Honors Theses   Student Research

4-29-2022

Peoples' Perception of Race-Based Microaggressions as a Function of Their Background and Beliefs

Emily Huesman
University of Richmond

Peoples' Perception of Race-Based Microaggressions as a Function of Their Background and

Beliefs

By

Emily Huesman

Honors Thesis

Submitted to:

Psychology Department

University of Richmond

Richmond, VA

April 29, 2022

Advisor: Dr. Jane Berry

Abstract:

This current study's aim was to further address microaggressions and how people perceive these "micro" aggressions based on Political identification, support for the Black Lives Matter movement, and their beliefs surrounding White privilege. Recent literature has shown that racial discrimination in any form can be incredibly detrimental to mental health, however, this study addresses the every-day microaggressions and subtle forms of racism that Black people experience every day and delves further into why these "smaller" forms of racism might not be addressed. This study used a Qualtrics survey to obtain both qualitative and quantitative data on peoples' beliefs surrounding the Black Lives Matter movement, White privilege, microaggressions, the "all lives matter" response, and general knowledge surrounding racism and microaggressions. Participants were University of Richmond students enrolled in the Intro to Psychology course. The findings suggest that those who rated higher support for Black Lives Matter, higher beliefs that white privilege is very prevalent, and leaned more towards the Liberal side were more likely to find these microaggressions both racist and offensive. Additionally, participants who rated higher support for all lives matter, were less likely to think white privilege is prevalent today, and leaned more towards the Conservative side were more likely to rate the microaggressions as not as offensive and racist.

Peoples' Perception of Race-Based Microaggressions as a Function of Their Background and

Beliefs

On February 26, 2012, Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old black male, was shot and killed by

the neighborhood watchguard, George Zimmerman, while walking home. He was unarmed and

posed no threat. On August 9, 2014, Michael Brown, an 18-year-old black male, was shot and

killed by police officer Darren Wilson after fleeing an altercation with the officer. He was

unarmed and reports say he had his hands in the air, begging, "Don't shoot." On May 25, 2020,

George Floyd, a 46-year-old black male, was suffocated and killed by police officer Derek

Chauvin after he was suspected of using a counterfeit twenty-dollar bill. He was unarmed, and as

Derek Chauvin kneeled on his neck, he was heard saying, "I can't breathe." These instances of

violence towards Black people, on top of many others, sparked the Black Lives Matter

Movement, which is defined as, "the mission is to eradicate white supremacy and build local

power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes," on

the Black Lives Matter website (Day, 2017).

A large part of the Black Lives Matter movement was the plea to incriminate police

officer Derek Chauvin, which led to many protests. As some of the protests led to riots, this

raised the question of who was participating in these riots and whether they were justified. In the

midst of the riots, this led to even more police brutality, which then raised the question of

whether the police had too much protection and power and if changes should be made to this

institution. Many studies have shown, and this was also seen in the riots, that much of the police

brutality was towards people of color. A recent study done in 2021 found that only 1% of White

adults reported unfair treatment by police as opposed to their Black counterparts who reported

37% (Zeiders, Umaña-Taylor, Carbajal, & Pech, 2021). This same study also found that Black

Americans were 2.7 times more likely than white Americans to report being stopped by police based solely on suspicion with no grounds (Zeiders et al.). Specifically, young Black men were found to be the most likely to be stopped by police (Zeiders et al.). The study asked participants on a scale from 0 (never) to 6 (more than 10 times), how often they were "hassled by police because of your ethnicity/race" (Zeiders et al.). Of the 1553 youths surveyed, 23.6% of the Black participants reported at least one instance of discrimination by police only in the last year, compared to 2.9% of the white participants, and 14% of the Black participants claimed to have more than two discriminatory encounters with police in the past year (Zeiders et al.). In another study, 96% of Black women reported experiencing race-based microaggressions at least a few times per year (Donovan, Galban, Grace, Bennett, & Felicié, 2013).

African Americans have been found to report more discriminatory acts and perceived racism than any other race and are more likely to experience lifetime PTSD than Asian Americans (Sibrava, Bjornsson, Pérez Benítez, Moitra, Weisberg, & Keller, 2019). Hispanic Americans and African Americans also report experiencing more traumatic events than white people (Williams, Metzger, Leins, & DeLapp, 2018). Experiencing traumatic events can actually cause changes in the enzymes of the brain, which can be passed down genetically and increase both the parents' and child's likelihood to experience anxiety and depression (Williams et al.). On top of people of color experiencing more traumas, people who experience one trauma have been seen to be more likely to experience another (Williams et al.) which can create an endless cycle of racism and microaggressions towards an individual. One study found that instances relating to "being treated like a second-class citizen, microaggressions in which they are invalidated, and microaggressions in which they are exoticized or assumed to be similar to others in their group" can also be seen to decrease mental health (Nadal, Griffin, Wong, Hamit, &

Rasmus, 2014). The DSM-5 criteria for PTSD also includes hearing of a traumatic event of a loved one or someone close to them, which could include hearing of racist acts towards a family member or even someone who shares the same skin color as them experiencing racism that could very well happen to them (Williams et al.).

Another study found that "perceived discrimination was significantly related to trauma-related symptoms in the Black and Asian-American undergraduate samples, but not in a White undergraduate sample, after controlling for general life stressors" and that there was not sufficient treatment for these race-related stressors (Sibrava, Bjornsson, Pérez Benítez, Moitra, Weisberg, & Keller, 2019). In this same study almost 57% of African Americans reported minor racist encounters on a weekly basis (Sibrava et al.). In a five-year follow-up study, only 38% of African Americans had reductions in their PTSD symptoms, showing that often there is insufficient knowledge to treat patients with these race-based traumas (Sibrava et al.). Many people have been found to believe that undue police violence is an issue and needs to be discussed, but these same people also reported having not enough knowledge to carry out these discussions or promote a change in any way (Green, & Evans, 2021). One study found that 95.4% counselors asked did not have the proper tools or knowledge to address police violence and race-related trauma (Green, & Evans, 2021).

Aside from the lack of knowledge and care for those experiencing race-based traumas, literature has also suggested that there is a stigma around people of color seeking help for race-based traumas as a way for them to avoid taking responsibility for their own setbacks (Williams, Metzger, Leins, & DeLapp, 2018). Regarding views on racism, white people are far less likely to accept that Black people have been set back in society due to racism and racism alone (*Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project,* 2019*)*. When asked, 56% of people

thought that being Black *disadvantaged* them in this society and 59% thought being white *helped* them in this society (*Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project,* 2019). With regards to political affiliation, 70% of white Democrats believe that racism is what prevents Black people from succeeding along with less access to better schools and better jobs, which also stem from racism (*Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project*, 2019*).* However, less than 35% of white Republicans view these as reasons for setbacks, rather they are more likely to believe setbacks stem from less hard work, instability within the family, and fewer role models (*Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project*, 2019*).* In terms of building a fair, racist-free society, 64% of white Democrats believe we have not done enough compared to 15% of white Republicans. One aspect, however, that almost everyone is willing to agree on is that there is a form of bias and unfair treatment towards Black people from the police system, with 87% of Black people agreeing and 61% of white people (*Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project,* 2019*).*

It has been found that white people generally have more confidence and trust in the police, while Black people tend to experience more fear and negative thoughts surrounding the police (Zeiders et al. 2021). Additionally, people who have more positive attitudes towards the police are less likely to believe that unprovoked police violence is an issue that needs addressing (Green & Evans, 2021). These differences in beliefs surrounding police brutality towards people of color could be largely due to how Black people are portrayed in the media. Minorities have been found to be represented in a more negative light in media and are more likely to be portrayed as criminals and less likely to be portrayed as victims (Dukes & Gaither, 2017). Dukes and Gaither surveyed 453 participants who heard of a case of a white person shooting a Black person and they either heard negative or positive information about the Black victim. It was

found in this study that participants were not only more likely to give a *lesser sentence* to the white shooter of the negatively portrayed victim, but also they were more likely to *blame* a Black shooter than a white shooter (Dukes & Gaither, 2017).

Media has been shown to play an important role in how court cases play out, but nothing has been done to change these misrepresentations. Not only are is active racism still an issue, but passive racism plays a huge role in why these prejudices continue to occur. The Williams et. al study poses that "Potential causes for racial trauma include covert racism such as pervasive microaggressions– everyday racism (e.g., vague remarks and insults, disrespectful behaviors), as well as overt or traditional racism (e.g., threats, physical assault related to race, victimization by law enforcement)." Both macroaggressions and microaggressions (when experienced over a long period of time), may "begin to reshape individuals' perceptions of themselves, their ethnic group, and the benevolence of the world, leading to low self-esteem, psychological distress, and even suicidal ideation" (Williams et al., 2018). Microaggressions can be defined as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group" (Nadal, Griffin, Wong, Hamit, and Rasmus, 2014). One study describes microaggressions as "(a) constant and continual in the lives of people of color, (b) cumulative in nature and represent a lifelong burden of stress, (c) continuous reminders of the target group's second-class status in society, and (d) symbolic of past governmental injustices directed toward people of color that can be found even in monuments and buildings everywhere" (Sue, Alsaidi, Awad, Glaeser, Calle, & Mendez, 2019). The sociology surrounding microaggressions and the acceptance of them claims that people go along with and do what their ingroup does and "it is more often used to explain cases of disparate impact, where organizations or societies distribute

more resources to one group than another without overtly racist intent (e.g., a firm with an informal policy of excluding applicants from a low income, minority neighborhood due to its reputation for gangs)" (Clair & Denis, 2015).

The study by Sue et al. describes microaggressions and how people could intervene, but their likeliness to intervene will be very low unless they view these microaggressions as racist and offensive towards people of color. Until people realize just how detrimental these "micro" instances are, people will continue not to step in due to "(a) the invisibility of modern forms of bias, (b) trivializing an incident as innocuous, (c) diffusion of responsibility, (d) fear of repercussions or retaliation, and (e) the paralysis of not knowing what to do" (Sue, Alsaidi, Awad, Glaeser, Calle, & Mendez, 2019). Sue et al. claim that microaggressions alienate people and in order for these aggressions to be stopped, allies must not only not participate, but actively combat them. Black people make up 13% of the population but are 27% of deaths from police brutality, and just in 2020, over half of the people who died at the hands of law enforcement were not violent and had no weapon (Green & Evans, 2021). While something obviously needs to be done surrounding police violence towards individuals of color, change can start at the level of everyday microaggressions. *The Sociology of Racism* states that "until racism is eliminated, it is important to investigate how the targets interpret and respond to it in order to understand how racism affects them, ensure their voices are heard, and develop more effective strategies to combat racism itself" (Clair & Denis, 2015).

This study expounds on the ideas that microaggressions do occur in everyday life and have been shown to impact mental health. Previous research, however, has not studied who commits microaggressions, as a function of race, political party, views on the Black Lives Matter movement and all lives matter counter-argument, and perceptions on white privilege. This study

explores who finds these seemingly "small" microaggressions to be both racist and offensive and why or why not. Those who do not realize how offensive microaggressions can be might continue to use them and progress will never be made towards eliminating race-based traumas.

Method

Participants

This study recruited participants currently enrolled in the Introduction to Psychology course (PSYC 100) at the University of Richmond. We recruited participants by offering the incentive of participation credit in their class. 154 participants took the survey, but after eliminating those who did not meet the criterion of completing at least 50% of the survey, we had a total of 136 participants. The age range of the participants was 18-22 years. All participants had at least obtained a high-school degree. 98 of the participants identified as female, 36 identified as male, and 2 as a gender not specified. 71 of the participants identified as White/Euro-American, 14 as Black/African American, 11 as Latinx/Hispanic, 1 as Native American Indian, 25 as Asian/Asian American, 1 as Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander, 10 as multiracial, and 3 as a race that was not listed. The participants' residential areas were distributed as 29 from urban, 100 from suburban, and 7 from rural areas. Moreover, 24 participants identified their political affiliation as conservative ranging from mildly conservative to strongly conservative, 78 identified their political party as liberal ranging from mildly liberal to strongly liberal, 34 participants identified their party affiliation as neither conservative nor liberal.

Measures

The final survey administered to all participants covered the topics of views and participation in Black Lives Matter, race relations, white privilege and opportunity, police and

policing, diversity of backgrounds, stances on all lives matter, how their support has changed over time, and how they view microaggressions and their likelihood to step in to prevent microaggressions. This study, however, specifically focuses on how support differs across age, race, gender, and political affiliation, and also how peoples' views on what microaggressions are and how offensive they are differs across these areas as well.

The demographics of the participants were asked at the end of the survey. They were asked their age to measure if differences of opinions differed by generation. They were asked their race with the options being "1 White or Euro-American", "2 Black or African American", "3 Latinx or Hispanic", "4 Native American Indian", "5 Alaskan Native", "6 Asian or Asian American", "7 Native Hawaiian/ other Pacific Islander", "8 Multiracial", "9 A race that is not listed." They were asked their gender which was coded as "1 Female", "2 Male", "3 a gender that is not listed" and they were asked to specify. Their political affiliation was measured on a seven-number scale ranging from strongly conservative to strongly liberal.

The specific area we focused on was microaggressions and how offensive participants believed they were and how racist they believed they were. Participants were asked to define in their own words both "racism" and "microaggression." The questions regarding microaggressions were on a scale from 1-10 with 1 being "not at all offensive" and 10 being "highly offensive" and another scale from 1-10 with 1 being "not at all racist" and 10 being "extremely racist." The specific microaggressions we asked about were in the context of a white person speaking to a Black person saying, "I feel like people who don't succeed in this society do not work hard enough," "As a woman I know what you go through as a racial minority," "When I look at you I don't see color," "America is a melting pot," "Where were you *actually* born," "You don't *act* black," "Wow! I did not expect you to be so well spoken," "You must be

so fast. What sport do you play?" "Oh! You are a professor? I thought you were a janitor." To ensure that participants were reading the questions carefully and not just clicking through with a response set, three measurement questions were added that should not have been considered offensive or racist. These statements were, "Do you know where the closest grocery store is from here?" "Those are great shoes!" and "What do you think of the upcoming election?"

Procedure

Four honors thesis students and five PSYC 300 (Methods & Core Analysis Project) students worked together to modify a pre-existing survey that explores attitudes towards Black Lives Matter. The researchers brainstormed and added additional survey questions over a timespan of 8 weeks. These additional questions covered topics that were not included in the previous study such as: perceptions of microaggressions/ likelihood of intervening when witnessing a microaggression; attitudes/support towards BLM pre- and post- COVID-19 pandemic; and diversity of school, neighborhoods, and social settings in relation to attitudes/support for BLM.

Upon approval from the University of Richmond's Institutional Review Board (IRB), the modified survey, "Black Lives Matter Across Generations" was administered starting in October, 2021 and concluding in March, 2022. Participants were recruited through SONA, a website utilized by researchers to administer and manage studies. Each student received course credit upon completion of our study. Students who chose to participate in our study, saw this description: "Thank you for your interest in our study! You will complete a survey with questions asking about your attitudes towards Black Lives Matter, racism, white privilege, and policing. We really care about your opinions and experiences and look forward to reading your answers. Your responses are anonymous; we will not know your identity."

The 9 student experimenters signed up for different time slots in order to have at least one person throughout the day supervising the participants. As each participant entered the lab, they were greeted and asked to sign-in. They were also told that this study's average completion time ranged from 45-60 minutes. Next, they were placed in a room with a computer that had the Qualtrics survey on the screen. After completing the survey, the participant was debriefed and thanked for their participation.

Results

We ran correlation analyses to determine how participants' ratings of these microaggressions functioned as a result of race, political affiliation, views on Black Lives Matter and all lives matter, and self-perceived "colorblindness". We also ran reliability statistics of the twelve items which provided a Cronbach's alpha of .82 for the offensiveness ratings and .84 for the racist ratings. Removing the three filler items to ensure participants were not just clicking through increased the Cronbach's alpha to .83 for offensiveness but did not change the Cronbach's alpha for racism.

We hypothesized that the statement "Oh! You are a professor? I thought you were a janitor!" (microaggression 12) would be the most offensive and racist, and the answers provided a mean score of 9.02 on a scale from 1-10 how racist it was, and a mean score of 9.60 on offensiveness. The microaggression stating, "You don't *act* black," (microaggression 8) was rated as the most racist with a mean score of 9.22, meaning out of all twelve statements people all around found this statement from a white person to a Black person to be most offensive. The filler questions showed means that corresponded with our hypothesis that these should not be found racist or offensive; microaggression 3, which states, "Do you know where the nearest grocery store is from here?" showed means of 1.44 for racism and 1.52 for offensiveness;

microaggression 5, which states, "Those are great shoes!" showed means of 1.24 for both racism and offensiveness; and microaggression 11, which states, "What do you think of the upcoming election?" showed mean scores of 2.19 for racism and 2.62 for offensiveness.

We ran correlation tests with our nine listed microaggressions and three filler questions to ensure that the participants' responses corresponded not only with their own other responses, but also other participants' responses. Microaggressions two and five, "As a woman, I know what you go through as a racial minority," and, "Those are great shoes!" showed least correlation across all participants, with a Pearson correlation of .022 and a p-value of .795. People who agreed that microaggression one was racist also strongly believed that microaggression four and microaggression eleven were racist with Pearson correlations of .466** and .423** and a significant p-value of <.05. Interestingly enough, microaggression four, which states, "When I look at you I don't see color," had a significant correlation with all other variables except microaggression five, stating, "Those are great shoes," (Pearson correlation of .152 and p-value of .078). All responses of racism and offensiveness correlated across every variable, showing internal consistency.

For microaggressions three, five, and eleven, which were the filler options, not one person answered them as being a nine or ten on the racist or offensive scale, and majority rated them as a one. This fit with our goal to use these statements as filler items and not be rated as racist or offensive. Many of the statements showed a variability of answers, but interestingly enough, for the statement "You don't *act* black," 91 of the 136 participants rated this a ten, meaning highly offensive, and 93 rated it as a ten on the racism scale as well. However, two people rated it as only a three on the racism and offensiveness scale. This shows the discrepancy between people viewing things as racist, and in turn them viewing them as offensive. If

something is perceived to be racist, it should also be perceived as offensive. In response to the question about defining what a microaggression is, however, the responses from the participant who rated this microaggression as a three were "No idea," and "Don't know what this is."

The other item we hypothesized to be the most racist and offensive was item 12, stating "Oh! You are a professor? I thought you were a janitor!" On the scale from 1-10, four participants rated this item a one, meaning not racist at all, and no one rated it a one on offensiveness, meaning all participants found this statement to at least be somewhat offensive, but not racist. One participant who rated this item as being not at all racist, however, defined a microaggression as "I don't know it. Sorry," and another responded, "Don't know though I am assuming it has to do with angering someone without letting others know that you are angering said person." One individual rated this item as a ten on the offensiveness scale, but a one on the racism scale, and their definition of a microaggression was "Aggressions towards an individual that are not explicit."

We ran a correlation analysis to determine the effects of political affiliation on responses to these microaggressions. Political affiliation ranged from 1-7 with 1 being strongly conservative and 7 being strongly liberal. For every item except item three, stating, "Do you know where the closest grocery store is from here?" the mean scores of both offensiveness and racism were higher for strong liberals than strong conservatives, meaning that liberals tended to find these microaggressions to be more offensive and racist (See Figure 2).

While there were differences in the means for racism and offensiveness, it was not significant, so we composited it the means for the two items in order to run the following correlational tests. We ran a correlation analysis of how support for Black Lives Matter and support for all lives matter influenced opinions on these items. Zero participants rated their

14

support for Black Lives matter as a 1, meaning they did not support it at all, and 71 participants responded with a 10. We ran the analysis comparing those who responded with a 5, meaning indifference, and those who responded with a 10, and the means for how offensive and racist the items were; the means were higher on every item for those who rated a level 10 on support for Black Lives Matter, as opposed to those who rated a 5 (See Figure 3). Those who rated their support for Black Lives matter as lower, however, many of the responses entailed ideas such as flaws in the organization, violence, or support for all lives matter.

Results of the correlation analysis on effects of support for all lives matter on responses to microaggressions showed that 62 participants answered a 1, meaning they did not support all lives matter, and 9 participants rated this item as a 10, meaning they fully supported all lives matter. However, the means for every item for both offensiveness and racism were lower for those who rated a 10 as opposed to a 1, meaning that those who supported all lives matter were less likely to find these microaggressions as racist or offensive (See Figure 3). Those who responded with full support for all lives matter, explained their support saying things such as "Everyones' life is important," and "All races should be equal."

Additionally, we ran a correlation analysis for participants' ratings of the microaggressions as a function of their beliefs surrounding white privilege. Participants were asked first to define their beliefs on what white privilege is and then were asked to rate on a scale from 1-10 how prevalent they felt white privilege was, with 1 being "it doesn't exist at all", and 10 being "it exists everywhere." As seen in figure 4, the results showed a positive correlation, meaning people who thought white privilege to be very prevalent everywhere also rated the microaggressions to be both more racist and offensive.

Discussion

As the previous mentioned studies and every day life have suggested, there is a clear discrepancy in the treatment of Black individuals as opposed to white individuals. There is a clear lack of understanding around mental health and race-based traumas, and this is largely due to the fact that Black people are experiencing microaggressions almost every day, yet very little has been done to address these microaggressions and how detrimental they can actually be. As one participant put it, "I am constantly thinking about the way my race plays a factor in almost everything I do in life." Our study's aim was to address these disparities in order to better understand the reasons why these microaggressions are so common and whether people even realize how harmful these "small" words or actions can be.

Our results showed that there were differences in beliefs surrounding microaggressions as functions of political affiliation, support or non-support for Black Lives Matter, and peoples' beliefs surrounding white privilege. We found that, as hypothesized, those who identified themselves to be on the more conservative side found these microaggressions to be less offensive and racist compared to those who leaned more to the liberal side, which is in line with the previously mentioned data found on *Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project*. Just these differences in ratings show that there is much educating to be done surrounding racism and what Black people themselves consider to be racist. If Black people are saying that these microaggressions are hurtful, and literature is showing that racism significantly impacts mental health, it is important for others to understand that just because they do not find something hurtful, does not mean is it not significantly impacting someone else.

After the death of George Floyd in 2020, the Black Lives Matter movement grew even bigger in an attempt to combat police brutality and push everyone to value the lives of Black

individuals as much as everyone else. The movement was in no way invalidating other races or their lives, however, many people have been seen to misinterpret this movement and counteract it with the phrase, "all lives matter." While yes, every life should matter, this statement is often used by those against Black Lives Matter who do not realize that saying "Black lives matter" is not saying that they matter *more* than other lives, but rather it is a cry from Black individuals for everyone to see that their lives matter more than society has been seen to think in the past and to highlight the mistreatment they experience every day.

The concept of "all lives matter" goes hand in hand with the idea of white privilege and the idea that being white in America gives you one leg up, an idea that many refuse to acknowledge. When asked in our survey what exactly white privilege is, one participant answered, "something that is made up," while another participant gave a vastly different answer, writing, "white privilege is the ability to go about your day without having to think of your race and how it affects how people perceive you." Our study found that the refusal to acknowledge white privilege and the idea that many have that "all lives matter" was seen to predict peoples' perceptions of microaggressions. Those who supported the claim that "all lives matter" were seen to rate the microaggressions as significantly less racist and offensive than those who support Black Lives Matter.

People who lacked knowledge around the idea of Black Lives Matter also lacked the knowledge surrounding microaggressions. We found throughout the study that quite a few people did not even know what the word "microaggression" was, something that is engraved in many Black individuals' everyday lives. We asked participants to first define this word before rating the items as racist and offensive, and what we found was that many of the people who gave lower ratings on the scales did not in fact know how to even define a microaggression. This

lack of knowledge surrounding something that is so common and many peoples' everyday lives shows that people are not realizing just how hurtful and harmful the things they say or do really can be.

On top of defining microaggressions, the other written portions of the survey provided vastly different answers on many of the items. One participant defined being Black in America as "having life on difficult mode", while another claimed that they feel as if, "Because of their past sometimes African Americans expect to get special treatment." These two vastly different answers show that these microaggressions are occurring because people do not even realize that many Black individuals go about their lives "wondering whether you have a seat at the table," as one participant put it.

Black Lives Matter, the movement, is one that is aimed towards advocating for the equal treatment of Black individuals, and this starts at the everyday things that people are experiencing. As one participant put it, "You cannot oppress the oppressor." If individuals fail to acknowledge that while they might not currently be "oppressing," they are still playing a part in the system that was built to disadvantage Black individuals in America, things may never change. While there is still a long way to go with the movement, and there are still very large acts of racism occurring everyday as seen in the very recent data from Zeiders et al., by learning and realizing that microaggressions, which are often overlooked, play a large role in making Black individuals feel as if their lives are valued less by not only the police system, but those around them as well. As one participant in the survey defined microaggressions, "(They are) the little things that people do against others that often fly under the radar, and if persist long enough, will eventually become another tool to suppress." Microaggressions are the subtle ways in which people further oppress Black individuals by grouping them into stereotypes and invalidating their experiences.

The chosen microaggressions we used in this study are things that many people hear in their everyday lives, and while these comments go unnoticed by most, it is not being ignored by the person receiving the comment. A scale was proposed in 2012 called the Racial Microaggressions Scale, which highlighted the categories of microaggressions that people experience, some of which were the themes of "alien in their own land," "ascription of intelligence," "colorblindness," "assumption of criminality," and "invalidation of interethnic differences" (Torres-Harding, Andrade, & Romero Diaz, 2012). Asking someone where they were *actually* born, such as in microaggression seven, implies that that person is not "American" and does not belong here. Telling someone that you do not see their color or that "America is just a melting pot" disregards and discredits someone's race and implies that everyone has just melted into the "dominant" culture, or White culture. Saying to someone that they do not *act* their race or implying a racial stereotype lumps every Black person into one stereotype and disregards their race if they do not act or think how people have stereotyped them to. Mistaking a Black professor for a service worker, while it seems like an innocent mistake, implies that the professor is not who or where he should be and reaffirms this prejudice that certain jobs and certain professions are for certain genders and certain skin colors. To some, what may seem as a small racial comment not meant to harm, for others it is a buildup of a lifetime of "small comments" and mistreatments that can completely alter someone's mental health.

This paper has focused largely on microaggressions, but macroaggressions and overt racism are still occurring everywhere around us. The purpose of this paper was to bring awareness to these topics and better understand the microaggressions we might not even know are occurring around us. One limitation of this study is the fact that it was limited to Intro to Psychology students at the University of Richmond. In order to further delve into the differences

behind race and political affiliations and perceptions of microaggressions a much more diverse sample would be needed. When asked about the diversity of University of Richmond, 28 participants rated the diversity either a 4 or 5, meaning they feel as if their school is very diverse. The reality is, as of 2019, 62% of the University of Richmond student population identify as white (*University of Richmond,* 2019). A similar study found that at a predominately white University, throughout their focus groups they identified over 70 racial microaggressions just within their one study in the residence halls (Harwood, Huntt, Mendenhall, & Lewis, 2012). Future studies could be done delving further into race-based microaggressions in the classrooms, study areas, dining halls, and other areas on campuses.

College is known to be a very vulnerable and growth-filled time, and as previous studies have suggested, microaggressions are occurring everywhere and they can severely impact mental health. Research has suggested that not only is race-based therapy very lacking, but microaggressions are often not even addressed in clinical settings (Sue, 2010). It is important that people not only understand microaggressions but are also aware and able to address these situations when they occur. Further research is needed to investigate why these disparities in clinical settings are occurring and how to better educate practitioners on these microaggressions, because often most people are unaware they are happening.

Not only was lack of diversity of race a limitation in this study, but also a lack of diversity in demographics. Aside from 13 out of the 136 participants, all participants in this study were born and raised in the United States of America. Future research regarding different ethnicities, backgrounds, etc. could be done to determine what differences are found across these different demographics and why those differences might be occurring. Much of this survey was

quantitative, but qualitative surveys, and what qualitative data we obtained from our survey, can

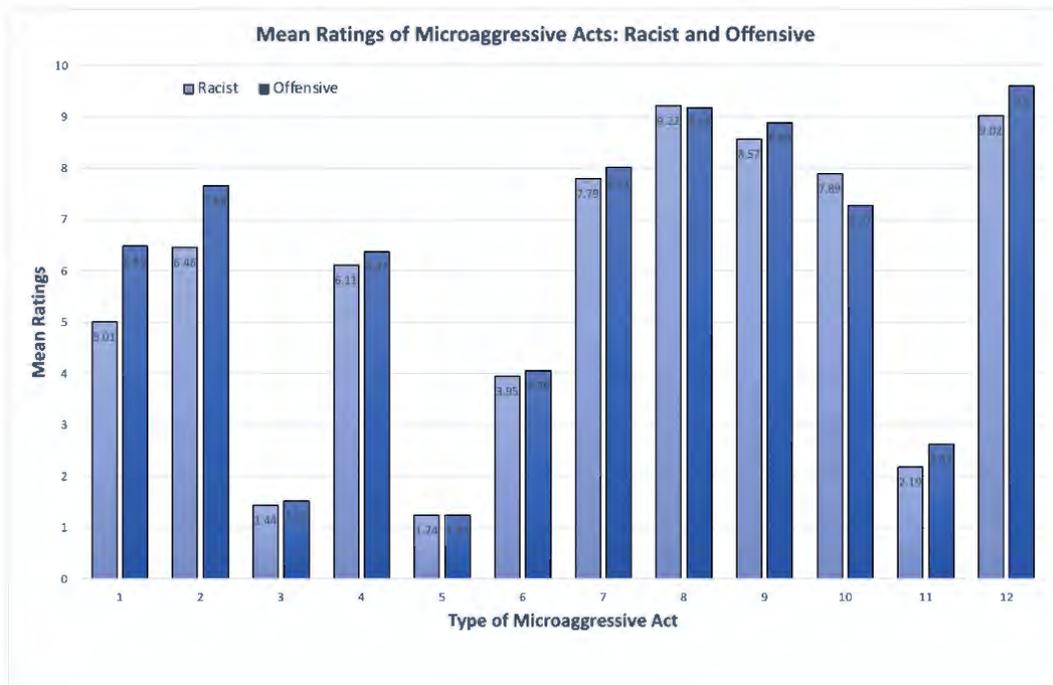be very informative on *why* things are happening, not just that they are happening.

Figure 1. The overall mean ratings on a scale from 1-10 of how racist and offensive the microaggressions were perceived to be.
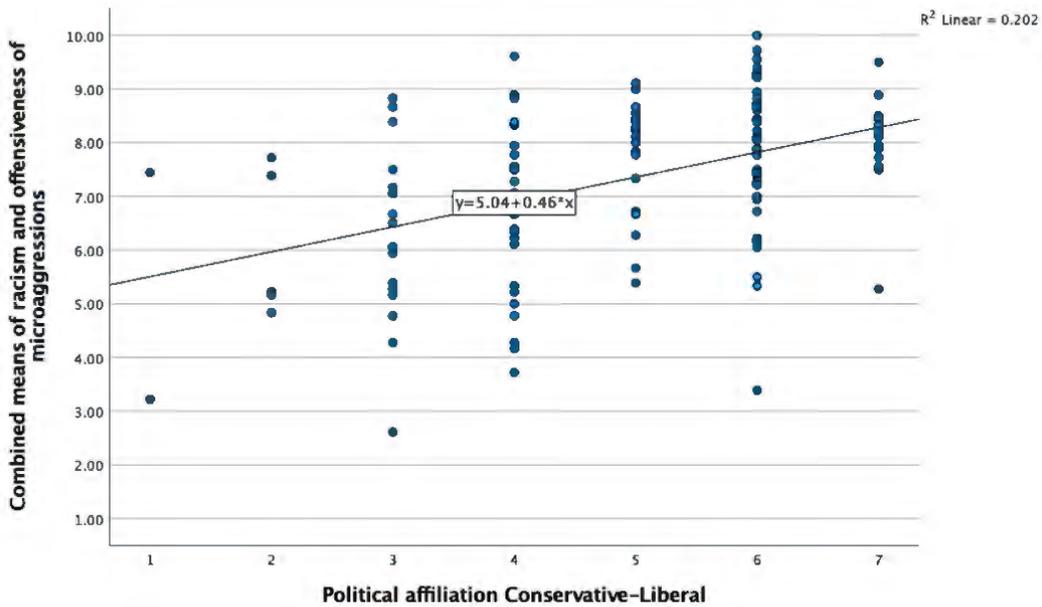

Figure 2. Combined mean ratings of how racist and offensive the microaggressions were as a function of Political affiliation.
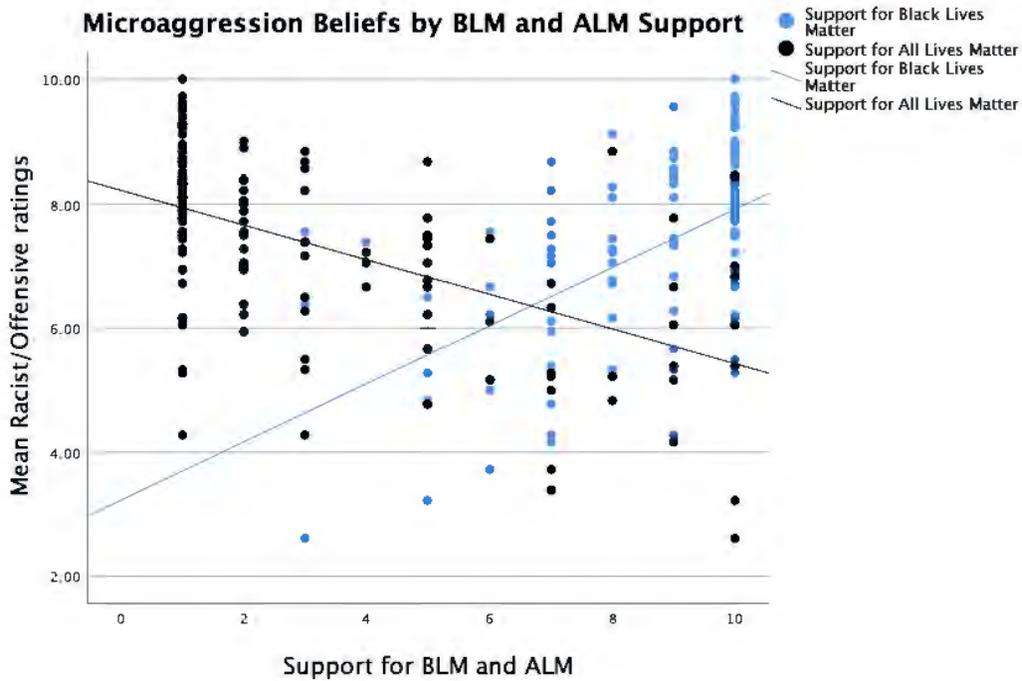
Figure 3. Combined mean ratings of how racist and offensive the microaggressions were as a function of support for Black Lives Matter and all lives matter.
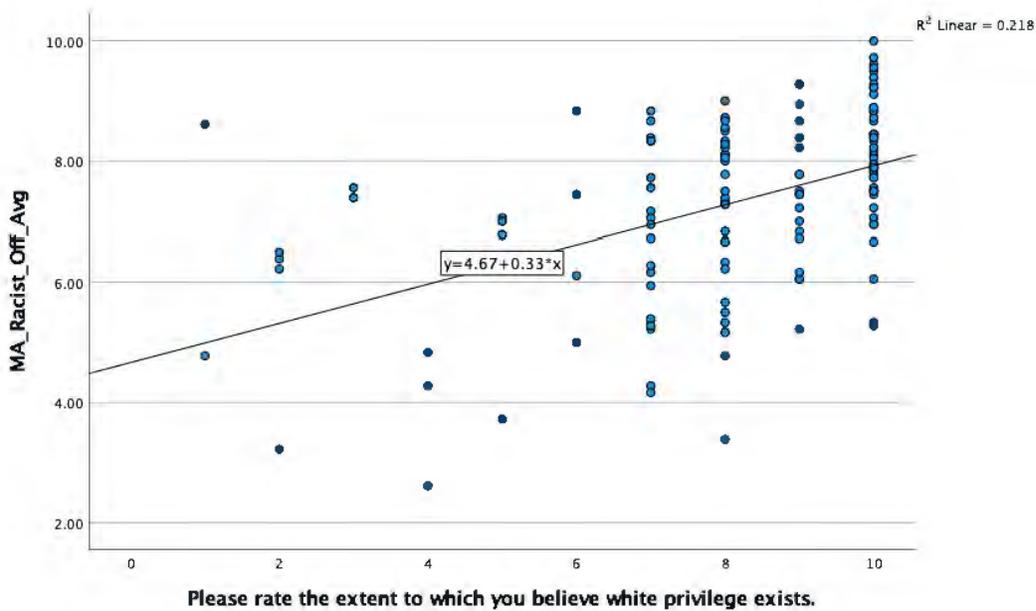

Figure 4. Combined mean ratings of how racist and offensive the microaggressions were as a function of beliefs surrounding white privilege.

References

Clair, M., & Denis, J. S. (2015). Sociology of racism. *The International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *19*, 857–863

Day, E., 2017. *#BlackLivesMatter: the birth of a new civil rights movement*. [online] the Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/19/blacklivesmatter-birth-civil-rights-movement> [Accessed 27 April 2022].

Donovan, R. A., Galban, D. J., Grace, R. K., Bennett, J. K., & Felicié, S. Z. (2013). Impact of Racial Macro- and Microaggressions in Black Women's Lives: A Preliminary Analysis. *Journal of Black Psychology*, *39*(2), 185-196. https://doi.org/10.1177/0095798412443259

Dukes, K.N. and Gaither, S.E. (2017), Black racial stereotypes and victim blaming: implications for media coverage and criminal croceedings in cases of police violence against racial and ethnic minorities. Journal of Social Issues, 73: 789-807. https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12248

Green, D. A., & Evans, A. M. (2021). Undue police violence toward African Americans: An analysis of professional counselors' training and perceptions. Journal of Counseling & Development, 99(4), 363–371. https://doi.org/10.1002/jcad.12389

Harwood, S. A., Huntt, M. B., Mendenhall, R., & Lewis, J. A. (2012). Racial microaggressions in the residence halls: Experiences of students of color at a predominantly White university. Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 5(3), 159–173. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0028956

Nadal, K.L., Griffin, K.E., Wong, Y., Hamit, S. and Rasmus, M. (2014), The Impact of racial

microaggressions on mental health: counseling implications for clients of color. Journal of Counseling & Development, 92: 57-66. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.2014.00130.x

Sibrava, N. J., Bjornsson, A. S., Pérez Benítez, A., Moitra, E., Weisberg, R. B., & Keller, M. B. (2019). Posttraumatic stress disorder in African American and Latinx adults: Clinical course and the role of racial and ethnic discrimination. *The American psychologist*, *74*(1), 101–116. https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000339

Sue, D. W. (2010). Microaggressions in everyday life: Race, gender, and sexual orientation. *John Wiley & Sons.*

Sue, D. W., Alsaidi, S., Awad, M. N., Glaeser, E., Calle, C. Z., & Mendez, N. (2019). Disarming racial microaggressions: Microintervention strategies for targets, White allies, and bystanders. American Psychologist, 74(1), 128–142. https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000296

Torres-Harding, S. R., Andrade, A. L., Jr., & 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. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0027658

University of richmond | data usa. (n.d.). Retrieved 27 April 2022, from https://datausa.io/profile/university/university-of-richmond

Views on race in America 2019. (2019, April 9). Pe*w Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project*. https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2019/04/09/race-in-america-2019/

Williams, M. T., Metzger, I. W., Leins, C., & DeLapp, C. (2018). Assessing racial trauma within

a DSM–5 framework: The UConn Racial/Ethnic Stress & Trauma Survey. *Practice*

Innovations, 3(4), 242.

Zeiders, K. H., Umaña-Taylor, A. J., Carbajal, S., & Pech, A. (2021). Police discrimination

among Black, Latina/x/o, and White adolescents: Examining frequency and relations to

academic functioning. Journal of Adolescence, 90, 91–99.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2021.06.001