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## RACIAL MICROAGGRESSION EXPERIENCES AND COPING MECHANISMS OF GRADUATE STUDENTS IN SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY PROGRAMS

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RACIAL MICROAGGRESSION EXPERIENCES AND COPING MECHANISMS  
OF GRADUATE STUDENTS IN  
SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY PROGRAMS  
BY  
YARIMAR ORTIZ-FRONTERA

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS  
IN  
SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY

UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND

2013

MASTER OF ARTS THESIS  
OF  
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2013

## **ABSTRACT**

Racial Microaggressions and the coping of graduate students of Color in School Psychology programs were examined. A national sample (N = 145) was collected from programs approved by APA and NASP. Two measures were administered to assess racial microaggressions occurrences and coping strategies. Results of the study suggest that there is a difference of racial microaggression experiences by Race. It showed that Black participants experience more racial microaggressions than Asian, Hispanic or Latino/a, Multiracial and White graduate students. Participants preferred positive rather than negative coping strategies when experiencing racial microaggressions. Practical implications to support graduate students of color and future directions for research are discussed.

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Finally, I would like to give a special thanks to my friends and family for their support. I would like to express my gratitude to Rafael for his moral support and encouragement.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the demographic composition of the United States has been rapidly changing and becoming more diverse. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010) the population of the US by race is the following: 72.4 percent White, 16.3 percent Hispanic or Latino, 12.6 Black or African American, 4.8 percent Asian, 0.9 American Indian and Alaska Nation, and 0.2 percent Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander. This change in the population is also evident in the nation's public schools where the population of students from diverse cultural and linguistic background is growing rapidly (Arroyos-Jurado, Fernandez & Navarro, 2010). It is important that school psychologists prepare to serve this population and become culturally sensitive and competent.

More specifically, the American Psychological Association (APA) and the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) have created training standards, multicultural guidelines (APA, 2003) and principles and code of conduct (APA, 2002; NASP, 2010) to demonstrate their commitment to multicultural competence. In addition, it is part of both organizations' goals to increase ethnic and cultural diversity within the field of school psychology. For example, the APA Resolution on Ethnic Minority Recruitment and Retention (1993) established that there is an under-representation of ethnic minority students, faculty, practitioners and researchers in psychology. In that resolution, the authors suggested higher recruitment and retention of ethnic minority students across all levels of education in psychology. Similarly, the

Directory of Bilingual School Psychologists was analyzed by Fagan and Wise (2007), who noted that only 45% of school psychologists stated they were proficient in Spanish. However, many of these were school psychologists practicing in Spanish speaking countries; there is a need for more psychologists in the U.S. who represent its diversity. For that reason, it is important to consider how to support graduate students of color while completing their academic degrees in school psychology in order to continue the effort to include diversity in all levels of education. Therefore, this study proposes to assess one aspect of the need for such support by examining racial and ethnic microaggressions experienced by students in graduate programs in school psychology and how students cope with these experiences.

According to Curtis et al (2008) only 7.9% of school psychologists in the US are from ethnic minority groups. An earlier study estimated that there are only 175 ethnic minority graduate students in School Psychology and that the numbers had not changed that much in the last years (Curtis, Grier & Hunley, 2003). In the field of School Psychology, ethnicity is primarily White or Caucasian and the small percent of ethnic minority groups has not changed much in the last ten years, even though many initiatives and policies have been created to increase the number of school psychologists from ethnic minority backgrounds (Curtis et al, 2008). In the same article, Curtis (2008) also described the large disparities between practicing psychologists and the population served in the schools, which has become more diverse over the years. In other words, there is a shortage of school psychologists, but especially minority school psychologists (Davis, McIntosh, Phelps, and Kehle, 2004). The article by Davis et al. (2004) suggested that the field of School Psychology should

increase cultural competence by increasing the number of culturally diverse psychologists in the field. In addition, the authors suggested the need to reconceptualize previous policies and consider new ones that could increase the recruitment and retention of school psychologists, especially school psychologists from minority groups.

The purpose of the study is to investigate graduate students' experiences with racial/ethnic microaggressions during their graduate preparation in School Psychology. More specifically, what types of racial microaggressions do school psychology graduate students experience (e.g. microinvalidations), how frequently have they encountered microaggressions (e.g., 4 times in the last six months)? Secondly, the study investigates whether there is a difference between different races and racial/ethnic microaggressions experiences? In addition, the study explores how graduate students cope with microaggressions experiences, the strategies they employ, and the resources they rely on. Also, the study investigates which microaggressions are coped successfully, and which unsuccessfully.

The study answers the following research questions:

- 1) What types of racial/ethnic microaggressions, do participants experience during their graduate preparation?
- 2) Is there a difference between races and racial/ethnic microaggressions experiences?
- 3) What coping strategies do participants use, and what resources do they rely on when they encounter racial/ethnic microaggressions?

4) Which microaggressions are coped with successfully, and which unsuccessfully?

The present study proposes a new conceptualization of the problem of retention by evaluating whether racial microaggressions might be responsible for an unwelcoming environment in graduate programs and so affect graduate students' completion of their degrees. At the same time, the present study investigates the characteristics and coping mechanisms of successful graduate students from minority groups that can be further evaluated to create new programs that support graduate students of color in School Psychology.

### **Racial Microaggressions**

The study of Racial Microaggressions is an area that is growing in interest in psychology. The term racial microaggressions was first introduced by Chester Pierce in the 1970's and was defined as "subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are 'put downs'" (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez & Willis, 1978, p. 66; as cited in Sue et al, 2007, p. 273).

Racism is a delicate topic in many social contexts. Since the Civil Rights movement, society has tried to have a more egalitarian view of races (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000; Sue et al., 2007). As a consequence, racism in its blatant or overt form is prohibited by law, to the extent that nowadays many can argue that racism does not exist and that it is not a problem in the US. However, contemporary researchers contest that idea by presenting studies that suggests there is a form of modern racism that is covert and subtle (Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakami & Hodson, 2002). Every day, indirect and unconscious racism still permeates our society. Pearson, Dovidio and

Gaertner (2009) developed the theory of aversive racism which is defined as “a form of prejudice characterizing the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of the majority of well-intentioned and ostensibly non-prejudiced White Americans (p.315).” This issue is particularly important for mental health professions because of interactions with people of color who are clients and/or service providers. In particular, it is important to investigate how racial microaggressions affect the daily life of School Psychologists of color who serve a diverse population in the US schools, and those who are currently in graduate school training about to join the field.

However, there are still areas that need further research. In a seminal article, Sue et al., (2007) argued that there is an urgent need for research in the following areas: enhancing the understanding of racial microaggressions, how they are manifested in society, the impact on people of color, the dynamic between the perpetrator and victim, and educational strategies that are needed to eliminate them.

There are several studies that have evaluated racial microaggressions on university campuses, in the counseling process and among faculty in university environments. For example, a study conducted by Sue and colleagues (2007) discusses what racial microaggressions are, as well as their clinical implications. The researchers analyzed the reviewed literature in social and counseling psychology as well as analyzing personal narratives provided by White psychologists and psychologists of color that described examples of racial microaggressions experienced in everyday life. The authors defined racial microaggressions as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial

slights and insults to the target person or group (p.273).” Based on the study analyses, microaggressions seem to appear in three different forms: microassault, microinsult, and microinvalidation. Microassaults refer to the conscious and intentional discriminatory actions characterized by a verbal or non-verbal attack with the intention of hurting the victim, for example, using racial epithets, displaying White supremacist symbols (e.g. swastikas) or preventing one's son or daughter from dating outside of their race. Microinsults are verbal, nonverbal, and environmental communications that slightly convey rudeness and insensitivity demeaning a person's racial heritage or identity. An example of microinsults is an employee who asks a co-worker of color how she got her job, implying she may have landed it through an affirmative action or quota system. Researchers use the term microinvalidations to refer to communications that subtly exclude, negate, or nullify the thoughts, feelings or experiential reality of a person of color. For example, a White person asking a Latino/a where they were born, conveying the message that they are perpetual foreigners in their own land.

The collection of personal narratives helped the researchers to code the information and classify it into nine different categories of microaggressions with distinct themes; these are: alien in own land, ascription of intelligence, color blindness, assumptions of criminality or criminal status, denial of individual racism, myth of meritocracy, pathologizing cultural values/communication styles, second-class citizen and environmental microaggressions. The study only focuses on clinical implications with the therapeutic relationship between a White therapist and client of color and is qualitative in nature. The authors mentioned the importance of doing more research in

this area on how microaggressions are manifested in society and ways to eventually eliminate them.

Several studies have explored how racial microaggressions are experienced by African Americans (Sue et al., 2008), Latina/os (Rivera, Forquer & Rangel, 2010), Asian Americans (Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, & Torino, 2010), indigenous people (Hill, Kim, & Williams, 2010, Clark et al., 2011), and students of color (Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009). These researchers found that people of color experiencing different microaggressions in their everyday lives are subject to pervasive and negative impacts on their mental health (Nadal, 2011, Sue et al., 2008).

A study evaluated negative race-related experiences in School Psychology (Clark, Mercer, Zeigler-Hill, & Dufrene, 2012). The study conducted by Clark and colleagues (2012) evaluated the factors that could be barriers to the success of ethnic minority graduate students in School Psychology. They assessed academic achievement and social and emotional experiences (belongingness and emotional distress). The sample of the study consisted of 87 ethnic minority students and 313 ethnic majority students. The researchers found that ethnic minority students experienced higher level of emotional distress, lower level of belongingness and more negative race-related experiences with lower perception of belongingness (Clark, Mercer, Zeigler-Hill, & Dufrene, 2012). This study was one of the firsts to use quantitative methods to confirm microaggression experiences in School Psychology programs; however it did not differentiate by microaggression type and race.

Overall, in the area of racial microaggressions, there is a lack of quantitative research that explores the experiences of graduate students of color as well as their



coping mechanisms for dealing with microaggressions. This fact is particularly true in the field of school psychology where principal organizations such as NASP and APA are striving to increase the representation of school psychologists of color in every area of the discipline (National Association of School Psychologists (NASP, 2010). In addition, since the US is becoming more diverse, our schools are also becoming more diverse. Presently, this can be seen in the percentage of students receiving English as a Second Language services or being categorized as English Language Learners (ELL). In the US 10.8 million children in public schools speak a language other than English at home, and 25% of them speak English with difficulty (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2008).

For this reason, it is critical to increase and retain graduate students of color in the field of school psychology that could better serve the evolving population of children in the schools. Therefore, exploring racial microaggressions experiences in graduate students in school psychology programs can help inform research about how these successful individuals cope with these pervasive experiences and complete their degrees. The results of this study may provide valuable information that could assist in the creation of interventions tailored by race to support graduate students through the completion of their graduate degrees.

### **Coping with Racial Microaggressions**

Coping refers to the things people do to protect themselves from being psychologically harmed by life strains (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). Experiencing racism whether it is overt or covert has pervasive effects on individuals of color. Racism is associated with high levels of stress that in turn contribute to mental and

physical health impairments, such as depression and heart disease (Brondolo et al., 2009b). Research has reported that for some ethnic minority groups, racism related experiences occur on a weekly basis (Brondolo et al., 2009a). Other studies reported that most ethnic minority individuals experience racism over the course of their lifetime (Kriger, 1990 as cited in Wei et al., 2010). In order to reduce stress and the negative outcomes of racism, it is important for minorities to learn coping strategies.

A qualitative study by Hernandez, Carranza, & Almeida (2010) evaluated mental health professionals' adaptive responses to racial microaggressions. The researchers identified eight coping themes when experiencing racial microaggressions. These were: identifying key issues in responding to racial microaggressions, self-care, spirituality, confrontation, support, documentation, mentoring, and collective organizing.

Similarly, in a qualitative study, Salazar (2009) investigated the strategies that counseling faculty of color use to survive and thrive in academia. The author found that for the participants surviving was beyond acquiring a tenured position; it required several actions that helped them withstand and rise above the pernicious effects of microaggressions. The general themes found were: safeguarding self, affirming one's sense of selfhood, finding, building, and maintaining a support network, coping (attitudes and internal qualities, and actions that help create and maintain them), and choosing to leave or remain where you are. The participants recognized the pervasive effects of microaggressions that undermined their wellbeing and compromised their energy and creative force, reducing their productivity. They also recognized the

importance of having some general strategies to better deal with microaggressions experiences.

Thus, experiencing racial microaggressions can affect negatively the mental health of people of color. Graduate students of color who might be dealing with these racial microaggressions and with the pressure and regular demands of graduate school, are at greater risk to have mental health problems. This in turn might affect their retention and completion of their graduate degrees.

## CHAPTER 2

### METHODOLOGY

#### Design

The study design is descriptive and exploratory. The study consists of using demographic information along with the Racial and Ethnic Microaggression Scale (REMS) to explore graduate students' experiences with racial/ethnic microaggressions during their graduate preparation in School Psychology. Secondly, the study investigates whether there is a difference between races and racial/ethnic microaggressions experiences? In addition, the study explores how graduate students cope with microaggressions experiences, the strategies they employ, and the resources they rely on. Also, the study investigates which microaggressions are coped successfully, and which unsuccessfully. The primary analyses were conducted by using Race as the independent variable and using the racial microaggression and the coping measure separately as dependent variable.

#### Participants

The total sample of the study was  $N = 145$  ( $N_{\text{Males}} = 13$ , 13.1%, and  $N_{\text{Females}} = 126$ , 86.7%). The sample was representative of the population. It represented an 82.9% of the US population of ethnic minority graduate students in School Psychology, a total of 175 students (Curtis et al., 2003). Most of the participants were between the ages of 26-30 years old (44.5%), followed by 21-25 age range (38.1%). The sample included graduate students of color ( $n = 108$ , 74.4%), international graduate students ( $n = 24$ , 16.6%), and students of color who graduated in the last six

months (n = 13, 9%). The majority of the sample was female (86.7%). In the study, the percentage of participants by race was similar between Blacks (27.1%), Hispanic or Latino/a (25.7 %), and Asian (24.3%). Fewer participants were from White (11.8%) and Multiracial (11.1%) descent.

The majority of the participants spoke English as their first language (n = 117 or 80.7%), from these participants (n = 61 or 42.1%) only spoke English, and (n = 84 or 58%) spoke a second language. The highest degree completed from participants was a Master's degree (n = 69 or 47.9%), followed by Bachelor's degree (n = 58 or 40.3%). The participants were distributed almost equally in both Specialist graduate programs (n = 73 or 51.4%) and Doctoral programs (n = 67 or 47.2%). The largest group of the sample reported being in year two of their programs (n = 45 or 31%). The number of faculty of color in the participant's school psychology program ranged from zero to four or more. The largest group (42.4%) reported that in their program there were no faculty of color. Only 32.2% reported that there was one faculty of color and 14.6% reported that there were two faculty of color in their program. The number of graduate students of color in their programs was reported. The largest group (29%) reported that there were two students of color in their program, followed by one student of color (28.3%).

## **Measures**

*Demographics Questionnaire.* A demographic questionnaire was provided to the participants so they can identify their gender, age, race, ethnicity, level of education, program in school psychology (specialist or doctoral level), year in the school psychology program and expected graduation date. Participants could

participate in the study if they met the following criteria: Graduate students of color in School Psychology programs, graduate students of color who graduated in the last six months, and international graduate students in a School Psychology program of the US. Graduate of student of color had to identify as a racial or ethnic minority and choose within the following options for later analyses: Asian, Black, Hispanic or Latino/a, White and Multiracial. These options were chosen to mirror the criteria used in Nadal (2011). See appendix A.

**REMS.** The Racial Ethnic Microaggressions Scale (REMS; Nadal, 2011) is a 45 item scale that uses dichotomous answers (1 and 0). Participants answered 0 they did not experience each racial microaggression event, and 1 if they did experience it in the last six months. The scale measures racial microaggressions using six subscales: (1) Assumptions of Inferiority, (2) Second-Class Citizen and Assumptions of Criminality, (3) Microinvalidations, (4) Exoticization/Assumptions of Similarity, (5) Environmental Microaggressions, and (6) Workplace and School Microaggressions. The REMS reports having an overall Cronbach's alpha of .912 and subscales ranging from .78 to .87. The validity of the REMS was assessed by analyzing correlations with scales that measure modern racism such as the Racism and Life Experiences-Self-Administration Version (RaLES-S; Utsey, 1998, as cited in Nadal, 2011). The high correlations obtained suggest that the REMS is a valid measure of racial microaggressions.

**Brief COPE.** The Brief Cope was created by Carver in 1997 to measure coping strategies. It includes of 28 items containing fourteen scales that assess different coping dimensions. The dimensions are: (1) Active Coping, (2) Planning, (3) Use of

Instrumental Support, (4) Use of Emotional Support, (5) Venting, (6) Behavioral Disengagement, (7) Self-Distraction, (8) Self-Blame, (9) Positive Reframing, (10) Humor, (11) Denial, (12) Acceptance, (13) Religion, and (14) Substance Use. The Brief COPE is a shorter version from the previously published BRIEF Inventory created by Carver, Scheir & Weintraub (1989) which contained 60 items.

Carver (1997) reported good psychometric properties. Exploratory Factor Analysis yielded 9 factors that accounted for the 72.4% of the variance. In addition, the author found acceptable reliability for each subscale ranging from .50 to .90. The Brief COPE has been translated to Spanish and French, and studies reported good psychometric properties (Perczek, Carver, Price & Pozo-Kaderman, 2000, Muller & Spitz, 2003). The range of issues explored includes health, social psychology and other fields. In sum, the Brief COPE is an appropriate measure for this present study because it examines coping in naturally occurring settings. Also, this measure is flexible and can be molded to fit the research questions of this study.

## **Procedure**

After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Rhode Island, all measures were available online via the website [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com). The researcher sent electronic mail to school psychology programs around US that are currently approved by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) and/or the American Psychological Association (APA), Division of School Psychology. The participants were presented with a consent form that explained the voluntary participation in the study, and its potential risks and benefits. The participants filled out a demographic questionnaire, followed by the

REMS and the Brief COPE. At the end of the survey, participants were offered to participate in a raffle of four gift cards from [www.Amazon.com](http://www.Amazon.com).



## CHAPTER 3

### RESULTS

All data (REMS, Brief COPE and demographics) were downloaded from Survey Monkey and entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. After the data was transformed from text to numerical values, the excel spreadsheet was uploaded into the statistical analysis program SPSS Version 20. Descriptive statistics, ANOVAS and post hoc Tukey tests were generated using SPSS to examine the four primary research questions.

- 1) What types of racial/ethnic microaggressions, and in what contexts, do participants experience during their graduate preparation?
- 2) Is there a difference between races and racial/ethnic microaggressions experiences?
- 3) What coping strategies do participants use, and what resources do they rely on when they encounter racial/ethnic microaggressions?
- 4) Which microaggressions are coped with successfully, and which unsuccessfully?

#### **Racial Microaggressions**

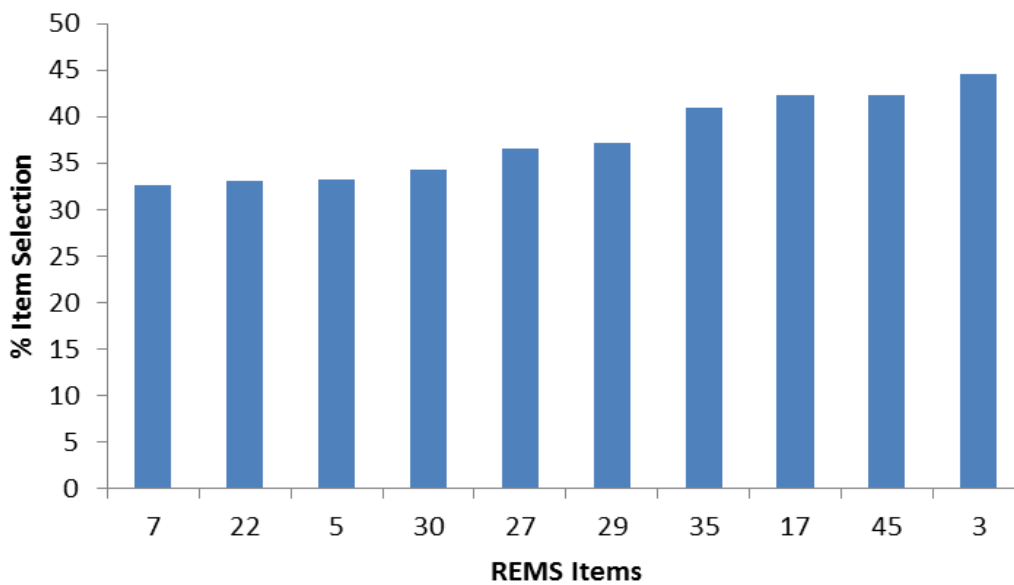
The number of microaggressions per person was analyzed. The majority of the participants in the sample reported at least one microaggression (87.6%). Only 12.4% of the sample reported no microaggressions. Participants experienced more microaggressions related to Exoticization and Assumption of Similarity ( $M = 0.30$ ,  $SD = 0.26$ ), followed by Assumption of Inferiority ( $M = 0.27$ ,  $SD = 0.28$ ),

Microinvalidations ( $M = 0.26$ ,  $SD = 0.30$ ), Workplace and School Microaggressions ( $M = 0.20$ ,  $SD = 0.28$ ). The least frequent microaggression type experienced by participants was Second-Class Citizen and Assumptions of Criminality ( $M = 0.30$ ,  $SD = 0.26$ ).

A frequency analysis of the item selection of participants in the REMS was performed. It showed that item 3 (“*Someone assumed that I spoke a language other than English*”) was the item that most participants selected 62 times or 44.6%. The second largest item selected was item 17 (“*Someone acted surprised at my scholastic or professional success because of my race*”) selected 60 times or 42.3%. Followed by item 45 (“*Someone assumed that I speak similar languages to other people in my race*”) selected 58 times or 42.3%. See Figure 1 for more detailed information on item selection for the REMS.

The descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) for the REMS by race groups are presented in Table 1. In addition, descriptive statistics are presented for each subscale of the REMS in the same table. In the current study, the highest means were from Black participants ( $M = 0.29$ ,  $SD = 0.21$ ), followed by Asian participants ( $M = 0.24$ ,  $SD = 0.161$ ) and Hispanic or Latino/a ( $M = 0.21$ ,  $SD = 0.19$ ). The results revealed that in the last six months of taking the REMS, racial microaggression experiences were more frequent in Black participants. The REMS subscales were evaluated by race. The data suggests that Black participants experienced more racial microaggressions related to Assumptions of Inferiority ( $M = 0.47$ ,  $SD = 0.35$ ), followed by reports related to Microinvalidations ( $M = 0.42$ ,  $SD = 0.34$ ), and Workplace and School Microaggressions ( $M = 0.38$ ,  $SD =$

0.35). Participants of Asian descent reported higher incidents in the Exoticization and Assumption of Similarity Scale ( $M = 0.39, SD = 0.27$ ), followed by Workplace and School Microaggressions ( $M = 0.22, SD = 0.26$ ). The Hispanic or Latino/a participants reported more frequent experiences with microaggressions related to Exoticization and Assumption of Similarity ( $M = 0.34, SD = 0.24$ ), followed by Assumption of Inferiority ( $M = 0.27, SD = 0.30$ ), and Microinvalidations ( $M = 0.22, SD = 0.28$ ).



*Figure 1.* Percentage of REMS item selected most by participants. Detailed information about all item selection can be found in Appendix F. (Items: 7= Someone told me that she or he was colorblind., 2= Someone told me that I was “articulate” after she/he assumed I wouldn’t be., 5= Someone assumed that I grew up in a particular neighborhood because of my race., 30= Someone told me that they do not see race., 27= Someone told me that they “don’t see color.” 29. Someone asked me to teach them words in my “native language.”., 35= Someone assumed that I ate foods associated with my race/culture every day., 17= Someone acted surprised at my scholastic or professional success because of my race., 45= Someone assumed that I speak similar languages to other people in my race, and 3= Someone assumed that I spoke a language other than English)

Table 1

*Summary of Means and Standard Deviations for the scores of the number of reported microaggression incidents on the Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale (REMS) as a Function of Race*

| Participant's Race | REMs Average | Subscale 1 | Subscale 2 | Subscale 3 | Subscale 4 | Subscale 5 |
|--------------------|--------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Total              |              |            |            |            |            |            |
| Mean               | 0.22         | 0.27       | 0.08       | 0.26       | 0.30       | 0.20       |
| N                  | 145          | 130        | 130        | 132        | 131        | 132        |
| SD                 | 0.18         | 0.30       | 0.17       | 0.30       | 0.26       | 0.28       |
| White              |              |            |            |            |            |            |
| Mean               | 0.10         | 0.13       | 0.05       | 0.06       | 0.19       | 0.07       |
| N                  | 17           | 9          | 13         | 9          | 9          | 9          |
| SD                 | 0.12         | 0.11       | 0.20       | 0.11       | 0.24       | 0.14       |
| Asian              |              |            |            |            |            |            |
| Mean               | 0.24         | 0.17       | 0.06       | 0.19       | 0.39       | 0.22       |
| N                  | 35           | 32         | 32         | 32         | 32         | 32         |
| SD                 | 0.16         | 0.19       | 0.13       | 0.25       | 0.27       | 0.26       |
| Black              |              |            |            |            |            |            |
| Mean               | 0.29         | 0.47       | 0.17       | 0.42       | 0.13       | 0.38       |
| N                  | 39           | 33         | 33         | 33         | 33         | 33         |
| SD                 | 0.21         | 0.35       | 0.24       | 0.34       | 0.13       | 0.35       |
| Hispanic/Latino/a  |              |            |            |            |            |            |
| Mean               | 0.21         | 0.27       | 0.04       | 0.22       | 0.34       | 0.15       |
| N                  | 37           | 33         | 33         | 33         | 33         | 33         |
| SD                 | 0.19         | 0.30       | 0.09       | 0.28       | 0.24       | 0.24       |
| Multiracial        |              |            |            |            |            |            |
| Mean               | 0.14         | 0.17       | 0.05       | 0.22       | 0.22       | 0.08       |
| N                  | 16           | 13         | 13         | 13         | 13         | 13         |
| SD                 | 0.11         | 0.24       | 0.11       | 0.27       | 0.21       | 0.15       |

*Note.* Means and standard deviations by race and the REMs subscales. REMS Subscale 1: Assumptions of Inferiority; REMS Subscale 2: Second-Class Citizen and Assumption of Criminality; REMS Subscale 3: Microinvalidations; REMS Subscale 4: Exoticization/Assumptions of Similarity; REMS; REMS Subscale 5: Workplace and School Microaggressions; REMS = Racial and Ethnic Microaggression Scale. On the original study (Nadal, 2011) Subscale 5 was Environmental Microaggressions; this subscale was eliminated for this study.

Multiracial individuals experienced microaggressions related to Microinvalidations ( $M = 0.22$ ,  $SD = .26836$ ), and Exoticization and Assumption of Similarity ( $M = 0.22$ ,  $SD = 0.21$ ). In the sample, White participants (International graduate students) reported more frequent microaggressions related to Exoticization and Assumption of Similarity ( $M = 0.19$ ,  $SD = 0.24$ ), and Assumption of Inferiority ( $M = 0.13$ ,  $SD = 0.11$ ).

Next, a One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was calculated on participants' REMS subscale scores to their race to answer the question whether there is a difference on microaggressions by race. Overall, the analyses were significant for all five subscales: Assumptions of Inferiority Subscale  $F(4, 125) = 6.94$ ,  $p < .000$ , Second-Class Citizen and Assumptions of Criminality Subscale  $F(4, 125) = 3.625$ ,  $p < .008$ , Microinvalidations Subscale  $F(4, 127) = 5.84$ ,  $p < .000$ , Exoticization and Assumptions of Similarity  $F(4, 126) = 11.649$ ,  $p < .000$ , and Workplace and School Microaggressions Subscale  $F(4, 127) = 4.418$ ,  $p < .002$ . The results from the ANOVA suggested that there are differences on the REMS subscales by race.

To determine which race(s) and subscales were different, Post hoc Tukey HSD tests were conducted, see Figure 2. Results indicated that in the Assumptions of Inferiority Subscale, Blacks exhibited significant differences between other races. Specifically, Blacks ( $M = 0.46$ , 95% CI [0.34, 0.58]) were significantly different than Whites ( $M = 0.13$ , 95% CI [0.06, 0.19],  $p < .002$ ). In addition, Blacks were also significantly different from Asians ( $M = 0.17$ , 95% CI [0.09, 0.23],  $p < .000$ ), Hispanics or Latino/a ( $M = .27$ , 95% CI [0.17, 0.39]  $p = .047$ ), and Multiracial ( $M = 0.17$ , 95% CI [0.03, 0.30],  $p < .009$ ). All of these comparisons, the biggest differences

were observed between Blacks and Whites, followed by Blacks and Asians, Blacks and Multiracial, and Blacks and Hispanics or Latino/a. Other races were not found to be statistically significant with other groups other than Blacks ( $p > .05$ ).

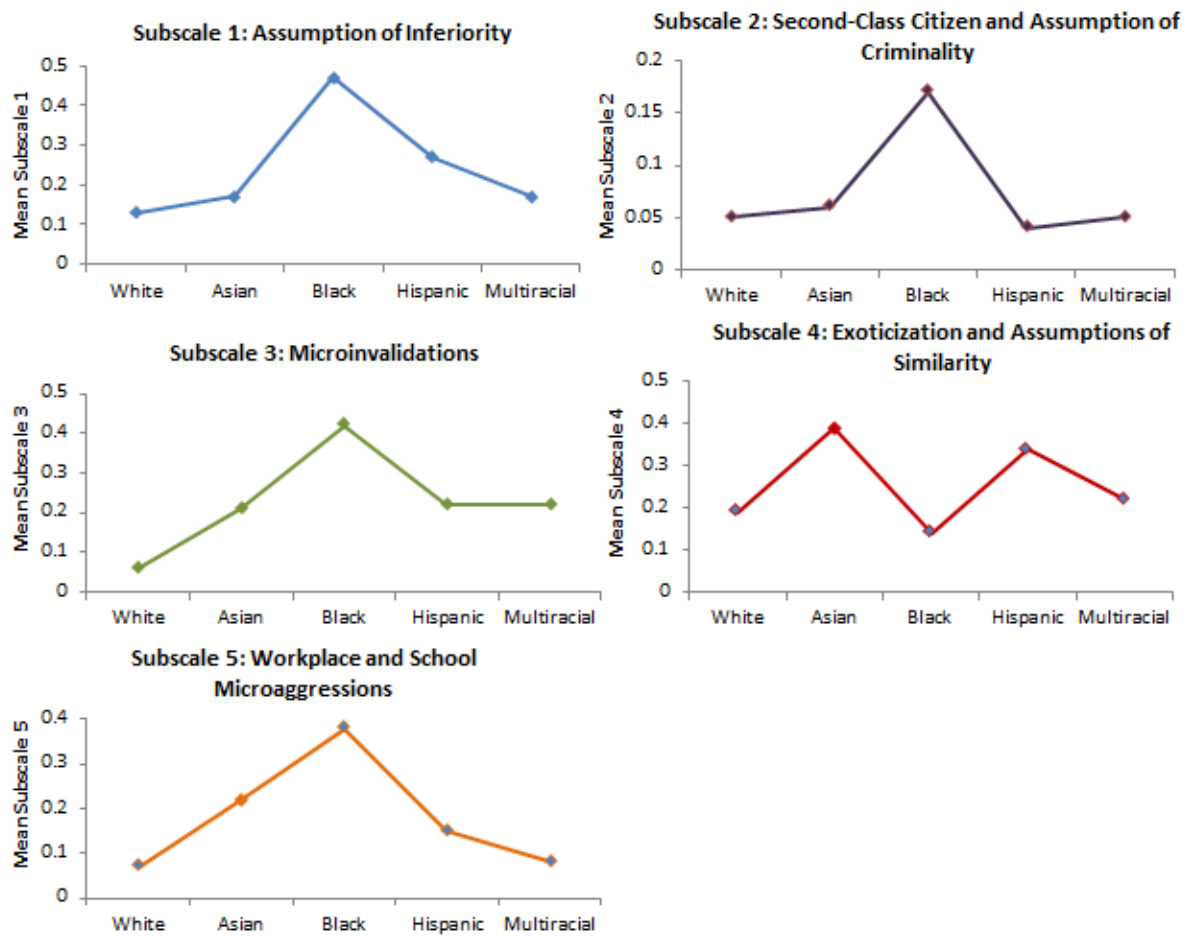


Figure 2. Means of the REMS subscales by race.

On the Second-Class Citizen and Assumption of Criminality Subscale, Blacks ( $M = .17$ , 95% CI [0.09, 0.26]) were compared to the other races and were significant only when compared to Asians ( $M = .06$ , 95% CI [0.03, 0.10]  $p = .029$ ), and Hispanics

or Latino/a ( $M = 0.04$ , 95% CI [0.01, 0.07]  $p = .008$ ). Other race comparisons were not statistically significant.

The Microinvalidations Subscale shows that Blacks were significantly different than the other races. Specifically, Blacks ( $M = 0.43$ , 95% CI [0.33, 0.55]) were significantly different than Whites ( $M = 0.06$ , 95% CI [-0.02, 0.11],  $p < .001$ ). Also, Black participants were significantly different from Asians ( $M = 0.21$ , 95% CI [0.12, 0.31],  $p < .009$ ), Hispanics or Latino/a ( $M = .22$ , 95% CI [0.13, 0.32]  $p = .014$ ). On this subscale, Blacks were not significantly different from Multiracial participants ( $p > .05$ ).

However, in the Exoticization and Assumption of Similarity Subscale the pattern changed. It was observed that Asians ( $M = 0.49$ , 95% CI [0.39, 0.59]) were significantly different from Blacks ( $M = 0.14$ , 95% CI [0.09, 0.18]  $p = .000$ ), Multiracial ( $M = 0.21$ , 95% CI [0.10, 0.33]  $p = .002$ ), and White ( $M = 0.22$ , 95% CI [0.08, 0.36]  $p = .006$ ). Similarly, Hispanic or Latino/a participants ( $M = 0.34$ , 95% CI [0.26, 0.43]) were significantly different than Blacks ( $M = 0.14$ , 95% CI [0.09, 0.18]  $p = .002$ ). In addition, Blacks showed significant differences between Asians ( $p = .000$ ) and Hispanic or Latino/a ( $p = .002$ )

On the last subscale comparison by race, Workplace and School Microaggressions revealed that there is a significant difference between Blacks ( $M = 0.35$ , 95% CI [0.24, 0.47]) and White ( $M = 0.11$ , 95% CI [-0.04, 0.25]  $p = .042$ ). It was also observed that there was a significant difference between Blacks and Hispanic or Latino/a ( $M = 0.15$ , 95% CI [0.07, 0.23]  $p = .014$ ), and Blacks and Multiracial participants ( $M = 0.07$ , 95% CI [-0.02, 0.16]  $p = .009$ ). However, there was no

significant difference between Asian ( $p > .05$ ) and the other races explored. The results indicate that in the Workplace and School Microaggressions Subscale do not appear to significantly differ from Asian participants to the other races when compared.

### **Coping**

The descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) for the coping measure Brief COPE are presented in detail in Table 2. Participants had higher means or use more the following six out of 14 subscales: Use of Emotional Support ( $M = 2.40$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ), Acceptance ( $M = 2.24$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ), Use of Instrumental Support ( $M = 2.20$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ), Self-Distraction ( $M = 2.00$ ,  $SD = 0.93$ ), Religion ( $M = 1.98$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ), and Positive Reframing ( $M = 1.99$ ,  $SD = 0.89$ ). In general, most participants coped with microaggressions by confiding and asking for support from another person.

Descriptive statistics were also calculated by race on the Brief COPE (See Table 2). Black participants reflected higher scores on the Brief COPE ( $M = 1.85$ ,  $SD = 0.79$ ), followed by Asian participants ( $M = 1.63$ ,  $SD = 0.77$ ), Multiracial participants ( $M = 1.44$ ,  $SD 0.95$ ), Hispanic or Latino/a participants ( $M = 1.36$   $SD = 0.80$ ), and White (International students) participants ( $M = 0.89$ ,  $SD = 0.85$ ). In general, Black participants tended to use more coping strategies when they experienced racial microaggressions.



Table 2  
*Summary of Means and Standard Deviations for the scores of the amount of use of coping strategies on the Brief COPE as a Function of Race*

| Participant's Race       | Subscales          |        |                   |                      |         |          |            |          |  |  |
|--------------------------|--------------------|--------|-------------------|----------------------|---------|----------|------------|----------|--|--|
|                          | Brief COPE Average | Denial | Emotional Support | Instrumental Support | Venting | Planning | Acceptance | Religion |  |  |
| <b>Total</b>             |                    |        |                   |                      |         |          |            |          |  |  |
| Mean                     | 1.05               | 1.29   | 2.40              | 2.20                 | 1.90    | 1.89     | 2.24       | 1.98     |  |  |
| N                        | 145                | 117    | 117               | 114                  | 116     | 115      | 115        | 117      |  |  |
| SD                       | 0.86               | 0.57   | 1.01              | 1.03                 | 0.72    | 0.85     | 0.94       | 1.17     |  |  |
| <b>White</b>             |                    |        |                   |                      |         |          |            |          |  |  |
| Mean                     | 0.89               | 1.44   | 2.12              | 1.68                 | 1.50    | 1.63     | 1.69       | 1.38     |  |  |
| N                        | 17                 | 8      | 8                 | 8                    | 8       | 8        | 8          | 8        |  |  |
| SD                       | 0.85               | 0.90   | 1.02              | 0.88                 | 0.60    | 0.88     | 0.80       | 0.74     |  |  |
| <b>Asian</b>             |                    |        |                   |                      |         |          |            |          |  |  |
| Mean                     | 1.63               | 1.23   | 2.54              | 2.29                 | 2.02    | 1.98     | 2.25       | 1.60     |  |  |
| N                        | 35                 | 24     | 24                | 24                   | 24      | 24       | 24         | 24       |  |  |
| SD                       | 0.77               | 0.42   | 1.00              | 0.98                 | 0.71    | 0.87     | 0.94       | 1.08     |  |  |
| <b>Black</b>             |                    |        |                   |                      |         |          |            |          |  |  |
| Mean                     | 1.85               | 1.67   | 2.87              | 2.76                 | 2.19    | 2.24     | 2.59       | 2.63     |  |  |
| N                        | 39                 | 27     | 27                | 27                   | 27      | 27       | 27         | 27       |  |  |
| SD                       | 0.79               | 0.83   | 0.98              | 1.06                 | 0.56    | 0.67     | 0.73       | 1.09     |  |  |
| <b>Hispanic/Latino/a</b> |                    |        |                   |                      |         |          |            |          |  |  |
| Mean                     | 1.36               | 1.11   | 2.11              | 1.89                 | 1.63    | 1.67     | 2.11       | 1.89     |  |  |
| N                        | 37                 | 27     | 27                | 27                   | 27      | 27       | 27         | 27       |  |  |
| SD                       | 0.80               | 0.32   | 0.92              | 1.02                 | 0.64    | 0.90     | 1.04       | 1.15     |  |  |
| <b>Multiracial</b>       |                    |        |                   |                      |         |          |            |          |  |  |
| Mean                     | 1.44               | 1.25   | 2.65              | 2.25                 | 2.20    | 1.65     | 2.70       | 1.55     |  |  |
| N                        | 16                 | 10     | 10                | 10                   | 10      | 10       | 10         | 10       |  |  |
| SD                       | 0.95               | 0.35   | 1.11              | 0.86                 | 0.79    | 0.58     | 0.89       | 0.98     |  |  |

*Note.* Data represents means and standard deviations by race and the Brief COPE subscales with significant differences indicated by post hoc Tukey HSD test  $p < .05$ .

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted for each of the 14 Brief COPE Subscales by race. The results indicated that only eight of the 14 scales were statistically significant, these are: Self-Distraction  $F(4, 113) = 3.08, p = .019$ , Denial  $F(4, 112) = 2.70, p < .034$ , Use of Emotional Support  $F(4, 112) = 2.55, p = .043$ , Use of Instrumental Support  $F(4, 109) = 3.56, p = .009$ , Venting  $F(4, 111) = 3.66, p = .008$ , Planning  $F(4, 110) = 2.54, p = .044$ , Acceptance  $F(4, 110) = 2.80, p = .029$ , and Religion  $F(4, 112) = 4.90, p < .001$ . The results indicate that there is a difference in the Brief COPE subscales by race.

Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that group differences were found on all the significant subscales mentioned above except for Self-Distraction that showed no significance on the Post hoc test. The group differences were found on the Denial Subscale when comparing Blacks ( $M = 1.52$ , 95% CI [1.26, 1.80]) to Hispanic or Latino/a participants ( $M = 1.10$ , 95% CI [0.97, 1.21],  $p = .021$ ) there was a significant difference. Similar patterns emerged with the following subscales: Use of Emotional Support, Use of Instrumental Support, Venting, and Planning, where there was a significant difference between Blacks and Hispanic or Latino/a participants ( $p < .05$ ), see Table 3. However, for the Acceptance Subscale there was a significant difference between Blacks ( $M = 2.48$ , 95% CI [2.22, 2.75]) and White participants ( $M = 1.55$ , 95% CI [1.00, 2.09],  $p = .043$ ). Furthermore, the results on the Religion Subscale indicated that there was a significant difference between Blacks ( $M = 2.64$ , 95% CI [2.26, 3.02]) and Whites ( $M = 1.40$ , 95% CI [0.89, 1.90],  $p = .017$ ), and between Blacks and Asians ( $M = 1.63$ , 95% CI [1.22, 2.043],  $p = .003$ ). There was also a significant difference between Blacks and Hispanic or

Table 3

*Summary of significant multiple comparisons between Brief COPE Subscales and race groups. A positive mean difference indicates that the Black score was higher.*

| Subscales                   | Mean <sub>difference</sub> | p-value |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|---------|
| <b>Denial</b>               |                            |         |
| Black Hispanic/Latino       | 0.43                       | 0.021   |
| <b>Emotional Support</b>    |                            |         |
| Black Hispanic/Latino       | 0.69                       | 0.047   |
| <b>Instrumental Support</b> |                            |         |
| Black Hispanic/Latino       | 0.81                       | 0.012   |
| <b>Venting</b>              |                            |         |
| Black Hispanic/Latino       | 0.49                       | 0.041   |
| <b>Planning</b>             |                            |         |
| Black Hispanic/Latino       | 0.58                       | 0.047   |
| <b>Acceptance</b>           |                            |         |
| Black White                 | 0.94                       | 0.043   |
| <b>Religion</b>             |                            |         |
| Black White                 | 1.24                       | 0.017   |
| Black Asian                 | 1.00                       | 0.003   |
| Black Hispanic/Latino       | 0.76                       | 0.048   |

*Note.* Data represents a Post hoc Tukey HSD summary of multiple comparisons of significant groups with  $p < .05$ .

Latino/a participants ( $M = 1.88$ , 95% CI [1.45, 2.03],  $p = .048$ ). The results indicate that Blacks used more coping strategies related to religion than the other races (Hispanic or Latino and Asian followed by White) when microaggressions occurred.

### **Coping with Racial Microaggressions**

The means from Table 1 and Table 2 indicate that Black participants experienced more microaggressions in general and related to Assumptions of Inferiority followed by Microinvalidations. The data shows that Black participants tended to use more coping strategies related to Use of Emotional Support, followed by Use of Instrumental Support, Religion, Acceptance, Planning, and Venting. Asian participants experienced more microaggressions related to Exoticization and

Assumption of Similarity, followed by Workplace and School Microaggressions and Microinvalidations. Looking at the results, it seems that Asian participants used more coping strategies related to Use of Emotional Support, followed by Use of Instrumental Support, and Acceptance. In the sample, Hispanic or Latino/a tended to experienced more microaggressions related to Exoticization and Assumption of Similarity, followed by Assumptions of Inferiority, and Microinvalidations. The coping strategies they employed more frequently were related to Use of Emotional Support, Acceptance, Use of Instrumental Support, Religion and Planning. In addition, Multiracial participants experienced more microaggressions related to Exoticization and Assumption of Similarity, followed by Microinvalidations and Assumptions of Inferiority. They in turn used more coping strategies related to Acceptance, followed by Use of Emotional and Instrumental Support, and Venting. The White (International graduate students) participants reported to experience more microaggressions related to Exoticization and Assumption of Similarity, followed by Assumptions of Inferiority, and Workplace and School Microaggressions. They reported using more frequently coping strategies related to Use of Emotional and Instrumental Support, followed by Acceptance and Planning.

## CHAPTER 4

### DISCUSSION

The term Racial Microaggressions is defined as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group” (Sue et al, 2007, p.273). Microaggressions exists in both social and academic collegiate environments (Solórzano, Ceja and Yosso, 2000). For that reason, it is important to explore RM in School Psychology programs and how to support graduate students of color while completing their academic degrees in order to continue the effort to include diversity in all levels of education.

The purpose of the present study was to explore the racial microaggressions and the coping strategies graduate students of color and White international students experienced during their graduate preparation in School Psychology. More specifically, what types of racial microaggressions do school psychology graduate students experience (e.g., microinvalidations), and how frequently have they experienced microaggressions (e.g., 4 times in the last six months)? Secondly, the study investigates whether there is a difference between races and racial/ethnic microaggression experiences? In addition, the study explores how graduate students cope with microaggression experiences, the strategies they employ, and the resources they rely on. Also, the study investigates which microaggressions are coped with successfully, and which unsuccessfully.

## **Summary of Results**

The present study examined Racial Microaggressions in graduate School Psychology programs around the US. The exploratory findings provide confirmation of the occurrence of racial microaggressions experiences in School Psychology programs (Clark et al., 2012). In the sample, 87.6% experienced at least one microaggression, and only 12.4% experienced no microaggressions. In general, graduate students of color experienced more microaggressions related to Exoticization and Assumption of Similarity, followed by Assumptions of Inferiority, Microinvalidations, and Workplace and School Microaggressions. The microaggressions type experienced least by participants was Second-Class Citizen and Assumptions of Criminality.

The study found that Black graduate students experience higher and more frequent incidents of microaggressions. Asians were next, closely followed by Hispanic or Latino/a, Multiracial and White graduate students. These findings are consistent with the literature on microaggressions where Black individuals experienced far more microaggressions than other races. The literature suggests that darker skin tone Blacks are more likely to experience discrimination (Borrell et al., 2006). The findings indicate that in School Psychology programs the students more affected by microaggressions are Black. This finding extends the research by Clark et al. (2012) where they found that ethnic minority students in School Psychology experienced higher microaggressions than ethnic majority (European descent) students. The findings of this current study found that within ethnic minority students in School Psychology, Black students had higher microaggression experiences.

However, when looking at coping strategies with race, Black students were the participants with higher use of coping strategies. This suggest that although they are frequently victims of microaggression experiences they usually have positive coping strategies, such as looking for emotional or instrumental support with friend and loved ones and religion. A reason for this finding could be the effect of their parents, family member or friends teaching (explicitly and not explicitly) Black students to cope with these experiences since they were very young. Although ethnic identity was not evaluated in this study, this construct could be an important aspect of coping (Sauceda, 2010).

Additionally, Black students and all the participants on this study being graduate students are assumed to have great intrinsic motivation and probably high use of coping behaviors (Clark et al., 2012). However, the constant negative experience with microaggressions could affect negatively the students' mental health and well-being, and it might prompt them to drop-out of graduate school (Brondolo et al., 2009a, Torres et al., 2010). Also, there is evidence that ethnic minority students in School Psychology who experienced microaggressions, reported higher levels of emotional distress and lower levels of belongingness to the program (Clark et al., 2012). They also found that negative race-related experiences were associated with lower perceptions of belongingness (Clark et al., 2012).

Another important finding is that Asian participants experienced microaggressions related to Exoticization and Assumption of Similarity (i.e., when people of color may feel like perpetual foreigner), followed by Workplace and School microaggressions (i.e., when people of color feel ignored or treated differently by

colleagues because of their race), and Assumptions of Inferiority (i.e., when people of color are assumed to be poor or hold substandard careers). There was a marked difference between Asians experiencing much more microaggressions related to Exoticization and Assumption of Similarity than Blacks. In the sample, Asians reported more microaggressions related to this, followed by Hispanic, and Multiracial individuals. This finding may be related to the fact that Asian and Hispanic or Latino/a are more recent immigrants to the US than Blacks. The data support previous findings on Asian and Hispanic or Latino/a feeling like perpetual foreigners in the country where they were born (Michael-Makri, 2010, Nadal, 2008a, Nadal et al., 2011). Another aspect to consider is that the majority of the sample (86.7%) was female, and a previous study at a university found that Latinas were more often exoticized (McCabe, 2009).

The study included international graduate students in School Psychology and many of them identified as White individuals. The study found that White participants also experienced racial microaggressions, particularly related to Exoticization and Assumption of Similarity, Assumption of Inferiority, and Workplace and School Microaggressions. In the sample, White individuals were the group with fewer microaggressions consistent with a previous study (Clark et al., 2012). Although research has shown that racial perceptions of people of color differ greatly from those of Whites (Jones, 1997 as cited in Sue et al., 2007), this particular group of participants shared ethnic/cultural differences than American White individuals from European descent and it assumed that there were differences in racial perception. This



finding confirms the need to expand the definition of racial microaggressions to include cultural microaggressions (Goodstein, 2008).

Overall, participants used coping strategies a “little bit” to a “medium amount” when exposed to microaggressions. The study also found that graduate students in this sample used more the following coping strategies: Use of Emotional Support, Acceptance, Use of Instrumental Support, Self-Distraction, Religion and Positive Reframing. In general, most participants coped with microaggressions by confiding and asking for support to another person. However, they also coped with microaggressions trying to forget the events distracting themselves, looking for a positive outlook of the incident and accepting the event as something that must be accommodated to, as opposed as something that can be easily changed (Carver, Scheier & Weintraub, 1989). These last coping strategies might negatively affect ethnic minority graduate students’ mental health and might affect their desire to finish the degree.

In the study, most participants tended to cope with microaggressions by actively seeking support or getting support from a friend or loved one. They also coped with microaggressions by relying in religion and accepting the microaggressions incidents. Although participants were from different races and cultures they showed similar coping strategies when experiencing microaggressions. This might be related to the fact that participants were graduate students who has been using more positive than negative coping strategies that has allow them to be in this academic position.

Overall, participants experienced racial microaggressions in School Psychology programs. Black participants experienced more microaggressions followed by Asian, and Hispanic or Latino/a participants. In the sample, participants used more positive coping strategies, such as Emotional Support and Religion, than negative coping strategies such as Denial or Self-Blame. Further exploration on these coping strategies is warranted to see whether these can help to decrease the negative effects of microaggressions, including that it might affect retention in the program and graduation rates of students of color.

### **Implications of the Results**

The results of the current study demonstrate the existence of microaggressions in School Psychology programs. This study extends previous research by investigating the types of racial microaggressions graduate students experienced by race and the coping strategies graduate students use on their own. The implications of the results are important to many people especially graduate students, faculty, and retention officials.

Ethnic minority and international graduate students in School Psychology can find some validation of the race-related confusing experiences that they might had in the past in their programs. It is important that ethnic minority graduate students become knowledgeable and aware of racial microaggressions and its effects. It is also important for them to know what types of microaggressions were usually associated for their race as well as the coping strategies against microaggressions. Ethnic minority graduate students will benefit on finding and planning effective and positive ways of coping with racial microaggressions. Students of color within a program may

benefit of coming together as a support group to discuss possible microaggressions, seek support and understanding as well as advice on a plan of action. Moreover, students should seek support and coping strategies in Religion related activities inside and outside the campus community.

Faculty in School Psychology programs might find this study helpful motivating them to become more knowledgeable and aware of racial microaggressions. Specifically, they should become more knowledgeable with Exoticization and Assumption of Similarity that was the most common experienced type of microaggressions in this study. Additionally, it will be beneficial to become familiar with the literature on how include multicultural issues on their courses as well as how to manage difficult dialogues in the classroom (Sue et al., 2011, Clark et al., 2012).

In order to retain ethnic minority students, faculty should motivate programs to facilitate diverse social and professional activities to foster belongingness (Clark et al., 2012). It will also be of benefit to motivate programs and students of color to create and facilitate a support group or informal meetings inside or outside of campus that would meet at least monthly. In these meetings academic concerns and advice can be shared as well as to provide emotional support when racial microaggressions occur. Moreover, faculty in School Psychology programs should consider these findings while performing advising and one-on-one meetings with their students of color. Consequently, faculty would be able to be aware of the experiences their students might be going through with microaggressions and can suggest or provide students with effective coping strategies such as emotional support. Another important

implication is that faculty can propose special interventions to make international students feel welcome, provide emotional support, and reassure them on their abilities (Gomez, Khurshid, Freitag & Lachuk, 2011). School Psychology programs should consider a creation of a multicultural task force composed of students and faculty where they can learn and discuss multicultural issues including microaggressions.

Admissions and retention officials within the School Psychology program and university level should consider microaggressions as a possible threat for graduate students of color's retention. Similarly, knowledge and awareness of microaggression is warranted as a first step. However, a plan of action is needed to create intervention to support and retain students of color. Rogers & Molina (2006) provide the following recommendations of exemplary efforts in psychology to recruit and retain graduate students of color. These are: (1) engaging current minority faculty and student in recruitment activities, (2) offering attractive financial aid packages, (3) having faculty members make personal contact with prospective and current students, (4) creating linkages with historical institutions of color, (5) having a critical mass of faculty and students of color, (6) offering diversity issues course, (7) engaging students in diversity issues research.

In general, the current findings might be helpful to graduate students of color in other psychology fields as well as other fields outside psychology. It would also be helpful to undergraduate students in predominantly White universities. In addition, this study could benefit potentially School Psychologists working in the field that might be also experiencing racial microaggressions.

In sum, faculty and students can apply emotional and instrumental support to mentoring programs in School Psychology graduate programs. School Psychologists who work in higher education and researchers might find these results meaningful to allow them to become aware of microaggressions in their graduate programs and possibly create interventions to raise awareness as well as to support students of color providing mentorship and guidance aligned with their most used coping skills as found in this study. This way, faculty in School Psychology programs can create ways to provide support for their graduate students of color and this in turn might help increase retention and graduation.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

In the study there were some limitations. The sample of  $N = 145$  represented about 82.9% of the US population of minority graduate students in School Psychology, however the size of the sample was still not very large. This might compromise the study's statistical power. Also, having an internet-based survey version could impose some limitations due to computer technical difficulties. Another anticipated limitation could be the use of the REMS and the Brief COPE that are self-report measures of perceived microaggressions and coping mechanisms that might not be reflective of past experiences. However, the literature has pointed out that the perceptions of racial microaggressions and/or discrimination experiences against people of color have pervasive effects on their mental health (Sue et al., 2007). Nonetheless, one of the reasons that a self-report measure such as the REMS might not be reflective of the experiences could be related to the ability of correctly recall all the microaggression incidents in the last six months. In addition, REMS had a

dichotomous answer format that might be a limitation in itself and could have been more useful to use a Likert type answer format. Another important limitation could be a lack of knowledge and awareness of racial microaggressions that might impede the recognition of microaggressions. Another aspect to consider is that many of the participants were first year graduate students (26.4) and although the surveys were collected in March they still might have a limited view of their program.

Future directions are to explore more carefully the specific settings in which microaggressions are experienced by School Psychologists of color, for example, training programs and field practicums. Hopefully, the results of this study will allow other researchers to identify best ways to address microaggressions and to support graduate students of color in School Psychology programs. In addition, future research should also explore other variables alongside microaggressions such as school racial climate, connections with faculty and other peers in the program, and whether microaggressions affect their desire to finish graduate school. Furthermore, there is a need to explore the effectiveness of different intervention to minimize microaggressions and cope with it. Another important area of future research is to explore what other factors and microaggressions might affect international students' sense of belongingness and desire to finish degree and potentiality of staying in the US.

Finally, a more careful exploration of other intersections of microaggressions in graduate students is needed, such as gender, ethnic minority, sexual orientation and disability. In addition, it is important to investigate with more detail the potential

mental health implications affecting graduate student's academic achievement and retention (Blume et al., 2011).

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Racial Microaggressions and the coping of graduate students of Color in School Psychology programs were examined. A national sample of N = 145 was collected from programs approved by NASP and APA. Results of the study suggest that there is a difference of racial microaggressions experiences by race. It showed that Black participants experience more racial microaggressions, followed by Asians and Hispanics or Latino/a. Participants preferred more positive than negative coping strategies when experiencing racial microaggressions.

Thus, experiencing racial microaggressions can affect negatively the mental health of ethnic minority students. Graduate students of color who might be dealing with these racial microaggressions and with the pressure and regular demands of graduate school, are at greater risk to have mental health problems (Gomez et al., 2011, Blume, Lovato, Thyken & Denny, 2011). This in turn might affect their retention and completion of their graduate degrees.

Racial microaggressions are an important topic to be discussed in School Psychology programs in the US. It is important to create awareness and educate students of color on ways to successfully cope with microaggressions and encourage and support them throughout their graduate career.

## Appendix A

### Demographic Questionnaire

What is your age? Please write.

What is your gender?

- Female
- Male
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Where were you born?

- United States
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

What is your race?

- White (Non-Hispanic or Latino/a)
- Asian
- Black
- Hispanic or Latino
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Native Hawaiians or Other Pacific Islander
- Multiracial
- Would rather not say
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

What is your ethnicity?

- African American
- Dominican American
- Filipino American
- Puerto Rican
- Mexican/Chicano/a American
- Would rather not say
- Two ethnicities or more: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

What is your primary language?

- English
- Spanish
- Portuguese
- Mandarin
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

What is your secondary language?

- English
- Spanish
- Portuguese
- Mandarin
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

What is your highest level of education completed?



- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Specialist level
- Doctorate
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

In what level of graduate program in school psychology are you in?

- Specialist level program
- Doctoral program
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

In what year are you?

- 1<sup>st</sup> year
- 2<sup>nd</sup> year
- 3<sup>rd</sup> year
- 4<sup>th</sup> or more

Please write your expected graduation date? (i.e., May, 2015)

\_\_\_\_\_

In your graduate program, the number of faculty of color is?

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3 or more
- Don't know

In your graduate program, the number of graduate students of color is?

- 0
- 1-3
- 4-6
- 7 or more
- Don't know

## Appendix B

### Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale (REMS), (Nadal, 2011)

Instructions: Think about your experiences with race. Please read each item and think of how many times this event has happened to you in the **PAST SIX MONTHS**.

0 = I did not experience this event.

1 = I experienced this event at least once in the past six months.

1. I was ignored at school or at work because of my race.
2. Someone's body language showed they were scared of me, because of my race.
3. Someone assumed that I spoke a language other than English.
4. I was told that I should not complain about race.
5. Someone assumed that I grew up in a particular neighborhood because of my race.
6. Someone avoided walking near me on the street because of my race.
7. Someone told me that she or he was colorblind.
8. Someone avoided sitting next to me in a public space (e.g., restaurants, movie theaters, subways, buses) because of my race.
9. Someone assumed that I would not be intelligent because of my race.
10. I was told that I complain about race too much.
11. I received substandard service in stores compared to customers of other racial groups.
12. I observed people of my race in prominent positions at my workplace or school.
13. Someone wanted to date me only because of my race.
14. I was told that people of all racial groups experience the same obstacles.
15. My opinion was overlooked in a group discussion because of my race.
16. Someone assumed that my work would be inferior to people of other racial groups.
17. Someone acted surprised at my scholastic or professional success because of my race.
18. I observed that people of my race were the CEOs of major corporations.
19. I observed people of my race portrayed positively on television.
20. Someone did not believe me when I told them I was born in the US.
21. Someone assumed that I would not be educated because of my race.
22. Someone told me that I was "articulate" after she/he assumed I wouldn't be.
23. Someone told me that all people in my racial group are all the same.
24. I observed people of my race portrayed positively in magazines.
25. An employer or co-worker was unfriendly or unwelcoming toward me because of my race.
26. I was told that people of color do not experience racism anymore.
27. Someone told me that they "don't see color."
28. I read popular books or magazines in which a majority of contributions featured people from my racial group.
29. Someone asked me to teach them words in my "native language."
30. Someone told me that they do not see race.

31. Someone clenched her/his purse or wallet upon seeing me because of my race.
32. Someone assumed that I would have a lower education because of my race.
33. Someone of a different racial group has stated that there is no difference between the two of us.
34. Someone assumed that I would physically hurt them because of my race.
35. Someone assumed that I ate foods associated with my race/culture every day.
36. Someone assumed that I held a lower paying job because of my race.
37. I observed people of my race portrayed positively in movies.
38. Someone assumed that I was poor because of my race.
39. Someone told me that people should not think about race anymore.
40. Someone avoided eye contact with me because of my race.
41. I observed that someone of my race is a government official in my state
42. Someone told me that all people in my racial group look alike.
43. Someone objectified one of my physical features because of my race.
44. An employer or co-worker treated me differently than White co-workers.
45. Someone assumed that I speak similar languages to other people in my race.

## **Appendix C**

### **REMS Subscales and items.**

**a. Assumptions of Inferiority Subscale:**

Items: 5, 9, 17, 21, 22, 32, 36, 38

**b. Second-Class Citizen and Assumptions of Criminality Subscale:**

Items: 2, 6, 8, 11, 31, 34, 40

**c. Microinvalidations Subscale:**

Items: 4, 7, 10, 14, 26, 27, 30, 33, 39

**d. Exoticization and Assumptions of Similarity Subscale:**

Items: 3, 13, 20, 23, 29, 35, 42, 43, 45

**e. Environmental Microaggressions Subscale:**

Items: 12, 18, 19, 24, 28, 37, 41

**f. Workplace and School Microaggressions Subscale:**

Items: 1, 15, 16, 25, 44

## Appendix D

### Brief COPE (Carver, 1997)

These items deal with ways you've been coping when experiencing racial microaggressions in your life as a graduate student in a School Psychology program for the **last SIX months**. There are many ways to try to deal with problems. These items ask what you've been doing to cope with this racial microaggressions . Obviously, different people deal with things in different ways, but I'm interested in how you've tried to deal with it. Each item says something about a particular way of coping. I want to know to what extent you've been doing what the item says. How much or how frequently. Don't answer on the basis of whether it seems to be working or not—just whether or not you're doing it. Use these response choices. Try to rate each item separately in your mind from the others. Make your answers as true FOR YOU as you can.

- 1 = I haven't been doing this at all
- 2 = I've been doing this a little bit
- 3 = I've been doing this a medium amount
- 4 = I've been doing this a lot

1. I've been turning to work or other activities to take my mind off things.
2. I've been concentrating my efforts on doing something about the situation I'm in.
3. I've been saying to myself "this isn't real."
4. I've been using alcohol or other drugs to make myself feel better.
5. I've been getting emotional support from others.
6. I've been giving up trying to deal with it.
7. I've been taking action to try to make the situation better.
8. I've been refusing to believe that it has happened.
9. I've been saying things to let my unpleasant feelings escape.
10. I've been getting help and advice from other people.
11. I've been using alcohol or other drugs to help me get through it.
12. I've been trying to see it in a different light, to make it seem more positive.
13. I've been criticizing myself.
14. I've been trying to come up with a strategy about what to do.
15. I've been getting comfort and understanding from someone.
16. I've been giving up the attempt to cope.
17. I've been looking for something good in what is happening.
18. I've been making jokes about it.
19. I've been doing something to think about it less, such as going to movies, watching TV, reading, daydreaming, sleeping, or shopping.
20. I've been accepting the reality of the fact that it has happened.
21. I've been expressing my negative feelings.
22. I've been trying to find comfort in my religion or spiritual beliefs.
23. I've been trying to get advice or help from other people about what to do.

24. I've been learning to live with it.
25. I've been thinking hard about what steps to take.
26. I've been blaming myself for things that happened.
27. I've been praying or meditating.
28. I've been making fun of the situation.

## **APPENDIX E**

### **Brief COPE Subscales**

- (1) Active Coping
- (2) Planning
- (3) Use of Instrumental Support
- (4) Use of Emotional Support
- (5) Venting
- (6) Behavioral Disengagement
- (7) Self-Distraction
- (8) Self-Blame
- (9) Positive Reframing
- (10) Humor
- (11) Denial
- (12) Acceptance
- (13) Religion
- (14) Substance Use

## Appendix F

### REMS Frequency and Percentages of Item Selection

| Item  | Frequency | %    |
|---|-----------|------|
| 1. I was ignored at school or at work because of my race.   | 15        | 10.7 |
| 2. Someone's body language showed they were scared of me, because of my race.   | 20        | 14.3 |
| 3. Someone assumed that I spoke a language other than English.  | 62        | 44.6 |
| 4. I was told that I should not complain about race.  | 24        | 17   |
| 5. Someone assumed that I grew up in a particular neighborhood because of my race.  | 47        | 33.3 |
| 6. Someone avoided walking near me on the street because of my race.  | 10        | 7.1  |
| 7. Someone told me that she or he was colorblind.   | 46        | 32.6 |
| 8. Someone avoided sitting next to me in a public space (e.g., restaurants, movie theaters, subways, buses) because of my race. | 12        | 8.5  |
| 9. Someone assumed that I would not be intelligent because of my race.  | 36        | 25.5 |
| 10. I was told that I complain about race too much.   | 10        | 7.1  |
| 11. I received substandard service in stores compared to customers of other racial groups.                                      | 8         | 5.8  |
| 13. Someone wanted to date me only because of my race.  | 12        | 8.5  |
| 14. I was told that people of all racial groups experience the same obstacles.  | 41        | 29.1 |
| 15. My opinion was overlooked in a group discussion because of my race.   | 31        | 22   |
| 16. Someone assumed that my work would be inferior to people of other racial groups.  | 33        | 23.4 |
| 17. Someone acted surprised at my scholastic or professional success because of my race.  | 60        | 42.3 |
| 20. Someone did not believe me when I told them I was born in the US.   | 9         | 6.3  |
| 21. Someone assumed that I would not be educated because of my race.  | 26        | 19.3 |
| 22. Someone told me that I was "articulate" after she/he assumed I wouldn't be.   | 45        | 33.1 |
| 23. Someone told me that all people in my racial group are all the same.  | 34        | 25   |
| 25. An employer or co-worker was unfriendly or unwelcoming toward me because of my race.  | 18        | 13.1 |
| 26. I was told that people of color do not experience racism anymore.   | 39        | 28.5 |
| 27. Someone told me that they "don't see color."  | 50        | 36.5 |
| 29. Someone asked me to teach them words in my "native language."   | 51        | 37.2 |
| 30. Someone told me that they do not see race.  | 47        | 34.3 |
| 31. Someone clenched her/his purse or wallet upon seeing me because of my race.   | 8         | 5.9  |
| 32. Someone assumed that I would have a lower education because of my race.   | 36        | 26.3 |
| 33. Someone of a different racial group has stated that there is no difference between the two of us.                           | 37        | 27   |
| 34. Someone assumed that I would physically hurt them because of my race.   | 5         | 3.7  |
| 35. Someone assumed that I ate foods associated with my race/culture every day.   | 56        | 40.9 |
| 36. Someone assumed that I held a lower paying job because of my race.  | 31        | 22.8 |
| 38. Someone assumed that I was poor because of my race.   | 19        | 14   |
| 39. Someone told me that people should not think about race anymore.  | 29        | 21.5 |
| 40. Someone avoided eye contact with me because of my race.   | 16        | 11.8 |
| 42. Someone told me that all people in my racial group look alike.  | 41        | 30.1 |
| 43. Someone objectified one of my physical features because of my race.   | 44        | 32.1 |
| 44. An employer or co-worker treated me differently than White co-workers.  | 39        | 28.5 |
| 45. Someone assumed that I speak similar languages to other people in my race.  | 58        | 42.3 |



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