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MANAGING MICROAGGRESSIONS: A STUDY ON THE EFFECT OF
MICROAGGRESSIONS ON MULTIRACIAL COLLEGE STUDENTS.

By

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A THESIS

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MANAGING MICROAGGRESSIONS: A STUDY ON THE EFFECT OF
MICROAGGRESSIONS ON MULTIRACIAL COLLEGE STUDENTS.

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University of Nebraska, 2014

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The purpose of this study is to raise awareness about the experiences multiracial students face on college campuses specifically working to understand how multiracial students experience and manage microaggressions on campus in their daily lives. Within this I will take into account their experiences on campus as a framework for the types of microaggressions they are facing because this act of racism can be known or unknown to the victim. A microaggression is a form of racism that is “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate[s] hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group” (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal & Esquilin, 2007, p. 273).

In my research I am looking to answer the following research questions: (a) what are the experiences of multiracial students on a predominantly White campus, specifically with regards to microaggressions? (b) How do multiracial students manage these microaggressions? Currently there is research on what types of microaggressions multiracial students face and what they look like, but there is little on how they manage microaggressions.

Dedication

In loving memory of Helen Birch. Her kind words inspired me to achieve my dreams no matter how far away they were.

For every student who is told success is unachievable, reach high and never stop pushing.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to thank my advisor Dr. Corey Rumann for all of his continued support during this project. There have been few professors that I have had that have made a difference, and I appreciate all that he has done to help me get through this program. Because of his investment in my success in the educational administration program, I was able to succeed through all of the struggles I endured during the process. He has encouraged me to follow my dreams, which lead to many conference presentations and my ability to strive for more. Because of his dedication to me as his student, and his persistent (but gentle) push to be the best, I have overcome one of the biggest challenges of my life. Being a mother and a student wasn't easy but he knew I was destined for greatness and helped me through.

Next, I would like to thank all of my participants who gave me their time, and willingness, to be part of my study. This study would not have happened without them and to them I owe all the gratitude.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank my mom Marjorie, and my daughter Amashanique. Without my mothers continued support through both of my degrees I would have never made it through. When I wanted to quit she continued to push me through, because she knew that I was destined for more than what I wanted to allow myself to think. She has always been my cheerleader just waiting for me to finish in first place. And to my daughter who has so patiently stood by as I completed my degrees to be the best mom I could be for her. She is the light at the end of my tunnels and I love her dearly. Without her I wouldn't strive to the heights of success I am aimed for today.

She is the reason I am able to say I am a graduate of this program, because in my struggle

I seen her future.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

As long as I can remember I have always been asked about my skin complexion. Why are you so light? Why is your mom White? How can she be your mom? And the list goes on and on. I eventually reached a point where I thought to myself, I cannot be the only one who experiences microaggressions like these. I cannot be the only person who is constantly aware of their skin complexion. Going through this almost daily is very taxing for me emotionally and physically.

The scenario above gives an example of what a microaggression looks like for a multiracial person. Microaggressions are a subtle form of racism that happen daily for the group being targeted (e.g. racial minorities, LGBT, disability etc. The definition of a microaggression is, “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or 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 can affect the psyche of those who encounter them, and often the person subjected to the microaggression is left contemplating about the encounter because they are unsure of what just happened (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal & Esquilin, 2007). The challenges of microaggressions confront multiracial persons on a day-to-day basis often times forcing them to internalize the process because they do not want to have to deal with microaggressions all of the time (Johnston & Nadal, 2010). The history of microaggressions for multiracial persons started many years ago during the times of slavery and the civil rights era. One of the most frequent microaggressions experienced by multiracial students is that they do not fit

in to monoracial populations and sometimes not even their families (Johnston & Nadal, 2010; Nadal, Sriken, Davidoff, Wong & McLean, 2013; Rollins & Hunter, 2013).

Another very common form of microaggression is colorism. Colorism is the “the tendency to perceive or behave toward members of a racial category based on the lightness or darkness of their skin tone” (Maddox & Gray, 2002 p. 250). Many times a multiracial person is put into a situation where it is perceived that they benefit from their light skin in society. This turns into multiracial people being discriminated against by not only the dominant culture, but by non-dominant cultures as well. “Skin color is related to a variety of factors that make one’s life more or less enjoyable” (Hochschild, 2006 p. 476) based on the color of their skin. Multiracial persons face this on a daily basis because they are seen one way in the eyes of society, but in reality this is not how they see themselves and how they are treated.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of multiracial students. Students from all backgrounds (e.g., multiracial, LGBT, Woman, disability) are experiencing microaggressions, not only in their everyday lives, but on campus as well. This study investigated the experiences, and stories, of multiracial students at a large Midwestern research university to see how microaggressions affect, or do not affect, their everyday college life.

Significance of the Study

Literature within the field of student affairs on multiracial students is very limited due to the newness of the topic (Johnston & Nadal, 2010). In order to understand the experiences multiracial student populations have, educators must understand each aspect

of the students' lives and how external, and internal, influences are challenging/creating their experiences. This includes understanding the micro-, meso-, exo- and macrosystems that Bronfenbrenner (1993) utilizes in his ecology theory. The microsystem looks at how the people (e.g., family, peers, church, etc.) the student interacts with influence their experiences. The macrosystem looks at how the micro- and exosystems work together to influence the student's experiences. The exosystem does not factor in the person per se, but looks at the environmental influences that are affecting the student's experiences. Finally the macrosystem looks at how the influences of societal patterns, or social norms, influence the students experience.

Bronfenbrenner (1993) shows that in order to understand the way a student develops on campus you must understand the totality of the student and understand how each system works to create their identities. As each system works to create particular experiences for students. The students also carry different identities that weigh on their experiences differently than others. For example a student could identify more as a woman of color and her perception of her experiences could be different than a student who identifies as a Lesbian Woman of color. Really looking at how external and internal factors influence the identity development of multiracial student's leads into Renn's (2003) multiracial student development theory. For Renn understanding the development of multiracial students' identities means you must understand how they experience being multiracial in terms of societal influences, peer interactions and how their parents support, or do not support a multiracial identity. Understanding how each system in Bronfenbrenner's ecology theory works together to create a student's

experience leads to an understanding of why a multiracial student chooses to identify in the ways he or she does.

The current literature surrounding multiracial students is in three categories: (a) the experiences of multiracial students on college campuses, (b) the development of the multiracial student and (c) How to support multiracial students on campus. My review of the research revealed that many of the underlying experiences of multiracial students were largely in part due to microaggressions, but there was little mention of microaggression within the research. This study is unique in the fact that I not only look at the experiences that students have with microaggressions but how that is influencing their experience on campus. In conducting my research I was very intentional about allowing each participant to tell their own story about their experiences with microaggressions without explaining what microaggressions were. In both the interview, and focus group, I waited until half way through the conversations with students before I gave a definition of microaggressions to understand if microaggressions were occurring, and if the students were internalizing the act of microaggressions. In addition I asked them how they manage microaggressions, and what their perceptions are of the best way to manage microaggressions.

Research Questions

To delve into this research on microaggressions and multiracial students the following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the experiences of multiracial students on a predominantly White campus, specifically with regards to microaggressions?
2. How do multiracial students manage these microaggressions?

By looking at and listening to/understanding the experiences multiracial students have with microaggressions it would be my hope that readers gain a better understanding of what higher education professionals can do to provide support on campus for these students. Some students may have feelings of apathy, frustration, despair and depression when their needs are not addressed on college campuses (Museus, Yee and Lambe, 2011). If a student feels that their needs are not being met on campus this can lead to a student leaving the institution. Knowing what types of services or programming to provide can help those working on college campuses to provide resources needed for this student population.

Research Design

A qualitative research design was used for this study. The purpose of using this methodology was to gain knowledge about how microaggressions affected the participants through their own description of their personal experiences. The purpose of this research was to understand how the phenomena of microaggressions affected the participants through their own lived experiences. Through semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions it allowed for less restriction within the protocol structure, and gave me the opportunity to ask additional questions that were not already created. It also allowed me as the researcher to delve into the experiences of my participants and not just look at one aspect of their stories. The data collected was transcribed and coded for themes and sub-themes and analyzed using a reflective journaling process as I transcribed the interviews and focus group. This included reflecting on each participant's experiences and making connections to how they related back to other participants'

experiences. I utilized Creswell's (2009) five steps to complete an in depth and rigorous analysis of the data which is further explained in the methodology section.

Definitions and Terms

Microaggressions: "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or 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).

Colorism: "the tendency to perceive or behave toward members of a racial category based on the lightness or darkness of their skin tone" (Maddox & Gray, 2002 p. 250).

Multiracial: For the purpose of this study, multiracial means any person who identifies with more than one race or ethnicity.

Ethnicity: Throughout the study participants would interchange their language between race and ethnicity. In this study when a participant is referring to ethnicity they are referring to race unless specifically noted.

Delimitations

The scope of this study was confined to multiracial students at one large higher education research institution in the Midwest. The focus of the study was to understand their experiences in regards to microaggressions and how they managed them. The study did not look specifically at access or programming for this student population, which could impact their experiences as well.

Limitations

The findings of this study should not be generalized to all multiracial students at institutions of higher education. Time was another limitation to this study. I conducted this research over the course of two academic semesters and had a strict deadline to have it done by graduation in May of 2014. If there were more time to conduct this research participants from other institutions could have been involved, and a potential longitudinal study could have been conducted to look at the differences between the experiences of those students who were first year students at the start of the study. I could have compared their perceptions of microaggressions once they had been on campus more than a couple months to their initial interviews to see how their perceptions changed.

Conclusion

There are many forms of microaggressions and many different types of experiences for multiracial students, which will be discussed further in later chapters. The primary focus on colorism is large in part to it is underlying meaning in this society and how it affects the way multiracial individuals are seen within this society. This form of microaggression is embedded in the everyday happenings of our society. To follow this chapter, Chapter 2 will discuss further the experiences of multiracial students and a further explanation of microaggressions based on the literature. It will also go further into the theoretical framework of this study and why it is important for this study. Chapter 3 will cover the methodology of the current study. Chapter 4 will outline the themes and findings of the study. Lastly, Chapter 5 will provide a discussion of the findings including limitations, future research and implications for practice.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Racial segregation has been a persistent problem since the end of slavery and the reign of Jim Crow Laws. Within this era individuals who identified as multiracial were shunned and forced to identify monoracially. This notion came from the one-drop rule where it was said that if you had one drop of Black blood you were considered Black (Cheng & Schaefer, 2008). Though multiracial students encompass more than just Black and White heritage, the thought of multiracial persons starts from a very Black White perspective.

In a post-racial society race has become even more of an issue especially with the rising populations of multiracial individuals. In 2013 cheerios aired a commercial that had an interracial couple with a biracial child in their commercial to advertise their product. The commercial immediately prompted responses from viewers and “negative responses, including claims of White genocide and calls for DIVERSITY” were posted (Funderberg, 2013, para 8). Shortly after the release of the commercial the commentary on the YouTube posting, and the cheerios website, was shut down by administrators. The fluidity of race is becoming more and more complex, which is forcing individuals all across the country to start thinking more critically about issues within the multiracial community (Sandefur, Campbell & Eggerling-Boeck, 2004).

The 2000 census was the first time that someone who identifies as bi- or multiracial could identify as such. About 6.8 million individuals identified as multiracial within the first set of data collected on the census in 2000 (U.S. Census, 2000). According to the 2010 census there has been a 32% increase of individuals who identify

as multiracial since 2000. The 2000 census reported that 40% of multiracial individuals were eighteen years or younger which is likely to have increased given the most recent information reported in the 2010 census. With this increase it is reasonable to assume that the number of multiracial students matriculating into higher education will continue to increase, and it is important to understand the development and unique challenges for these students as we prepare our agendas of how to serve underrepresented students. It is also important because if a student does not feel supported on campus they are more likely to leave the institution, so understanding and supporting multiracial students on college campuses becomes an issue that we should think about. To set up the next sections of the literature review, some context of theories used to understand multiracial student development will be given.

Theoretical Framework

Bronfenbrenner's Ecology Theory

In her 2003 research, Renn delved into multiracial student identity in the context of Bronfenbrenner's Ecology Theory applying the ideas of person, process, context and time. Most important to her research was the micro-, meso-, exo- and macrosystems. Each of these systems takes a holistic view of the student, their social contexts (that may not directly include them) and societal contexts. Table 1 provides an overview of the micro-, meso-, exo- and macrosystems.

Table 1

Microsystem	“A pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing persons in a given face-to-face setting with particular physical, social, and symbolic features that invite, permit, or inhibit engagement in sustained, progressively more complex interaction with, and activity in, the immediate environment” (Bronfenbrenner, 1993 p. 15).
Mesosystem	“Comprise linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing the developing person” (Bronfenbrenner, 1993 p. 22).
Exosystem	The exosystem does not contain the developing individual but takes his or her environmental influences and analyzes how that influences the decisions/acts the developing individual makes.
Macrosystem	“Consists of the overarching patter of micro- meso- and exosystems characteristics of a given culture, subculture, or other extended social structure, with particular reference to the developmentally instigative belief systems, resources, hazards, lifestyles, opportunity structures, life course options and patterns of social interchange that are embedded in such overarching systems” (Bronfenbrenner, 1993 p. 25).

Bronfenbrenner’s (1993) ecology theory considers the totality of the student. Instead of just looking at one aspect of the student’s life, ecology theory takes a broader perspective and investigates how not only personal beliefs and values affect the development of a student, but how other social and societal influences may cause a difference in how a student may identify. This context informs Renn’s multiracial student development theory.

Multiracial Student Identity Development Theory

Evans et al. (2010) stated “the importance of space and peer culture on multiracial identity development” is an important tenet of Renn’s multiracial theory (p. 296). In Renn’s theory on multiracial student development, she focuses on what she describes as identity patterns. These patterns consist of five different categories.

1. Monoracial Identity: Those who chose to identify monoracially only identified with one parent's background over the other (Renn, 2003). "Claiming a monoracial identity was the easiest for students whose appearance and cultural knowledge were congruent with that identity" (Evans et al., 2010 p. 297).
2. Multiple monoracial identity: Identifying under the multiple monoracial identity means that participants identified with two or more races (e.g. White and Latino or African American and Asian). Rather than viewing two races as a combination, individuals who identify as multiple monoracial regard each racial identity as separate from the other(s).
3. Multiracial Identity: This identity uses specific words associated with this classification as "multiracial, biracial, hapa, mixed" (Renn, 2003). Renn states participants see themselves not identifying with those who are monoracial and share common experiences with those who are of multiple backgrounds, races, and/or ethnicities.
4. Extraracial Identity: extraracial identity refers to those participants who did not want to identify as any of the previous categories.
5. Situational Identity: Situational identity describes those participants who identified as a certain race in one setting and a different race in another setting. Renn said that these students, "considered racial identification fluid and contextually driven" (Evans et al., 2010 p. 297-98).

Each of Renn's identity patterns describes how a student views themselves, and how their identity is influenced by societal factors. According to Renn (2000):

The ability of students to move among identities, or their decisions not to, was related to two factors: (a) permeability of boundaries around social and physical

spaces defined in part by racial and ethnic identity, and (b) the extent to which students felt like they fit in or belonged to those spaces (as cited in Renn, 2003 p. 391-392).

How students form their identities is built upon many different factors. These factors include family background, physical appearance, cognitive development related issues of race, culture & identity, peer culture, belief systems and socio-historical context (Banks, 2008; Garbarini-Philippe 2010; Renn, 2003; Sand & Schuh, 2003). Understanding the historical, societal and social setting each multiracial student is coming from can help administrators understand how each of these systems work to influence multiracial student's identity and will allow one to understand why microaggressions affect, or do not affect, a students' experiences. In this context how they identify themselves in terms of Renn's multiracial identity categories can influence how they experience microaggressions.

Multiracial students struggle with the fluidity of race every day. They look different from their monoracial counterparts and are questioned about their legitimacy of being enough of their own race to be accepted in that group. "Several multiracial students endorsed experiencing discomfort when in the presence of traditional student groups. In some cases multiracial individuals were asked why they were interested in joining a particular ethnic group" (Nishimura, 1998, p. 50).

Multiracial students face unique challenges in that they are not only being discriminated against based on their appearance but the group they choose to identify with may not accept them either (Nishimura, 1998; Renn, 2000). There may be instances where they are discriminated against within their own racial communities and their families, which will be discussed further in the section on microaggressions.

Cheng and Lee (2009) reported, “multiracial individuals who grow up in communities that are more tolerant of and friendly toward multiracial individuals may have more positive experiences regarding their multiracial status” (p. 64). Based on this research one could surmise that the more inclusive and accepting an environment is for multiracial students the more capable the student will be able to develop and feel supported, within that environment. Experiences can have a long lasting effect on multiracial students, which is why understanding the student, as a whole through an ecological lens is important.

Understanding Race and Being Multiracial

Rollins and Hunter (2013) suggested that in order for a multiracial child to truly understand their multiracial identity the parent has to be open about race in their conversations with their children. “It is through interactions with others, especially, parents that children and youth gain insight regarding their racial heritage and learn to assume, resist, or negotiate the statuses associated with racial group membership” (Rollins & Hunter, 2013 p. 140). The lines between which race multiracial individuals choose, or do not choose, to navigate are unclear and give them a sense of insecurity when trying to understand how they fit within those contexts.

Understanding one’s racial ecology is crucial to the development of a multiracial identity. “Racial ecology refers to the racial context which individuals are embedded, and it includes social position variables that influence experiences of racism, prejudice, discrimination, oppression, and privilege” (Rollins & Hunter, 2013 p. 141). In one study, it was found that when children did not learn about the different heritages they were part

of, there was a sense of sadness and regret due to lack of knowledge and not being able to communicate with other family members (Nadal et al., 2013).

Parenting through color blindness. Many individuals within US society preach a color-blind outlook on racial issues. Since the election of a “Black president” we now live in a post-racial America. President Obama himself is a biracial man and the lines of race are becoming even more inconsistent and confusing.

Rollins and Hunter (2013) suggested that some parents use color blindness as a way to address race with their children. They teach their multiracial children that they should not see race and look at each person as an equal. “Endorsing color-blind and post-racial perspectives in a society where racial stratification persists does not challenge and helps to maintain the symbolic, institutional, and interpersonal dimensions of race and racial oppression” (Rollins & Hunter, 2013 p. 143).

It is suggested that multiracial identity development starts well before a student comes to a college campus (Rollins & Hunter, 2013). Understanding the context in which a student lived prior to coming to college can assist professionals within different institutions on how to assist a student during their development process when they come to campus. Understanding the totality of the student and the contexts they live in, on a macro, and micro, level is the basis of Renn’s identity development theory. Included in this, one must understand microaggressions and how that affects the everyday life and development of a multiracial person.

Microaggressions

Microaggressions have been an increasingly discussed subject over the last decade but in many cases individuals do not know, or understand, what a

microaggression is or looks like in practice. Microaggressions are a form of modern racism that is taking the place of more overt racism of the past. Though overt racism still exists, researchers believe that these more subtle forms of racism are becoming an even more prevalent area of concern (Sue, et al., 2007). Microaggressions are “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or 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).

Racism does not look the same as it did during the civil rights era, and it is becoming even harder to detect (Sue et al., 2007). Many times a person has to question whether or not a microaggression occurred because they are unsure if they were just being too sensitive to the situation, or if the person really meant harm by what they said. Most of the time “these exchanges are so pervasive and automatic in daily conversations and interactions that they are often dismissed and glossed over as being innocent and innocuous” (Sue et al., 2007 p. 273). For example, when a multiracial person is asked the all too familiar question of “what are you?” is a microaggression. The person asking the question seems to have a genuine curiosity in knowing, but it suggests that because of the way a multiracial person looks in terms of the skin tone they cannot be fully one race because they are too light. Another example is when a Caucasian person is in situation when they are walking past an African American and they clinch onto their purse or walk on a different sidewalk. These microaggressions are very subtle actions but happen all the time.

There are three major types of microaggressions. This includes microassaults, microinsults and microinvalidations. Microassaults are what is known as old-fashioned

racism (Sue et al., 2003). They are explicit verbal or nonverbal attacks that are meant to hurt the target person (Sue et al., 2003). This can include using terms like mullato, or the “N” word. “A microinsult is characterized by communications that convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a persons racial heritage or identity” (Sue et al., 2003 p. 274). An example of this is asking a multiracial person what are you, or making comments such as because you speak proper you are acting White. The last major type of microaggressions is microinvalidation. Microinvalidations “exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color” (Sue et al., 2003 p. 274). An example of this is when someone states that an experience a person of color faces is not true because that person did not experience it himself. The scope of this study is to understand how microaggressions affect multiracial students experiences, thus the literature focuses on microaggressions experienced by students of color. It is important to understand that experiences with microaggressions are present for all underrepresented populations including LGBT groups, woman, students with disabilities, veterans and so forth.

Students of Color and Experiences with Microaggressions

“Little is known about microaggressions, and yet this subtle form of racism has a dramatic impact on the lives of African Americans” (Solorzano, Ceja, Yosso, 2000, p. 60). Just as when dealing with traditional forms of racism, microaggressions have a large influence on the psyche and can cause physical, emotional and spiritual distress. In many cases this contributes to why persons of color have feelings of anger, hostility and/or distress when encountering a microaggression (Sue et al., 2003).

Within African American communities microaggressions started in the form of socially constructed categories of race and superiority versus inferiority (Solorzano et. al., 2000). In U.S. history people of color have been looked upon as second-class citizens and inferior to their White counterparts. Many times low expectations for people of color presented by teachers, family members, or society members, could cause a microaggressions to occur because someone thought it was interesting that a person of color was educated (Solorzano et al., 2000). Microaggressions for a Black student may come in the form of White students perceptions of how they got to where they are. In their minds a Black student is in college because of affirmative action and quotas and nothing else. This stems from a long history of misrepresentation of the true meaning of affirmative action.

In media African American or Black men are portrayed as criminals, so these students come to campus there is a preconceived notion of who they are versus who they really are (McCabe, 2009). For example, more often than not African American men are portrayed in the news as gangster, or unintelligent men who wear their pants down to their ankles and fight. This is the perception of who they will be in college and this perception is accepted as truth when it is not.

Oftentimes students of color find that within the classroom they are looked to as the spokesperson for their race. Whenever a situation arises that deals with race it is expected they have the answers because they are part of the racial group (McCabe, 2009). It is also expected that their experience is the same as every other monoracial minority, which is rarely the case. McCabe (2009) noted, “alienating classroom experiences were reported most frequently to me by Black women, followed by Latinas, and not very

frequently by Latinos, Black men” (p. 143), which suggests that the experience of being singled out as a spokesperson in this research was different for each population.

For many students microaggressions become tiring to deal with on a day-to-day basis. Because of microaggressions students on college campuses feel frustrated, burnt out and isolated (McCabe, 2009; Solorzano et al., 2000). It can also lead to self-doubt, or not having the confidence in themselves that they can succeed. Solorzano et al. (2000) reported, “several students commented that racial microaggressions had affected their academic performance in overt ways such as pushing them to drop a class, changing their major and even leaving the university to attend school elsewhere” (p. 69).

Though many microaggressions are the same between multiracial students and other students of color, there can be subtle differences in the ways in which microaggressions occur for multiracial students.

Multiracial Students and Experiences with Microaggressions

“Multiracial people may be victims of microaggressions based on their perceived racial heritage, their actual multiracial heritage, or both” (Nadal et al., 2013 p. 191). Multiracial individuals are often questioned about their appearance because they look different from their monoracial counterparts. Often times they are asked “what are you?”, “is that your real hair?”, or statements such as “you do not talk like we do” or “you look exotic” are made to them. These comments can become internalized or normalized over the course of their lives due to high levels of exposure to these microaggressions (Johnston & Nadal, 2010). Current research tends to focus on multiracial identity development while the influence of microaggressions on multiracial students’ lives is only given a nod in some articles.

“While the experiences of multiracial individuals seem to have gained much more popularity in academic and social arenas, little attention has been given to multiracial people’s experiences with racism or discrimination” (Johnston & Nadal, 2010 p. 123). The importance of understanding this group of students is becoming an increasing issue on campus, but there are little tools, or resources to effectively support these students. Johnston and Nadal (2010) surmised the assumption is that multiracial persons have the same experiences as their monoracial counterparts. However, what is not discussed in this article is how they are discriminated against by both majority and minority students. Multiracial students often struggle with their ability to fit into one group or another because they do not know where they fit in the spectrum of race, especially if they do not identify with one race. Garbarini-Phillipe (2010) reported multiracial students who are secure in their multiracial identity have higher levels of confidence in diverse contexts than those who are not secure.

Examples of microaggressions. Johnston and Nadal (2010) reported several examples of multiracial microaggressions in everyday life. This list includes:

1. Exclusion or isolation: occurs when a multiracial person is made to feel excluded or isolated based on their multiracial status
2. Exoticization and objectification: occurs when a multiracial person is dehumanized or treated like an object
3. Assumption of monoracial identity (or mistaken identity): occurs when multiracial people are assumed or mistaken to be monoracial (or a member of a group they do not identify with)
4. Denial of multiracial reality: occurs when a multiracial person is not allowed to choose their own racial identity)
5. Pathologizing of identity and experiences: occurs when multiracial people’s identities or experiences are viewed as psychological abnormal.
(Johnston & Nadal, 2010 p. 133)

Loud (2011) suggested microaggressions occur daily on college campuses. Due to this there is a lack of connectedness to the campus. When multiracial students’ needs are

not being met they may feel isolated on campus (Loud, 2011). Renn (2003) argued that when a multiracial person identifies and is prideful in their multiracial identity they tend to fair better on college campuses, and when their identity development is not supported multiracial students identity development is challenged. Having to deal with microaggressions can challenge the everyday experiences of multiracial students leaving them with feelings of isolation, apathy, frustration, despair and depression (Museus et al., 2011).

Inclusion on Campus

Racial microaggressions can become a challenge in the everyday lives of multiracial students. Often times they feel as if they no longer want to deal with the everyday struggle of being a multiracial person and wish they could identify with one race because it would be easier and they would not have to explain themselves. One reason it may be difficult to identify multiracial students on campus is because they choose to identify in other ways such as monoracial. Sands et al. (2003) reported that some multiracial students did not want to feel alienated or isolated by being identified as multiracial. Though not explicitly stated, it can be inferred from Hyman (2010) findings that racial microaggressions can cause students to disengage from campus activities and groups. Having to legitimize themselves in every situation because they are not Black, Latino, or Asian enough to be part of a specific group on campus can be frustrating.

Renn (2003) emphasized the inherent need, desire, and importance for a multiracial student to not only feel accepted in a space, but also welcomed in that space (Renn, 2003). Hyman (2010) argued, “A lack of cultural knowledge can be just as powerful in keeping a student out of a certain space” (p. 131). When multiracial students

are not supported in college it does not allow for a student to grow within that environment and can lead to failure or withdrawal from the institution.

Microaggressions Within Family Contexts

Microaggressions not only happen in societal contexts for multiracial students but also within their families. In some cases a multiracial person can experience family members treating them differently because of their skin tone. Nadal et al. (2013) reported that participants in their study described how siblings would be treated differently based on their skin tone. Those who were lighter skinned were treated more favorable than those who were darker skinned. This difference in treatment led to feelings of inadequacy, anger and hurt (Nadal et al., 2013). These ideologies of color relate back to a long history of colorism in the United States

Colorism. The term *mullato* was first used in the 1850 census as a way to identify multiracial persons representing that they were different from other monoracial groups (Hochschild, 2008). Many people today do not understand the nature of this term and the reasons it is offensive.

The term *mulatto* was used as a way to distinguish lighter skinned African Americans from darker skinned African Americans, which formed and shaped the ideas of colorism. Colorism is “the tendency to perceive or behave toward members of a racial category based on the lightness or darkness of their skin tone” (Maddox & Gray, 2002 p. 250).

Colorism can be considered the cause of many forms of microaggressions within communities of color due to the history of race in America. Solorzano et al. (2000) discussed this as they explored the idea of power dynamics within the United States.

Being lighter skin came with higher socioeconomic status, higher educational attainment and overall better treatment (Hochschild, 2006). During slavery it was the thought of many that if a person was light skinned they were a house slave and never had to do any manual labor. “Skin color is related to a variety of factors that make one’s life more or less enjoyable” (Hochschild, 2006).

This relates back to microaggressions within families because if a multiracial person is faced with the issue of colorism it is often because of what is considered favorable, or not, in our society. Nadal et al. (2013) states, “The issue of colorism is evident in multiracial families” (p. 196).

Colorism is not the only form of microaggression a multiracial person may face in their families. They can also face situations where their authenticity is questioned. Nadal et al. (2013) reported participants feeling judged and excluded because they did not speak the same language as their monoracial family members. This can become a real issue when a multiracial individual lacks the ability to communicate with their family, because many times they want to be able to communicate with their family member but can’t. This can be because it was something that was not taught within the home, or because the child was not raised by the parent who spoke the language.

There is a wide variety of research on multiracial people ranging from familial discrimination to what their experiences are as college students. After reviewing the literature I found the majority of research on multiracial students focuses on how multiracial students interact on campus in terms of student activities and whether or not they feel supported on campus. In terms of research on microaggressions it focuses on what that experience looks like. This research will be centered at the intersection of these

two topics. It will delve further into the research of microaggressions and look at how microaggressions affect the college experiences of multiracial students.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

There are ample amounts of research on (a) microaggressions and what they look like, (b) multiracial student identity development, and (c) how to support multiracial student identity development. There is a gap in the research on the effects of microaggressions on multiracial students and what measures they take to manage them. The purpose of this study is to identify the experiences multiracial students have at a predominately White institution in the Midwest by specifically looking at microaggressions. There are two research questions:

1. What are the experiences of multiracial students on a predominantly White campus, specifically with regards to microaggressions?
2. How do multiracial students manage these microaggressions?

This study is unique in the sense that it will look further into microaggressions and work to understand the experiences of multiracial students and their perceptions of the college campus. The current literature focuses on to societal microaggressions multiracial students face, but does not look at how those microaggressions infiltrate the college campus system and how that may, or may not, affect the experience a student has when they come to campus.

Conclusion

With the limited research that has been conducted focusing on this growing population, it is my intent to add to the field of knowledge. Chapter 3 will describe the methodology of the study, the techniques used to conduct the research and analyze the data. Chapter 4 will give a detailed description of the findings of the study. Then,

Chapter 5 will be a discussion surrounding the current research, implications of the research and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The fluidity of race is becoming more and more ambiguous as multiracial persons begin to identify themselves at increasing rates since the 2000 census. Being forced to categorize oneself within one box has been a persistent issue for multiracial individuals for many years. “While documenting and understanding racism in its multiple forms is important for progressing toward equality, there has been less focus on better understanding how the use of rigid racial categories can be considered the very basis of racism” (Johnston & Nadal, 2010, p. 126). Understanding the different categories of race is becoming more and more difficult as research continues in the field of multiracial identity. Because of the simplicity of only listing certain races or ethnicities, this leads to frustration for multiracial individuals even if they can check more than one box because whom they identify as is not listed. This is an ongoing form of microaggressions in the everyday lives of multiracial individuals (Johnston & Nadal, 2010).

Microaggressions are known to cause psychological distress to the targeted person or group (Sue et al., 2007). In some cases, microaggressions can be the primary reason a student of color chooses to leave an institution (Solórzano et al., 2000). Research on microaggressions has focused on the general population of students of color but there is little known about the effects of microaggressions on multiracial students. In light of the past research conducted this study will focus on how students experiences microaggressions and how they then manage those microaggressions.

Institutional Review Board Approval

In order to conduct research on human subjects the primary investigator completed the Consortium for Institutional Review Board Training Initiative in Human Subjects Protections (CITI) training. Additionally, the requirements for the university's Institutional Review Board was completed and accepted (see Appendix A). At the beginning of the focus group, and interviews, each participant was given time to look over the informed consent as the primary investigator went over the form with them. Each participant was given the opportunity to ask questions and opt out of the research if they wanted to (see Appendix B). At that time they signed the informed consent to continue participation in the research project. In order to protect each participant's identity within the study, pseudonyms were used for each person. If there were any identifying characteristics (e.g. hometown or other social identities) in their transcriptions, I removed that information in order to protect the confidentiality of each participant. Each transcription was kept on the researcher's computer under password-protected files.

Study Rationale

Research on multiracial students focuses on their experiences on college campuses and the resources needed in order to help them make a smooth transition through college. In conjunction to this research, Renn (2004) has also conducted research on multiracial student identity development in order to add to the literature in understanding multiracial student identities, and how that affects their experiences. Garbarini-Philippe (2010) suggested that those students who fully embrace their multiracial identity are more successful on college campuses, but there are no resources

available on many campuses to help students through this development process. Though there is ample research done on the multiracial student experience, there is little to no research done on microaggressions and how those interactions affect the multiracial student experience.

Following a review of the current literature, both through online journals and books, I found that my study was heavily influenced by my personal experiences with microaggressions and finding little research currently available addressing this area. The purpose of this study is to more clearly understand multiracial student experiences as it relates to microaggressions, provide further insight into how microaggressions affect multiracial students' experiences at a predominately White institution, and understand how they manage microaggressions on a day-to-day basis.

Research Questions

There were two research questions for this study. The first research question is: what are the experiences of multiracial students on a predominantly White campus, specifically with regards to microaggressions? The second research question is: how do multiracial students manage these microaggressions?

Methodology Rationale

The methodology design for this research was qualitative in nature, with a survey to collect basic demographic information from participants. Qualitative research "is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2009, p. 232). A qualitative research design was selected because I was interested in learning more about each participant's experiences, and understanding how they made meaning of their experiences with microaggressions

on campus. In many cases a qualitative research approach is taken in order to understand the meaning participants assign to certain experiences within their lives (Creswell, 2009).

Many studies on multiracial students employ a qualitative research design to shine light on the experiences of multiracial students. Renn (2008) stated, “it is important to note that most studies of biracial college students rely on qualitative methods and limited samples” (p. 14). This is important to this study as there is a lower sample number, but employing a qualitative research method is important to understanding the experiences multiracial students have. Qualitative research has been shown to provide rich, thick, descriptions in helping understand the meaning making processes of multiracial students. For the purpose of this study it was appropriate to utilize a qualitative approach in order to understand the meaning making process of the participants within the study. Through allowing them to narrate their stories, I was able to understand further how microaggressions influenced the experiences each student had.

Just as many other qualitative studies, a limited sample size is considered a limitation by some. However, generalizability is not the goal of qualitative research so depths of engagement by the researcher in the process and with participants are the primary strategies to increase the study’s trustworthiness and credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). Other limitations of this type of research on multiracial students include selective recruitment of participants, interpretive biases and breadth and depth of microaggression experiences (Lau & Williams, 2010). Despite these limitations, the qualitative approach was chosen because I wanted to focus on the experiences of multiracial students through their lens in order to gathering rich, thick descriptions, through the interview process.

Epistemology and Theoretical Perspective

In understanding my own perspectives and what lens I would use during this study I deduced that I would employ a critical theory perspective and a social constructivist worldview. One of the goals of this study is to understand the inequalities faced by multiracial students when dealing with microaggressions. Fay said, “critical theory perspective are concerned with empowering human being to transcend the constraints placed on them by race, class and gender” (as cited in Creswell, 2009, p. 63). In understanding the impact microaggressions have on multiracial students, I looked to explore what type of constraints this placed on their ability to succeed or their ability to function in their everyday lives. My primary purpose of conducting this research study was to allow the students within my study the opportunity to talk about the oppressions which burden them but also empower them to feel their voices are being heard through this study.

A social constructivist believes that the way one experiences life is socially constructed and there are multiple truths. There is an assumption that “individuals seek understanding of the world which they live and work” (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). There is also an assumption that humans make meaning of their worlds based on their historical and social perspectives (Creswell, 2009). Within this I am interested in understanding how my participants view their worlds and trying to understand their experiences and truths within the context of microaggressions.

This study employed a phenomenological approach where the participants’ experiences are understood through the lens in which they see things. “Understanding the lived experiences marks phenomenology as a philosophy as well as a method”

(Creswell, 2009 p. 13). The focus group, and interviews, were used as a means to elicit responses from participants in a one-on-one setting in order to understand their lived experiences. This happened with the use of a semi-structured focus group, and interview, protocol that allowed for me to delve deeper into the meaning of their conversations.

Participants

To meet the participant criteria for this study, respondents had to identify with being multiracial and be an undergraduate student between the ages of 19 and 25 at Midwestern University. There were six participants in this study (see Table 2). There were five females and one male in this study whom all identified that they were mixed with more than one racial or ethnic identity. The demographic information collected in the survey can also be seen in Table 2 for participants who were in the focus group. Due to restrictions within the informed consent approved for this study only participants who were in the focus group completed the demographic survey. The original intent was to only interview participants who participated in the focus group. There were two participants who were not able to make the focus group but were still willing to participate in the interview process.

Participants were recruited using various recruitment methods. I first posted flyers in the multicultural center on campus and in the student union. Recruitment emails were sent out to staff, professors, students and student organizations to elicit participation. A copy of the recruitment flyer was attached for redistribution. Once participants were recruited, snowball sampling (Schutt, 2009) was used in order to gain more participants. An email was sent to participants who had confirmed their participation in the study in order for them to refer other multiracial students they may

know to the researcher if they were interested in volunteering for the study. Snowball sampling is utilized when you have “hard-to-reach or hard-to-identify populations” (Schutt, 2009, p. 174). Within this sampling method “at least some members of the population know each other” therefore utilizing them is a way to recruit other participants like them (Schutt, 2009).

Table 2: Participant Demographics¹

Name	Race	Gender	Age	Class	Participation
Tiana	African American or Black, Latino, Bi/Multiracial	Woman	21-25	Senior	Survey, FG, Int
Roxi	Bi/Multiracial	Woman	19-21	Freshman	Survey, FG, Int
Alexus	Latino	Woman	19-21	Freshman	Survey, FG, Int
Jeremiah	African American or Black	Man	21-25	Junior	Survey, FG, Int
Allison	Vietnamese, Laotian, and White	SNT	SNT	SNT	Int
Karissa	Other (if option available), or Black/African American	SNT	SNT	SNT	Int

FG – Focus Group; Int – Interview; SNT – Survey Not taken

Research Site

Midwestern University enrollment is 24,207 students and 19,103 undergraduate students. About 53% (or 12,889) students are male and 47% (or 11,318) students are

¹ Demographic information on some of the participants was collected through interviews due to limitations within the informed consent. Others were collected from demographic survey.

female. The racial demographics taken from the official Midwestern University web site can be seen in Table 3. Midwestern University is located in a rural community in the Midwest with a large White population. This location made the institution a good place for this study because the experiences with microaggressions could be more prevalent on a campus with larger numbers of students. This is the case because there is a greater likelihood that students would come in contact with other diverse populations that may, or may not, understand their experiences. Midwestern University is a large four-year public, research extensive, institution. It has a significant number of traditionally aged college students and many students live on or near campus, which also makes it a good place for this study since many of the students are interacting with their peers, faculty and staff daily.

Table 3: Midwestern University² Racial Demographics

Category	Number of Students
American Indian/Alaskan Native	74
Asian	524
Black/African American	542
Hispanic/Latino	969
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	18
Non-Resident Alien	1,949
White/Non Hispanic	18,944
Two or more races	435

Due to the low population of multiracial students I had to utilize staff, professors and students in order to obtain greater access to the population. One of the greatest challenges in this study was identifying participants, as I did not require them to openly identify as multiracial. This created a challenge because I did not want to assume the multiracial identity of my participants, so I had to wait for them to identify themselves to me. In utilizing staff, professors and other students I had greater awareness of which students identified as multiracial because these groups would have more insight to whether or not the student identified as being mixed race. It was also a challenge because in many cases multiracial students do not want to be singled out and targeted as multiracial. An example of not wanting to be singled out could be a Native American

² The data presented in this chart was taken from the 2013/14 enrollment information on the university's website. In order to protect the identities of the participants the website has not been identified.

and Black student that only identifies as Black. In many cases my conversations with these students who identified as Black and Native American consisted of letting them know that if the way they chose to identify was as mixed race their participation would be greatly appreciated. In many cases they did not identify themselves as mixed race because they only saw themselves as Black and not both.

Data Collection

The study utilized a focus group, an interview, and a demographic survey for data collection purposes. All of these data collection methods were used to address the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of multiracial students on a predominantly White campus, specifically with regards to microaggressions?
2. How do multiracial students manage these microaggressions?

The focus group was utilized to create a welcoming environment where the participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences with other participants. It was the idea that by allowing students to speak in a group with one another they would be able to recall experiences based on what others said. The focus group was also used as a way for me to build rapport with the participants.

Demographic Survey

Prior to the start of the focus group each participant was asked to complete a 10-minute survey collecting some basic demographic information (See Appendix D) The survey allowed me to understand how my participants identified in terms of race when it came to filling out a census, their age, year in school, and their prior knowledge regarding microaggressions. This survey was only given to participants in the focus group due to

limitations in the interview informed consent. This limitation was that there were two separate informed consent forms for each portion of the study. The demographic survey and the focus group informed consent were tied together, not allowing participants who only participated in the interviews to consent to the survey.

Each questionnaire was taken by hand and turned into the researcher at the time of the focus group. In order to protect the identity of the participants, the questionnaires were kept in a locked cabinet in the researchers' home.

Focus Group

There were a total of six participants in the study, four of whom participated in the focus group. Focus group participants completed a one-time one and half hour group interview. Originally six participants confirmed for the focus group meeting. However, there was a scheduling conflict with two of the participants so they were not able to participate in the focus group. In order to still include these two participants they were asked if they would be interested in taking part in the interview process. Allison agreed to an interview, but I never heard back from the other participant. An additional participant was added after the focus group was conducted.

The room was a reserved conference room in the institutions student union. The atmosphere of the room seemed very welcoming as each participant was engaging and interacting with each other prior to the start of the focus group. A semi-structured protocol was used in order to facilitate meaningful conversations among the participants. A semi-structured protocol allowed for participants to talk about their experiences freely and allowed me, the researcher, to interject with additional questions as they came up. The primary focus in this group was to understand multiracial student experiences with

microaggressions in their daily lives and on campus. See Appendix E for the interview protocol.

Responses from the focus group were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by me, the researcher. This allowed me to have more in depth reflections of the data as transcriptions were completed. Participants were asked if they had a preference on the pseudonyms to be used to protect their identity. There was no preference so I assigned pseudonyms for each participant to protect their identity. These pseudonyms were used during the transcription process in order to protect the confidentiality of the participants. Additionally, any identifying information participants disclosed was changed. Transcriptions were saved to my flash drive and were encrypted with a password. The transcriptions of the focus group and interview were also saved with password protection to ensure confidentiality of the participants. The focus group lasted approximately one and a half hours.

Interviews

Each participant in the focus group was asked if they would like to commit to an interview. There were also five additional participants not in the focus group who were asked if they would be interested in completing the interview process. All four focus group participants and two others agreed to a 30-minute interview. During the interview consent each participant was asked to consent to a follow-up interview if necessary.

The purpose of the interview was to understand more deeply the participant's experiences with microaggressions. The interview was also another way to build relationships with the participants and establish trust. Interviews "allow interviewees to express their opinions and ideas in their own words" (Esterberg, 2002 p. 87). The focus

group was conducted first in order to allow participants the opportunity to reflect on what was said within a group setting through the focus group and expound upon those experiences. This was a way for the researcher to allow participants to feed off of each other's experiences, and gives participants the opportunity to explore their own experience more as others talk about it. In a group setting at times it could be possible for the participants to only say something because someone else said it causing group think. This is why I implemented individual interviews that looked closer at each student's experiences. More specifically, I sought to understand how each participant managed microaggressions individually and understand whether these issues were internalized or normalized. The benefit of interviews was that each participant was given their own space and time to think about their experiences without others influencing their responses.

A semi-structured interview protocol was utilized to explore the experiences each participant had with microaggressions in college. This protocol structure allowed for a more conversation-like approach in each interview, and allowed me to use appropriate probing questions to inquire further about certain experiences. See Appendix E for the interview protocol used in the individual interviews.

Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by me, the researcher. The pseudonyms created for participants in the focus group were transferred to the interview transcriptions, and two additional pseudonyms were created for the two added participants. Each transcription was saved to my flash drive under the appropriate pseudonyms with password protection in order to protect the identity of each participant.

Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes, which seemed to be an appropriate length for collection of data.

Data Analysis

In the data analysis process I utilized the time in typing transcriptions to take reflective notes, which included my thoughts, feelings and speculations of the data (Creswell, 2009). This reflective journaling process included writing down my thoughts after each interview and reflecting on the transcriptions after they were finished. Journaling strengthened the credibility of the findings because it allowed me to ensure that I was capturing rich, thick descriptions from the participants and understanding how they were making meaning of their experiences. This just started the beginning stages of analysis. In finalizing the analysis I utilized Creswell's (2009) steps on how to follow the necessary steps to complete a rigorous and in depth analysis of the data. The process is as follows:

1. Step 1: "Organize and prepare the data for analysis. This includes scanning material, typing up field notes, or sorting and arranging the data into different types depending on the sources of information" (p. 185);
2. Step 2: "read through all the data. A first step is to obtain a general sense of the information and to reflect on its overall meaning" (p. 185);
3. Step 3: Begin detailed analysis with coding process (p. 186);
4. Step 4: "use the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes of analysis" (p. 189);
5. Step 5: "Advance how the description and themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative" (p. 189).

(Creswell, 2009)

This process allowed for a full immersion into the transcriptions in order to obtain a rich, thick analysis of the data. My process through these steps will now be described.

To start the data analysis process I began by printing out each of my transcriptions, and listening to the audio again in order to write a brief reflection of each interview, and focus group, through my own interpretations of the data. From this process I began coding my data. “Coding is the process of organizing the material into chunks or segments of text before bringing meaning to information” (Creswell, 2009 p. 186). As aforementioned I listened to the audio-recordings and reviewed the transcriptions several times highlighting quotes that stood out to me as the researcher and adding reflective notes. After I listened to the audios for a second time, I re-read the transcriptions again seeking to understand the broad experiences of each participant in regards to their experiences with microaggressions. After listening, and reading, through each recording/transcription I reflected on the underlying meaning of each set of data. During the beginning stages of my coding process I was trying to understand how each person experienced college but not specifically focusing on the thematic findings. From there I utilized the focus group as a foundation for my findings, and themes, utilizing the quotes I pulled out to categorize them into like themes, and I put each of these quotes into piles. From here I took each quote from the interviews and placed them into the respective theme’s pile. Within each theme I categorized the quotes into like areas in order to capture the narratives of the participants as they fit together and flowed to create their narrative story.

Trustworthiness

A number of strategies were employed to strengthen the credibility of this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). Creswell (2009) stated, “validity does not carry the same connotations in qualitative research as it does in quantitative research, nor is it a companion of reliability (examining stability or consistency of responses) or generalizability (the external validity of applying results to new settings, people, or samples)” (p. 190). The importance of qualitative research is to provide context for each participants experiences through their worldview without infringing upon their views with your own. He also identified eight validation techniques: triangulation, member checking, rich, thick descriptions to convey the findings, clarifying researcher bias, presenting negative or discrepant information, spend prolonged time in the field, peer debriefing and using an external auditor (Creswell, 2009, p. 191-192). I utilized each of these techniques in my research to strengthen the trustworthiness of this study.

As part of the member checking process I emailed my participants with my findings and asked for feedback. I received little feedback but those who gave feedback their suggestions were reflected in the findings. Triangulation was utilized by collecting multiple different layers of data through the focus group, interviews and demographic surveys. Each facet of the data collection methods allowed for participants to discuss their experiences in a group setting, and a more individualized setting through the interviews. From each set of data I was able to provide rich, thick descriptions to convey the findings. Within the research findings there was one participant who had a different experience from each of the other participants. As a way to protect the trustworthiness of the study, I allowed for her experience to stand alone even in the case it did not fit into

the thematic findings. In some cases her experiences showed discrepant, or negative, information. I reported this in my findings by letting her experience stand-alone even in the case that it did not fit into a thematic finding.

In the next section I will provide my reflexivity statement, which clarifies my researcher biases. In my reflexivity (in the following section) I talk about my biases and assumptions as the researcher, and what influence I may have had over the study participants and the analysis of the findings. To address the issue of influence I added a section in my informed consent that addressed students who may be affiliated with my employment center. It was my hope that this process alleviated any influence I potentially had over a student's participation. A copy of this consent can be found in Appendix B. I also utilized two additional readers to ensure validity of the findings presented.

Reflexivity

I am a multiracial student that attends a predominately White campus, and as a multiracial student I've had many experiences in college that negatively impacted my experience because of the way that I identify. As an undergraduate student I was curious about how other multiracial students experienced dating and how they talked to their partner about meeting their parents. To me this was a very difficult conversation to have and I had expectations that others' experiences would be the same.

I would say the same is true for this study. As a multiracial person I have experienced microaggression every day of my life. People constantly question my authenticity as a person of color because I am light skinned, and I am supposed to be able

to fit in anywhere. My experience has been that I fit in nowhere. Not in either sides of my family, and definitely not in a monoracial environment.

As I sought out to do my research I found that my passion is to begin to shine more light on this growing body of research. Throughout the last year of my life I have immersed myself in multiracial student identity development, and literature, to help myself better understand my own identity and the identities of those around me. I found that as I began to get further and further into the research I was learning right along with my participants. I learned more about my assumptions, my biases, and myself.

In many situations I identify as an African American woman. Being able to identify in this context has been very difficult because of the ideas of colorism. I am too light to be Black but too dark to be White. I wanted to know the experiences of other multiracial students because I felt that my experience could not be the only experience out there. I knew that I could not be alone in this process of understanding my identity, so I sought an answer. My positionality as a multiracial student was a benefit for me in this study because I perceived the participants felt more comfortable talking to someone who has had a similar experience to them. In many cases students of color will choose to talk with someone who looks like them because of similarity in experiences, and they feel like that person gets their experience. The same idea would be employed in this research. Each participant felt comfortable in disclosing difficult experiences because they felt some connection with me as being multiracial. It also allowed me to make immediate connections with my participants because we shared similar backgrounds, and experiences.

My assumptions prior to the study were that each multiracial student would have a similar experience to their peers, and these experiences would reflect my own experience. I assumed that each student had experienced microaggressions in some way during their everyday life. I also assumed that if they did not experience microaggressions that the experience was normalized, or legitimized, into the everyday life of a multiracial person. As I reflected on my notes, and reflections, after each interaction with the participants, began to realize that for each student the experience of microaggressions could have very well been something they never had to deal with. In the same sense I also realized that many of the students were legitimizing the experiences they had with microaggressions, making them normal in their everyday lives so they did not have to experience them.

As an employee at the university there is a potential that my position on campus could have influenced participation. As I reflected on this throughout the process of getting my IRB approved I took precautions to attempt to alleviate students feeling coerced into completing the study. As part of the informed consent I added a section to make sure each participant knew that their participation was voluntary and resources could not be affected by participation or non-participation. I also integrated questions into my interview protocol to allow participants the option to discontinue answering questions in the interview.

Another bias is that as a multiracial person I really tend to look at minority experiences and ignore the experiences of the majority because they are privileged. I also tend to think that the majority will never be able to understand minority issues because they are not forced to walk in the shoes of a minority. In this sense it could

affect my research through gaining the full perspective on the research I look at especially if I have a multiracial student who identifies as being Caucasian. In this particular study I did not have any students who identified as Caucasian but one student whose experiences were influenced by the fact that she phenotypically looked White. Her experience was very intriguing to me, and made me want to learn more, but at the same time challenged my ideology of what experiences a multiracial person should have.

Limitations

Some find lack of generalizability to be a limitation of qualitative research. This qualitative research is based on the experiences of the participants and should not be transferred to other populations on other campuses. Thus, readers should not generalize the findings in this study to other multiracial students at other predominately White research institutions or to monoracial students.

Another limitation is the fact that as a multiracial student I had many assumptions and biases prior to conducting the study. These assumptions and biases could have potentially impacted the results of the study due to utilizing the researcher as the research instrument. By applying validity techniques it is my hope that this limitation would be managed.

The representation of males in this study was limited which is a limitation to the results of the research. If there were more male presence the study results may have been different. Also if there were more time for the primary investigator to conduct the research the results may have been different because a longitudinal study could have been explored. If it were to become a longitudinal study with multiple interviews throughout the duration of the students being on campus (especially for those students who are

currently first year students) I would have been able to look at the progression of microaggression on campus over a period of time, and how the students felt affected, or not affected, by them as their time at the institution progressed. This limitation is due to the requirement of the thesis project being due by the time the researcher graduated. The same limitation can also be seen if I examined socioeconomic status, or other intersecting identities, which was not the scope of this study.

Strengths

Though my multiracial status can serve as a limitation it was also a strength. In conducting qualitative research it is important to earn the trust of your participants (Creswell, 2009). Also, people of color may be more comfortable disclosing personal information to someone who looks like them (Museus & Neville, 2012). I believe my multiracial status made participants feel more comfortable sharing their experiences with me because they perceive that I have experienced similar situations. In each setting (interview and focus group) the participants seemed to feel comfortable in discussing their experiences with microaggression with me. In some cases the participants stayed after the interview was over to continue conversations off the record, which made me feel they were comfortable discussing their experiences.

This study also adds to the current literature on microaggressions and multiracial students. It takes on a unique perspective as it not only looks at multiracial student experiences, but it explores how a certain phenomena (microaggressions) affect their experiences. In addition it explores the ways in which this student population would feel more supported on campus.

As aforementioned, one of the limitations to microaggression research as presented by Lau & Williams (2010), is the participants have to agree to the underlying assumption that microaggressions exist. The benefit to this study is that within this research I allowed participants to identify whether or not they experienced microaggressions and allowed them to explain that experience. In many cases the participants would be discussing microaggressions within their experiences but not recognizing it as such. For them it was a part of everyday life and therefore many times unnoticeable. If it was apparent that a microaggression did occur in their stories I asked questions to understand the possibility of those participants normalizing, or legitimizing, the experience as something that just happens.

Conclusion

To summarize this chapter, I have described the study rationale, research questions, methodology rationale, epistemology and theoretical perspectives, researcher reflexivity, and data analysis process. Multiracial student experiences are very complex, and as multiracial students enter college at increasing rates it is important that administrators, faculty, and staff understand the growing concerns of the population, and how to make them feel supported on campus. Chapter 4 will build upon the foundations of the current and previous chapters to identify and describe the findings and themes of the current study. Following Chapter 4, Chapter 5 will provide a discussion of the findings.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

At Midwestern University Multiracial students make-up around 1.8% of the campus population. This number could be different depending on how students identify themselves within their racial categories. The experience of multiracial students at this institution, and others, is a fairly new research area. Understanding the experience of multiracial students can be challenging because each student's racial identity is different and this can change their experiences. The purpose of this study is to not only understand the experiences of multiracial students at Midwestern University, but to look at the types of microaggressions they face, what they look like, and how they manage them. The following research questions were developed to further explore this topic:

1. What are the experiences of multiracial students on a predominantly White campus, specifically with regards to microaggressions?
2. How do multiracial students manage these microaggressions?

The themes, which emerged from the data analysis, will address these research questions.

Introduction to Participants

In order to understand the context of the findings, it is important to know who the participants were. Therefore, I provide descriptions of the participants in the next section.

Focus Group Participants

Each participant was communicated to by email to set up times to come in for the focus group, and the interviews. The focus group was scheduled for mid-November at the end of the fall semester at Midwestern University, and was scheduled first before the individual interviews. As participants arrived to the meeting room located in the union,

they were having conversations with each other as they walked in. Only two participants knew one another prior to the focus group, but the atmosphere of the focus group seemed very welcoming because each of the students had conversations with each other while they were waiting for the study to start. There was a sense of community because they were all there talking about the same experience, and how that does, or does not, affect them. One of the participants was running late, and walked in shortly before we went through the informed consent. During the focus group participants seemed to adapt to the atmosphere quickly and were able to have a meaningful conversation with one another, laughing and joking about their experiences. I observed this through body language and verbal conversations as the participants would jump in and talk when something would spark an idea for them. Next, I will provide a table (Table 4) with how I interpreted each student's identity in terms of Renn's multiracial identity development theory and give an introduction for each participant in the focus group.

Table 4: Multiracial Identities Table

Participant Name	Renn's Identity Category	Explanation
Alexus	Multiple Monoracial Identity	I interpreted that this participant would identify with her racial identities separately and not as one identity.
Tiana	Multiracial Identity	I interpreted that this participant was raised to embrace a multiracial identity and continued to embrace this identity. She stressed being each race every day all the time, not just some days.
Jeremiah	Situational Identity	I interpreted through conversations with this participant that he would

		identify with his multiracial identity when people asked him about it but typically identified with a monoracial identity.
Roxi	Multiracial Identity	I interpreted through conversations with this participant that she started grappling with the idea of being multiracial in high school, and felt very comfortable with identifying with each side of her.
Karissa	Multiracial Identity	I interpreted through conversations with this participant that she developed her multiracial identity in high school, and her experience as a multiracial student was supported as she came into college, so she felt very comfortable identifying as multiracial.
Allison	Situational Identity	Through conversations with this participant I noticed she had a situational identity as she talked about how she mainly identified monoracially in her interview.

Alexus. Alexis is a freshman Spanish major. She identifies herself as Mexican American, or Mexican and White.

I identify as Mexican American, but if someone were not to know exactly what that means I would probably identify, as I'm half White and half Mexican. I usually don't go into exactly uhm that I'm White cuz most people know what that means.

Alexus has a very unique perspective because she does not experience her racial identity through the lens of a person of color like most of the other participants.

Phenotypically she looks White so when she is experiencing a microaggression it is not as apparent, or in some cases she feels she does not experience them at all because she can fit into the dominant culture. Sometimes she would prefer to experience things through the lens of a person of color because it would make her feel more legitimate as a Mexican person.

I would always like wish that I was more Mexican I guess. And I would pretend like I was speaking Spanish like to my mom but I was really just like Rollins my tongue and doing things like that, and then one time I was actually embarrassed that one of my shirts had a word in English on it cause I was like “no then they are not going to think I am Mexican enough.

Through my interactions with her, I interpreted she has not begun to understand herself in her multiracial identity. As conversations evolved between the participant and myself, we had discussions about how she felt about her identity development. In these conversations with Alexis I recognized that as she struggled to place herself in the context of a multiracial student, she was also beginning to try and understand what being multiracial meant for her. Because of that I think it is hard for her to have concrete answers of her experience, and what that means to her. She has had challenges with her skin color, which brings up this idea of colorism. Because she was perceived as White it is expected that she does not have certain experiences but she has had the same experiences just in a different way. The fact that she addressed herself as Mexican American, or letting people understand that she is half Mexican, shows that she feels she has to prove herself because society says since she looks this way she is privileged to be so.

As she talked about her needs as a multiracial student she talked about being comfortable in the dominant space on campus, but being uncomfortable in certain

cultural spaces. For her it is hard to identify why she feels uncomfortable in cultural groups. She explains that she is not sure if it is that she puts Hispanics up on a pedestal because she wants to be more Mexican, or if she feels that she is better than them, which she states she does not believe it is that she is better than them. She is working through her development and trying to understand why she feels uncomfortable in culturally diverse spaces.

Tiana. Tiana is a senior graphic design fine arts major. She identifies herself as “Afro-Latino”, which is something that she has created herself. Fully, she is a mix of Puerto Rican, Black, and Native American. When she checks boxes on the census she will check: African American or Black, Latino, and Bi/Multiracial. She is very confident in her multiracial identity, and this is mainly in part to her familial support of her identity development. Tiana struggled when she came to campus because her identity as a multiracial person was taken into question.

I had an identity crisis when I got here that’s my experience being multiracial on campus. Like I never had problems knowing what I was because everyone; every last person in my family is mixed. All the people I know. Uhm even if it is between tribes Guatemala you know they’re all mixed. And that was something that is completely normal to me and coming here where there’s all these monoracial groups it was an identity crisis because it is like people who are Black telling me this is what Black means, this is what Black is, and if you don’t act like this you’re not Black. And Latinos were doing the same thing and the Whiteness has always been an issue but I’ve come to terms with that so it is never, it is not as much a problem but that was my identity crisis.

For her, identifying as who she is has been a constant struggle. When asked what her expectations of college were prior to coming, she reported that her expectations were low.

I expected to not really be something that people really thought about. I mean when you look at me I look like I’m just Black, or at least that’s how people treat me. And so that plays a part in a lot of what I expect.

In large part she noticed that there was not anything for her on campus. This included programming, or some type of multiracial student support group. Other cultural minorities had heritage month celebrations, and other programming, but there was really nothing specific for multiracial students on campus until this past year. She stated that the programming provided:

A place for us to talk about it safely, providing a place where it is important, or at least I feel like it is important where I feel like my voice is heard. Simply recognition. Like hey I recognize that you are different from everybody else or different from a lot of people but not making me feel like my difference is bad.

Jeremiah. Jeremiah is a junior at Midwestern University. He identifies himself as African American or Black when filling out a census, but is Black, White, and Native American. Depending on the situation he will talk about his multiracial identity, but most of the time claims a monoracial identity. When talking about his identity he stated, “I mean I claim them if you ask me about them but I feel like I’m around Black people so I’m going to act mostly how, not the ignorant part, but how they act pretty much.” He talked about a time when he would want to identify as White because all of his friends were White, and he did not like being identified as Black because he wanted to be like his friends. When he moved to a larger city with a higher Black population his identity shifted because his group of friends were now Black.

When asked about his expectations prior to college he spoke of a specific person who made him feel welcomed in the multicultural center.

I just knew that I met with [a coordinator in the multicultural center] like when I was down here for some visit and she just made me feel welcomed and I knew there wasn’t a lot of Black people, but knowing that she was there and there was other people; I knew that together we’d be okay and we’d all help each other.

When asked how his needs were met, or unmet, when he came to campus he talked about how he really did not hang out with anybody on campus. He stayed to himself a lot until he was placed on academic probation. “I got emails about like events that they were having so they were met but I was more in my room being (student paused) I don’t know, uh not social I guess.”

Roxi. Roxi is a freshman animal science major. When identifying herself on a census she marks bi/multiracial. She is mixed with Black, Indian, Puerto Rican, Irish & German. For her she felt that her she started to recognize her identity development in high school. She felt that understanding who she was as a multiracial student really began to be challenged more during this time. “I feel like identifying yourself was so much harder before high school because there were so many parts of myself that I did not know how to identify with.” Now that she is in college she feels that she is more solidified in her multiracial identity. When asked how she feels being multiracial is viewed on campus, she did not feel like it was a problem at the university.

I don’t think it is as big a problem here at the university. I think it is just something another person just walking through I don’t see anybody defining people as color per se. Yet.

Since she is only a freshman she said that she couldn’t say that this perception won’t change.

When talking about her expectations of college being met, or unmet, she stated that they were met “simply just by noticing all different groups on campus.” She feels that being one race or another at Midwestern University did not matter. In both the focus group and the interview she did mention that she finds herself being friends with people who are from a different race group than she is, and this was the reason she felt that race

was not viewed negatively. As a commuter student she believes that her disconnect from the campus plays a large role in her perceptions of campus.

I come here go to my classes and I get out. So I don't really stay around to see what could be and what's going on under cover besides my classes. So yea that's a big effect on that.

Participants Participating in Interviews Only

For the interviews the participants set up their individual interview with me face-to-face. The interviews were conducted at the end of November into the beginning of December 2013. The interviews were conducted in an office space in the multicultural center. The multicultural center was a space that was a designated place by the researcher, but the participants were asked if they would like to have it elsewhere and they all agreed they were comfortable in that space. As the researcher I confirmed with the participants that they felt comfortable meeting in this space, and they agreed. Because of the familiarity with the space, each student seemed to be comfortable in that space and during the interview. There were two additional participants added for the interview process since they were not able to make the focus group, but still interested in participating in the study. These two participants will be introduced next.

Karissa. Karissa is a senior at Midwestern University and identifies differently depending on what is listed. If the option for other is available she will check other, but if it says check one she will check African American or Black. The participant reported that as a child she was very confused about her identity because she lived in a house with her mother who was Caucasian.

I grew up with my mom who is English and White and that was it. So anyone that was mixed ethnicity was just me and my brother in my house. So anyone that was around us did not really understand, I did not really understand...I did not really grow up around my dad who is Black, and I never met anyone on his

side of the family. So trying to understand why it is the way I am not having anyone that was like me even in my own house was really confusing.

The student said for her she became more aware of her identity development process began in high school, so by the time she got to college she was very comfortable with her multiracial identity. She also received a scholarship specifically for multiracial students so she felt very supported in her identity since she was around other multiracial students who had the same experiences as her. She reported that having this scholarship created a space where her, and other students like her, could talk about their experiences on campus. Her expectations of college were low, if she had any at all. She expected to be treated just like any other minority and that the minority population would be very small. In this sense she prepared herself to be at a predominately White institution where people like her were the minority because this is the way she grew up.

Though she felt as if she was confident in her multiracial identity and felt supported on campus, she did say that some type of programming, or multiracial group, would be beneficial for her.

I think even as a freshman we do a lot of courses that focus on integrating students to campus but not really integrating all the different types of people that are on campus, and I think having some type of event, or required class, [or] the little presentation that freshman are supposed to go to, or freshman and sophomore, or transfers, or whoever would've been helpful...Not just [for] me but the people that are surrounded by me that don't understand what it is like to be of mixed race, and mixed ethnicities.

Allison. Allison is a junior at Midwestern University. On the census she identifies herself as Asian, but she is part Vietnamese, part Laotian, and part White. When she is filling out a census form she only marks Asian, but in most other situations she will identify as multiracial. She feels as if her multiracial identity is not recognized per se, but just categorized into a whole group of minority students. When asked if she

felt like she was grouped a single box in terms of her identity she responded saying, “Oh yeah. Even though I’m also part of them too....I feel like they still separate me. Which is understandable I guess.”

Allison experienced being multiracial from a different perspective than the other participants, because many of her experiences were cultural. There are very distinct cultural boundaries when thinking about the Asian culture. She talked about her experience as an Asian who was born in the U.S., and holds American traditions. This complicated her experience because she did not fit the mold. She stated, “I’m not very embraced by the Asian population on our campus nor the White population.” Because of cultural differences between her and other Asians on campus, she feels a disconnect from “their culture.”

When asked about her expectations prior to coming to campus she stated that she knew she would stick out,

So I expected to be noticed by other people and with me though I also hang out with a lot of other ethnicities, people of other backgrounds, so that I stand out with them too. So, I expected to stand out.

Though each participant has a different perspective on their identity, and different experiences, there are many similarities between the experiences. These experiences will be explored throughout the following themes. Each participant shares common experiences on campus related to being multiracial at a predominately White campus.

Now that each student has been introduced I will proceed to the findings of the study. To begin the conversation of microaggressions amongst multiracial college students, I will begin with an overview of how the students in the study viewed being multiracial on campus.

Findings

I approached this study from a social constructivist perspective in which I allowed each of my participants to identify their experience, and worked to create their experiences into a meaningful story. There are multiple realities to each person's experiences, and that influenced the way I put together my findings. Also by utilizing the ecology theory as a framework I was focused on capturing the uniqueness of each participant's experiences as multiracial students at a Predominately White University. As mentioned previously, each student's experience is different but they all share a multiracial identity. In understanding the campus perception the participants had, I wanted to show the uniqueness of each participant. In doing so I utilized all voices finding commonalities when I could but letting each voice stand-alone if needed. The next section will talk about how the students in my study viewed being multiracial on campus. This section gives context to the campus environment toward multiracial students through the participant's perspectives.

Campus Climate Toward Multiracial Students

In trying to understand the participant's perceptions about the campus climate towards multiracial students, I asked each participant about their perceptions of the campus culture in terms of multiracial, or mixed race, students. Many of them agreed that it was something that was not really recognized, or thought about.

I think its kind of a general confusion. It is the way that people see it. Like they understand that you can be mixed race, mixed ethnicities...It is kind of like that taboo topic that no one really wants to dive into but everyone is always really curious what are you. (Karissa)

This is the overall feeling most of the participants had when talking about what the perception of multiracial students was on campus. Many times they felt students who are

multiracial might not be recognized at all. Tiana stated, “I don’t think it is viewed. I don’t think people-- I don’t think they talk about it. I don’t think they think about it.” Tiana also felt that the campus was unwelcoming, and initially she felt like an outsider.

When talking about how it was viewed the idea of microaggressions came up in each of their comments, but they were not explicit in the experience of it meaning the students did not recognize them. Participants identified the campus climate was one where they were treated as if they were part of a perceived monoracial group based on their skin tone even if that was not how they identified. But in many cases they do not fit into the monoracial groups the campus confines them to, and leaves them feeling like they have to prove themselves as a monoracial minority even when they do not want to be identified that way. Allison stated,

It is like even if you are part uhm White at a predominately White [school] you’re still considered colored, and they don’t see you I don’t know I feel like you get uhm treated like as how they would treat others that are not White. So, it is just different of course. So I see, I feel like that’s how students who are White see multiracial students.

Tiana states, “not only is it confusing for minorities but to White people it’s just like well you’re just one of them [a minority]. You know whatever that is, and that sucks”. Even if participants wanted to identify themselves as being multiracial there is a general feeling of being categorized because the issue of being mixed race has yet to be discussed on campus. Understanding what that means for them, as well as the campus climate, is a challenge.

Though many of the students felt that being multiracial was not recognized at all on campus, the perceptions of the first year students in the study were different. Both of the first year students had a positive view on how multiracial students were perceived on

campus. They felt that it was more about people being genuinely curious about who they were, and having meaningful conversations about it. Though the idea of people being genuinely curious is a microaggression, this was not looked at negatively by both of these students. Roxi felt that because she was only a freshman that her experiences could possibly change. For Alexis she felt that she was accepted on campus. Karissa also had a mostly positive experience on campus, but for her it was more a learning opportunity for herself, and the other person she was interacting with. In talking about an intercultural communication course she took she stated, “I think that was a great kind of uplifting experience from being mixed in a way that I could help other people understand, but it also helped me understand who I am.”

Overall, the students felt that being multiracial on campus was not viewed at all, because there was a general confusion about what it meant to be a multiracial student. Even though they see themselves as multiracial they are still perceived as colored. Though this does not tie into my research questions it is important to understand the campus climate to set up the context for why the participants are experiencing campus the way they do. The following sections will delve further into these perceptions of campus to shape the experiences of multiracial students in terms of microaggressions.

Experiences of Multiracial Students and Microaggressions

The idea of microaggressions can be seen as I describe participant’s perceptions of the campus climate, and culture. As it’s mentioned in the previous section the perception of many of the participants in this study is that being multiracial is not something that is viewed, or discussed on college campuses. The campus climate shows the subtle, and microscopic, ways in which microaggressions work to infiltrate the

everyday lives of multiracial students on campus. In some cases microaggressions did not affect them because they were not looking at it as such, which is why microaggressions are so prevalent in the campus environment. Microaggressions exist because the experiences of those who are victims of microaggressions are invalidated and not recognized by dominant groups. Though the idea of microaggressions is often talked about when the campus climate is described, the following sections will describe the thematic findings of this study in regards to experiences with microaggressions at Midwestern University. Before getting into the themes I will first talk about colorism, which can be seen as one of the most common microaggressions. This term was not directly reported by students but emerged as I transcribed interviews with the participants of this study. To reiterate, colorism is the preferential treatment of minorities based on skin tone or the perceived benefits of a fairer skinned minorities to a darker skinned minority. The presence of colorism interwoven throughout every experience in relation to microaggressions with multiracial individuals, which is why I utilize it as a precursor to the themes, but I felt it was necessary to talk about some of the experiences separately to understand the impact it has on the experience of multiracial students.

Colorism

In conversations with the participants the idea of colorism could be found in many of their experiences. As mentioned before, colorism is one of the most common microaggressions, especially for multiracial persons. The idea of colorism came up in both the focus group and interviews. As a whole colorism is an overarching microaggression experienced by multiracial students and is integrated into every facet of their lives because they are delegitimized as a monoracial person. Their perceptions of

their identities are discounted because they are seen to be favored in the eyes of monoracial people in this society. There is a stigma that there is differential treatment by someone who is lighter skinned, compared to those who are darker skinned. Tiana shared:

I feel like a lot of times since it is popular in social media or well just the media period to have fairer skin, which tells people oh that's mixed. People are like oh I'm mixed so they can be like those girls that they see on TV. You know when you look at a music video there's always a girl with light colored eyes the soft hair that's straight not to curly, and she has a caramel colored skin and she's mixed because Black girls that are just straight up Black don't look like that.

Roxi at times felt herself getting angry because of her dark skin. In the focus group she stated, "I used to get really angry; resentful about who I am. Why I'm mixed. Why I can't be White like my mom because I felt they got it easier." In most cases there is an assumption that because a person is mixed race they have it easier but to them they do not believe that. Tiana states,

It is always well at least you have this, well at least you have that, or you don't get to complain because your hair grows, or I'm so mad at you for cutting your hair off because Black girls don't have good hair and you had such good hair and you cut it all off.

Participants talked about how even within their family structures biases based on colorism were present. Alexis talked about how she was one of the only people out of her siblings and cousins who had fair skin. In many cases she wanted to be darker because she wanted to look like the rest of her family. She did not want to be singled out as the one that was different. "People do look at us different when we're all together. I mean just because I look White doesn't mean I necessarily look like my dad [who is White]" (Alexis). Tiana talked about what her mother was taught about race as a child. She talked about her mother and she talked about her light skin and how she could be

passable in society for someone who is White. Her perceived racial identity (i.e., White) gave her privilege, which plays a role in the idea of colorism.

My mom's fair skinned kind of like Denise Huxtable and in the time when she was growing up like yeah she had this nappy hair but she's just light skinned so my mom is totally passable. Like she could be White if she wanted to; she could be Latina if she wanted to but because of everything my lived through in the sixties and the seventies she [Tiana's grandmother] thought it was important that my mom understand what it meant to be a Black woman at any capacity.

Even though her mother could blend in with the majority population her grandmother still knew that she would be treated like any other minority.

Each participant talked about colorism in some way during the study even though it was not explicitly stated. For them colorism was about the inability to be who they wanted to be because of a perceived identity that was forced upon them, and the perceived benefits that go with it. Allison talked about how even though she is half White, she does not fit in with the White population because she does not look like them. This idea of fit will be discussed further in later discussions of the thematic findings. Ideas of colorism infiltrate many of the microaggressions multiracial students face, and can be found in any setting. Now that I have set up the campus climate in which these students navigate, and given some examples of colorism within the research, I will move into the first thematic finding.

Theme 1: What are you? Delegitimizing Experiences/Questioning Authenticity

For many multiracial students their identity is questioned every day, and who they are does not fit into the constricting categories society has set for them. Participants in this study talked about their experiences being delegitimized because of others' perceptions of their perceived privilege as multiracial individuals due to the fairness of their skin, and the ability to assimilate into the dominant culture. This included

questioning their identity because that is not how monoracial people would think someone like them should look and in many cases confining multiracial students into a box that does not fit them. Alexis shared how she would be insulted if someone thought that she was not Mexican because that is how she wanted to be perceived.

If someone were to ask me what ethnicity I am and I say Mexican American, then they say you don't look Mexican, that I almost take as an insult because you don't know what I want to look like. Obviously I can't really change it but you don't know what I want to look like, and saying that I'm not something what if I want to be that and I think that could be tough to hear. Especially if I've wanted to be Mexican my whole life, or more Mexican.

Because of her perceived identity as a White female, there are certain benefits tied to that. For Alexis this experience was not something she wanted. It was not how she wanted to be identified. She wanted to be more Mexican. The other participants in the study shared this experience of not wanting to be categorized. To be told who they are instead of letting them identify themselves was insulting to them as a multiracial person, because it is their right to be able to identify in whatever way fits them. This experience was a frequent microaggression experienced by participants in this study

Though Alexis had similar experiences as other participants in the study, there was a point during conversations with her when she questioned her legitimacy as a participant, and wondered if she was the right person for this study.

I would say I look more like my dad who's White, and when I'm living in a White world, uhm or mostly White world, it is easier to blend in I guess. But that doesn't mean that I haven't dealt with things that were not, that had to do with my race. But that could also mean someone who (pause) I guess when it comes, when it depends on who I identify with I would identify with most people. Which makes me wonder if I am like the right person for this, because I was really excited about it and I wanted to help out and I want to make sure that school is good for everybody you know.

When asked about her experiences as a multiracial student who could blend in with the majority group on campus, she felt that in many cases she did not see microaggressions happening. Through conversations with her she reported that she recognized that largely her experiences came from a dominant lens, and that was why she questioned if what she had to say was valid. Even though she was not recognizing her experiences with microaggressions, her inability to feel comfortable within her chosen racial identity is a microaggressive experience. Her perceived identity of being able to blend in with the majority of White students on campus made her feel that because she does not experience microaggressions in the same way other participants did she was not the right person for the study. Through conversations with her I gathered that she feels as if she is not legitimate enough as a multiracial student because of her appearance. She is still working through her identity and experiences, so at times it was more difficult for her to talk about her experiences as a multiracial student in college. For her looking White and being multiracial can be a blessing and a curse. “I kind of have the best of both worlds and the worst of both worlds in a sense. Like I have the perks of being like everybody else, but also the ability to stand out if I need to.”

Another experience participants addressed was how people would try to guess what category they should fit into based on their appearance or dress. Tiana talked about how people are always trying to dissect her identity because she does not look like other Latinos on campus.

People are always like dissecting how I appear on the outside uhm I even guess my own attitude I guess their dissecting who I am and how I am and attributing that to a race. Like you have...you know you're so opinionated, you talk fast, or you're spicy and sassy because you're a Latina (Tiana).

Karissa's experiences support this,

I'm pretty comfortable with who I am but a lot of times people are like oh you don't relax you're hair, you don't curl your hair, you're hair isn't so whatever so a lot of stuff like that which is people's expectations and what I view differently. It doesn't jive in their brain.

So because of the fact that participants act a certain way, dress a certain way, or their hair looks a certain way, others try to categorize them based off of stereotypes of their perceived race. Because you have good hair you cannot be Black or if you are darker than a paper bag then you are Black.

Participants shared experiences where even people close to them such as their friends would question their identity/appearance and invalidate their experiences.

Allison stated,

I had a friend that told me like uhm she, she was saying something about a group of like a group of Asians, and I told her I'm part Asian, and then she's like oh well you're— I don't consider you Asian. 'Cause I don't hang out with them. So that kind of made me a little uncomfortable when she said I don't consider you Asian, which kind of made me think then what do you think of Asians then or why wouldn't I be considered Asian 'cause I am Asian! I am! So it made me yeah it made me a little uncomfortable of the way like how does she...if she did not know me how would she perceive me?

This experience was difficult to understand for Allison because for her she identifies as being Asian. For someone to tell her this was not how they perceived her was shocking to her, and made her wonder how her friends did perceive her racial identity and why they thought that.

Tiana talked about how she went to her mother after she had a racial identity crisis shortly after coming to campus. She talked about the struggle of having to talk to her mother about it because her mother had never experienced being questioned about her identity. Being multiracial was something that was supported throughout her, and her mother's, life so she did not understand.

I was telling her that I was having racial crisis identity after coming to college and she was like why? I always raised you to know who you are and what you are and I was like yeah it is not so much that I don't know it is just that it is being questioned by other people, and her answer was so matter-of-factly that it almost felt dismissive. She was just like if they don't understand what you are and who you are then that's their problem not yours why are you letting that create a crisis in your life?

Though she is confident in her multiracial identity because it was being questioned it became a really challenging task, and frustrated her.

I feel like I have to validate the races that I say I am and even just saying like I claim it. No that's fact. Like that is the truth. Why would I lie about it? Why would I make it up? That's stupid. And who are you to tell me that this isn't enough percent to make me worthy of claiming that race? (Tiana).

She also stated,

My struggle, my conflict, my wish, that this would be resolved is people understanding and accepting that I'm multiple things at once and that's okay. Like I don't have to explain it to you. I don't need your permission. You don't have to understand what it is or how it is you just need to understand and know that it is (Tiana).

Alexus commented on this experience by stating,

When you are what you are then that's all there is to it I guess. Like you don't like yeah it is how you identify and how you want to be perceived but uhm whether you like it or not you are what you are and in my case I'm really happy to be both parts of my parents, and I'm happy that their different.

Roxi talked about her experience moving from one state to another and how that was very different for her. "I came here and I felt like I was faking because no one had an accent here and I'm obviously Black and so if I had an accent they thought aw she's faking....and I tried so hard to have that Black accent" (Roxi). She briefly talked about her identity development that she went through during high school. Even though this bothered her at the beginning eventually she became more comfortable with it, because she was comfortable with who she was and how she identified. "I felt okay being Black

and having this weird accent that no one understands why I have it” (Roxi). Tiana shares a similar experience.

Coming here to Midwestern University it was like well your last name is [Spanish surname] and you’re in the Hispanic Student Club, but you’re Black, so what’s going on. You speak like a White girl. Your Spanish sounds weird. Well duh my mom’s Puerto Rican my dad’s Panamanian and Guatemalan of course my Spanish sounds crazy. Uhm it is crazy. But then for the Latinos a lot of them are Mexican and I’m not Mexican.

Alexus adds,

People always say like not because I look Mexican but because I’m like yeah I’m half Mexican and then they’ll say well do you speak Spanish? And then the people whoa are Mexican are like “ahhh” (in a disappointed voice) like what a waste of a life someone who doesn’t speak Spanish who’s Mexican.

The experience of participants being questioned about their racial identification, or legitimacy in their racial category, was very real for many of the participants. For them if you do not know how to do certain things within the culture you are not enough for them, and you do not fit. Tiana talked about how hard it is to resist the urge to fight back when in certain situations.

It is hard to not get so tense and want to fight but the only way we’re ever going to solve the problem, the only way people will stop looking at us sideways you know when our kids are brown with freckles and red hair is if we take the opportunity to let them know like hey the thing you’re thinking that you see on TV not reality. I’m real this is real life. We have the same parents but we are different skin color. It is fine.

For her being put down because you do not fit a certain mold was really frustrating.

Roxi and Alexis also had similar stories about their parents and people questioning who their parents were because they do not look like them. “I should be lighter but my dad’s really really dark and so a lot of people don’t know what I am” (Roxi).

Karissa summarized the experience by stating, “I think it is everyone’s natural instinct to be really curious, and to identify you and to place you in some sort of identifying box.” For many multiracial students the first thing someone wants to do is categorize them into one racial category based on their physical characteristics. This delegitimized their experiences as multiracial students because they are not given the opportunity to identify themselves the way they want to. Participants talked about a general confusion about how society perceived them compared to how they perceived themselves. As Alexis talked about her identity she stated, “sometimes I don’t always say that I’m White because it is obvious. Like I have pale skin that’s just how it is. You know I don’t usually need to be like oh yeah I’m White too.” This identifies her difference in the context of what it means to be a person of color. Because she is perceived as White there is a perception that she has some type of benefit in society, but for her she wants to identify that she is a person of color. This moves us into the inability to fit into certain groups, or spaces, or wanting to be able to assimilate and not be recognized.

Theme 2: Inability to Fit In

In many situations participants indicated being part of a monoracial group on campus was not the best for them, and each of them identified the inability to fit within specific monoracial groups during the data collection phase of the study. This included the feeling of being categorized or put into a box. Participants expressed frustration when they were made to feel that who they are is not considered valid enough to be part of a certain group. For example, Tiana talked about being part of the Hispanic Club at Midwestern University and how they questioned her when she came in because she

looked Black not Hispanic. She stated, “When I was in Hispanic Club they looked at me funny. Why is this Black girl in Hispanic Club?” In her experience “as a multiracial student you have to get in where you fit in. Like you have to create that space” (Tiana).

Alexus talked about her experiences trying to join the Hispanic club:

I felt comfortable in campus because I can identify with the White part of campus uhm in that sense. But then at the same time there are parts like I go to the Hispanic Club and I’ve never felt comfortable. I’ve never felt completely comfortable with all Mexicans just because I’ve wanted...I’ve really wanted to be more like Mexican my whole life because I know my mom was all Mexican and I wanted to be like her. Uhm but wanting to be more like them kind of made my...made me set myself apart from them, and I feel like even if they totally took me in as their own I don’t know if I could ever feel completely one with them. I would love to but I don’t know if I could let myself do that because I see myself differently from them whether it is I put them up on a pedestal, or if I think I’m better than them, I don’t know.

Joining a race specific student organization on campus, she experienced a lot of cognitive dissonance around how she viewed herself and others. She felt that she fit into the “White” part of campus but not in this club. For her she wanted to be more Mexican, but even when put in a situation to be with others who identify similarly she does not feel comfortable. Like Tiana, there is a sense of isolation when joining a monoracial group because they do not look like everyone else in the group making them feel like outcasts.

Alexus also talked about the ability, or inability, to fit as a multiracial person due to others’ perceptions. She talked about how she does not necessarily have negative experiences based on her race, but she understands they happen. In some cases she wanted to experience a microaggression the way that someone who looked like a person of color would. In her process of understanding her experiences she realized that comments were being made that were questioning who she was, but she never realized them. In talking about this she stated, “I feel like there are also people that are jealous of

multiracial people because maybe they think that they [multiracial people] can fit anywhere, but maybe being multiracial myself does that mean you can't fit in anywhere?" There is a conflict between whether or not she fits because she is multiracial, or she does not fit at all.

I think multiracial either means that you're going to fit in everywhere or you're going to fit in nowhere...Because even if you may look super comfortable in that setting--even if people are accepting you it really depends on how you feel about it. Even if people are accepting you, you can still feel rejected (Alexus).

As she talked through her experience she began to question whether or not being multiracial meant you fit, or do not fit within dominant cultures. This assumption is based on societal influences that say because a person is multiracial they fit into society better because they are light skinned, and historically that has been the benefit of being mixed race. On the other side of that being the person to experience being multiracial she feels that even though she is seen as being accepted in society she still feels rejected in many ways, because who she is perceived to be does not match who she is.

Roxie had a similar experience as she talked about not fitting because she feels that depending on the situation she is in she has to change who she is in order to do so, and she does not like that. "I feel like I don't fit in as well because I end up having to change how I talk, or change something about me just so we [her friends] can communicate to the highest level to have the most fun" (Roxie). For her the inability to fit related back to how she could communicate with those she was hanging out with, and because they did not have similar experiences, or they did not talk the same way, it was more difficult to communicate with them because they did not understand. Tiana and Alexus also shared similar experiences. They feel as if they have to be more Black, or

Mexican, in order to fit into the “in crowd.” Roxie further expanded on this experience by stating,

I’m obviously a little darker than them and if I stand with the African American group and you know they’re being loud, [and so] I’m obviously loud because I just don’t care [I’m] trying to get my point across, [but] I don’t fit there either because I’m too light. Now if I’m with my White friends I’m too dark which is very hard.

For her she was going to act the same way her friends acted, but she did not want this to count against her, and for people to think she was just another stereotypical Black woman. For her being able to fit in with her Black peers was just as difficult as trying to fit in with her White peers because she was too dark to be White, and she was too light to be Black. Tiana noted a similar experience with feeling like she does not fit anywhere when it comes to her racial identity:

I couldn’t even really make friends because for the Black kids it is like well your hair is nice and your skin’s not that dark so you’re not that Black and you don’t talk like us so you’re not Black. You’re not Black enough essentially. And with the Latinos you don’t speak Spanish so it is the same thing. Or your Spanish is different, and I mean my Spanish isn’t something that I go around flaunting, because it is not good so it is embarrassing. And then I don’t have brown skin so I’m obviously not White enough for White people

Alexus has a similar experience but she talked about it differently. She stated “I have had difficulty with not fitting in places but that rarely is because of my ethnicity [race] I would say.” So in thinking about this experience she really did not attribute it to race, or ethnicity, even when in most cases she was being discriminated against because of her racial identities. Through further exploration she stated, “but thinking back on it now I see that it was probably against my race but at the time I probably wouldn’t have noticed that.” In many cases microaggressions are not apparent to the person being microaggressed. As mentioned previously, for Alexis going through and understanding

her experiences in the context of her racial identity was very difficult because it was something she had not really thought about before entering into this study. There is a constant battle between being able to fit, and not being able to fit, because even if they identify themselves to be part of a certain group they still have to prove themselves worthy of being part of that group.

Karissa talked about how because she does not wear a specific type of clothing, or because she speaks differently, she has struggled to fit.

Sometimes a lot of people used to kind of critique the way that I wore clothes because I typically don't dress in a way that people would expect people who are mixed, or Black, to dress.

Because she did not fit the stereotypical mold of her perceived identity she was discriminated against and accused of "acting White."

Also in communicating this experience Karissa talked about her perceived communication style affecting her relationships with her professors because there was an expected perception of her based on her ability to articulate herself well through email. When they seen her they were surprised by the fact that she looked Black. This relates to the notion of "acting White" because being able to articulate oneself in a professional manner, or looking a particular way, communicates what it means to be White in today's society. For her it was who she was and she found it offensive when people would make the assumption that because she communicated in a specific way that she somehow should fit a specific description of what it meant to be White, but she does not fit into those roles when they see the color of her skin. Following she describes her experience,

When people don't know who I am or I'll send an email of importance and then I'll meet that person for the first time and they say "oh I did not really expect you" and then you'll be like oh what did you mean oh I did not expect you to be Black or I did not expect you to be a girl or anything like that so you get kind of

this push back by what do you mean you did not expect me to be Black. Oh, well your email was so proper and well written. So then you're like oh ok so because I'm Black I can't have correct grammar and I can't understand concepts and email you professionally. I think that one I've gotten from my job, emailing teachers and professors, the large class uhm even applying for like yacht club positions they'll ask questions and then not expect you to have a distinct answer or even understand their questions so they'll speak slowly to you and make sure you understand really well. And you're like yes I get it. Thank you. Now you make me feel like an eighth grader. I get it I don't even want to answer the question anymore. So I think that happens a lot. I think that's kind of like the main one. Like oh I did not expect you to be...never mind. Oh Black cool (Karissa).

For her these microaggressive acts happened all the time, especially in the classroom setting, and affected her relationships with professors. It shows the inability to be able to fit into the culture because she does not act the way they think she should, or the perceptions ascribed to her actions do not fit who they perceive her to be. In many cases this is because society does not perceive them as mixed race but as a monoracial person, which is the frustration for many multiracial students because they are not monoracial they are multiracial.

Tiana talked about not being able to fit in terms of people's lack of awareness, or knowledge, of multiracial student experiences.

If there were any issue well this is kind of being nit-picky and it is mostly just being honest, the problem would be lack of exposure, lack of education. Like I know what I am every day that I exist. People like me also understand that. People not like me might understand it if they had been exposed to somebody like me before, and this isn't just saying like White people don't get it 'cause there are African Americans there are Black people. Latinos, Asians etcetera who don't understand. Uhm and I think that to me it doesn't...I'm not concerned so much with fitting into a certain group. I now that I'm never going to fit into that Black box, or that Puerto Rican box, or whatever.

She also talked about having to fight to create spaces that she fits in, and how there is nothing for multiracial students on campus. "If you want something like that you have to go find it or make it known that's what you need if it is not already in place" (Tiana).

Having to fight for an opportunity was a very challenging task for her, and took a toll on her as a student. She stated,

If I hadn't had to fight to create these relationships, if I hadn't had to fight to make a place and a space for multiracial students because not to toot my own horn but I do feel like I'm a little bit of a trailblazer uhm if I hadn't done those things than I don't think that I would have found the niche I wouldn't have found the place here

In the discussion of the findings on how multiracial students manage microaggressions I will go into further detail about how this took a toll on her education. For Tiana she felt that because she had to fight to create these spaces for herself on this campus that academically she could have done better. Karissa reported a similar experience as she discussed her relationships with her professors. She felt that if she would not have been approached by faculty in a way that was demeaning to who she was then she would have felt more comfortable going to them for help, but because of the relationships she had with them she rarely would go to them. In thinking about this I talked with the participants about how they might feel supported on campus, which moves us into the next sub-section before we move into students wanting to assimilate.

Support for inclusion and fit. During the interviews with each participant when I asked about whether or not some type of multiracial group, or programming would have been beneficial for them each of them agreed it may have made their experience better. In many cases it would provide a space for them to talk about being multiracial, and share their experiences with others who have similar experiences. It would provide a space for them to not feel alone on campus, and it would make them feel like their experience as a multiracial student is valid on campus.

Many participants talked about being able to speak with someone who has had similar experiences as them and knowing that they are not alone on campus. Karissa had the opportunity to be part of a group of multiracial students who were able to talk about their shared experiences, and understood the benefits to being in an environment where she shared the same experiences with those around her rather than being isolated. Tiana felt that “even if we don’t like each other we still make it a point to acknowledge one another because at the end of the day like we don’t want to have to....we don’t want to feel alone.”

Assimilation. This inability to fit was not consistent amongst all of the participants and two of the participants identified with wanting to just blend in. Alexis talked about an experience she had when she was in kindergarten. “I was coloring with a brown crayon, and he (student) said stop coloring on yourself and I was like, being a kindergartner, I did not want to be identified as different, I wanted to be just like everybody else” (Alexis). In certain circumstances she still has this same mentality in college. Depending on the day she may, or may not, want to be identified because it is just easier to blend in. This idea of not wanting to be identified or seen as different was an experience that was shared by Jeremiah. He talked about how he does what his friends do, and what they do has a large influence on what he does, and the experiences he has on campus. He talked a lot about his experience living in a small metropolitan community in Nebraska versus living in a large urban community. For him in the small metropolitan community many of his friends were White, and he just wanted to be like them. He did not want to be singled out by being different. “I remember my mom told me like oh yeah you have like the square nose from your grandfather and that hurt. Like

I don't want to hear that. I was just, I was trying to be like my friends you know White” (Jeremiah). He talked about being afraid of Black people during this time, because for him all he saw was the stereotype of the Black race. When he moved to a community where there was more Black people his perceptions changed, and he started acting more Black. This is still the case for Jeremiah in college as the people whom he is around are mainly Black.

“Some people prefer to like blend in with the walls. That’s cool like some people prefer to stand out and I guess for me it depends on the day” (Alexus). Assimilation, or blending, into the culture was something very prevalent for Alexus. It came up in both the focus group and interview. In the focus group she talked about something called purple paper syndrome. She explained it as

Where uhm when everybody at school uhm everybody wants the blue paper because that’s the cool color to take. Well you take the purple because nobody else is taking the purple or because there’s more of the purple left, or just because you don’t want to be like everybody else. So it is purple paper syndrome.

So in some cases she wanted to be different from other people and you have purple paper syndrome, but sometimes it’s just because you are left with the only color there. In her explanation she talked about how sometimes she wanted to stick out, and sometimes she did not because it was easier that way. In many ways this relates back to assimilating into the culture, because getting stuck with the blue paper when you do not want to be identified is challenging. Though Alexus felt that sometimes blending was better, she also felt that embracing who she was is something she takes pride in. She talked about living in a White world and what that meant for her.

I’d say I look more like my dad who’s White, and when I’m living in a White world uhm or mostly White world uh it is easier to blend in I guess. Uhm but that doesn’t mean that I haven’t dealt with things that had to do with my race.

Though many times she blends in with the dominant culture on campus, she still feels that she experiences some things from a racial perspective it is just not as prevalent for her. The same can be said about Jeremiah. For him he lives his life as if he were a Black man, so experiencing things because he is multiracial is not at the forefront.

For many multiracial students it is their choice to assimilate into their respective groups. In many cases this is why it is difficult to identify a multiracial student because they do not choose to identify themselves as multiracial, or they do not want to feel singled out. There is comfort in being able to fit, because in many situations they are not able to fit into one category and feel isolated on campus.

Theme 3: Being the Voice

For many of the participants they felt that being multiracial gave them multiple perspectives when it came to having discussions about race. Karissa talked about being able to view situations from different perspectives in the classroom. “You get to view things from a lot of different aspects opposed to most people seeing it as Black and White, you see a lot of different histories and cultures and experiences that way”

(Karissa). Tiana states,

I’m quick to give the multiracial opinion, or my multiracial opinion, right. So when questions of race come up or here’s the Black perspective, and here’s the Latino perspective, here’s the Asian and Native American perspective, here’s the White perspective. When I see all of those things represented as a whole that’s nice and that’s good and I’m glad that we’re in a space that we’re sharing those things, but I don’t fit into any one of those boxes. I’m a human being I don’t live in a box.

While many of the participants identified the ability to have different perspectives as one of the perks to being multiracial, for Tiana it was not always well received.

People always have this exasperated look like ahhh here the mixed girl goes again with her mixed perspective and can't you just pick one, and some days your this and some days your that. Like dude chill out. No not some days I'm this and some days I'm that every day I'm all of it.

For her it was frustrating because when she would give the multiple perspectives of being mixed race it was not perceived well by her peers, and she was told to just pick one race or the other. This type of microaggression showed a lack of knowledge surrounding this population of students, and the inability to look at race from a broader context.

Allison talked about being viewed as a racial minority in class and how when another perspective is needed they turn to her. "That's the only thing really like that made me notice that I'm not White or that I'm multiracial." For her being multiracial is something that was not something she thought about all the time. It is a part of who she was but in more cases than not she was singled out as being a minority because of her perceived identity as Asian. This perception gave her automatic authority to be able to speak for her race even if that is not the experience that she has. Similarly, Karissa talked about a time when she recognized she was the only person of mixed race in the class.

I think everyone that's of a different culture has had that one situation when you start talking about like hate, or any sort of hate crimes, and everyone looks around and you're like oh God I am the only mixed person even if you did not realize it everyone else knew it before you even thought of it. You were like, oh God, I have to answer this question and I see how it is gonna go. So I definitely had that experience probably in every class that I've ever had.

She also talked about how her professors would gauge how she would receive, or react, to a certain topic before they would discuss it. "You could tell when the teacher is about to bring up a topic and they only look at you to kinda gauge your attitude on like how you're gonna perceive this topic. That's definitely happened in countless classes."

Tiana talked about her experience having conversations about race and someone asking

her about the “Black experience”. “What do Black people think? All eyes turn to me. Well I don’t know ‘cus I’m not even all the way Black, so why don’t you ask a Black person?” (Tiana). Karissa expresses frustration in these types of situations:

Most times it is frustrating just to sit there and feel like you have to magically have the answers. You have to understand the situation better than anyone, and for me the way I grew up I am mixed but I did not really grow up with a lot of African Americans (Karissa).

Multiracial students do not have the same experience, and just because they can check a box does not mean that they know what it is like to be part of that cultural group. “It is [a] really frustrating experience because the way I grew up isn’t necessarily the way you grew up but because of me being able to check the box Black I’m supposed to understand everything” (Karissa).

For Tiana there was an obligation to be the voice, and try to mend race relations for all. She felt it was her job to carry the weight of teaching and fighting for those whose experiences are not validated just like hers. She stated, “I feel like I’m kind of a liaison or something between groups of people who are minorities but not necessarily a racial minority”. In many cases she felt like she had to be the spokesperson for all underrepresented groups on campus, and therefore it was her responsibility to speak out on their behalf. Even though it did not relate to her specifically as a mixed race student, she felt like each identity that encompassed a person should be recognized and celebrated.

I think a lot of times in monoracial groups they think only about themselves and they think only about their race. They don’t think about people who are between two races....me being multiracial on campus that’s kind of a responsibility that I have because it is something that I notice and so even if those people aren’t in the same space as me I take it on myself to speak up for them when they’re not there. Which can be hard but I don’t mind.

Allison discussed a similar experience as she talked about bridging the gap between White students, and non-White students.

[There are] stereotypes that I do try to fight and so I feel like I could talk to my White peers easily cus I was born here, I know the culture of course and uhm so that kind of helps with them actually understanding me and listening to me opposed to someone completely...cus I am completely different from them too but, you know what I mean (laughter) yeah and so kinda help bridge the gap between White students and non-White students at a predominately White university so yeah kind of like breaking stereotypes and that.

She feels that as a person who sees the world from multiple perspectives she could help facilitate these conversations, and help bridge the gap.

The experiences of microaggressions can vary depending on the student and how they identify themselves. As has been shown in this section microaggressions can look a variety of different ways, and mean different things to each student. Many times they are very painful and cause a lot of confusion for the victim. In understanding what microaggressions look like for multiracial students, we will now turn to how microaggressions made them feel, and then discuss some ways in which the participants in this study managed microaggressions.

The Effect of Microaggressions

In order to understand how a multiracial person manages microaggressions one must understand how they make a multiracial person feel. The first portion of this section will talk about the effect microaggressions have on the participants in this study.

Tiana summed up many of the experiences in this statement,

As much as I can want for it not to be about microaggressions the fact that I don't feel comfortable in this city, at my job, in my classes, in the studio when I'm doing my homework; the fact that I'm uncomfortable in my own skin not like I don't like it or I don't like myself but I know that because I walk into a room and I'm already perceived a certain way based on how I look, but then the way that I act doesn't match that and what I am made up of also doesn't match any of those

other things, like that's stressful, it is exhausting, it causes anxiety, it weighs on you, it gets old. Like none of that is good. The only positive from that is I have the experience now and I know how to deal with it in the future should it arise. But that's not fun, that's not exciting, this hasn't been the time of my life.

Microaggressions are exhausting, and take a toll on the person being microaggressed both psychologically and physically. It can be very stressful and many times they want to be able to not get so angry about it. Roxie states,

Uhm it used to make me feel offended. Now it just makes me laugh because it is just hilarious thinking all the different questions people ask me. I like answering questions so it just makes me giggle like okay I'll educate you, so yea.

Feeling offended is an experience shared by Alexis. In any situation where her identity comes into question, she immediately feels that she has to defend herself, and the statements sometimes offend her.

Karissa describes her experience as always feeling frustrated:

It is always just kind of that frustration like you start to develop like an immediate answer dialogue. Like you know when the questions are coming so you already after 21 years like this is my answer just ask the question what do you want to know. So you kind of just put up this wall because you know that's the only thing that they want. And so you reach for those answers that are like okay this'll fix you and now you can sit back down and get back to whatever you were doing.

For her people always want to ask the question of "what are you?", but it is frustrating when they try to jump around the question. She would rather they just ask the question and get it over with rather than pretend they do not want to know.

Tiana also talked about being frustrated, annoyed, and upset when microaggressions are present. She stated,

So that [her experience] (pause) that's frustrating and microaggressions I think those are the root cause of that. If people did not ask me asinine questions about my grandfather and who came from where then I wouldn't feel the need to explain, and I wouldn't have had that identity crisis. I wouldn't feel like I need to prove my Blackness or my Latinoness or whatever to anybody.

In her experience Tiana also talked about feeling like an outcast. “I don’t mind being the lone voice in a room but there’s something isolating and alienating and negative about being the outcast.”

For Allison she feels that many people do not want to intentionally hurt you, but many times she is left feeling hurt after experiencing a microaggression. “I know that they might not intentionally hurt me but I do feel hurt that uhm you know because it is who I am that they are kinda insulting/attacking. But like unintentionally” (Allison).

Jeremiah feels that it depends on the situation. For him it depends on how someone approaches him. In an experience he had with someone asking him about his hair, he talked about how the person was enthusiastic about wanting to know why his hair was the way it was. “[But] if he would have had a different tone of voice then it would have been a whole different situation.”

Understanding the effects microaggressions have on the psyche is important to understand the severity of microaggressions. Next, we will discuss how participants in this study managed microaggressions.

Managing Microaggressions

Normalizing or Legitimizing

Each participant had many different ways in which they managed microaggressions. The one way to manage microaggressions that was consistent across all participants was the idea of normalizing or legitimizing the experiences they were having. When Roxie talked about being multiracial, she talked about how racial comments, or jokes were made but it was not a big deal to her. For her “it is accepted and not looked down as, I don’t know, as a slam. It is not supposed to be taken offensive

you know, so it is more I don't know, a way of having fun.” Alexis stated, “It is kind of sad that you get used to ‘em [microaggressions] but sometimes you do.”

Karissa stated, “I think most times I just kind of ignore it [microaggressions] and let it brush off my shoulders because in the end it is not really going to change anything.”

When asked whether or not she felt that she normalized or legitimized the experience of a microaggression, she responded,

Absolutely. Uhm it is kind of the only way for me in the way that I adapted was experiencing stuff it was easier to just ignore it and let it keep going then to make a fuss about it every situation because then I would start to be a really angry person.

Roxie shared a common experience as she talked about how depending on how a person approached her she would react differently. “If they're going towards me in an aggressive way then I'll just brush it off and laugh and walk away cus it is pointless to get into an altercation over something so, I wouldn't say so little, but something that we have dealt with our whole lives” (Roxie). Allison states, “I really don't take it personal. Uhm but I just you know, I just let it go cus it is just everyday life for me. It is just this is normal and so I just deal with it; live with it like this is bound to happen so I don't really hold on to much anger or anything.”

In many ways microaggressions become part of their everyday lives, and for many participants this is why recognizing microaggressions was hard for them to do.

Teaching Moments

Some participants talked about making it a teaching moment for the person who perpetuated the microaggression toward them. In the moment many times one is frustrated, or questioning what just happened, but for some participants making it into a teachable moment was how they managed it. These teaching moments included talking

to someone they trusted before they had a conversation about it just to decompress the situation. Tiana and Roxie talked about how they are working to achieve being able to talk to people about why it is offensive to say, or do, certain things as it relates to microaggressions. This can include any comments made to them relating to their mixed race status, or racially driven comments. Though it seems like it might be the best way to manage microaggressions it may not be all the time, and it is not an easy task. Tiana explained,

I have no problem walking away and revisiting the scenario a few days later, few hours later, by myself or with somebody else but if I were to correct someone or make it a teaching moment or talk to a close friend every time a microaggression occurred in my life I would always be talking, or I would always be correcting somebody. I don't have time for that.

Jeremiah also described when he experiences a microaggression there are administrators on campus that he has identified, and is comfortable talking to about the challenges he is facing.

There's good administrators like [name of administrator], or pretty much anybody that works here in the [Culture Center]. Uh I'm not sure about people who don't work in the Culture Center, like I really don't experience a lot so I don't have to go talk to people like that but I know people in the Culture Center they want to listen they wanna talk to you and they wanna make sure you're doing okay. And uh there's a few other (pause) staff of color here but if they're not working in the Culture Center then I probably haven't talked to them.

Tiana joked about making everyone feel uncomfortable because she was uncomfortable in order to show why it is inappropriate to engage in certain behaviors (i.e., microaggressions). Describing an experience with someone asking her about her hair she stated,

You know it is conditioner again we're going back to this but that's how I navigate it. Like I'm not gonna like if I'm made uncomfortable everybody's about to be uncomfortable. Even in an educated way but we're going to address

this because the only way to solve any of the problems is to get it out there in the open. So if it is awkward for me it is awkward for everybody else.

For her it was just about talking about the situation. You cannot progress if you aren't willing to talk about the differences you have.

Assimilating. Assimilating is an experience that only one participant explicitly talked about during the research process. Though assimilating as a way of managing microaggressions stands alone many of the participants hinted at their need to assimilate into their environments, but did not explicitly talk about it as a way to manage microaggressions. This experience was one that stood out to me as the researcher because it was what I experienced myself as a multiracial student, and I wanted to ensure each participant's way of managing microaggressions was discussed. Alexis talked a lot about her ability to assimilate throughout the interview and the focus group. For her the ability to assimilate comes easily. She stated, "I've managed them by trying better to fit in and letting people know that I was offended by them." Assimilating is a comfortable place because there is no disruption, and microaggressions can be looked at from a different angle. For her she felt that she was in a position to be able to educate others, because of her ability to fit into the majority group on campus. Further she stated, "I'd say that trying to blend in could be the best solution in some cases as long as other people allow you to blend in....Sometimes it is just better to just lay low." For many it would be nice to fit into one group but that does not happen for them because they are too light or too dark.

Conclusion

Being multiracial in the beginning I think I could say a lot of us is confusing. Cus I don't know what part to show and who to be. So whether that's just Black and White they don't know if they need to act more Black, or act White. So they

don't know what's accepted in society so they just kind of follow the group instead of being themselves (Roxie).

The multiracial student experience is varied and contingent upon how they view themselves, not only in the context of their racial identity, but how they view the campus environment influences who they are. Multiracial student experiences in this study were separated into four themes: colorism, "What are you?" Delegitimizing Experiences/Questioning Authenticity, the Inability to Fit In, and Being the Voice on Campus. The last section talked about the effect microaggressions had on the participants, and how they manage microaggressions. From both the focus group, and interviews, conducted with six multiracial students at Midwestern University, data were collected that provided answers to the research questions. Chapter 5 will provide a dialogue about how the research connects to current literature, and where it differs. Recommendations for future research, implications for practice, and limitations will also be discussed.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

The final chapter will focus on making a connection from the findings to current literature from Chapter 2. The current study took a qualitative approach to collecting data using a semi-structured interview protocol for both the focus group and one-on-one interviews. This allowed for participants to tell their own stories and lead the conversations. Through discussions with the participants it allowed them to explore their experiences with microaggressions, discuss how microaggressions made them feel, and talk about the ways they manage microaggressions.

Research in this area is necessary because multiracial students are a growing population on every campus (Renn, 2003). Since the 2000 census multiracial populations in the United States has increased by nearly 32% as presented in the 2010 census (U.S. Census, 2010). The experiences of multiracial students are often misunderstood, and it is thought that their experience is the same as those of a monoracial minority. Microaggressions are one of the leading forms of psychological distress for persons of color in large part because they are so innocuous and the person being attacked may not know it is happening (Sue et al., 2003). Because of microaggressions many students have feelings of isolation and discomfort when it comes to integrating into the campus environment (Renn, 2003; Sands et al., 2003; Loud, 2011). Although there is research about the experiences of multiracial students, the focus tends to be on how to facilitate multiracial students identity development and implying microaggressions happen but not explicitly addressing them.

Summary of Findings

The research questions used to guide this study aimed to understand how multiracial students experience microaggressions. Utilizing Renn's multiracial student identity development theory, and Bronfenbrenner's ecology theory, as the theoretical frameworks the following research questions were investigated:

- What are the experiences of multiracial students on a predominantly White campus, specifically with regards to microaggressions?
- How do multiracial students manage these microaggressions?

At the beginning of the research I expected to speak with many participants who were frustrated about their experiences on campus, thus creating experiences that were isolating them from their peers. I expected that each participant would have a different perspective of their experiences from my own, but I expected participants to recognize that microaggressions were occurring. Though in many cases this was true, those students who were still working through their identity development or those who identified as monoracial did not necessarily have this experience because they either normalized the experience, or did not associate it being against their race. A couple of the experiences stuck out to me because it was against the grain of the traditional Black-White, or Black and something else, framework. For example, Allison focused on cultural experiences, and Alexis focused on wanting to look more like a minority because phenotypically she looked White. This perspective is important to understand because many times when we think of multiracial students we think they are only experiencing discrimination based on race, but for Allison it was about cultural norms

here in America versus cultural norms for Asians in other countries. For Alexis it was about being able to fit in more as a racial minority.

It was also my expectation that more students would want to challenge microaggressions, but participants identified that they either brush microaggressions off or they do not see them because it has become part of their every day life. The main focus of this chapter is to discuss the findings as it connects back to current literature.

The main points covered will be:

1. How each theme responds to the research questions.
2. Implications from the participants' experiences for future practice at Midwestern University and possibly other higher education institutions looking to provide a more inclusive campus for their multiracial students.
3. Recommendations for types of programming that will assist in making multiracial students feel more accepted and included on campus.

Link of Themes to Literature

Each participant shared their own unique experience about how they view microaggressions. Each experience differs depending on the context in which the micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro system affected how they looked at themselves in terms of their multiracial background. Bronfenbrenner's (1993) ecology theory, and Renn's (2003) multiracial student identity development theory, talked about understanding the totality of the student and how the environmental, personal, and societal context influence the experiences each student has. "The importance of space and peer culture on multiracial identity development" is an important tenet in Renn's multiracial student development theory (Evans et al., 2010 p. 296).

When linking students' identities to Renn's theory in some cases it was not easy to identify how they perceived themselves because it varied widely. For Jeremiah he mainly identified how his friends identified, which was as a monoracial minority but would claim his multiracial identity when people asked him about it putting him in the situational identity category. Allison was the same way. She identified depending on how it would benefit her to do so. For both participants their race was fluid and depending on the context was when they identified themselves. For Alexis her multiple monoracial identity was very apparent as she unconsciously separated being Mexican and American. For her American identified the "Whiteness" in her identity, but she felt like it was obvious to identify that she was White so she put more emphasis on her Hispanic identity. For Karissa, Tiana, and Roxie, each of them was very solidified in their multiracial identity. They embraced multiracial identity and in many cases felt uncomfortable when their identities were targeted separately. As Tiana discussed her identity was not something she just identified with on one day or the other, she is mixed every day not some days. This relates back to the research questions because microaggressions occur when a multiracial persons' experience is invalidated. Not allowing them to identify with all of who they are suppresses an identity that is very salient to them.

As it relates back to the literature the experience of microaggressions is very isolating for many of the participants. Being categorized or put into one box was frustrating, exhausting and mentally taxing. Many researchers recognize that feelings of isolation and frustration are common when experiencing microaggressions (Garbarini-Philippe, 2010; Renn, 2003; Sue et al., 2003). In the same vain Renn (2003) and

Bronfenbrenner (1993) focus on the individual experience, and how vastly different the experience of a student can be in a different environment depending on how a student interprets internal and external influences. This then reflects into the ways in which they identify.

Colorism. The idea of colorism extends all the way back to slavery as it relates to the unequal treatment of Black people based on the color of their skin (Maddox & Gray, 2002). Many of the participants talked about an experience of being chastised for having a certain type of hair, speaking a certain way, or just in general defying the way someone would expect a person of color to act. As noted in the literature review “the tendency to perceive or behave toward members of a racial category based on the lightness or darkness of their skin tone”, was the formal definition of colorism (Maddox & Gray, 2002 p. 250). Tiana, Roxie and Alexis had a conversation about the exoticification of their identity through being called a “red bone” as it refers to their light skin. This made them feel out casted, and often times, confused about how this related to their identity as a multiracial person. The participants also talked about not being able to fit into society because of the lightness of their skin. The perception of colorism is that multiracial persons would assimilate more seamlessly into the dominant culture when in reality this was not true for all of the participants in this study.

Theme 1: Delegitimizing Experiences, or Questioning Authenticity. There are many perceived benefits to being multiracial, and actions associated with it. Many of the participants talked about being asked the question “What are you”, because they are not light enough to be White, and they aren’t dark enough to be a person of color so they must be something different. Tiana, Alexis, and Roxie shared their experience of not

being enough of either to be part of the group. For them speaking Spanish was a barrier to them feeling accepted in the Hispanic Club on campus. Karissa talked about how a professor, and other people she interacted with through email, having a perception that she was White because she was educated and could articulate herself well through email. For her it was frustrating because when they saw her they did not expect her to be the person who wrote the email. This experience was talked about in Johnston et al. (2010) when he talked about the experiences multiracial persons had with microaggressions. In his research he discussed examples of microaggressions. Within these examples were listed exclusion or isolation, assumption of monoracial identity (or mistaken identity), or denial of multiracial reality.

Sands et al. (2003) discussed how some multiracial students choose to identify in other ways because they do not want to be alienated or isolated in their experience. Jeremiah and Alexis talked about this experience, and how they just wanted to assimilate into the culture. For them sometimes it was just easier than dealing with the every day experience of microaggressions because of their multiracial identity.

Theme 2: Inability to Fit In. Another aspect of participants' experience was the ability or inability to fit into certain spaces. Being multiracial there is a perception that those with a lighter skin complexion fit in better to society because they are more accepted than those with a darker complexion. This goes back to the idea of colorism, but ties into the need to create inclusive spaces on campus where multiracial students do not feel that they are differentiated because of the color of their skin and therefore do not fit. Several researchers recommend creating inclusive spaces for multiracial student to feel accepted, and welcomed on campus (Garbarini-Philippe, 2010; Renn, 2003; Sands et

al., 2003). In most situations participants in this study did not feel accepted, or welcomed across campus, because there were many alienating experiences that made them feel they did not fit or belong in the campus environment. This inability to fit included trying to be part of monoracial groups across campus. As Nihimura (1998) explained multiracial students may express discomfort when participating in groups designated for monoracial students because many times they are not accepted into that space. Tiana talked about a time when she felt alienated in the Hispanic Club, because there was a perception that she did not understand Spanish because she was multiracial, making her feel like an outcast in that space. Alexis had a similar experience where she felt that she was comfortable in the dominant culture on campus, but did not fit into the monoracial cultural groups. Creating inclusive environments is crucial to the success of multiracial students on college campuses, because in some cases if a student does not feel included on campus they can feel like they no longer want to go to school there and drop out.

Theme 3: Being the Voice. The participants in this study talked about feeling an obligation to creating change on campus, and fighting to create spaces where they felt comfortable and supported. All of the participants in this study, and other research studies, have the desire to feel included, accepted and welcome (Hyman, 2010; Renn, 2003), but when they have to fight for those spaces the feeling of being included and accepted becomes challenging. The same experience comes with being the voice. The participants in this study felt that it was their job to create an inclusive campus for all underrepresented persons on campus. Even in trying to be the voice they are still looked down upon because they are seen as the person who is always preaching about something

that nobody cares about. Because of this experience, and their needs as a multiracial student being unmet, it could be the cause of their feelings of isolation, and why they feel they have to be the voice. Loud (2011) suggested that due to the daily occurrences of microaggressions there is a lack of connectedness to campus, and their needs as a student being unmet leads to their feelings of isolation. Two out of the three students who expressed this opinion were very solidified in their multiracial identity, and were comfortable stirring conflict to make change. Renn (2003) reported that a multiracial person who is prideful in their multiracial identity tend to do better on campus, but when this identity is not supported their identity development is challenged.

Managing Microaggressions

Experiencing microaggressions can challenge the everyday experiences of multiracial students leaving them with feelings of isolation, apathy, frustration, despair and depression (Museus et al., 2011). Understanding the totality of the experiences and the influences factoring into that experience can help one understand how, and why, multiracial students manage microaggressions in the ways they do. In my search for current literature this was an area that I did not find any literature on. What I did have access to was a presentation given at the NASPA national conference on research about racial microaggressions and how one copes with microaggressions (Allen & Hubain, 2013). In the preliminary findings on coping with microaggression, Allen & Hubain (2013) found there were four different responses. This included peer and familial support, or faculty-mentor support, ignoring or minimizing, emotional/physical responses, and action based responses. Each participant in this study identified with one of these ways to respond to microaggressions. Overwhelmingly they fell within the

ignoring or minimizing category. Each participant talked about the experience of microaggressions becoming normal for them. It was something they dealt with on a daily basis so they chose not to waste their time trying to discuss it or address it. Ignoring microaggressive behavior becomes exhausting for them. Wanting to assimilate seemed like the best option in some cases because it was better to not be recognized than to have to deal with it every day and deal with the emotional distress. For some of the participants it was to recall experiences with microaggressions until they heard what the definition of a microaggression was because it was so engrained into their everyday lives. Experiencing microaggression was such a common experience they felt it was normal to experience such assaults.

Though many of the participants did not use teaching moments as a way to manage microaggressions all the time, many of them agreed that it could potentially be the best way to manage microaggressions. It is better to have the conversations about it rather than letting people just continue to think its okay to do it. Leonardo & Crubb (2013) states marginalization, limitation, and lower chances of success in school are based on the “hierarchical social system of race which is the valuation of social groups grounded on skin-color differences” (p. 3). Microaggressions is a cyclical process and its so deeply engrained into the society that no one questions it, and the only way to address the issue of microaggressions is to first recognize that they exist.

Implications of the Current Study for Future Practice

In conducting this research it was integrated into the interview protocol to ask the participants about whether or not they felt some type of multiracial student programming,

or group, would be beneficial for them as a multiracial student. In every situation the participants agreed that programming would be a benefit for them.

In previous research, “offering services specifically for biracial students on their adjustments” is something that students have identified as being helpful (Sands et al., 2003 p. 355). Some students may feel that programming is beneficial, but not beneficial for them. Though they do not want to feel alienated or isolated, they also feel disconnected on campus when they try to join monoracial groups (Sands et al., 2003). When multiracial students begin to face these challenges, it is hard for them to feel a sense of belonging, and so even students who say that the programming may not be beneficial for them per se still believe that some type of programming is needed (Sands et al., 2003). This was true for participants in the current study. Though they all agreed some type of programming would be beneficial, some felt that it might not be most effective for them.

Suggestions have also been made on how to be supportive. Instead of forcing a student to check a single box for their racial category, one should allow them to “accurately reflect their heritage on official forms” (Garbarini-Philippe, 2010 p. 4). Though some students feel that choosing one category on a form does not bother them, Sands and Schuh (2003) believe that this is due to them internalizing the perceptions of others and legitimizing it. Many scholars also suggest having inclusive spaces or groups on campus to ensure students’ comfort and growth in identity development (Banks, 2008; Garbarini-Philippe, 2010; Renn, 2003; Sands et al., 2003).

Some individuals have an expectation of what one race may do, or say, or how they might act. For multiracial students they are lumped into those categories even when

that's not how they identify. Understanding the totality of the student and how certain actions may affect them is key to understanding the experience of multiracial students. Participants in this study did not like being lumped into one category, and they felt that administrators on campus are not interested in understanding the unique challenges they face. Providing some type of cultural competency and cultural awareness trainings across campus could be a way to address this tension.

One last suggestion is the idea of creating an inclusive space where students can share their experiences as multiracial students on a predominately White campus. Karissa talked about how she is part of a cohort of multiracial students because she had a scholarship tied to her status of being multiracial. For her being part of this group on campus allowed her to share her experiences with others who had similar experiences to her. Alexis expressed the same perspective. For her, since she is newly exploring her multiracial identity, having others around her share her experience was important for her in understanding her own experiences. Tiana expressed creating inclusive spaces as a way for her to be able to talk about her experiences safely, and without being judged for how she chooses to identify. "The notion of a safe physical space and the impact of peer culture and acceptance in relation to those spaces" are important in creating inclusive spaces on campus (Hyman, 2010 p. 130). This quote from Tiana provides data that supports providing a place on campus for students to talk about multiracial student issues:

Providing a place for us to talk about it safely, providing a place where it is important, or at least I feel like it is important where I feel like my voice is heard. Simply recognition. Like hey I recognize that you are different from everybody else or different from a lot of people but not making me feel like my difference is bad. (Tiana)

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. Time proved to be a limitation of this study. Additional time could have resulted in the ability to conduct a longitudinal study of students' perceptions over time. However, due to the researcher's program of study there was a limit on time. It may have also allowed for more time to interview participants on their campuses to compare experiences across campuses. As with any qualitative study, though not the purpose of the study, readers should not generalize the findings of this study to all multiracial students at institutions of higher education in the United States. Furthermore, participants were all attending one PWI in the Midwest. And, finally, there was a gender imbalance of participants, which was not accounted for in the planning of the study.

Recommendations for Future Research

Researching further exploring the types of programming and/or student groups is needed to more deeply understand multiracial students experiences at colleges and universities. Currently research on multiracial students is limited and in order to best serve these students across higher education institutions it may be beneficial to understand the types of programming, or groups, they feel would be most effective in keeping them on campus.

In many cases studies that discuss the multiracial student experiences focuses on the experiences of those who fit the Black-White mold. In the current research there were two participants who did not fit into that mold, and had experiences that stood apart from others in the research. My recommendation would be to conduct a research study

that focuses on the experience of multiracial students who phenotypically does not look like they are a racial minority, and what effects that has on their experience in college.

The third recommendation I have is conducting research how familial influences affect the experiences multiracial students have in college. Current literature that suggests that the way in which a multiracial student is raised will affect the way in which they view their racial identification. Research focusing on family influences would allow student affairs and higher education professionals the ability to understand how that influences the development process multiracial students go through when they get into a higher education setting.

The last recommendation I have is conducting a longitudinal study on the development of a student's multiracial identity from the time they enter college to their senior year. Karissa talked about how she had developed a lot in her multiracial identity from her freshman year to her senior year. Also in this study the two freshmen that were newly experiencing the campus environment and hadn't necessarily developed a perception about the campus climate. Researchers could interview multiracial students as a first year students and have follow-ups throughout their college experience, examining how their perceptions on campus climate change as they gain more experience on campus.

Final Thoughts

The process of creating an experience that is inclusive of multiracial students' experiences starts with acknowledging that microaggressions exist, and that their experience is legitimate. For myself and many other multiracial students it is very frustrating to feel like you do not fit on campus because there is nothing there for you.

Everything is focused on monoracial student experiences, which leaves a large gap for multiracial students who feel they do not fit into any of those boxes. Harper (2012) stated, “in order to get beyond persistent racial disparities and to realize the vision for a version of American higher education that is truly equitable and inclusive, we must first take account of racism and its harmful effects on people in postsecondary contexts” (p. 23). I believe this is a very true statement. Many times we do not understand how hurtful it can be to put someone in a situation where they are constantly questioning who they are, and how they fit into a particular context. Not having that support on campus is a constant struggle for multiracial students, and it can ultimately end in a student feeling that it is necessary to leave the institution. It is my hope that this research has challenged individuals to acknowledge that multiracial students have experiences that need to be addressed on college campuses, and they need someone on campus who will support them and help them continue to develop and grow.

Conclusion

This study sought to understand the experiences of multiracial students in the context of microaggressions, and how they manage these daily acts of racism. The themes and sub-themes created a story of what this looked like for multiracial students, and the effects microaggressions had on them. The goal of this research study was to provide professionals with information about what these experiences look like so they can assist in the development of multiracial students on their campuses, and to promote success of multiracial students in higher education by creating an inclusive campus, in which they feel they are welcome, accepted and supported.

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Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Approval



September 30, 2013

Brittany Hunt

Department of Educational Administration

5009 Goldenrod LN Lincoln, NE 68512

Corey Rumann

Department of Educational Administration

129 TEAC, UNL, 68588-0360

IRB Number: 20130913533EP

Project ID: 13533

Project Title: Managing Microaggressions: A Study on How Multiracial Students Manage Microaggressions at a Large Research Institution in the Midwest

Dear Brittany:

This letter is to officially notify you of the approval of your project by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects. It is the Board's opinion that you have provided adequate safeguards for the rights and welfare of the participants in this study based on the information provided. Your proposal is in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide Assurance 00002258 and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46). Your project has been approved as an Expedited protocol, category 6 & 7.

Date of EP Review: 09/09/2013

You are authorized to implement this study as of the Date of Final Approval: 09/30/2013.
This approval is Valid Until: 09/29/2014.

We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:

- * Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures;
- * Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that involves risk or has the potential to recur;
- * Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research;
- * Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others; or
- * Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff.

For projects which continue beyond one year from the starting date, the IRB will request continuing review and update of the research project. Your study will be due for continuing review as indicated above. The investigator must also advise the Board when this study is finished or discontinued by completing the enclosed Protocol Final Report form and returning it to the Institutional Review Board.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office at 472-6965.

Sincerely,

Julia C. Torquati

Julia Torquati, Ph.D.

Chair for the IRB



Appendix B
Informed Consents

Focus Group/Demographic Survey Consent

Participant Informed Consent Form

Must be on University of Nebraska Letterhead

IRB# 20116

Title: Managing Microaggressions: A Study on How Multiracial Students Manage Microaggressions at a Large Rural Research Institution in the Midwest.

Purpose of the Research: This research will aim to raise awareness about multiracial student issues on college campuses specifically looking at how multiracial students at a large rural research institution in the Midwest manage microaggressions on campus, or in their daily lives. A microaggression is a form of racism that is “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group” (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal & Esquilin, 2007 p. 273).

In my research I am looking to answer the following research questions: 1. What are the experiences of multiracial students on a predominantly White campus, specifically with regards to microaggressions? 2. How do multiracial students manage these microaggressions? Currently there is research on what types of microaggressions multiracial students face, and what they look like, but there is nothing on how they manage microaggressions.

Qualifications: In order to qualify for this study you must be an undergraduate multiracial student between the ages of 19-25.

Procedures: The first part of this study will consist of a survey and a focus group. The survey will comprise approximately 10 minutes of the allotted focus group time. This survey, along with the focus group and interviews, will help the researcher understand where you are in your identity development process. Once the survey is complete we will introduce ourselves and then the focus group will start. This portion of the study will take approximately 1-1.5 hours. If more time is needed for conversations to continue time may exceed 1-1.5 hours. During the focus group you will talk about your experience as a multiracial student on campus. Your responses during the focus group will be audio recorded during this time. If at any point you would like the audio recorder to be turned off you may ask me to do so.

For the second part of the study you will be asked to participate in an individual interview, which will last approximately 30 minutes. A follow-up interview may be requested after your interview is transcribed. Once all interviews are completed I will send your transcriptions to you to check for accuracy. After this your participation in the study is complete.

Benefits: The benefits of this study would be to create a better understanding of multiracial student populations on campus, and what microaggressions look like within the community. Also, the findings of the study will help student affairs professionals understand how this population of students persists on a predominately White campus at a rural a large research institution in the Midwest. Specifically for the participants it is our hope that the findings of this research will assist professionals in creating a more positive and welcoming environment for multiracial students. It may also allow you to create a better understanding of who you are, how you see yourself in the context of campus the campus culture, and what your needs are as a multiracial student.

Risks and/or Discomforts: As participants in this study you might experience some emotional responses and/or reflections that would bring up past memories that may be hurtful to remember. In order to minimize risks remember that your participation is voluntary and you can withdraw from the study at any point if you are uncomfortable with no consequences to you. If you are affiliated with the [REDACTED] know that your participation in this study will not affect the relationship you have with this office.

If you need further assistance, you should seek services through [REDACTED]. The phone number is [REDACTED]. As a student your first 3 visits are free. Any cost accrued during your visits with [REDACTED] will be your responsibility to pay back.

Confidentiality: By participating in a focus group there is no guarantee of confidentiality within a group setting. Therefore, you should only share what you feel comfortable sharing. Any information obtained during this study, which could identify you, will be kept strictly confidential. The printed data will be stored in a secure/locked location at the researchers' home, and all audio files will be saved on the investigators computer, which is protected with a password. Only the investigator and the investigator's advisor Dr. Corey Rumann will have access to this information during the study and all audio/video files will be deleted at the completion of the project in May of 2014. The information obtained in this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings and steps will be taken to protect your privacy and pseudonyms will be used for all participants.

Opportunity to Ask Questions: You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. Or you may contact me at the phone number below. Please contact [REDACTED] Institutional Review Board at [REDACTED] to voice concerns about the research or if you have any questions about your rights as a research participant.

Freedom to Withdraw: Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers or the [REDACTED], or in any other way receive a penalty

or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Also, your involvement with [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] will not be altered if you withdraw from this study.

Consent, Right to Receive a Copy: You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Signature of Participant:

Signature of Research Participant
Date

Name and Phone number of investigator(s)

Brittany Hunt, Graduate Student, Principal Investigator Phone: [REDACTED]
Email: [REDACTED]

Dr. Corey Rumann, PhD, Secondary Investigator Phone: [REDACTED]
Email: [REDACTED]

Interview Consent

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Educational Administration

Title: Managing Microaggressions: A Study on How Multiracial Students Manage Microaggressions at a Large Rural Research Institution in the Midwest.

Purpose of the Research: This research will aim to raise awareness about multiracial student issues on college campuses specifically looking at how multiracial students at a large rural research institution in the Midwest manage microaggressions on campus, or in their daily lives. A microaggression is a form of racism that is “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group” (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal & Esquilin, 2007 p. 273).

In my research I am looking to answer the following research questions: 1. What are the experiences of multiracial students on a predominantly White campus, specifically with regards to microaggressions? 2. How do multiracial students manage these microaggressions?

Qualifications: In order to qualify for this study you must be an undergraduate multiracial student between the ages of 19-25.

Procedures: You will be asked to participate in an interview where I will ask you about your experiences with microaggressions and how you manage them. This interview will last approximately 30 minutes. If after reviewing the first interview I feel that more clarification is needed, a follow-up interview will be conducted with your consent. This interview will last approximately 30 minutes. Once all interviews are completed I will send your transcription to you to check for accuracy. After this your participation in the study is complete. All interviews will be audio recorded, so if at any point you do not want the audio recorder on you may ask me to turn it off. Please remember, only share information you are comfortable sharing.

Benefits: The benefits of this study would be to create a better understanding of multiracial student populations on campus, and what microaggressions look like within the community. Also, the findings of the study will help student affairs professionals understand how this population of students persists on a predominately White campus at a rural a large research institution in the Midwest. Specifically for the participants it is our hope that the findings of this research will assist professionals in creating a more positive and welcoming environment for multiracial students. It may also allow you to

create a better understanding of who you are, how you see yourself in the context of campus the campus culture, and what your needs are as a multiracial student.

Risks and/or Discomforts: As participants in this study you might experience some emotional responses and/or reflections that would bring up past memories that may be hurtful to remember. In order to minimize risks remember that your participation is voluntary and you can withdraw from the study at any point if you are uncomfortable with no consequences to you. If you are affiliated with the [REDACTED], [REDACTED], or the [REDACTED], know that your participation in this study will not affect the relationship you have with this office.

If you need further assistance, you should seek services through [REDACTED]. The phone number is [REDACTED]. As a student your first 3 visits are free. Any cost accrued during your visits with [REDACTED] will be your responsibility to pay back.

Confidentiality: By participating in a focus group there is no guarantee of confidentiality within a group setting. Therefore, you should only share what you feel comfortable sharing. Any information obtained during this study, which could identify you, will be kept strictly confidential. The printed data will be stored in a secure/locked location at the researchers home, and all audio files will be saved on the investigators computer, which is protected with a password. Only the investigator and the investigator's advisor Dr. Corey Rumann will have access to this information during the study and all audio/video files will be deleted at the completion of the project in May of 2014. The information obtained in this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings and steps will be taken to protect your privacy and pseudonyms will be used for all participants.

Opportunity to Ask Questions: You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. Or you may contact me at the phone number below. Please contact the [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Institutional Review Board at [REDACTED] to voice concerns about the research or if you have any questions about your rights as a research participant.

Freedom to Withdraw: Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers or the [REDACTED], or in any other way receive a penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Also, your involvement with [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] will not be altered if you withdraw from this study.

Consent, Right to Receive a Copy: You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

If a follow-up interview is needed do I have your consent to contact you for an additional interview?

Yes

No

Signature of Participant:

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Name and Phone number of investigator(s)

Brittany Hunt, Graduate Student, Principal Investigator

Phone

Email:

Dr. Corey Rumann, PhD, Secondary Investigator

Phone:

Email:

Appendix C
Recruitment Emails

Faculty/Staff

Dear (Faculty/Staff Name),

My name is Brittany Hunt and I am a graduate student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in the Educational Administration Student Affairs program. I am currently seeking students who are multiracial, to recruit participants for a qualitative study focused on the experiences of multiracial college students. The purpose of this research is to raise awareness about multiracial student issues on college campuses specifically looking at how multiracial students manage microaggressions while attending college and/or in their daily lives. Attached you can find a flyer that you can post in your office with my contact information on it.

If you know any students who may be interested in participating in the study please ask them to contact me at the information provided below:

Brittany Hunt
Email: [REDACTED]
Phone [REDACTED]

If you are willing to let me come into your classes and talk to your students about my study please let me know the day and time that would be best.

Thank you for your help in identifying participants for my study on students who are multiracial.

Sincerely,

Brittany Hunt
Graduate Student, Educational Administration
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
[REDACTED]

Student

Dear (Students Name/Group of Students),

My name is Brittany Hunt and I am a graduate student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in the Educational Administration Student Affairs program. I am currently seeking students who are multiracial, and may be interested in participating in a study focused on multiracial students. The purpose of this research aims to raise

awareness about multiracial student issues on college campuses specifically looking at how multiracial college students manage microaggressions on campus and/or in their daily lives.

This study will consist of one focus group that will last approximately one hour. After the focus group interviews, interested participants will be asked to do individual interviews that will last approximately 30 minutes. The only qualification for this study is for you to identify as multiracial. So, if you identify as multiracial, or you have friends who identify as multiracial, and would be interested in participating in this study please contact me at the information provided below:

Brittany Hunt

Email: [REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

Thank you for any participation, or interest you may have.

Sincerely,

Brittany Hunt
Graduate Student, Educational Administration
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

[REDACTED]

Appendix D
Demographic Survey

**Managing Microaggressions: A Study on How Multiracial Students Manage
Microaggressions at a Large Rural Research Institution in the Midwest.**

Please fill out the following survey. The results from this survey will be used to help the researcher understand where you are in your identity development process and collect some basic demographic information from you.

Thank you for your participation!

DIRECTIONS: Please indicate your response by filling in a circle next to one answer.

First Name:

Last Name:

Are you multiracial?

- Yes
 No

How do you identify when completing forms for school, or government documents?

Note: Please answer this question the way you normally would on any demographic forms (i.e. if you only check one race then do so here, if you check multiple races etc....)

- American Indian or other Native American
 Asian or Pacific Islander
 African-American or Black
 Caucasian or White (other than Hispanic)
 Latino
 "Bi/Multiracial" or "mixed"
 Other _____

Please identify your multiracial background if different from the aforementioned question.

-

What is your gender?

- Man
 Woman
 Trans

Prefer not to respond

Are you 19 or older?

- Yes
- No

Select the following age group you fall into:

- 19-21
- 21-25

What is your academic standing?

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior

Do you know what microaggressions are?

- Yes
- No

Several questionnaire items were adapted from the following survey instrument:
Pace, C. R., & Kuh, G. D. (1998). College Student Experiences Questionnaire (4th ed.).
Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research and Planning.

Appendix E
Focus Group Protocol

Focus Group Questions

For this focus group the protocol will be a semi-structured protocol to allow for students to be able to talk about their experiences.

Focus Group Layout

1. Go through informed consent/questions about study (10 minutes)
2. Participants will take survey (10 minutes)
3. Have the participants briefly introduce themselves: Name, Hometown, Major, Year in School, and Ethnic background (5 minutes).
4. Focus group starts (1 hour)

Overall Questions (Approximately 1 hour):

1. Please tell me about your experiences being a multiracial student here on campus.
2. Please discuss why you choose to identify the way you do.
 - a. Do you find that people often question your authenticity within your racial categories (e.g. you're not Black, White, Latino enough)?
3. What behaviors, attitudes, looks, comments and/or gestures do you notice from those around you as a multiracial student?
 - a. How did you feel about those experiences?
4. Discuss how your experiences differ, or not, from other students on campus.
5. Please discuss the challenges, if any, that you face on campus as a multiracial student.
 - a. How do you navigate these situations?

Appendix F
Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

Pre-interview ethics statement

Hello. My name is Brittany Hunt. I am a graduate student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in the Educational Administration Student Affairs Program. I am conducting this research as part of a thesis requirement for my Master's program. I will be looking at is multiracial student's experiences in college. Specifically I will be looking at what forms of microaggressions are present in your life and how you manage them. During the interview I will ask you to answer some open-ended questions related to your experience as a multiracial individual. The entire process will take approximately 30 minutes to an hour.

Before we begin, there are a few things I would like to go over with you:

- In order for me to accurately retain all of the responses you provide in the interview, I will be audio recording this interview. The only people who will be allowed access to your audiotape will be myself, and my faculty advisor Dr. Corey Rumann who is overseeing this research project. Even though this interview will be transcribed, your name will not be indicated throughout the recording of this interview and pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity, as well as the files being password protected. However, I would like you to know that you are free to ask me to turn off the tape recorder at any time during the interview, and you may also refuse to answer any questions.
- There are no direct benefits to you as a result of participating in this study except potentially gaining a greater understanding of your experience as a multiracial student. However, talking about your experiences may make you feel uncomfortable and if you feel that you need additional services for this I can provide you with the information to [REDACTED] if it is needed. Any responses you give will be regarded with the utmost confidentiality.

I also want to take you through the informed consent form and procedures for the study so you clearly understand your rights today. **[Give both copies of consent form to participant, give participant time to read and sign both forms, collect one form from participant]**

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Part I: Qualitative Questions

What I'm interested in is your experiences as a multiracial student here on campus. Everyone's experience is different, so there aren't any right or wrong answers here. Whenever you can give me stories and examples to clarify your point that will be helpful. Do you have any questions about this interview?

[TURN ON TAPE RECORDER NOW]

1. Do you identify as being multiracial where multiracial means that you are mixed with more than one race or ethnicity?
2. For the purpose of this study can you please tell me how you identify yourself in terms of race or ethnicity?
3. If your multiracial identity differs from how you identify racially can you please tell me your multiracial identity?
4. What were your expectations of college prior to coming to campus in terms of your needs as a multiracial student?
 - a. In what ways were these needs met or unmet?
5. How do you feel being multiracial is viewed by others on campus?
6. What challenges, if any, have you faced being multiracial in college?
7. What role, if any, does being multiracial play in your college experience?
 - a. What other experiences have you had being multiracial on a college campus?

This is where we will begin to talk about microaggressions. Just to reiterate the definition it is: a form of racism that is “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group” (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal & Esquilin, 2007 p. 273). Now that I have read to you this statement are you still willing to continue with the interview process?

8. Do you find that individuals you encounter are curious about your multiracial identity?
 - a. Are you asked questions that may question your physical appearance?
9. What types of questions are you asked about your multiracial identity?
 - a. How does that make you feel?
10. Would you say that you have experienced microaggressions at some point in your life?
 - a. Explain to me a time when you experienced a microaggression and how that made you feel.
 - b. How do you manage these microaggressions?
 - c. Do you feel this is the best way to manage microaggressions? Please explain to me your reasoning.
11. How have microaggressions affected or not affected your college experience?
 - a. Please explain to me how it does or does not affect you.
 - b. How has this affected or not affected your everyday life?
 - i. Please explain to me how it does or does not affect you.