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THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN GENDERED RACIAL MICROAGGRESSIONS
AND SELF-EFFICACY

by

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Dedication

From now and every moment forward, I dedicate my research to the Black women who came before me and to all those who will follow.

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Even if I wrote a thesis on it, I do not think I could properly explain my appreciation for my support system. I would like to thank my husband for the endless support and love. Secondly, I would like to thank Dr. Amanda Johnston, for understanding and realizing that representation matters, for validating my experiences, for listening to my ramblings and for guiding my obvious genius, I appreciate you! Thirdly, I would like to acknowledge individuals who attempted to interrupt my self-efficacy, simply by saying “ha-ha you failed.”

ABSTRACT

THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN GENDERED RACIAL MICROAGGRESSIONS AND SELF-EFFICACY

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This study examined the association between general self-efficacy beliefs and racial microaggressions for Black women. Specifically, if the self-efficacy of Black women is impacted when met with racial microaggressions. I predicted self-efficacy would be negatively associated with the experience of microaggressions. Participants reflected on a microaggression experience, answered questions regarding their general self-efficacy, racial microaggression experiences, and their Black identity. Although results demonstrated self-efficacy was not negatively associated with racial microaggressions as predicted, varying tenets of Black identity were associated with self-efficacy and racial microaggression experiences. Limitations and implications of the study are addressed, as this research contributes to our understanding of microaggression experiences for Black women.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Gendered Racial Microaggressions

Black women frequently experience racial discrimination at the interpersonal, individual, and structural level (Clark & Williams, 1999). Lawyer Kimberle Crenshaw first coined intersectionality to address the oppression that she noticed was faced by Black women, stemming from being a part of two marginalized social groups: Black people and women (Crenshaw, 1991). The framework for intersecting identities is founded upon the realization that Black women are oppressed simultaneously on two different social constructs, race and gender. Intersecting identities involves more than gender and race, as intersections can occur along the sexual orientation or social class axis. Crenshaw (1991) argues that when differences are ignored within groups (women), tension rises amongst the groups (White women, Black women, Latinx women) causing differing levels of oppression.

A form of oppression experienced by Black women as part of daily life are racial microaggressions. A racial microaggression can be conceptualized as an everyday racial slight or racially charged derogatory insult, whose underlying meaning implies that racial minorities are inferior, or less than their White counterparts (Sue et al., 2007). Donovan and colleagues (2012) conducted research on a Southeastern university to study the impact of racial microaggressions in Black women's lives. All participants were undergraduates and ranged in age ranged from 18-63 years; ninety-six percent of these Black college women reported experiencing at least one form of a racial microaggression while on campus (Donovan et al., 2012). Further, these women reported feeling more anxious and depressive symptoms after experiencing a microaggression. When researching the relationship between gendered racial microaggressions and traumatic

stress symptoms amongst Black women, Moody and Lewis (2019) confirmed that Black women who experience a higher level of racial microaggressions also experience greater traumatic stress symptoms. Thus, this suggests that the mental health of Black women may be impacted by racial and gendered discriminatory experiences. Beyond the negative mental health impact, racial microaggressions can diminish academic performance (Murphy et al., 2012) and diminish cognitive performance (Banks, Ciccarelli, & Pavon, 2022). If mental health and cognition are impacted by racial microaggressions, then it is within the realm of possibility that mental cognitions, specifically self-efficacy beliefs, may be influenced by racial microaggressions as well. This study investigated the association between racial microaggressions and self-efficacy for Black women.

Racial microaggressions are conceptualized as derogatory slights or insults directed at a target person or persons who are members of an oppressed racial group (Sue et al., 2007). Empirical research details three distinct forms of microaggressions: the microassault, microinsult, and the microinvalidation. Sue et al. (2007) conceptualizes a racial microinsult as an unintentional behavior or verbal comment that convey rudeness or insensitivity or demean a person's racial heritage/identity. On a college campus, this may look like a White person assuming based on their spoken words that a Black person in an academic office is an administrative assistant rather than a professor. The underlying message being the Black person could not hold an advance degree to be a professor. A microinvalidation is a verbal comment that dismisses the psychological reality of the target group. In a workplace, this may look like a White man telling a Black woman that they do not see color during a discussion of promotion or hiring practices. A microassault is defined as a blatant verbal, nonverbal, or environmental attack that is intended to convey a biased or discriminatory message. Microassaults are most closely related to overt racism, during these interactions the offender and the one being offended

are both keenly aware of what is transpiring, in some cases making the offensive situation easier to handle. Microinvalidations and microinsults may be more difficult to identify, call out, or buffer against due to their innocuous nature, as both forms of microaggressions may occur outside the offender's level of consciousness (Torino et al., 2018). Although microinvalidations and microinsults occur outside of the offender's level of consciousness and this implies that the offense is not recognized from the perspective of the offender, these microaggressions are still experienced by the target of the microaggression. This suggests that those who are offended are impacted by the inoculation of the microaggression and the perceived insult itself, which is important to note in the context of the impact of gendered racial microaggressions to the noted decline in Black women's mental cognitions and health after experiencing a gendered racial microaggression (Loyd et al., 2021). The current study expanded on this existing research by examining if the self-efficacy beliefs of Black women are also adversely influenced by racial microaggressions.

General Self-Efficacy

Bandura (1977) conceptualizes self-efficacy as a person's inherent beliefs regarding a particular skill set that regulates how successfully one may potentially complete a plan of action. The social learning theory of self-efficacy states that people's beliefs regarding their efficacy stem from four main areas of influence: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and finally psychological and emotional states. Mastery experiences are described as being able to provide one with the most authentic evidence that one can achieve a specified task. Experiences become mastered by practice, with those who repeatedly experience failures having their sense of efficacy undermined, while experiences of success bolster self-efficacy beliefs. Vicarious experiences are the second way Bandura proposes strengthening one's belief in self.

Experiences that are lived vicariously occur when one sees characteristics or personality traits that exists within themselves, existing in others who have achieved a skill in a manner that they have not. The third manner in which people strengthen self-efficacy beliefs are by social persuasion. As its name suggests, social persuasion occurs when one person is persuaded by another that he/she possess the specific capabilities to complete a specific task.

Self-efficacy can be thought as a person's inherent belief in themselves to have the ability to complete a specific task (Bandura, 1997). Regarding Black women and self-efficacy, researchers have considered various domains where self-efficacy is beneficial. When appropriate interventions (e.g., social support system, learning videos) are put into place, Black women's breastfeeding self-efficacy increases, along with the amount of time they spend breastfeeding their babies (McCartner-Spaulding & Gore, 2012). Chambers et al. (2016) demonstrated a positive association between math self-efficacy of Black college aged women and college enrollment. Leath and Chavous (2017) demonstrated that Black women's civic engagement increased with the gain of political self-efficacy. As the research by McCartner-Spaulding and Gore (2012), Chambers et. al (2016), and Leath and Chavous (2017) highlight, when the self-efficacy beliefs of Black women in a particular domain are fostered, positive behavioral changes occur for Black women. One area where Black women's self-efficacy beliefs may be re-enforced lie within the realm of coping with discrimination and unfair treatment. Bandura (1994, p.3) suggests that "it is more difficult to instill high beliefs of personal efficacy by social persuasion alone than to undermine them." Suggesting that when regarding Black women and racial microaggressions, it is much more likely that a Black women's self-efficacy beliefs are impaired by racial microaggressions (social persuasion), than bolstered by them.

Bandura (1994) suggests that cultural and demographic differences may also impact one's self-efficacy. In the case of the current research, Black women's racial and gender identity may buffer the impact of racial microaggressions on self-efficacy, as a positive racial and gender identity can serve as a mediating effect against several life barriers. For example, a meta-analysis by Smith & Silva (2011) found that a positive racial identity is positively associated with self-esteem and negatively associated with symptoms linked to depression. Similarly, Sellers et al. (2006) and Rivas-Drake et al. (2014) have empirically demonstrated that certain tenets associated with a positive ethnic or racial identity can buffer against societal consequences that come with being a part of a racially marginalized community. While a positive racial identity can be a buffer against negative life experiences stemming from existing as racial minority, further research into Black women's racial and gender identity is needed to explore the connection between the two social constructs, microaggressions and self-efficacy.

Study Overview

The study used a correlational method to examine the association between Black women's self-efficacy beliefs and the frequency of and impact felt by racial microaggressions. The primary hypothesis was that the experience of racial microaggressions is negatively associated with self-efficacy. Further, I predicted self-efficacy and the experience of microaggressions would be associated with racial identity, allowing for the possibility that the impact of a racial microaggression on a Black women's self-efficacy beliefs is dependent upon their racial identity.

CHAPTER II: METHODOLOGY

Participants

Using Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk), 170 Black women between the ages of 19-74 years ($M = 39.5$, $SD = 12$) were recruited. Participants ranged in education levels from less than a high school diploma to a doctoral degree. One participant reported having less than a high school, 15 participants reported having a high school diploma, 43 reported having some college education, 19 reported having a trade school or vocational school degree, 65 participants reported having an associate's degree, four reported earning a bachelors, one master's degree, six reported earning a professional degree such as a J.D., and 16 participants reported earning a doctoral degree.

Along with varying education levels participants reported income levels ranged from earning less than \$15,000 to earning more than \$150,000 annually. Eighteen participants self-reported earning less than \$15,000 annually, 30 reported earning between \$15,001 and \$25,001 annually, 29 reported earning \$25,001 to \$35,000 annually, 39 reported earning between \$35,001 and \$50,000 annually, 28 reported earning between \$50,001 and 75,000 annually, 18 reported earning between \$75,001 and \$100,000 annually, seven reported earning between \$100,001 and \$150,000 annually, and one participant reported earning more than \$150,000 annually.

Participants received a small monetary payment (i.e., \$2) for their participation. MTurk was utilized for participant recruitment to expand beyond the traditional college-aged samples, and to recruit a sufficient sample size to examine my hypotheses.

Measures

Inventory of Microaggressions Against Black Individuals (IMABI)

The Inventory of Microaggressions Against Black Individuals (IMABI; Mercer et al., 2011) was used to measure the impact of racial microaggressions. In developing this scale, a unidimensional framework was utilized to differentiate between microinsults and microinvalidations. This fourteen-item measure assesses the stress appraisal and frequency of racial microaggressions with questions that address assumptions of beauty, potential criminality, and marginalization. A sample question is “I was followed in a store due to my race/ethnicity” Participants respond to each question using a 5-point Likert scale with 1 equating to this has never happened to me and 5 equating to “this event happened, and I was EXTREMELY UPSET.” The IMABI is scored in a manner that higher scores indicate greater frequency and impact of racial microaggressions experienced by the participant.

General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE)

The General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) was utilized to measure participants general self-efficacy beliefs. This measure consists of ten questions, answered on a four-point scale ranging from 1 = Not at all true to 4 = Exactly true. A sample question is, “I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough.” A total score is computed by calculating the sum of the 10 questions; higher scores indicate greater self-efficacy.

Multidimensional Model of Black Identity (MMBI)

The Multidimensional Model of Black Identity scale (MMBI; Sellers, 2013) was utilized to measure participants conceptualization of their Black identity across various dimensions: centrality, private regard, assimilation, humanist, minority, and nationalist. This measure consists of fifty-six questions answered on a 7-point scale, where 1 =

Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree. A sample question is “Overall, being Black has very little to do with how I feel about myself.” The MMBI responses are summed within each sub-scale then averaged. Higher scores on the MMBI subscales relate to a higher reported level of Black identity for each dimension.

Procedure

Participants were directed to a Qualtrics survey. After consenting, participants completed the General Self-Efficacy Scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) for the first time. Participants then responded to two open-ended prompts. First, participants answered the question, “What is a racial microaggression?” Second, participants described a time when they were a victim of a racial microaggression. Participants provided information about the context (e.g., university, workplace), the perceived gender of the offender, the perceived race/ethnicity of the offender, and the nature of the microaggression (e.g., microassault). After writing about their experience with a racial microaggression, participants completed the Inventory of Microaggressions Against Black Individuals (Mercer et al; 2011). Next, participants completed the General Self-Efficacy Scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) for a second time, followed by the measure of racial identity (Sellers, 2013). Last, participants completed a demographics measure (e.g., age, education level), received a brief debriefing statement, and were thanked for their participation.

CHAPTER III:

RESULTS

Statistical Analysis

Jamovi was utilized to conduct correlational analyses to examine the associations between the experience of racial microaggressions, self-efficacy, and racial identity to test my hypotheses. My primary hypothesis was that the experience of racial microaggressions would be negatively correlated with general self-efficacy. Further, I predicted that varying tenets of Black identity would be associated with self-efficacy and the experience of microaggressions.

Before examining the associations between measures, I conducted a paired samples *t*-test to determine if self-efficacy beliefs differed from before and after reporting racial microaggression experiences. There was no significant difference between participant's initial self-reported general self-efficacy ($M = 31.1$, $SD = 5.08$) and their self-efficacy after reporting their racial microaggression experiences ($M = 31.1$, $SD = 5.32$), $t(166) = -.274$, $p = .785$.

For the correlations between microaggressions, self-efficacy beliefs after reflecting on microaggression experiences, and Black identity, there were a few significant correlations of note. First, there was a positive correlation between the frequency and impact of racial microaggressions and general self-efficacy beliefs, $r(165) = .207$, $p = .004$. Second, private regard, a subscale of the MMBI, and general self-efficacy were positively correlated, $r(165) = .240$, $p < .001$. Third, the experience of racial microaggressions was positively correlated with two separate subscales of the MMBI, Black nationalist ideology, $r(164) = .250$, $p < .001$, and Black centrality and $r(160) = .183$, $p = .01$.

CHAPTER IV:

DISCUSSION

Previous research demonstrates the impact of microaggressions for Black women (Donovan et al., 2012, Moody et al., 2019, Loyd et al., 2021). The current study adds to the existing literature by examining if those microaggression experiences are negatively associated with self-efficacy beliefs. Self-efficacy is needed to carry out life's daily functions, and for Black women these daily functions are often interrupted by the non-necessities of outright racist environments, experiences and explicit or subtle discriminatory experiences that comes with being a Black woman in a non-Black environment. Existing research on self-efficacy beliefs of Black women focuses on whether self-efficacy beliefs are bolstered when interventions are put in place, while the current study examined if self-efficacy beliefs of Black women were negatively impacted when met with discriminatory behaviors. Further, the current research considered the role of racial identity on buffering the detrimental effects of microaggressions on self-efficacy beliefs. This research is an important addition to the existing literature on self-efficacy beliefs, as well as the psychological experiences of Black women.

Surprisingly, my results did not fully support the primary hypothesis as the correlation between racial microaggressions and self-efficacy was a positive association rather than a negative as I predicted. This positive association may suggest that when encountering a microaggression, Black women are more, rather than less, determined to pursue their goals and advocate for the self. Interestingly, different aspects of Black identity were positively associated with self-efficacy and experience of microaggressions.

In addition to the positive correlation between the experience of microaggressions and self-efficacy, there was also a positive correlation between self-efficacy and one aspect of the Black identity, private regard. Sells et al. (1997) conceptualizes private

regard as “the extent to which individuals feel positively or negatively toward African Americans and their membership in that group. This component of regard is consistent with the concept of psychological closeness and racial pride in other racial models” (p. 807). The positive correlation between general self-efficacy, even after reflecting on microaggression experiences, and private regard may suggest that Black women who personally take pride in her Black identity have more positive beliefs or pride regarding herself and abilities overall.

Another aspect of Black identity, Black centrality, can be thought of as the measurement of importance of race to one’s self concept, or in other words, how central a Black racial identity is to the Black women’s sense of self identity (Seller et al., 1997). Understanding social hierarchies is crucial in the conceptualization of Black centrality, as occupation, and gender may impact one’s societal ranking. The more Black women reported a Black racial identity as being a core tenet of self, the more Black women reported experiencing and feeling an impact of microaggressions. This may suggest that the more one identifies her sense of self as being Black, the more one is able to identify threats to this identity and find those disturbing.

Sellers et al. (1997) conceptualizes Black nationalist ideology as a viewpoint that highlights the uniqueness and importance of being African descent. Similar to the association between racial microaggressions and Black centrality, the more Black women believe in a Black nationalist ideology the higher the frequency and impact of racial microaggressions experienced. Or in other words, the more one believes in a Black nationalist ideology, the more attune to identifying and finding upsetting the experience of racial microaggressions.

Limitations and Future Directions

The goal of this study was to examine the association between racial microaggressions, general self-efficacy beliefs, and a Black racial identity. While the utilized microaggression measure considers the impact to and frequency of microaggressions toward Black people, the Gendered Racial Microaggression Scale (GRMS; Lewis & Neville, 2015) measures specifically gendered racial microaggressions. That is, this measure considers microaggressions centered equally around race and gender, acknowledging the intersecting identities of Black women. Unfortunately, permission was not retained to utilize the GRMS from the survey authors, even after repeated attempts to receive permission. Future research should utilize a measure, such as the GRMS, to more completely examine the experience of microaggressions unique for Black women, as Black women are held to subjective and varying standards at the intersections of Blackness and womanhood.

My primary hypothesis, that self-efficacy beliefs would be lower following the experience of microaggressions was not supported, although there was a positive correlation between microaggression experience and self-efficacy. However, self-efficacy before and after reflecting on microaggression experiences was not significantly different. This lack of change in self-efficacy beliefs from time one to time two may be a result of the methodological design. That is, there was a limited amount of time between the two measures, leaving room for participants to remember previous answers. Future research should consider including an extra measure or performing a test-retest with more required time in between survey answers, to account for this possible limitation.

Finally, additional analyses could be considered with the existing data. Two open-ended questions were asked of participants regarding their thoughts about what is a microaggression and a specific microaggression experience. Specifically, researchers were interested in the race and gender of the perceived offender and the location where

the microaggression offense occurred. Future analyses may include coding the qualitative responses to further the understanding between microaggression experiences, self-efficacy, and Black identity. For instance, it might be that participants who wrote about a particular type of microaggression experience (e.g., microassault) were more or less likely to show a decline in self-efficacy. Better understanding the open-ended responses could help in the interpretation of the current data, as well as for developing additional studies related to my primary question.

Implications

Identifying a positive association between general self-efficacy beliefs and Black private regard may help Black women to successfully navigate everyday life challenging moments. For instance, those with lower general self-efficacy beliefs may be able to raise those levels by possessing stronger Black private regards beliefs. The positive association between reported general self-efficacy levels and the negative experience of racial microaggressions to Black women details that those who have higher general self-efficacy levels are experiencing unfavorably high levels of racial microaggressions, possibly validating the positive association between general self-efficacy beliefs and Black private regard. Meaning, Black women with higher levels of Black private regard may have correlating levels of general self-efficacy due to the positive association between general self-efficacy and the negative experience of racial microaggressions. Or in other words, when Black women are interrupted by racially microaggressive moments, those with higher Black private regard levels may be able to navigate those discriminatory moments (through high self-efficacy levels) more successfully than those with lower Black private regard levels.

Black centrality and Black nationalist items, two tenets of Black racial identity, are positively associated with the disturbing experience of racial microaggressions. Those

who possess high Black centrality levels believe that being Black is a core tenet of self-identity, as centrality defines the significance of race to one's identity. Those who have elevated Black nationalist levels may highlight the significance and the uniqueness of being Black (Sellers et al. 1997). Black women who emphasize Black centrality and Black nationalist items report their discriminatory moments as more detrimental than those with lower centrality and nationalist beliefs; suggesting that the racial assault to the Black women (racial microaggression) is more impactful to the Black women when she carries a strong sense of Blackness.

Conclusion

The current study contributes to the literature regarding Black women and general self-efficacy. Findings of the current study also highlights the role of different aspects of racial identity as related to microaggression experiences and self-efficacy, suggesting future research is needed. The findings of the current study suggest the need for more intersectional research that explores how our social intersections impact our current beliefs regarding the self.

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