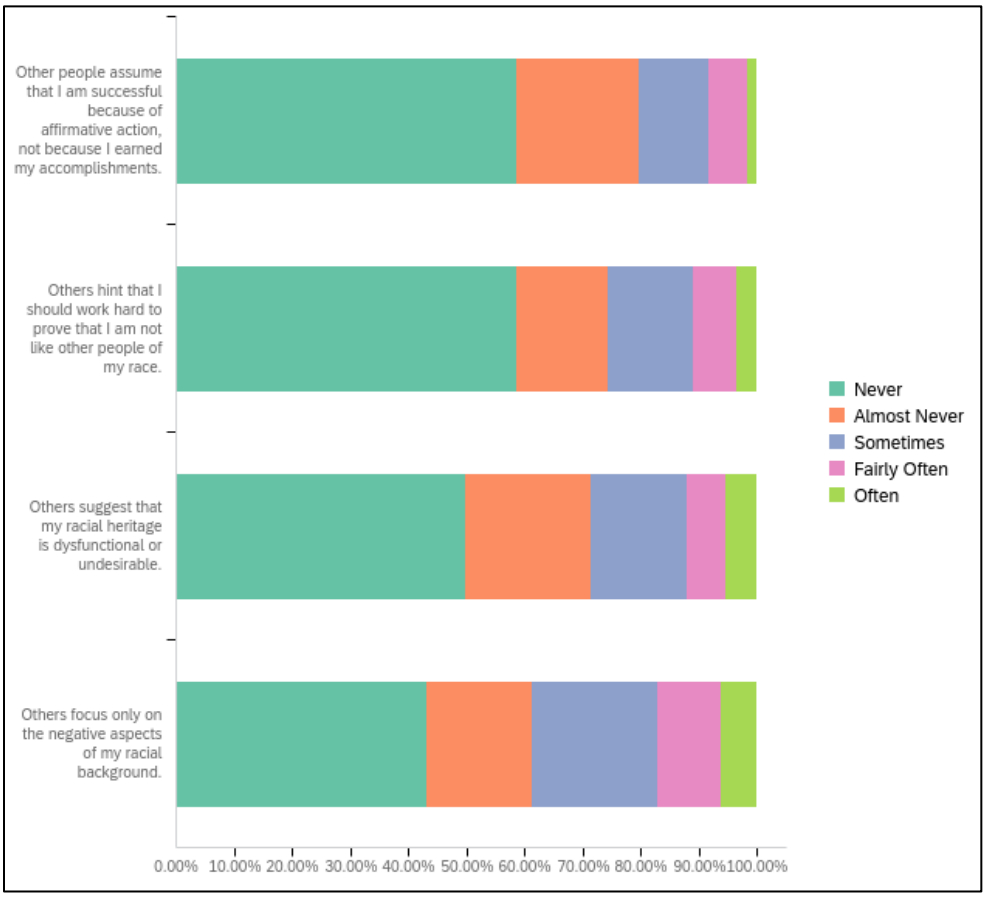
Note. This figure shows the survey results on Low-Achieving/Undesirable Culture related microaggressions among community college students, based on a sample of 321 (*adapted and reproduced with permission from Torres-Harding, S. R., Andrade, A. L., & Romero Diaz, C. E. (2012). The Racial Microaggressions Scale (RMAS): A new scale to measure experiences of racial microaggressions in people of color. Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 18(2), 153–164.*

The important distinction in Figure 5a is that more than half of the sample has experienced these forms of MAs. The most common MA encountered in this section was the perception that "Other people act as if all individuals of my race are alike," which received responses from 80% of the sample. The second most common MA encountered was the perception that "Others suggest that people of my racial background get unfair benefits," which received responses from 75% of the respondents. Given that there is a balanced ratio of White

and non-White participants, this is a noteworthy finding that further substantiates the claim that perceived MAs vary based on race (Nadal et al., 2014).

Figure 5b

Low-Achieving/Undesirable Culture Index



Note. This figure shows the survey results on Low-Achieving/Undesirable Culture related microaggressions among community college students, based on a sample of 321 (*adapted and reproduced with permission from Torres-Harding, S. R., Andrade, A. L., & Romero Diaz, C. E. (2012). The Racial Microaggressions Scale (RMAS): A new scale to measure experiences of racial microaggressions in people of color. Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 18(2), 153–164.*

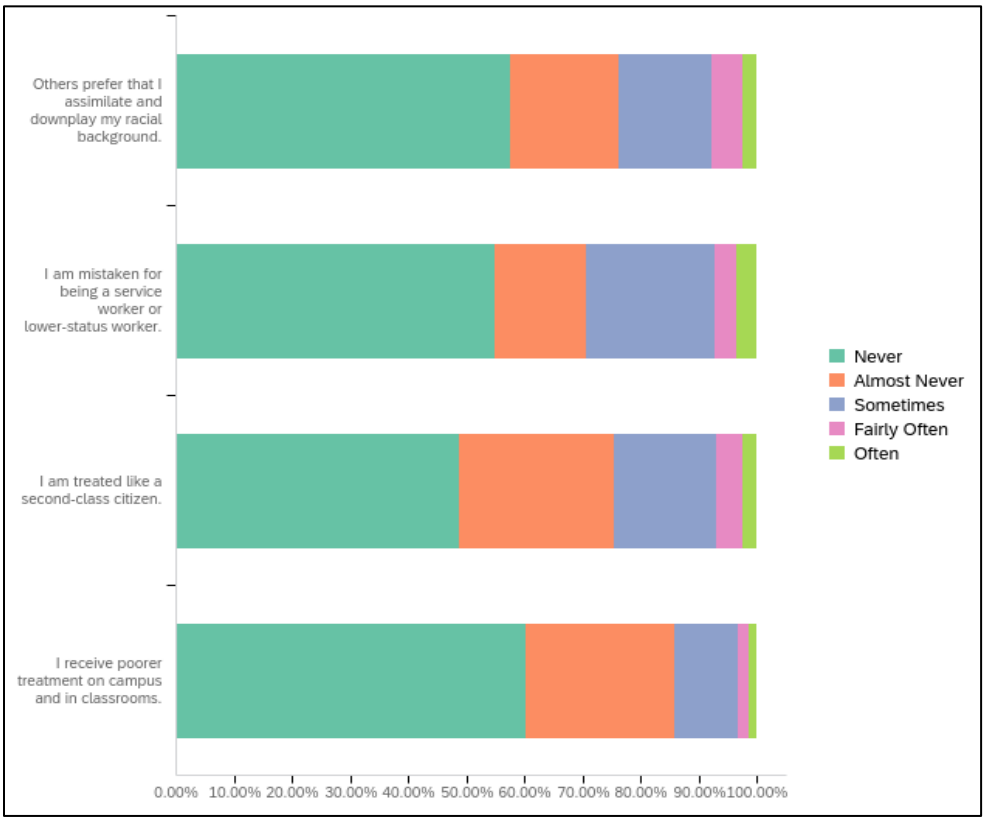
However, Figure 5b above depicts a more balanced response from the sample for the remaining items in this index. Of these items, only 40% of the sample reported experiencing items 18 through 20. The most common MA encountered in this section was the perception that "Others focus only on the negative aspects of my racial background," which received responses

from 57% of the sample. Overall, the average score for this index was 1.29 with a standard deviation of .88. This shows that the average response for the Low-Achieving/Undesirable Culture Index fell between "Almost Never" and "Sometimes."

The following figures present the findings for the Invisibility Index. The Invisibility Index consists of eight items divided into two sections in the survey. Invisibility MAs involve being treated as if one were of lower status, not visible, or not seen as a "real" person, and being dismissed or devalued (Torres-Harding et al., 2012).

Figure 6a

Invisibility Index

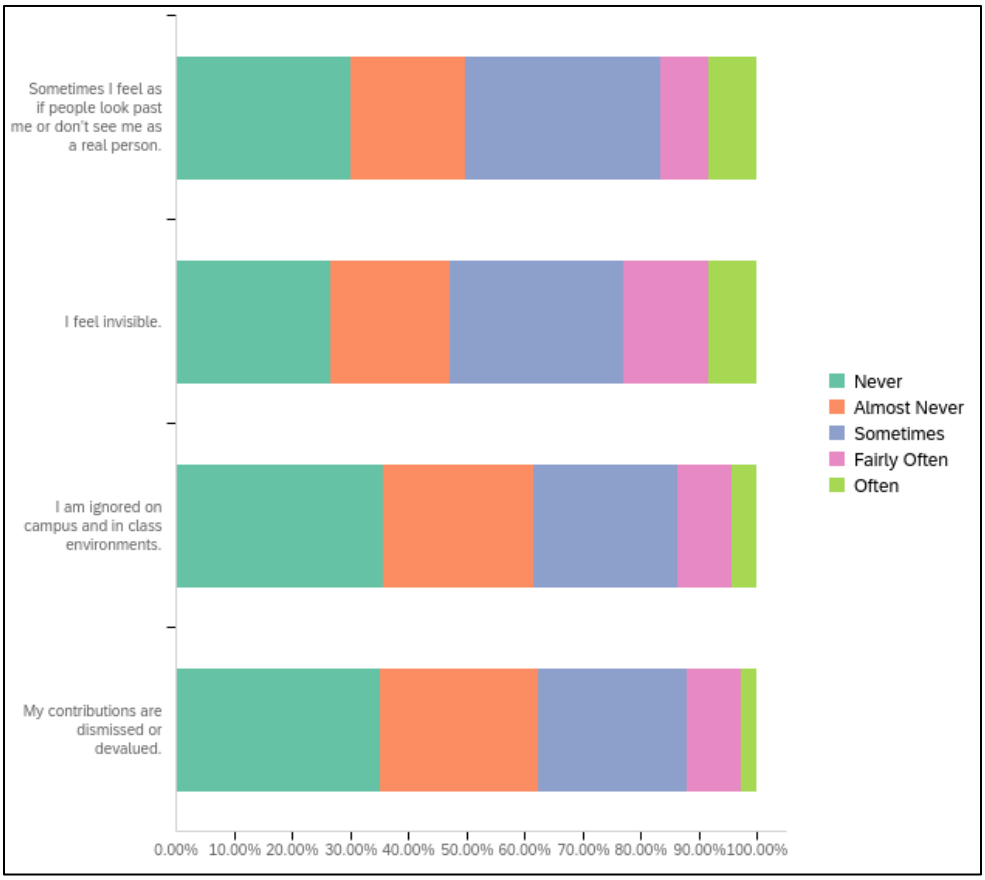


Note. This figure shows the survey results on Invisibility related microaggressions among community college students, based on a sample of 321 (*adapted and reproduced with permission from Torres-Harding, S. R., Andrade, A. L., & Romero Diaz, C. E. (2012). The Racial Microaggressions Scale (RMAS): A new scale to measure experiences of racial microaggressions in people of color. Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 18(2), 153–164.*

Figure 6a shows that about 40% of the sample has experienced items 22 through 25. The most reported item in this section was the perception that "I am treated like a second-class citizen," which received responses from 52% of the sample.

Figure 6b

Invisibility Index



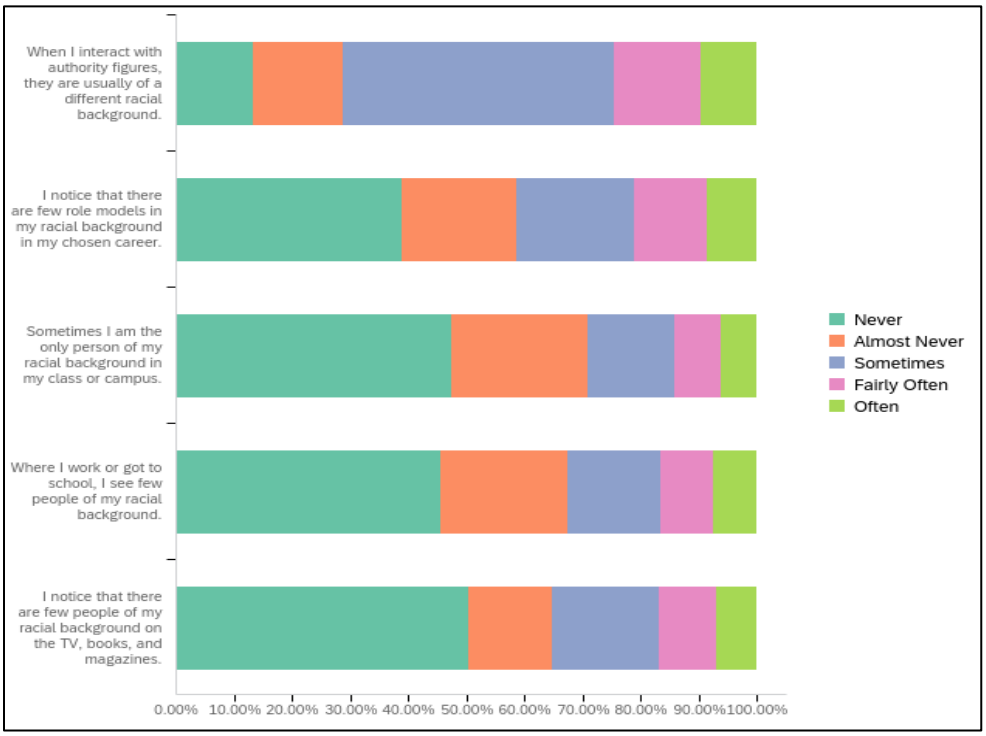
Note. This figure shows the survey results on Invisibility related microaggressions among community college students, based on a sample of 321 (*adapted and reproduced with permission from Torres-Harding, S. R., Andrade, A. L., & Romero Diaz, C. E. (2012). The Racial Microaggressions Scale (RMAS): A new scale to measure experiences of racial microaggressions in people of color. Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 18(2), 153–164.*

Conversely, it appears that at least 60% of the sample experienced the latter half of the items in this index. Specifically, Figure 6b shows that the most reported MAs in this section were "I feel invisible" and "Sometimes I feel as if people look past me or don't see me as a real person," which received responses from 73% and 70% of the sample, respectively. For this

index, the mean was 1.05 with a standard deviation of .81. This indicates that the average response for the Invisibility Index is within "Almost Never" and "Sometimes."

Figure 7

Environmental Invalidations Index



Note. This figure shows the survey results on Environmental Invalidation related microaggressions among community college students, based on a sample of 321 (*adapted and reproduced with permission from Torres-Harding, S. R., Andrade, A. L., & Romero Diaz, C. E. (2012). The Racial Microaggressions Scale (RMAS): A new scale to measure experiences of racial microaggressions in people of color. Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 18(2), 153–164.*

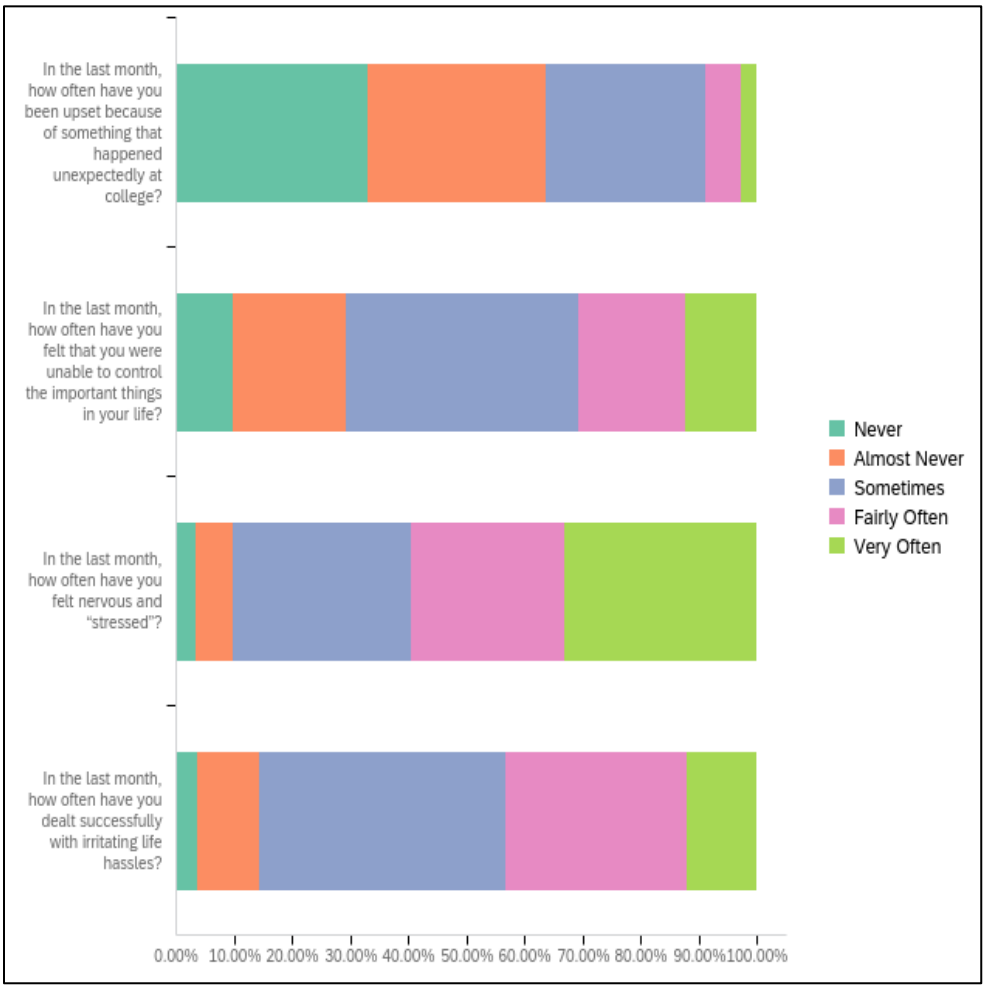
Figure 7 above presents the results for the Environmental Invalidations Index. Environmental Invalidations are negative perceptions that derive from observing that visible or powerful roles in one's community do not include people from one's own racial background (Torres-Harding et al., 2012). The important distinction in Figure 7 is that more than half of the sample experienced these forms of MAs. The most reported MA was the perception that "When I interact with authority figures, they are usually of a different racial background," which received responses from 86% of the sample. Overall, the average score for this index was 1.28 with a

standard deviation of 1.01. This shows that the average response for the Environmental Invalidations Index fell between “Almost Never” and “Sometimes.”

Next, I will discuss the results received for the Perceived Stress Score Scale (PSS), comprising 14 items that measure a person’s perceived stress level. The scale includes seven negatively stated items and seven positively stated items. The positively stated items are 38, 39. 40, 41, 43, 44, and 47; these items were divided into four sections in the survey. The following figures will present the findings for each section.

Figure 8a

Perceived Stress Score



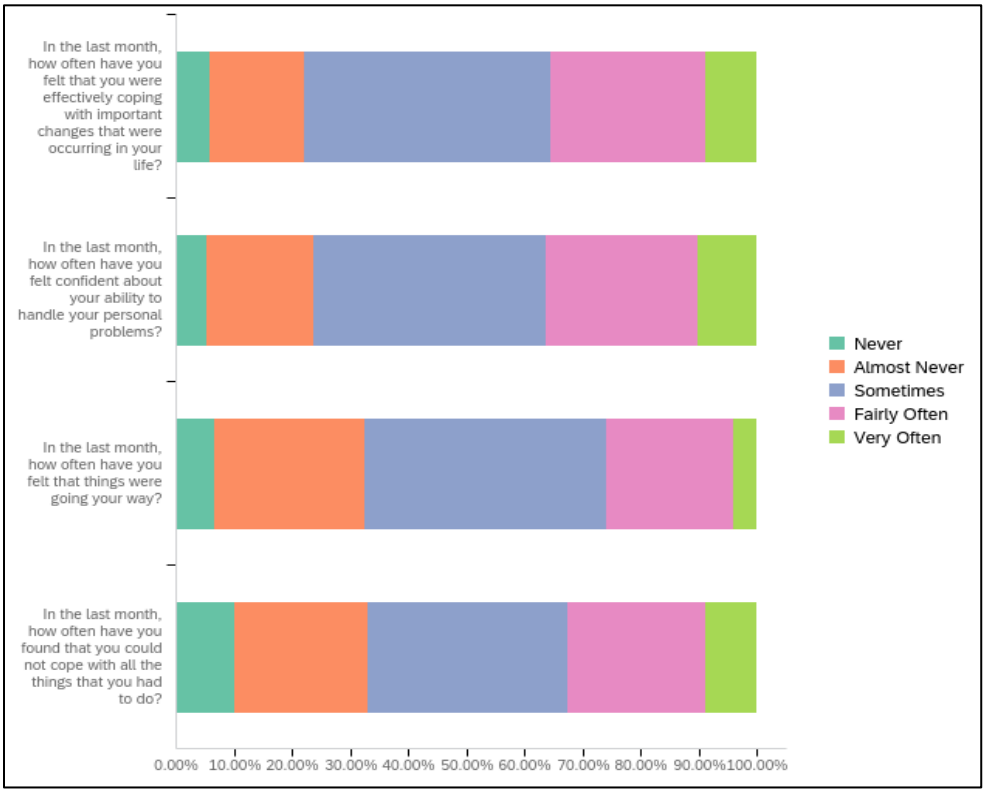
Note. This figure shows the survey results for perceived stress score scale among community college students, based on a sample of 321 (*adapted and reproduced with permission from*

Cohen, S., Kamarck, T., & Mermelstein, R. (1983). A Global Measure of Perceived Stress. Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 385-396.

Notably, Figure 8a in this section shows that at least 60% of respondents are experiencing stress. The least-reported item was item 35, which asked, "In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly at college?" Thirty-two percent of respondents reported that they have "Never" experienced that feeling. The next important distinction from Figure 8a is that 33% of the sample responded "Very Often" to the prompt, "In the last month, how often have you felt nervous or stressed?" Based on this information, it is plausible that respondents are experiencing stress and nervousness, although this may not be due exclusively to their college environment.

Figure 8b

Perceived Stress Scale



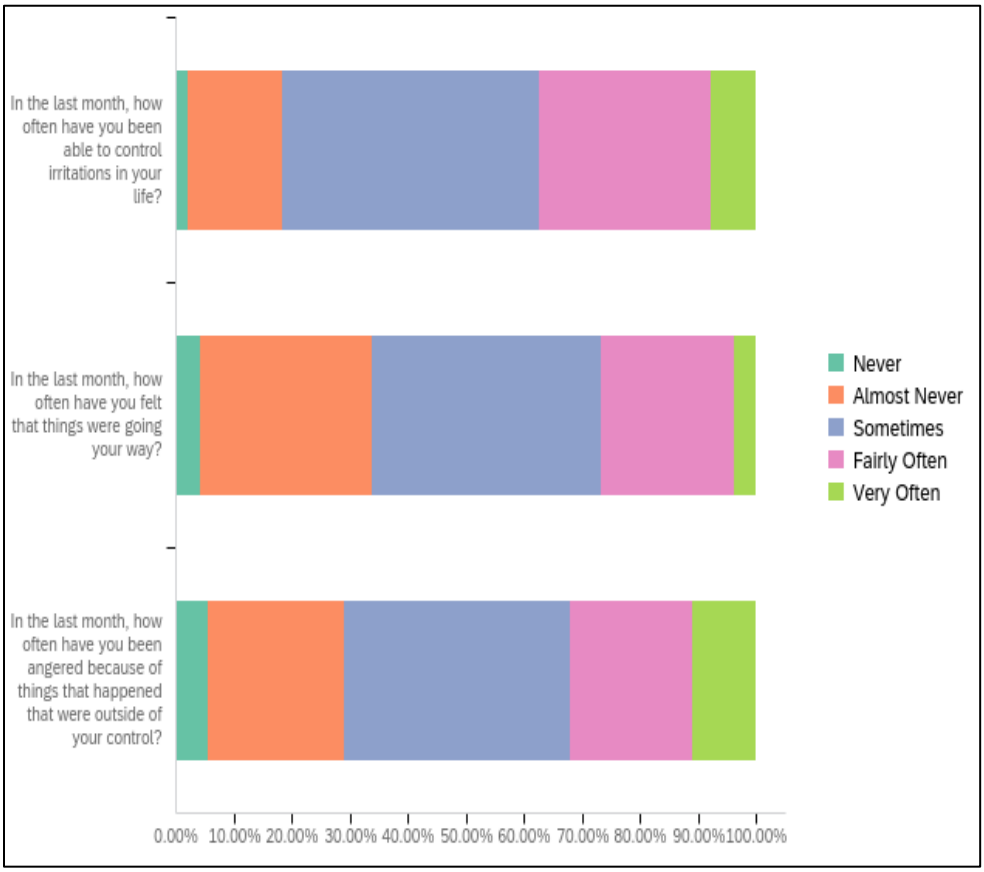
Note. This figure shows the survey results for perceived stress score scale among community college students, based on a sample of 321 (*adapted and reproduced with permission from*

Cohen, S., Kamarck, T., & Mermelstein, R. (1983). A Global Measure of Perceived Stress. Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 385-396.

Figure 8b starts with three positively stated items and ends with a negatively stated item. Figure 8b shows that less than 7% of the sample responded "Never" to the following prompts: (1) "In the last month, how often have you felt that you were effectively coping with important life changes that were occurring in your life?"; (2) "In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle personal problems?"; and (3) "In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?" The most reported response for these statements was "Sometimes," which received responses from at least 40% of the sample.

Figure 8c

Perceived Stress Scale



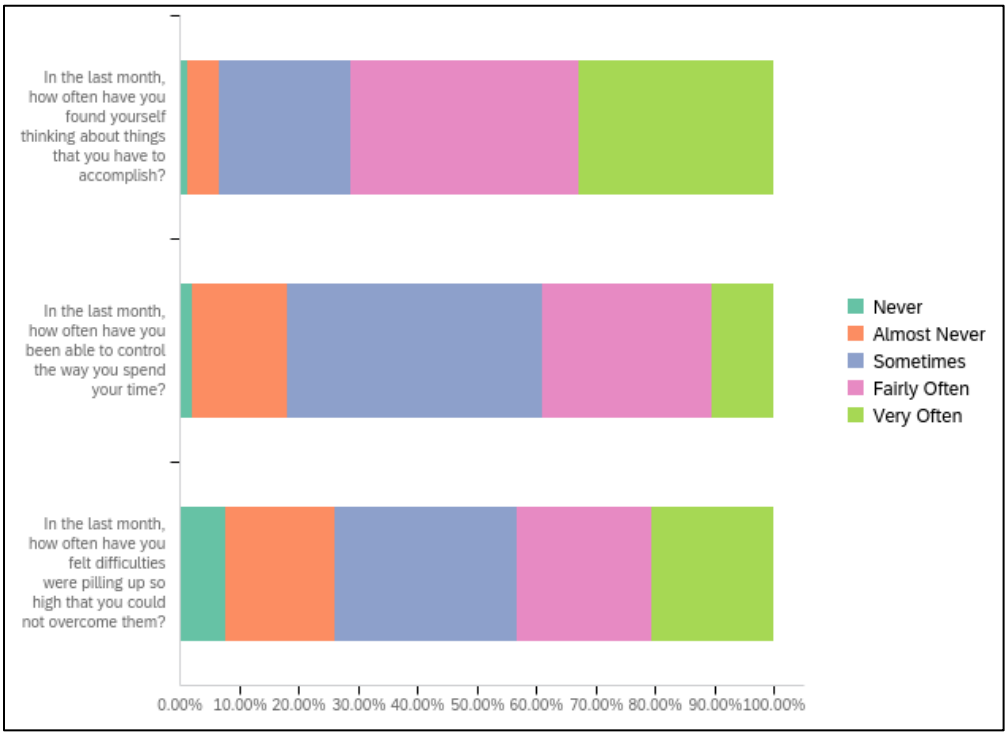
Note. This figure shows the survey results for perceived stress score scale among community college students, based on a sample of 321 (*adapted and reproduced with permission from*

Cohen, S., Kamarck, T., & Mermelstein, R. (1983). A Global Measure of Perceived Stress. Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 385-396.

Figure 8c consists of two positively stated items and one negatively stated item. The important distinction in this figure is that less than 5% of the sample responded "Never" to the first two positively stated items. However, 30% of the sample responded "Almost Never" to the prompt, "In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?" Additionally, it appears that 38% of this sample reported "Sometimes" to the prompt, "In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that happened that were outside of your control?"

Figure 8d

Perceived Stress Scale



Note. This figure shows the survey results for perceived stress score scale among community college students, based on a sample of 321 (*adapted and reproduced with permission from Cohen, S., Kamarck, T., & Mermelstein, R. (1983). A Global Measure of Perceived Stress. Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 385-396.*

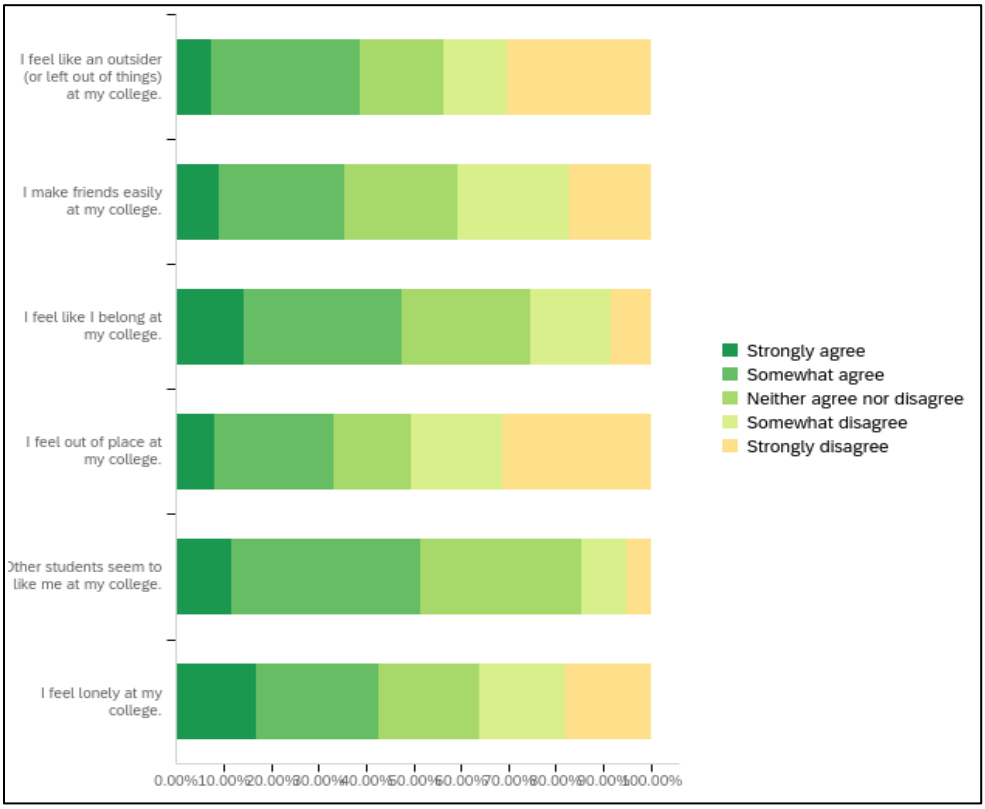
Lastly, Figure 8d presents the findings for the remaining items in the PSS scale. This section consists of one positively stated item sandwiched between two negatively stated items. The positively stated item shows that 18% of participants reported "Never" or "Almost Never" being able to "control the way you spend your time." The majority in this statement responded "Sometimes," which amounts to 43% of the sample. Conversely, it appears that at least 90% of the sample has experienced the negatively stated items in this section. The first negatively stated item asked respondents, "In the last month, how often have you found yourself thinking about things that you have to accomplish?" This statement received the response "Very Often" from 33% of the sample. The second most reported response for this item was "Fairly Often," which received responses from 38% of the sample. Additionally, Figure 8d shows that 20% of the sample responded, "Very Often" to the prompt, "In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?"

Collectively, Figures 8a through 8d show that these participants are experiencing moderate to high levels of stress and nervousness in general. Specifically, it appears that although some participants are confident in coping with life changes and personal challenges, a significant portion of respondents are experiencing stress due to unexpected events, lack of control over time, and overwhelming difficulties. For this index, the average score was 3.05 with a standard deviation of .70. This indicates that the average response for the Perceived Stress Scale was within "Sometimes" and "Fairly Often."

The last survey measure in this study is the six-item Sense of Belonging Scale, designed to measure students' subjective feelings of connection and integration with their institution and campus community (Pedler et al., 2021). In this study, the adopted survey items were amended to apply to community college students. Figure 9 presents the results obtained for this scale.

Figure 9

Sense of Belonging Scale



Note. This figure shows the survey results for sense of belonging scale among community college students, based on a sample of 321 (*adapted and reproduced with permission from Pedler, M. L., Willis, R., & Nieuwoudt, J. E. (2021). A sense of belonging at university: student retention, motivation, and enjoyment . Journal of Further and Higher Education, 397-408.*

This scale uses three positive and three negative stated items. I will start by presenting the findings from the negative items (1, 4, and 6). Item 1 shows that only 38% of the sample responded “Strongly Agree” or “Somewhat Agree” to the prompt, “I feel like an outsider (or left out of things) at my college.” Nonetheless, item one received the response “Strongly Disagree” from 30% of respondents. Moreover, Figure 9 shows similar response rates for item four. In item four, 32% of the sample responded “Strongly Agree” or Somewhat Agree” to the prompt, “I feel out of place at my college.” However, less than 9% of respondents reported “Strongly Disagree” to this statement. The important distinction for item 6 is that 16% of the respondents reported

"Strongly Agree" to the prompt, "I feel lonely at my college," to which a further 26% of respondents "Somewhat Agree." Next, I will describe the findings from the positive stated items (2, 3, and 5). In item 2, 40% of the sample responded, "Somewhat Disagree" or Strongly Disagree" to the prompt, "I make friends easily at my college." Conversely, in item 3, only 25% of respondents reported "Somewhat Disagree" or "Strongly Disagree" to the prompt, "I feel like I belong at my college." Lastly, item 5 shows 50% of the sample responded "Strongly Agree" or "Somewhat Agree" to the prompt, "Other students seem to like me at my college." Overall, the mean for this index was 3.16, along with a standard deviation of 1.00. This indicates that the average response for the Sense of Belonging Scale fell between "Neither Agree or Disagree" and "Somewhat Disagree."

Below are the key takeaways for the scales used in this study.

- Racial Microaggressions Scale: The RMAS received positive responses from at least 30% of respondents for all six MA indices. The most reported MAs were found within the Environmental Invalidations (86%) and Invisibility (80%) indices. The least reported MAs were found within the Sexualization Index.
- Perceived Stress Scale: The figures for the PSS show that students are experiencing moderate to high levels of stress and nervousness in general. Specifically, it appears that although some participants are confident in coping with life changes and personal challenges, a significant portion of respondents are experiencing stress due to unexpected events, lack of control over time, and overwhelming difficulties.
- Sense of Belonging Scale: Although the average score for this scale fell within "Neither Agree or Disagree" and "Somewhat Disagree," 16% of students reported

that they "Strongly Agree" with the prompt, "I feel lonely at college." Additionally, more than 30% of students reported that they "Strongly Agree" or "Somewhat Agree" with the prompts, "I feel like an outsider at my college" and "I feel out of place at my college."

Results for Research Question 1

What is the prevalence of microaggressions experienced by students in two-year community colleges, and do these experiences vary based on race?

To answer Research Question 1, a one-way ANOVA was used to compare the means between one nominal independent variable (race) with more than two levels (six demographic groups) and a scale-dependent variable (MA indices) (Nolan & Heinzen, 2011). In this analysis, the six demographic groups used were White or Caucasian, Black or African American, Hispanic, Asian, Two or More, and American Indian/Alaska Native/Pacific Islander/ Unknown. The American Indian/Alaska Native and Pacific Islander/Unknown demographic groups were combined since these groups only received responses from four participants in total. Table 2 below presents the results for the one-way ANOVA for the six MA indices by race.

Table 2

Summary of One-Way ANOVAs for Microaggression Indices by Race

		White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Two or More	Nat. Amer. & Other
Dependent Variable	F (5, 315-320)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
Foreigner	27.64***	0.23 (0.46)	0.76 (0.89)	1.27 (1.00)	1.58 (0.92)	0.07 (0.77)	1.44 (1.05)
Criminality	7.53***	0.51 (0.77)	1.29 (0.97)	0.81 (0.83)	0.5 (0.71)	0.06 (0.73)	0.63 (1.27)
Sexualization	14.27***	0.37 (0.60)	1.47 (1.21)	1.09 (1.18)	1.09 (0.99)	1.10 (1.03)	1.25 (1.85)
Low Achieving	5.48**	1.10 (0.79)	1.76 (0.99)	1.36 (0.89)	1.39 (0.85)	1.17 (0.83)	2.12 (1.02)

Invisibility	2.84**	0.92 (0.76)	1.32 (0.94)	1.11 (0.82)	1.32 (.78)	0.87 (0.67)	1.31 (0.78)
EnvInval	29.12***	0.72 (0.71)	1.97 (0.92)	1.66 (0.83)	1.95 (1.05)	1.87 (1.09)	1.85 (1.43)

Notes. *P< .05, **P<.01, ***P<.001. Standard deviations are noted in parenthesis under means.

According to Table 2, the one-way ANOVA revealed significant differences for race as it relates to the six MA indices. Specifically, the *p*-values for the Foreigner, Criminality, Sexualization, and Environmental Invalidations indices were significant at the $p < .001$ level. The *F*-statistics for these indices were (F (5, 315) = 27.64), (F (5, 315) = 7.53), (F (5, 315) = 14.27), and (F (5, 315) = 29.12), respectively. Additionally, significant differences were found within the Low-Achievement/Undesirable Culture Index ($p = .001$) and Invisibility Index ($p = .01$). The resulting *F*-statistics for those indices were (F (5, 315) = 5.48) and (F (5, 315) = 2.84), respectively. These results suggest that the top three MAs that community college students may experience based on their race are (1) Environmental Invalidation, (2) Foreigner, and (3) Sexualization. This observation derives from sorting the *F*-statistics from highest (F (5, 315) = 27.64) to lowest (F (5, 315) = 2.84), wherein a higher *F*-value indicates greater confidence that a pattern exists within the population (Nolan & Heinzen, 2011).

Based on these results, the post hoc Tukey HSD ("honest significant difference") test was used to determine which groups are different from each other (Nolan & Heinzen, 2011). I will outline the three significant findings revealed by the Tukey test. Most importantly, the test shows that White students are less likely to experience Foreigner-, Sexualization-, and Environmental Invalidation-related MAs compared to students of color. This is supported by the resulting p-values of $p < .001$ for Black, Hispanic, and Asian students. It also appears that students who identify with Two or More races experience higher levels of MAs given the *p*-value of $p = 0.02$. Furthermore, the analysis revealed that Black students are more likely than White students to experience MAs related to Criminality ($p < .001$), Low-Achieving/Undesirable Culture ($p <$

.001), and Invisibility ($p = 0.03$). These two findings align with the literature on MA theory by highlighting that individuals may experience varying levels and types of MAs based on their race and other relevant factors (Nadal et al., 2014; Proctor et al., 2018; Sue et al., 2007; Sue et al., 2007b). Lastly, the Tukey test revealed significant differences between students of color within the Foreigner, Criminality, and Low-Achieving/Undesirable Culture indices. For instance, within the Foreigner Index, there were significant differences found between the following students: Black and Asian ($p < .001$), Hispanic and Black ($p = 0.04$), Two or More and Asian ($p < .001$), and Two or More and Hispanic ($p = 0.01$). Additionally, within the Criminality Index, significant differences were found between the following students: Black and Asian ($p < .001$), Black and Hispanic ($p = 0.02$), and Black and Two or More ($p = 0.01$). There was also a difference found between Black students and students who identified with Two or More races within the Low-Achieving/Undesirable Culture Index ($p = 0.04$).

In summary, these findings provide strong evidence to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that not all group means are equal. Specifically, the results indicate a statistically significant relationship between community college students' race and the extent to which they experience MAs. The findings also reveal that Black students are more likely to experience MAs within community colleges. Additionally, the analyses confirm with a high certainty that the most significant disparities lie within Foreigner-, Sexualization-, and Environmental Invalidations-related MAs. Lastly, the study found differences among students of color and their experiences with Foreigner-, Criminality-, and Low Achieving/Undesirable Culture-related MAs. This suggests that students of color have unique experiences with MAs within community colleges.

Results for Research Question 2

Research Question 2: Are there differences in stress and sense of belonging among students attending two-year community colleges?

Similarly, Research Question 2 was answered using a series of one-way ANOVAs to compare the means between the six race groups in this study and the scale-dependent variables for stress and sense of belonging. In this analysis, the same demographic groupings were used as in Research Question 1. I will start by presenting the results for one-way ANOVA for the Stress Index by race in Table 3 below.

Table 3

Summary of One-Way ANOVAs for Stress Index by Race

		White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Two or More	Nat. Amer. & Other
Dependent Variable	F (5, 315-320)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
Stress Index	1.07	3.05 (0.75)	2.99 (0.61)	3.18 (0.71)	3.16 (0.42)	2.85 (0.79)	3.09 (0.43)

Notes. No * = $p > .05$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Standard deviations are noted in parenthesis below means.

As it relates to the Stress Index, a one-way ANOVA revealed that there were no significant differences between the six race groups in this study. The *F*-statistic for this test was (F (5, 315) = 1.07) and resulting *p*-value of p = 0.38). The average score for this test was M = 3.05 (SD = 0.70). This demonstrates that the average response for the Perceived Stress Scale fell within "Fairly Often." Additionally, Table 3 shows that the Hispanic and Asian students experienced the highest levels of stress, with averages of 3.18 and 3.16, respectively. Conversely, Black students and students identifying with Two or More races reported the lowest levels of stress, with averages of 2.99 and 2.85, respectively. The average response for those groups fell within "Sometimes." These results indicate that we fail to reject the null hypothesis for this section of Research Question 2; I therefore discontinue the post hoc Tukey HSD test.

Furthermore, Table 4 below presents the results for one-way ANOVA for the Sense of Belonging Index by race.

Table 4

Summary of One-Way ANOVAs for Sense of Belonging Index by Race

Dependent Variable	F (5, 315-320)	White M (SD)	Black M (SD)	Hispanic M (SD)	Asian M (SD)	Two or More M (SD)	Nat. Amer. & Other M (SD)
Sense of Belonging	0.96	3.19 (0.99)	3.13 (1.10)	3.13 (1.02)	2.79 (0.88)	3.40 (0.96)	3.08 (0.97)

Notes. No * = $p > .05$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Standard deviations are noted in parenthesis below means.

Based on the results presented in Table 4, a one-way ANOVA revealed that there were no significant differences between the six race groups as it relates to the Sense of Belonging Index. The *F*-statistic for this test was (F (5, 315) = 0.96) and resulting *p*-value of p = 0.44). The average response for the Sense of Belonging Index fell within "Neither Agree nor Disagree" indicating that respondents felt uncertain with their sense of belonging at their colleges (M = 3.16, SD = 1.00). Students who identified with Two or More races reported the highest average of sense of belonging with 3.40. However, this table shows that Asian students experienced the lowest levels of sense of belonging with 2.79. The test shows that we fail to reject the null hypothesis for the second section of Research Question 2; I therefore discontinue the post hoc Tukey HSD test.

Overall, the results of Research Question 2 indicate that there is no evidence of significant differences between the race groups in this study as it relates to stress and sense of belonging. The limitations and implications for this question will be discussed in the next chapter.

Results for Research Question 3

Research Question 3: Do microaggressions mediate the relationship between race and the stress and sense of belonging that students experience in two-year community colleges?

To answer Research Question 3, mediation analysis was used to explore how race affects stress (*H3a)* and sense of belonging (*H3b)* by examining the role of MAs as a mediator variable (Baron & Kenny, 1983; Moran, 2024). I will begin this section by noting that because no relationship was found between race and the central outcomes in Research Question 2, it is unlikely that I will find evidence of mediation for Research Question 3. Furthermore, I began this analysis by running a regression between the stress index (*DV*) and race (*IV*). I then continued with a regression between stress index (*DV*), race (*IV*), and the six MA indices (*M*) to compare the results. Table 5 below presents the results for these tests.

Table 5

Mediation Analysis Between Race and Stress Through Microaggressions

			95% CI	
Variables	*B*	*P*	*LL*	*UL*
Regression between Stress and Race without including Microaggression Indices				
Stress Index (DV)				
Race (IV)				
Asian	.113883	0.478	-.6570844	.7452398
Black or African American	-.0556246	0.632	-.283871	.1726218
Latino or Hispanic	.1374619	0.196	-.0712985	.3462222
Two or More	-.1957182	0.176	2.935031	3.155385
Native American and Other	.0440777	0.902	-.6570844	.7452398
Regression between Stress and Race including Microaggression Indices				
Stress Index (DV)				
Race (IV)				
Asian	.0100733	0.953	-.3270828	.3472294
Black or African American	-.1805022	0.149	-.4259505	.0649462
Latino or Hispanic	.0759427	0.518	-.1547207	.3066061
Two or More	-.1345885	0.360	-.4236626	.1544855
Native American and Other	-.0858559	0.798	-.7446263	.5729144
Microaggressions (M)				
Foreigner Index	.0289493	0.635	-.0907517	.1486503

Criminality Index	.0636679	0.279	-0518179	.1791537
Sexualization Index	.0161597	0.750	-.0834574	.1157768
Low Achieving Index	-.0202125	0.742	-.1408534	.1004284
Invisibility Index	.3480296	0.000	.2122073	.4838518
Environmental Index	-.0646356	0.196	-.1628212	.0335499

The next step in this process involved interpreting the beta coefficients and *p*-values along the independent variable to determine whether there were any significant relationships. The beta coefficient in this analysis describes the direction and strength of the relationship between each race group and stress. Beta coefficients range from 0 to 1 or 0 to -1 depending on the direction of a relationship. Beta coefficients tell us that the outcome variable will increase/decrease by the coefficient value for every 1-unit increase in the predictor variable (Menard, 2004). Furthermore, the *p*-value indicates the statistical significance of the relationship that is found. To support the evidence of mediation, the independent variable (race) should not influence the dependent variable (stress) after the mediator (MAs) has been controlled, or the independent variable's influence on the dependent variable should reduce after the mediator is controlled (Baron & Kenny, 1983; Maron, 2024). This was determined by comparing the racial coefficients in the first regression to the second regression. The results indicate that four of the five student populations presented larger coefficients in the first regression than the second regression, which indicates a stronger relationship among the variables in the first regression. Thus, there was no evidence that MAs mediate the relationship between race and the Stress Index. Therefore, the test showed that we fail to reject the null hypothesis for this section of Research Question 3; I therefore proceed to examine sense of belonging.

Next, I proceeded to run the same series of regressions using the Sense of Belonging Index. The results of these analyses are presented below in Table 6.

Table 6

Mediation Analysis Between Race and Sense of Belonging Through Microaggressions

Variables	*B*	*P*	95% CI	
			LL	*UL*
Regression between Sense of Belonging and Race without including Microaggression Indices.				
Sense of Belonging Index (DV)				
Race (IV)				
Asian	-.3977752	0.083	-.8476853	.0521348
Black or African America	-.0537096	0.746	-.3795566	.2721375
Latino or Hispanic	-.0572387	0.706	-.3552673	.2407899
Two or More	.2131555	0.302	-.1922394	.6185504
Native American and Other	-.1023206	0.841	-1.103307	.898666
Regression between Sense of Belonging and Race including Microaggression Indices				
Sense of Belonging Index (DV)				
Race (IV)				
Asian	-.3834538	0.087	-1.099788	.6148427
Black or African American	-.0780326	0.631	-.3974559	.2413907
Latino or Hispanic	.1649715	0.280	-.465154	.1352109
Two or More	-.0555464	0.772	-.4317437	.3206509
Native American and Other	-.2424726	0.578	-1.099788	.6148427
Microaggressions (M)				
Foreigner Index	.075747	0.339	-.0800304	.2315243
Criminality Index	-.0829342	0.278	-.233226	.0673576
Sexualization Index	.1672526	0.012	.0376122	.2968929
Low Achieving Index	.250716	0.002	.0937155	.4077165
Invisibility Index	-.922695	0.000	-1.099452	-.7459377
Environmental Index	.0498793	0.443	-.0778981	.1776567

Similarly, the regressions revealed that MAs did not mediate the relationship between race and the Sense of Belonging Index. However, the second regression involving sense of belonging, race, and the MA indices did find significant relationships with MAs related to Sexualization ($\beta = .1672526$, $p = .012$), Low-Achieving ($\beta = .250716$, $p < .01$), and Invisibility ($\beta = -.922695$, $p < .001$). Despite these results, the analyses showed that we do not have sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis for the second hypothesis in Research Question 3.

Overall, there was no evidence of mediation found between stress (*H3a),* sense of belonging *(H3b),* race, and MAs. This suggests that within this sample, MAs did not mediate the relationship between race and the stress or sense of belonging experienced by students. Thus, further research is needed to understand the impact of MAs on students in community colleges.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented the central tendencies for the variables in this study. I found strong evidence that community college students are experiencing MAs at varying levels depending on their race. Survey responses also indicated that students are experiencing varying levels of stress and sense of belonging in their institutions; however, these differences were not significant. Lastly, the data revealed that race does not play a significant role in contributing to the stress or sense of belonging that students experience when encountering MAs. In the following chapter, I will explain why MA theory in community college settings merits continued research. The strengths and limitations of this study will also be presented. Finally, the chapter will conclude with implications, future recommendations, and final thoughts on this field of study.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In 2019, the Pew Research Center reported that 58% of Americans felt race relations in the U.S. are bad, and that approximately two thirds said it has become more common for people to express racist views since Donald Trump was elected president (Horowitz et al., 2019). Many prestigious organizations believe this sentiment was motivated by the anti-immigrant, racist, and sexist rhetoric voiced and amplified by Donald Trump (Horowitz et al., 2019; Williamson & Gelfand, 2019). Since then, several events have worsened race relations, including a global health crisis in COVID-19, a divided democracy in Washington D.C., police negligence, and gun violence. In 2023, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that race could no longer be considered as a factor in university admissions which triggered states like Florida, Texas, Utah, and Arizona to ban diversity, equity, and inclusion departments in higher education (Adams & Chiwaya, 2024; Debusmann, 2023). Additionally, state legislatures are passing laws that prohibit the teaching of CRT (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 2024), which is, as mentioned in Chapter 2, the foundation of RM literature (Pierce, 1975). Consequently, these bad policies generate additional challenges for scholars to conduct research on MAs in higher education and leave community college students at a distinct disadvantage due to the limited research available within these institutions. Existing research on community colleges indicates that their student bodies have become more diverse within the last two decades (American Association of Community Colleges, 2019). Specifically, students of color represent more than half of the student body enrolled in community colleges nationwide (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). Factors that have contributed to this influx of community college admissions are affordability, flexibility, and academic opportunities (American Association of Community Colleges, 2019; Barrington, 2022; Chen, 2022). Additionally, literature on MAs

within this population shows that Black and Hispanic students are frequently the victims of these exchanges, and the adverse outcomes of these messages are underexplored. Moreover, the goal of this study was to (a) investigate the prevalence of MAs within community colleges, particularly across racial groups; (b) examine the influence of experienced MAs on stress and sense of belonging; and (c) analyze the relationship between MAs, stress, and sense of belonging within these institutions. These motivations were addressed by analyzing the following research questions.

Research Question 1: What is the prevalence of microaggressions experienced by students in two-year community colleges, and do these experiences vary based on race?

Research Question 2: Are there differences in stress and sense of belonging among students attending two-year community colleges.

Research Question 3: Do microaggressions mediate the relationship between race and the stress and sense of belonging that students experience in two-year community colleges?

Discussion of Study Findings

The results of this study indicate a statistically significant relationship between community college students' race and the extent to which they experience MAs. The findings also reveal that Black students are more likely to experience MAs within community colleges. Additionally, the analyses confirm with a high certainty that the most significant disparities lie within Foreigner-, Sexualization-, and Environmental Invalidations-related MAs. Lastly, the study found significant differences among students of color and their experiences with Foreigner-, Criminality-, and Low-Achieving/Undesirable Culture-related MAs. This suggests that students of color have unique experiences with MAs within community colleges. However, results did not indicate significant differences for stress or sense of belonging within this

population; this may be attributable to the transient nature of community colleges, which serve a wide range of students with various educational goals. A typical public two-year community college offers various associate degrees, applied associate degrees, and certificates tailored to meet the job demands of local communities (Baime & Baum, 2016). Community colleges have also expanded their scope to offer continuing education for non-traditional students, GED preparation/examination courses, and courses designed for limited English-speaking learners. Collectively, these characteristics contribute to an older student population. For instance, this study received responses from 180 participants over the age of 25, 134 participants enrolled part-time, and 230 participants with more than one year of college experience. This sample suggests that a substantial portion of respondents are older adults searching for new or improved economic opportunities. It is plausible that these participants may have been less intertwined with the campus climate due to evening class schedules, employment obligations, and personal responsibilities. Therefore, the study did not find that MAs mediate the relationship between race and the sense of belonging that students experience in community colleges.

Theoretical and Practical Limitations

This section will discuss the theoretical and practical constraints of this study. I will begin by presenting the theoretical limitations, after which I will outline the practical challenges within this study.

This study found that (a) community college students are experiencing MAs in their institutions, and (b) the prevalence of MAs differs based on race. These results are consistent with the theoretical framework that Sue et al. (2007) established in their Taxonomy of Microaggressions. A framework that suggests MAs can be categorized into three categories: micro-insults, micro-assaults, and micro-invalidations (Sue et al., 2007). These categories were

adopted by Torres-Harding et al. to create a scale that would measure the frequency and effects of MAs (Torres-Harding et al., 2012). Adopting the RMAS for this study produced significant results for the six MA indices in this study.

However, a significant limitation of the RMAS is that several items may be vague or unrelated to White students. For instance, when a White student responds to survey item 18, "Other people deny that people of my race face extra obstacles when compared to White people," they may consistently respond "Never" because they themselves belong to the White race group. The same notion applies to survey items 17, 19, and 23 (see Appendix A). Consequently, these items may influence respondents to answer in ways that inflate the study findings. This limitation may be avoided by removing these items from the survey instrument or redesigning them to include the experiences of White students.

From a practical standpoint, although this study used a reputable survey platform to recruit participants, the size of the sample was dependent on financial constraints that limited the number of participants who could be paid to complete the survey. As a result, the sample for this study was underrepresented in certain demographics. For instance, females made up 48% of the sample, whereas the average U.S. community college student body is 58% female (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). The sample also contains fewer Hispanic respondents overall: 19% compared to the national average of 28% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022).

Implications for Future Research

This section will connect the gaps between the existing literature on this topic, the study contributions, and future suggestions for research. I will begin by discussing the theoretical and

practical applications of the study findings. I will then present the policy implications of this study. Finally, I conclude by providing suggestions for further research.

Primarily, this study provides further proof that MAs are prevalent and permeate all levels of higher education. In the inception of MA theory, studies focused on identifying, categorizing, and measuring these experiences in everyday life (Katz & Hass, 1988; McConahay, 1983; McConahay & Hough Jr, 1976; Pierce, 1974; Solorzano, 1998; Sue et al., 2007). After this period, scholars used the frameworks that emerged from these studies to investigate how MAs manifest within day to day areas such as counseling, employment, and physiological well-being through qualitative and quantitative perpectives (Capodilupo et al., 2010; Constantine & Sue, 2007; Guzman et al., 2010). This led researchers to explore the experiences of diverse communities (Huynh, 2012; Nadal et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2012). During this period, MA literature began to seep into the education field. Notable studies found that students of color will begin to experience MAs as early as the third grade, and that these experiences may continue onward through graduate school (Beaulieu & Boylan, 2016; Borges, 2016; Kohli & Solorzano, 2012; Nadal et al., 2014b; Palmer & Maranba, 2015; Pittman, 2012; Watkins et al., 2010). The literature within higher education has since expanded to developing scales to measure MAs; examining MAs in predominiately White, Black, or Hispanic-serving institions; and determining the effects that these experiences have on college students (Ackerman-Barger et al., 2020; Casanova et al., 2015; Harwood et al., 2012; Keel et al., 2017; Keum et al., 2018; Lewis & Neville, 2015; Torres-Harding et al., 2012).

Most importantly, although a plethora of research studies have focused on microoaggression research in four-year institutions, there is a gap in such literature on two-year community colleges. The studies that have been conducted on this population have found similar

comparisons to four-year institutions such as intersectionality, frequent prepetrators, and low levels of self-esteem and student engagement (Casanova et al., 2018; Garcia-Louis et al., 2020; Nadal et al., 2014b; Proctor et al., 2018; Willis, 2016). Nonetheless, the current literature is mostly qualitative in nature, with the exception of one study that used a mixed-methods approach (Casanova et al., 2015; Casanova et al., 2018; Garcia-Louis et al., 2020; Willis, 2016). Qualitative studies are great for establishing that a problem exists, and expanding our theorteical understanding of how these problems manifest in people's lived experiences, but they do not tell us if and how these problems affect the broader community. As a result, this study helps bridge that gap in literature by demonstrating that community college students are experiencing varying levels of MAs based on their race. Additionally, this study was also able to capture responses from community college students located in all four regions of the United States—a notable accomplishment that eluded previous studies due to the limited generaziliability of qualitative research (Casanova et al., 2015; Casanova et al., 2018; Garcia-Louis et al., 2020; Willis, 2016). Thus, this study lays the foundation for further quantitative research into the prevalence, causes, effects, or interventions for MAs within community colleges.

Furthermore, the results of this study indicate four practical applications for higher-education leaders. First and foremost, higher-education leaders should consult with general counsel to identify the most effective and legal method to conduct a campus climate survey at their institutions to determine how their student bodies are experiencing MAs. A review of Texas Senate Bill 17, which prohibits higher-education institutions from operating and maintaining diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, shows in subsection (C) that the law should not be construed to restrict an institution from collecting data. The ambiguity of this condition presents an opportunity for higher-education leaders to conduct research. If the institution does not feel

inclined to run this survey internally, they can hire an outside agency to conduct the survey. In fact, numerous studies have found that institutions have outsourced these surveys to external agencies and received insightful information to minimize occurrences of MAs (Berk, 2017; Crandall & Garcia, 2016; Nadal et al., 2014). Higher-education leaders should also consider incorporating training and development seminars on identifying and reporting MAs for students, staff, and faculty. Students can be apprised of this information during first-year orientation seminars or introductory college-success courses. This information can then be embedded into quarterly or annual training acknowledgments for continuing students. As needed, faculty and staff may receive this information through similar media such as new-hire orientations, convocation, or department trainings.

Second, literature identifies the classroom as the main point of contact for community college students due to their time status, age, and external obligations (Mitchell & Hughes, 2014). However, there are other institutional realms with which students must regularly engage, such as financial services departments, academic advising, and the registrar. Future research may consider using qualitative methods to explore the adverse effects of the interactions between students of color and faculty or staff within these areas of the institution. For instance, how do students of color experience MAs when interacting with faculty, and do these experiences impact their academic performance or emotional well-being?

Third, future research should consider developing new survey instruments that encompass the social structure of community colleges with the Taxonomy of Microaggressions. As previously mentioned, the social dynamics of community colleges differ from those of traditional four-year institutions: Because community college students typically spend most of their on-campus time in class, developing new survey instruments to study their interactions with

professors and peers in the classroom could provide more insight on the adverse effects of these experiences.

Fourth and finally, the results of this study can be used by higher-education advocacy groups to address overt and subtle forms of racism in higher education. Prominent organizations such as the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (NADOHE), National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and Pew Research Center use emerging research to advocate for equality and social justice in higher education. Most recently, the NAACP released an issue brief detailing the anti-CRT legislation that has emerged from Capitol Hill. The article states that more than half of U.S. states have signed anti-CRT measures into law (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 2024). These laws are detrimental to the advancement of MA research. Although numerous studies have shown that MAs manifest at all levels of higher education (Beaulieu & Boylan, 2016; Borges, 2016; Kohli & Solorzano, 2012; Palmer & Maranba, 2015; Pittman, 2012; Nadal et al., 2014b; Watkins et al., 2010), no significant change can be made without taking proactive steps toward addressing these behaviors.

Future research may benefit from using quantitative methods to continue to explore the prevalence, causes, and effects of MAs on student outcomes within two-year community colleges. Researchers may also investigate the relationship between these experiences and student success outcomes such as academic performance, persistence, and degree completion rates within similar institutions. Despite our political landscape, higher-education leaders can use campus climate surveys and institution-wide awareness initiatives to effectively measure and address how their student body experiences MAs. Researchers can also use qualitative studies to explore the experiences of students of color with MAs and their relationships with frequently

visited areas within these institutions. This includes developing new survey measures that encompass the social structure of community colleges and focus on both classroom and out-of-classroom experiences. Lastly, higher-education advocacy groups can promote the findings to members and the public to build support for more research on this topic. In the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in the moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.” My greatest hope is that this endeavor will lead to continued research and more positive learning experiences for community college students nationwide.

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Appendix A

Below is a complete list of the survey items used for this study. Thirty-two of these items were adopted from the Torres–Harding et al. RMAS scale (Torres-Harding et al., 2012). For each item, respondents answered how often they experienced a particular microaggression using a four-point Likert-type scale (0 = never, 1 = a little/rarely, 2 = sometimes/a moderate amount, 3 = often/frequently) (Torres-Harding et al., 2012). Items 4 and 12 were added to the survey to gather more knowledge from participants regarding their experiences with Foreigner and Sexualization microaggressions. The RMAS also includes three subscales called the Schedule of Racist Events (SRE) that was developed in 1996 (Landrine & Klonoff, 1996). The SRE is used to assess specific, negative life events, and race-related stressors that occur to African Americans. The frequency of these events is captured at three separate periods. Those periods are within the past year, within one's entire lifetime, and for the appraisal of the stressfulness of each event. Respectively, these subscales are labeled "Recent Racist Events," "Lifetime Racist Events," and "Appraised Racist Events." Originally, the SRE consisted of 18 scale items that contained the phrase "because you are Black" (Landrine & Klonoff, 1996). However, the RMAS was modified to "because of your race" to be applicable more generally to people of color (Torres-Harding et al., 2012). Each item is answered on a six-point Likert-type scale that ranges from 1 (the event never happened to me) to 6 (the event happens almost all the time) (Landrine & Klonoff, 1996). Furthermore, this survey adopted 14 items used by Cohen et al. to measure the degree to which situations in one's life are appraised as stressful (Cohen et al., 1983, p. 385). For these items, respondents answered using a five-point Likert-type scale (0 = never, 1 = almost never, 2 = sometimes, 3 = fairly often, 4 = very often) (Cohen et al., 1983).

Lastly, this survey adopted six items used by Pedler et al. to measure the sense of belonging of college students (Pedler et al., 2021). Respondents will answer these items using a five-point Likert-type scale (5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree) (Pedler et al., 2021). Furthermore, this study began with introducing my name, giving a description of the research, and advising respondents that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential (Fowler Jr, 2009, p. 165).

Foreigner Factor

1. Other people assume that I am a foreigner.
2. People suggest that I am not a "true" American.
3. People often ask me where I am from, suggesting that I don't belong.
4. People often ask me to teach them words in my native language.

Criminality Factor

5. Other people treat me like a criminal.
6. People act like they are scared of me.
7. Others assume that I will behave aggressively.
8. I am singled out by police or security.

Sexualization Factor

9. People suggest that I am "exotic" in a sexual way because of my race.
10. Other people view me in an overly sexual way because of my race.
11. Other people hold sexual stereotypes about me because of my race.
12. People often objectify one of my physical features because of my race.

Low-Achieving/Undesirable Culture Factor

13. Other people act as if they can fully understand my racial identity, even though they are not of my racial background.
14. Other people act as if all of the people of my race are alike.
15. Others suggest that people of my racial background get unfair benefits.
16. Others assume that people of my background would succeed in life if they simply worked harder.
17. Other people deny that people of my race face extra obstacles when compared to White people.
18. Other people assume that I am successful because of affirmative action, not because I earned my accomplishments.
19. Others hint that I should work hard to prove that I am not like other people of my race.
20. Others suggest that my racial heritage is dysfunctional or undesirable.
21. Others focus only on the negative aspects of my racial background.

Landrine, H., & Klonoff, E. A. (1996). The Schedule of Racist Events: A measure of racial discrimination and a study of its negative physical and mental health consequences. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 22, 144–168. https://doi.org/10.1177/00957984960222002

Invisibility Factor

22. Others prefer that I assimilate to the White culture and downplay my racial background.
23. I am mistaken for being a service worker or lower-status worker.
24. I am treated like a second-class citizen.
25. I receive poorer treatment on campus and in classrooms.
26. Sometimes I feel as if people look past me or don’t see me as a real person.
27. I feel invisible.

28. I am ignored on campus and in class environments.

29. My contributions are dismissed or devalued.

Environmental Invalidations Factor

30. When I interact with authority figures, they are usually of a different racial background.

31. I notice that there are few role models in my racial background in my chosen career.

32. Sometimes I am the only person of my racial background in my class or campus.

33. Where I work or go to school, I see few people of my racial background.

34. I notice that there are few people of my racial background on the TV, books, and magazines.

Perceived Stress Score Factor

35. In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly at college?

36. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?

37. In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and "stressed"?

38. In the last month, how often have you dealt successfully with irritating life hassles?

39. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were effectively coping with important changes that were occurring in your life?

40. In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?

41. In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?
42. In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?
43. In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?
44. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?
45. In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that happened that were outside of your control?
46. In the last month, how often have you found yourself thinking about things that you have to accomplish?
47. In the last month, how often have you been able to control the way you spend your time?
48. In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?

Sense of Belonging Factor

49. I feel like an outsider (or left out of things) at community college.
50. I make friends easily at community college.
51. I feel like I belong at community college.
52. I feel out of place at community college.
53. Other students seem to like me at community college.
54. I feel lonely at community college.

Demographics

55. What gender do you identify as?

56. Choose the race that you consider yourself to be?

57. What is your age (in years)? Please enter numbers only.

58. Are you currently a full-time or part-time student?

59. Are you in your first year of community college?

60. What state is your community college located?

Informed Consent Form

Title of Research Study: What About Us?: A Quantitative Analysis of Microaggressions in Community Colleges

Principal Investigator: Marcelo Angulo, candidate for Ed.D in Higher Education Leadership, Management, and Policy.

Department Affiliation: Department of Education Leadership, Management, and Policy

Sponsor: This research is supported by the Department of Education Leadership, Management and Policy within Seton Hall University.

Brief summary about this research study:
The following summary of this research study is to help you decide whether or not you want to participate in the study. You have the right to ask questions at any time.

The purpose of this study is to use a survey to measure the frequency of microaggressions exhibited towards students in community colleges, determine the influence that race and ethnicity have on the type(s) of microaggressions that students experience in community colleges, and understand the potential distress caused by these incidents to students in this population.

Microaggressions are defined as subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) that send denigrating messages to recipients because of their group membership such as race, gender, or socioeconomic status, often automatically and unconsciously.

You will be asked to complete an anonymous survey that will collect information about your experiences with microaggressions while enrolled in your community college.

We expect that you will be in this research study for approximately 15 minutes.

The primary risk of participation is minimal.

The main benefit of participation is to create conducive learning environments for college students. This study will measure how often and how impactful microaggressions are to students in community college. Most importantly, this study will provide recommendations for strategies to detect, deter, and respond to microaggressions for both higher education leaders and students.

Purpose of the research study:

You are being asked to take part in this research study because you are a student currently enrolled in a community college.

Your participation in this research study is expected to be for one occurrence to complete an anonymous survey.

What you will be asked to do:

Your participation in this research study will include completing an anonymous 60 question survey at your own pace on one occasion.

Informed Consent Form

Your rights to participate, say no or withdraw:
Participation in research is voluntary. You can decide to participate or not to participate. You can choose to participate in the research study now and then decide to leave the research at any time, which may be done by closing the survey from your web browser. Your choice will not be held against you.

The person in charge of the research study can remove you from the research study without your approval. Possible reasons for removal include non-compliance with the study procedures and incomplete surveys.

Potential benefits:

There may be no direct benefit to you from this study. You may obtain personal satisfaction from knowing that you are participating in a project that contributes to new information.

The risks associated with this study are minimal in nature. Your participation in this research may include answering questions that trigger traumatic experiences in your life. If there is a question that causes extreme discomfort, please skip or exit the survey immediately. We appreciate your participation in this study.

Confidentiality and privacy:

Efforts will be made to limit the use or disclosure of your personal information. This information may include the research study documents or other source documents used for the purpose of conducting the study. We cannot promise complete secrecy. Organizations that oversee research safety may inspect and copy your information. This includes the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board who oversees the safe and ethical conduct of research at this institution.

This survey is being hosted by Qualtrics and involves a secure connection. Terms of service, addressing confidentiality, may be viewed at https://www.qualtrics.com/terms-of-service/. Upon receiving results of your survey, any possible identifiers will be deleted by the investigator. You will be identified only by a unique subject number. Your email address, which may be used to contact you to schedule a study visit will be stored separately from your survey data. All information will be kept on a password protected computer only accessible by the research team. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used.

Data sharing:
De-identified data from this study may be shared with the research community at large to advance knowledge. We will remove or code any personal information that could identify you before files are shared with other researchers to ensure that, by current scientific standards and known methods, no one will be able to identify you from the information we share. Despite these measures, we cannot guarantee anonymity of your personal data.

Cost and compensation:

You will not be responsible for any of the costs or expenses associated with your participation in this study.

You will be compensated for your participation in this study according to Prolific's minimum fair pay policy of $8.00 per hour. Visit the following website for more details on Prolific's fair pay policy: https://researcher-help.prolific.com/hc/en-gb/articles/360009223533-What-is-your-pricing-#h_01HA4PEJ9DEH1V29DAMV0EMFCN

Informed Consent Form

After completing your survey, please allow up to 24 hours to approve your payment in Prolific and expect to receive your payment through their website according to their pay schedule. Visit the following website for more details on Prolific's pay schedule: https://participant-help.prolific.com/hc/en-gb/articles/360021984573-How-do-I-get-my-payments-

Conflict of interest disclosure:

The principal investigator and members of the study team have no financial conflicts of interest to report.

Contact information:

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about this research project, you can contact the principal investigator Marcelo Angulo at Angulomb@shu.edu, or the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board ("IRB") at (973) 761-9334 or irb@shu.edu.

I hereby "agree to participate"/"do not agree to participate" in this research study.

Signature of participant	Date
Printed name of participant	
Signature of person obtaining consent	Date
Printed name of person obtaining consent	

SETON HALL UNIVERSITY
1 8 5 6

November 15, 2023

Marcelo Angulo
Seton Hall University

Re: IRB # 2023-428

Dear Marcelo,

The Research Ethics Committee of the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved the amendment to your research proposal entitled, "What About Us?: A Quantitative Analysis of Microaggressions in Community Colleges" as submitted. This memo serves as official notice of the aforementioned study's approval.

Approval of this amendment does not change the previous expiration date from your one-year approval period. You will receive a communication from the Institutional Review Board at least 1 month prior to the original expiration date requesting that you submit an Annual Progress Report to keep the study active, or a Final Review of Human Subjects Research to close the study.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Mara C. Podvey, PhD, OTR
Associate Professor
Co-Chair, Institutional Review Board

Phyllis Hansell, EdD, RN, DNAP, FAAN
Professor
Co-Chair, Institutional Review Board