



Perceptions of Microaggressions and Color-Blind Racial Attitudes among College Students

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ABSTRACT

We examined the relation between color-blind racial attitudes (i.e., the perspective that race should not and does not matter; Neville et al., 2007) and perceptions of microaggressions (i.e., identity-based insults) among students at Predominantly White Institutions, as the literature suggests that experiences with these transgressions may be heightened for Students of Color attending these universities. After completing survey items and being exposed to several vignettes, participants were asked to rate the degree to which they found the scenarios offensive or problematic. Results of the study suggest that individuals who hold stronger color-blind racial attitudes are less likely to perceive microaggressive situations as offensive. Implications for addressing microaggressions particularly among white students in higher education holding color-blind attitudes are addressed.

Keywords: color-blind racial attitudes, microaggressions, higher education

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pierce (1970) first used the term microaggression to describe subtle, unconscious, and automatic putdowns that Black individuals regularly receive from their white counterparts. Today, researchers broadly define microaggressions as verbal, behavioral, or environmental insults that are directed at individuals who hold marginalized identities and are acts of oppression that occur as a result of institutional and systemic inequities (Sue et al., 2007). Although microaggressions are often administered unintentionally, as they are at times meant as compliments, jokes, or conversation starters, these transgressions may have a negative impact on those receiving them (Sue et al., 2007). Microaggressions can take many forms and can come from many different sources. For example, individuals may receive microaggressions from strangers, while these insults may also be disseminated from individuals a receiver regularly interacts with, such as family, friends, classmates, or professors. Microaggressions can be based on any or multiple marginalized identity a person holds (e.g., gender alone, sexual orientation and disability), while the focus of the current paper is on race-based microaggressions and the experiences of People of Color. Researchers have categorized microaggressions as microassaults, which are intentional and conscious behaviors or comments (e.g., using a racial slur), microinsults which are demeaning comments or actions (e.g., saying that someone is a credit to their race due to their achievements), and microinvalidations which negate or ignore an individual's feelings or experiences (e.g., commenting that not everything is about race; (Sue et al., 2007). Racial microassaults are better conceptualized as outright racism and are deemed less socially acceptable. Microinsults and microinvalidations fit better with the definition of microaggression and are the focus of the current study.

Aside from racial microaggressions, color-blind racial attitudes are another focus of the current study. Such attitudes refer to perspective that one should not acknowledge race, but instead should focus on similarities among individuals (Neville et al., 2007). Our culture's shift to preference for color-blind racial attitudes emerged during the transition from the Jim Crow to Post Civil Rights era, in which we saw society push for equality and to eradicate racial bias. Although we acknowledge that this frame of thinking was well-intentioned, a color-blind perspective ignores the lived experiences of those holding racialized identities, as macro- and micro-level racial injustice did not end following the Civil Rights Movement. Research suggests that individuals continue to hold color-blind racial attitudes today (Neville et al., 2007), and

for the purpose of the current study, we were interested in examining how these attitudes are related to individuals' perceptions of racial microaggressions, which we know to negatively impact those on the receiving end.

The Impact of Microaggressions

A significant number of research studies have been conducted to examine the negative impact of microaggressions. Sue and colleagues (2007) discuss the dilemma of managing microaggressions, as receivers must make sense of what occurred and decide whether or not to respond. Either choice may lead to a negative outcome for the receiver. When choosing to provide feedback, receivers must then manage defensive or dismissive responses from those who harmed them. On the other hand, a decision to withhold their true feelings may result in loss of self-integrity. Both of these experiences may contribute to "racial battle fatigue," which points to the physiological and psychological stress People of Color deal with when managing race-based microaggressions (Smith et al., 2007). More specifically, racial battle fatigue is associated with anxiety, sleep difficulties, hypervigilance, withdrawal, and anger in People of Color (Smith et al., 2007).

In an experimental study conducted by Wong-Padoongpatt and colleagues (2017), researchers studied the impact of racial microaggressions on Asian American individuals depending on the race of the perpetrator. Researchers found that experiencing microaggressions, particularly from white people as opposed to Asian American individuals, negatively influenced self-esteem and increased stress. Further, Nadal and colleagues (2014) have also found that experiences with microaggressions are related to symptomology of depression, anxiety, and other mental health concerns particularly among People of Color. Later research by the same author suggests that microaggressions do not only impact mental health, but are related to worse physical health, with setting (e.g., school, workplace) playing a role in the type of health concern (Nadal et al., 2017).

Relevant to the purpose of the current study, we know that experiences with microaggressions can also impact university students' perceptions of campus climate. A great deal of research has been conducted to examine the impact of school climate on student success, which Thapa and colleagues (2013) state is "based on patterns of people's experiences of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures" (p. 358). Much of this literature has focused on K-12 schools and has noted several academic and social-emotional benefits of a positive school climate, where students feel

safe and respected in the learning environment (Thapa et al., 2013). Although a different setting, these findings can be applied to university campuses. Researchers emphasize the importance of how individuals view the campus, as climate is “a function of what one has personally experienced, but also is influenced by perceptions of how members of the academy are regarded on campus” (Rankin & Reason, 2005, p. 52). Results of research studies suggests that students holding marginalized racial identities experience the campus climate differently than their white counterparts. Specifically, given experiences with racism and harassment, Students of Color at Predominantly White Institutions have identified their campus climates as hostile in comparison to their white peers (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Rankin & Reason, 2005).

Blatant instances of racism, however, are not the only experiences that negatively impact the way Students of Color perceive their campuses, as research suggests that microaggressions play a role in shaping the way individuals view climate. For example, Solórzano and colleagues (2000) used focus group interview data to examine the microaggressive experiences of African American students on a college campus. Researchers were particularly interested in how these experiences impacted the functioning of students. Participants endorsed experiences of blatant discrimination that contributed to their interpretation of their university as hostile, and also noted that their experiences with racial microaggressions in academic and social spaces made them feel unwelcome on campus. Similarly, as part of a large study at their institution, Harwood and colleagues (2012) conducted focus groups with African American, Asian American, Latino, and Native American students. Participants discussed their experiences with microaggressions, as researchers identified more than 70 racial microaggressions that students reported experiencing regularly on campus. These microaggressions were verbal, behavioral, and environmental in nature and occurred across all spaces on campus, including classrooms, residence halls, and study areas. These experiences with microaggressions were associated with negative perceptions of campus climate, which can impact student retention and engagement (Brezinski et al., 2018).

Potentially most relevant to the college student experience, microaggressions may directly impact students’ ability to learn effectively. Some research suggests that individuals experience an immediate depletion in cognitive resources as a result of experiencing microaggressions. For example, although they did not label the manipulation as a microaggression, Murphy and colleagues (2013) found that exposure to subtle racism had a greater impact on the depletion of cognitive resources in Black college

students, as compared to instances of blatant racism. Bair and Steele (2010) also found direct links between exposure to prejudiced encounters and diminished cognitive functioning in Black college students, although this was only relevant for participants who reported high levels of racial centrality (i.e., race is an important part of my self-concept). Finally, in a study conducted by (Banks & Cicciarelli, 2019), researchers found that college Students of Color who were exposed to a racially derogatory term experienced diminished cognitive functioning when compared to their white counterparts. Taken together, students on the receiving end of microaggressions are clearly at a disadvantage on the college campus, as they have to manage constant exposure to these insults that may directly impact their physical, psychological, social-emotional, and cognitive functioning. Although research has not explored this relationship, it may be the case that exposure to racial microaggressions directly impacts the degree to which Students of Color persist and reach their academic goals at Predominantly White Institutions, given what we know about campus climate and retention (Rankin & Reason, 2005).

Color-blind Racial Attitudes

As mentioned previously, color-blind racial attitudes encompass the idea that “race should not and does not matter” (Neville et al., 2007). Although the first part of this idea is well-intentioned, the latter part ignores and diminishes the experiences and lived reality of those who hold marginalized racial identities. Race is a noticeable characteristic that triggers immediate preconceived notions, ideas, and previous experiences. To argue that race is not important ignores oppression and injustices that those with marginalized racial identities have historically and are currently experiencing. Although color-blind racial attitudes have received some attention in the literature, few studies using empirical measures of color-blind racial attitudes have been conducted. To fill this gap in the literature, Neville and colleagues (2007) developed and validated the *Color-blind Racial Attitudes Scale (CoBRAS)*. In their study, researchers found that color-blind racial attitudes were linked to racism and to the idea that white privilege does not exist. Holding the belief that race does not and should not matter does not prevent individuals from holding racial biases that influence how they view individuals with marginalized racial identities. It may also prevent white individuals from recognizing certain advantages they have in life because of their racial background, while simultaneously ignoring disadvantages People of Color may experience.

Color-blind Racial Attitudes and Microaggressions

Some research has explored the connection between color-blind racial attitudes and microaggressions. For example, in a study conducted by Kim and colleagues (2019) researchers explored the relationship between color-blind racial attitudes, as measured by *CoBRAS* (Neville et al., 2007), and the perception of the negative effects of microaggressions in the workplace. Researchers found that white participants with higher ratings on *CoBRAS* (Neville et al., 2007), meaning they held stronger color-blind racial attitudes, were less likely to find microaggressions problematic. Similar to the purpose of the current study, Offermann and colleagues (2014) found that those who held color-blind racial attitudes were less likely to identify microaggressions and blatant racism. This research implies that holding color-blind racial attitudes may influence an individual's ability to perceive or recognize microaggressions. It may also impact an individual's perceptions of microaggressions, making them more likely to find microaggressions less problematic. Finally, Wise (2021) found that for white participants, the negative relation between color-blind racial attitudes and the endorsement of racial microaggressions as offensive or problematic is explained by one's awareness of privilege.

Gaps in the Literature

Although microaggressions have recently received an increasing amount of attention from researchers and have been demonstrated to have negative effects for those on the receiving end, some scholars question the current state of the literature. Specifically, some researchers argue that classifying an act or statement as microaggressive is difficult, as we have not engaged in research to evaluate the degree to which members of a particular group deem a specific action or statement as microaggressive (Lilienfeld, 2017). Further, while one person may label an encounter as microaggressive, another individual holding similar identities may not interpret it the same way and in turn may not experience any negative consequences as a result of exposure (Lilienfeld, 2017). Additionally, a great deal of research on microaggressions has been qualitative in nature, generally through self-report and focus groups. Although some argue that qualitative research should not be the focus, because it lacks a certain experimental rigor (Lilienfeld, 2017; Wong et al., 2014), it is important to note that both qualitative and quantitative forms of research have strengths and weaknesses (Queirós et al., 2017). Further, given several studies demonstrating that negative consequences are associated with microaggressions, it seems the focus should shift towards how to combat these transgressions, rather than determining whether or not some

agree about their existence. In addition, examining factors that are associated with microaggressions and individuals' perceptions of them may help determine how to best address them. We were specifically interested in building on previous research (Kim et al., 2019; Offermann et al., 2014) by exploring color-blind racial attitudes as a potential factor that predicts perceptions of these transgressions.

Further, the state of the microaggression literature could benefit from diverse research methodologies. As part of the current study, researchers sought to address this gap by using quantitative methods to examine participant responses to microaggressive exchanges. Lilienfeld (2017) also argues that there is difficulty in determining whether microaggressions are perceived as offensive. Researchers address this issue in the current study by directly asking participants whether or not they found various microaggressive scenarios offensive. Finally, Lilienfeld (2017) and Wong and colleagues (2014) stress the importance of examining individual difference variables that may contribute to one's interpretation of microaggression. This contributes to the issue described earlier surrounding the differential interpretation of these microaggressions as offensive or not. We sought to address this issue by examining the influence of color-blind racial attitudes on participant interpretations of microaggressions as offensive or insulting.

The Current Study

Researchers sought to add to the current literature by examining the relation between color-blind racial attitudes and perceived offensiveness of microaggressions. Although similar research on this topic has been conducted (Kim et al., 2019; Offermann et al., 2014), this study adds to the literature by examining this relation with university students instead of individuals in the workplace. Researchers must engage in scholarship to directly assess how university students interpret microaggressive exchanges, given research suggests these transgressions occur frequently in this setting and may negatively impact students' functioning. Prior to data collection, researchers hypothesized that color-blind racial attitudes would predict the degree to which participants would rate microaggressive encounters as offensiveness. This hypothesis was based on the notion that individuals holding color-blind racial attitudes are less attuned to the offensive nature of the scenarios, and therefore less likely to find them offensive. Researchers were also interested in examining differences in ratings given race and gender. Specifically, we hypothesized that women would rate the microaggressive encounters as more offensiveness than men and that participants of color would rate the

microaggressive encounters as more offensiveness than white participants. The hypotheses surrounding race and gender are based on prior research that suggests individuals holding non-racial marginalized identities are better able to detect microaggressions and rate them as offensive (Banks & Landau, 2020).

RESEARCH METHOD

Participants

Participants in the current study included 235 individuals enrolled at a mid-sized, midwestern, Predominately White Institution. Specifically, Students of Color at the institution represented 8% of the student body. Participant age ranged from 18 to 59 ($M = 22.96$, $SD = 6.61$). Participants' self-reported year in school was as follows: 14.5% freshman, 10.6% sophomore, 32.8% junior, 17.4% senior, and 24.7% graduate student. Data regarding race/ethnicity (198 white, 8 Black/African American, 12 Latinx, 9 Asian, and 6 multi-Racial) and gender (55 men, 177 women, 2 non-binary, and 1 other) were also gathered. Two participants did not report their race.

Materials

The *Color-blind Racial Attitudes Scale (CoBRAS)* (Neville et al., 2007) is a self-report measure of color-blind racial attitudes. The measure includes 20 items that respondents rate on a 6-point Likert scale (i.e., *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*) that contains three subscales; *Unawareness of Racial Privilege* (e.g., "White people in the U.S. have certain advantages because of the color of their skin") *Institutional Discrimination* (e.g., "Due to racial discrimination, programs such as affirmative action are necessary to help create equality") and *Blatant Racial Issues* (e.g., "Racism is major problem in the U.S."). Research suggests that the *CoBRAS* (Neville et al., 2007) is related to other measures of racial attitudes and that "greater endorsement of color-blind racial attitudes [is] related to greater levels of racial prejudice" (Neville et al., 2007, p. 59). Internal consistency coefficients for the initial examination of the measure were acceptable, ranging from .70 to .86.

Procedure

Following approval from their university's Institutional Review Board, researchers recruited participants through a mass email that was disseminated to all individuals at the university who had opted to receive notifications about research studies. Using the online data collection tool Qualtrics, participants completed a survey that first asked for demographic information, including their year in school, age, gender identity, and race.

Next, participants viewed four scenarios (see Appendix A) that were created by the researchers. Each scenario depicted a woman of color (i.e., African American, Latinx, Asian American, and Native American) receiving a racial microaggression from a white individual with a witness present. Specifically, participants viewed the following four scenarios:

Scenario 1: Rachel is an African American physics major at Illinois State University. One day while working on a group project with Mark and David, who are both white men, they get on the subject of graduate school. Mark expresses his concern with getting into a program and Rachel sympathizes with him. "Well, you don't have to worry. You'll get in because of affirmative action. You're Black and female, so you hit the jackpot." Mark tells her.

Scenario 2: Lily is a student at Illinois State University who immigrated from China when she was 9 years old. In one of her classes, she has to give a presentation in front of her whole class, something she is not looking forward to, as she hates public speaking. However, the day arrives, and her presentation goes really well. Lily returns to her seat beside her friend Chloe and is feeling great about how she's done. A girl, Holly, who is sitting behind her, leans in and whispers what she intends to be a compliment, "Wow, you did a good job! Your English was really good."

Scenario 3: Taylor is a Latinx student at Illinois State University whose parents are originally from Mexico. One day at lunch with her friends, Nicole and Anna, the three of them began to talk about their Halloween plans. After Taylor shares with them her family's Día De Los Muertos traditions, Nicole, comments, "Wow! That's so cool. I've always wanted to dress up like the Day of the Dead people. Maybe I'll make that my costume this year!"

Scenario 4: Kena is a Native American History major at Illinois State University. She is currently enrolled in a number of history courses including "Colonial Life and Institutions" with her friend Darby. She is particularly excited for this course, as colonial history is her major area of interest. As someone who is deeply rooted in her Native American identity, Kena speaks to the injustices against Native American individuals at the hands of colonial settlers. "I hear you, but I feel like people really need to let that go. Not everything is about

race.” Laura, one of her classmates, says after a particularly heated argument.

After reading each scenario, participants indicated whether or not they found the white individual’s comments offensive, by indicating “yes” or “no.” Participants who responded “yes” viewed a follow-up question that asked them to offer an explanation as to why they found the comment offensive. Additional questions were presented to solicit information surrounding prior exposure to the microaggression described in the scenarios (e.g., Has something like this ever been said to you?). These data (i.e., follow-up and prior exposure items) were not examined as part of the current study. Participants then completed the *CoBRAS* (Neville et al., 2007).

RESULTS

Prior to conducting analyses to address the primary research questions, variables were coded to interpret facilitation. Specifically, a racial status variable was created and coded as 0 for white participants and 1 for participants who reported their racial background as Black, Latinx, Asian, or multiracial. This approach was taken because there were a limited number of participants who indicated a race other than white, given data were collected at a Predominantly White Institution. Gender was recoded as 1 for cisgender women and 0 for cisgender men. Data were not analyzed for those reporting non-binary status or other as their gender, as there were not enough cases to examine differences. Based on the structure of the *CoBRAS* (Neville et al., 2007) outlined in the original study, researchers calculated scores to obtain the *Unawareness of Racial Privilege*, *Institutional Discrimination*, and *Blatant Racial Issues* subscales. The obtained subscales were reliable, as correlation coefficients ranged from 0.83 to 0.94.

Shapiro Wilk tests of normality indicated that the *Unawareness of Racial Privilege* ($W = .96, p < .01$), *Institutional Discrimination* ($W = .94, p < .01$), and *Blatant Racial Issues* ($W = .88, p < .01$) subscale composites were not normally distributed, so nonparametric tests were used to examine these data. Specifically, binary logistic regressions were performed to determine the effects of *CoBRAS* (Neville et al., 2007) ratings on the likelihood that participants found each scenario offensive or not. Results of the analyses indicate that participants providing higher ratings on the *Institutional Discrimination* (e.g., “Due to racial discrimination, programs such as affirmative action are necessary to help create equality”) subscale were more likely to rate Scenario 1 and 2 as offensive. Likewise, the *Unawareness of Racial Privilege* (e.g., “White people in the U.S. have certain advantages

because of the color of their skin”) subscale predicted offensive ratings for Scenario 3, while the *Blatant Racial Issues* (e.g., “Racism is major problem in the U.S.”) subscale predicted offensiveness ratings for Scenario 4. Results of these analyses are reported in Table 1. It should also be noted that the Hosmer and Lemeshow analysis across each scenario was not significant, with the exception of Scenario 2. Further, the Nagelkerke R2 values for each scenario demonstrate the *CoBRAS* (Neville et al., 2007) subscales explained at least 26% of the variance in offensiveness ratings (i.e., Scenario 1 = 0.37, Scenario 2 = 0.31, Scenario 3 = 0.26, and Scenario 4 = 0.38).

Table 1:
Binary Logistic Regressions – CoBRAS Predicting Offensiveness Ratings

| | <i>B</i> | <i>SE</i> | <i>Wald</i> | <i>p</i> | <i>Exp(B)</i> | <i>95% CI</i> |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------------|-----------|---------------|---------------|
| Scenario 1 | | | | | | |
| Constant | 6.62 | 0.95 | 48.33 | <.01 | 748.95 | |
| URP | -0.42 | 0.29 | 2.07 | .15 | 0.66 | 0.38-1.16 |
| ID | -0.98 | 0.31 | 9.86 | <.01 | 0.38 | 0.20-0.69 |
| BRI | -0.07 | 0.35 | 0.05 | .83 | 0.93 | 0.47-1.84 |
| | | | χ^2 | <i>df</i> | <i>p</i> | |
| H&L | | | 7.53 | 8 | .48 | |
| Model | | | 49.31 | 3 | <.01 | |
| Scenario 2 | | | | | | |
| Constant | 3.98 | 0.54 | 54.52 | <.01 | 53.65 | |
| URP | -0.37 | 0.21 | 3.17 | .08 | 0.69 | 0.46-1.04 |
| ID | -0.83 | 0.23 | 13.18 | <.01 | 0.44 | 0.28-0.68 |
| BRI | 0.09 | 0.27 | 0.11 | .74 | 1.10 | 0.64-1.87 |
| | | | χ^2 | <i>df</i> | <i>p</i> | |
| H&L | | | 17.28 | 8 | .03 | |
| Model | | | 57.10 | 3 | <.01 | |
| Scenario 3 | | | | | | |
| Constant | 2.52 | 0.44 | 32.75 | <.01 | 12.39 | |
| URP | -0.58 | 0.19 | 9.20 | <.01 | 0.56 | 0.38-0.81 |

| | | | | | | |
|-------------------|-------|----------|-----------|----------|--------|-----------|
| ID | 0.08 | 0.21 | 0.13 | .72 | 1.08 | 0.71-1.64 |
| BRI | -0.54 | 0.28 | 3.63 | .06 | 0.58 | 0.33-1.02 |
| <hr/> | | | | | | |
| | | χ^2 | <i>df</i> | <i>p</i> | | |
| H&L | | 6.11 | 8 | 0.64 | | |
| Model | | 49.48 | 3 | <.01 | | |
| <hr/> | | | | | | |
| Scenario 4 | | | | | | |
| Constant | 5.48 | 0.73 | 55.74 | <.01 | 238.88 | |
| URP | -0.24 | 0.25 | 0.96 | .33 | 0.78 | 0.48-1.28 |
| ID | -0.18 | 0.28 | 0.40 | .53 | 0.84 | 0.48-1.45 |
| BRI | -1.11 | 0.33 | 11.15 | <.01 | 0.33 | 0.17-0.63 |
| <hr/> | | | | | | |
| | | χ^2 | <i>df</i> | <i>p</i> | | |
| H&L | | 7.32 | 8 | .5 | | |
| Model | | 60.51 | 3 | <.01 | | |

Note. Unawareness of Racial Privilege = URP, ID = Institutional Discrimination, BRI = Blatant Racial Issues, H&L = Hosmer and Lemeshow

Before examining the impact of race and gender on participant ratings of offensiveness, analyses were conducted to determine if at least half of the overall sample found each scenario offensive. Results of binomial tests indicated that the proportion of “yes” responses for Scenario 1 (.88), Scenario 2 (.70), and Scenario 4 (.83) was significantly higher than .50, $p < .01$. Significance did not surface for Scenario 3, as the proportion of “yes” responses was .50. Two-way Analyses of Variance were conducted to determine the effect of race and gender on offensiveness ratings. Means and standard deviations are reported in Table 2, and results of analyses are reported in Tables 3 through 6. Significant main effects were identified for gender across scenarios, as cisgender women reported higher offensiveness ratings than cisgender men. Race only significantly predicted offensiveness ratings for Scenario 3, as participants of color reported less offense when compared to their white counterparts. Significant interactions between race and gender did not surface for any of the scenarios.

Table 2:
ANOVA Descriptive Data

| | <i>n</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|-----------------------|----------|----------|-----------|
| Scenario 1 | | | |
| POC cisgender men | 10 | 0.80 | 0.42 |
| POC cisgender women | 25 | 0.92 | 0.28 |
| White cisgender men | 45 | 0.73 | 0.45 |
| White cisgender women | 151 | 0.93 | 0.26 |
| Scenario 2 | | | |
| POC cisgender men | 10 | 0.50 | 0.53 |
| POC cisgender women | 25 | 0.76 | 0.44 |
| White cisgender men | 45 | 0.49 | 0.51 |
| White cisgender women | 151 | 0.76 | 0.43 |
| Scenario 3 | | | |
| POC cisgender men | 10 | 0.10 | 0.32 |
| POC cisgender women | 25 | 0.40 | 0.50 |
| White cisgender men | 45 | 0.36 | 0.48 |
| White cisgender women | 150 | 0.59 | 0.49 |
| Scenario 4 | | | |
| POC cisgender men | 10 | 0.70 | 0.48 |
| POC cisgender women | 25 | 0.96 | 0.20 |
| White cisgender men | 45 | 0.78 | 0.42 |
| White cisgender women | 151 | 0.83 | 0.37 |

Note: Scenario 1 = African American woman and affirmative action, Scenario 2 = Chinese woman and English, Scenario 3 = Latinx woman and Día De Los Muertos, Scenario 4 = Native American student and course

Table 3:

ANOVA Comparing Effects of Race and Gender on Offensiveness Ratings for Scenario 1

| | <i>SS</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>MS</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i> | η^2 |
|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Intercept | 67.68 | 1 | 67.68 | 684.70 | < .01 | .75 |
| POC | 0.02 | 1 | 0.02 | 0.21 | .65 | .00 |
| Gender | 0.58 | 1 | 0.58 | 5.90 | .02 | .03 |
| POC*Gender | 0.03 | 1 | 0.03 | 0.33 | .57 | .00 |
| Error | 22.44 | 227 | 0.10 | | | |

Table 4:

ANOVA Comparing Effects of Race and Gender on Offensiveness Ratings for Scenario 2

| | <i>SS</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>MS</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i> | η^2 |
|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Intercept | 37.33 | 1 | 37.33 | 185.32 | < .01 | .45 |
| POC | 0.00 | 1 | 0.00 | 0.00 | .96 | .00 |
| Gender | 1.68 | 1 | 1.68 | 8.34 | < .01 | .04 |
| POC*Gender | 0.00 | 1 | 0.00 | 0.01 | .95 | .00 |
| Error | 45.72 | 227 | 0.20 | | | |

Table 5:

ANOVA Comparing Effects of Race and Gender on Offensiveness Ratings for Scenario 3

| | <i>SS</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>MS</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i> | η^2 |
|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Intercept | 12.32 | 1 | 12.32 | 51.94 | < .01 | .19 |
| POC | 1.16 | 1 | 1.16 | 4.88 | .03 | .02 |
| Gender | 1.67 | 1 | 1.67 | 7.04 | .01 | .03 |
| POC*Gender | 0.03 | 1 | 0.03 | 0.12 | .73 | .00 |
| Error | 53.58 | 226 | 0.24 | | | |

Table 6:

ANOVA Comparing Effects of Race and Gender on Offensiveness Ratings for Scenario 4

| | <i>SS</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>MS</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i> | η^2 |
|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Intercept | 63.42 | 1 | 63.42 | 454.13 | < .01 | .67 |
| POC | 0.01 | 1 | 0.01 | 0.10 | .76 | .00 |
| Gender | 0.59 | 1 | 0.59 | 4.25 | .04 | .02 |
| POC*Gender | 0.25 | 1 | 0.25 | 1.75 | .19 | .01 |
| Error | 31.70 | 227 | 0.14 | | | |

Finally, researchers examined race and gender as predictors of color-blind racial attitudes using Mann Whitney U tests, given the non-normality of the *CoBRAS* (Neville et al., 2007) data. Results are presented in Table 7. Gender significantly predicted ratings on the *Blatant Racial Issues* and *Institutional Discrimination* subscales, as cisgender men provided higher ratings than cisgender women. Race was a significant predictor on the *Blatant Racial Issues* subscale, as white participants provided higher ratings than participants of color.

Table 7:

Mann-Whitney U Comparing Effects of Race and Gender on CoBRAS Ratings

| | | <i>n</i> | Mean Rank | Sum of Ranks | Mann-Whitney U | <i>Z</i> | <i>p</i> |
|-----|-------|----------|-----------|--------------|----------------|----------|----------|
| URP | POC | 35 | 115.36 | 4037.50 | 3407.50 | -0.16 | .88 |
| | White | 198 | 117.29 | 23223.50 | | | |
| | Women | 177 | 112.9 | 19983.00 | 4230.00 | -1.47 | .14 |
| | Men | 55 | 128.09 | 7045.00 | | | |
| ID | POC | 35 | 102.41 | 3584.50 | 2954.50 | -1.35 | .18 |
| | White | 197 | 119 | 23443.50 | | | |
| | Women | 176 | 105.32 | 18537.00 | 2961.00 | -4.35 | <.01 |
| | Men | 55 | 150.16 | 8259.00 | | | |
| BRI | POC | 34 | 96.28 | 3273.50 | 2678.50 | -1.87 | .06 |

| | | | | | | |
|-------|-----|--------|----------|---------|-------|------|
| White | 197 | 119.4 | 23522.50 | | | |
| Women | 175 | 109.23 | 19114.50 | 3714.40 | -2.56 | <.01 |
| Men | 55 | 135.46 | 7450.50 | | | |

Note. Unawareness of Racial Privilege = URP, ID = Institutional Discrimination, BRI = Blatant Racial Issues

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Research on microaggressions has received increasing attention in recent years, although some researchers argue that the current literature lacks experimental rigor and data that supports researchers' interpretations these transgressions as offensive and insulting (Lilienfeld, 2017; Wong et al., 2014). As part of the current study, researchers sought to address gaps in the literature by (a) using quantitative methods, (b) directly assessing participants' interpretations of microaggressive statements as offensive or insulting, and (c) examining the relationship between color-blind racial attitudes and perceived offensiveness in the microaggressive scenarios. Some evidence supporting research hypotheses surfaced. Particularly, color-blind racial attitudes generally predicted ratings of the scenarios as offensiveness, although this was not the case across all *CoBRAS* (Neville et al., 2007) subscales and scenarios. Nonetheless, results suggest that the more likely an individual holds color-blind racial attitudes, the less likely they are to interpret microaggressions offensive. This finding is consistent with results of previous studies that have identified links between color-blind racial attitudes and diminished sensitivity to microaggressions (Kim et al., 2019; Offermann et al., 2014) and has strong implications surrounding how individuals might respond when they witnesses microaggressions or are identified as perpetrators. Although additional research that specifically addresses the following is necessary, it may be the case that individuals holding color-blind racial attitudes who are less likely to view microaggressions as offensive may be more likely to be dismissive or defensive when responding, further harming individuals holding marginalized identities.

Generally, participants in the study found the scenarios offensive, although this was not the case for Scenario 3. Further, research hypotheses regarding race and gender as predictors of color-blind racial attitudes and offensiveness ratings were partially supported. For all four scenarios, gender differences emerged in participant ratings of offensiveness, as cisgender women found the scenarios more offensive than cisgender men. This finding is consistent with the results of previous research that has demonstrated that women are better able to detect race-based insults when compared to men

(Banks & Landau, 2020). Further, research suggests that women are more empathetic, which may account for gender differences (Rueckert et al., 2011). As another explanation, it may be the case that cisgender women's experiences with gender-based microaggressions may explain why they are better able to identify microaggressions that are race-based, as they have had their own experiences with microaggressions, albeit directed at a different identity. Going forward, researchers should examine variables that may account for these differences. Future research in this area may also benefit from use of scenarios that are more diverse, as the current study only positioned women on the receiving end of the microaggressions.

A main effect of race only surfaced for the third scenario. This may have been related to the limited sampling of participants of color, as it was difficult to recruit a racially diverse sample, given data collection occurred at a Predominantly White Institution. However, race surfaced as a predictor for the third scenario that examined participant reactions to microaggressive comments surrounding Día De Los Muertos. Interestingly, participants of color provided ratings indicating that they found the scenario less offensive than their white counterparts. Although significant racial differences did not surface for the other scenarios, an examination of the means points to a trend that is consistent with research hypotheses: the mean for offensiveness was higher for participants of color. This difference in results for Scenario 3 suggests that the scenario may have been interpreted differently than the others by participants of color. It may also be the case that white participants provided responses that they deemed socially acceptable (i.e., microaggressions are offensive), which would have increased the means of their ratings across scenarios. As such, in the future researchers should consider the use of social desirability measures to control for this possibility.

Finally, although no main effects for race or gender were identified when examining the *CoBRAS* (Neville et al., 2007) *Unawareness of Racial Privilege* subscale, cisgender men provided higher ratings on the *Institutional Discrimination* and *Blatant Racial Issues* subscales, indicating a greater likelihood to hold color-blind racial attitudes as compared to cisgender women. This finding is also consistent with the thought that those who are more likely to experience discrimination that is not race-based, in this case as a result of gender, are better able to detect the occurrence of racism and generally the oppression of People of Color. The finding that white participants endorsed a greater degree of color-blind racial attitudes on these same subscales was not surprising, given People of Color's direct experience with racism and discrimination. However, this may point to the importance of engaging white individuals in discussions about racism and institutional

discrimination, given results of the current study indicate that knowledge of these inequities is associated with greater likelihood to endorse microaggressions as offensive.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations exist surrounding the findings of the current study. As mentioned earlier, the developed scenarios only presented examples of women on the receiving end of microaggressions. Although this methodology offered consistency and control, it too may have impacted participants' ability to empathize with the receiver, as cisgender women may have found it easier, while cisgender men more difficult. Further, because the current study was conducted at a Predominantly White Institution, researchers were limited in their ability to recruit participants of color to the study. A larger and more diverse sample may have produced better power and distributions that were closer to normal, such that more rigorous analyses to explore the interaction of race and gender could have been explored.

The study was conducted with university students at a Predominantly White Institution, so the findings may be specific to this group and should be generalized to individuals of other age groups or in other settings with caution. The current study adds to the literature in that researchers employed quantitative methods to offer insight into the offensive or insulting nature of microaggressions. Going forward, researchers should consider continued use of quantitative methods to explore microaggressions, but should not dismiss the benefits of qualitative methods that can provide detailed information surrounding the experienced of marginalized groups.

In conclusion, as it continues to be common for universities to take on efforts to address inequities, such as the implementation of trainings and workshops on microaggressions to improve campus climate, institutions must consider research to inform these initiatives. Given the results of the current study, those facilitating workshops and more generally faculty, staff and administrators who are in ongoing contact with students might consider the impact of factors such as color-blind racial attitudes during the development of these workshops or when working with students across other settings. Addressing individuals' knowledge about microaggressions without considering such factors may not produce desired changes in behavior, given these underlying factors may directly contribute to the way individuals interpret microaggressive incidents. In particular, we might consider efforts to produce changes in individuals' color-blind racial attitudes prior to exposing them to content about microaggressions.

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