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Is an Election More Than Just a Political Opinion: The Impact of Racial Microaggressions on
College Students During the Trump Era

by

Jasmyne Hill

Under the Direction of Lakeyta Bonnette-Bailey, PhD

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2021

ABSTRACT

Multiple studies concluded that the 2016 presidential election was psychologically traumatic for young people and people of color. I conducted an online survey on 272 Georgia State University college students to measure their experience with racial microaggressions, hyper vigilance and how their social and familial relationships, academic performance, school and workplace environment, and physical and mental health have been impacted by the Trump presidency. The statistical data and qualitative findings indicate that college students have been negatively affected from the Trump presidency. College students of color also experienced an increased amount of racial microaggressions during Trump's presidency. These results solidify and strengthen the argument from previous literature acknowledging college students', especially students of color, negative experience under the Trump presidency.

INDEX WORDS: Trump presidency, Racial microaggressions, College students, Political behavior, Political opinion, People of color

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2021

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May 2021

DEDICATION

To my mom, I am eternally grateful for you. There is absolutely no way I could have achieved this milestone if it was not for your constant encouragement, love, and dedication. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for spending hours with me helping to revise my paper, easing my stress, and preparing me for my defense presentations. You always see me through my struggles, and I sincerely thank you. As this journey comes to an end, I know you will be cheering me on in my next chapter.

To my siblings and grandparents, thank you for your constant love, reassurance, and letting me talk your ear off about school. You taught me how to be truly confident and proud of myself. To my friends, thank you for listening to me talk about my research, letting me practice my presentations with you, and your words of encouragement. I truly could not have done this without the support of my friends and family.

I dedicate this work to those who have been severely impacted by the current political climate. I hope this study shines a light on the everyday battles you face.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The United States was believed to be living in a “post-racial” society after the election of Barack Obama, the first Black president. The campaign and election of Donald Trump, who notoriously spouted racist, misogynistic, xenophobic, sexist, Islamophobic, and homophobic rhetoric, brought serious doubts to the idea of living in a “post-racial” society. The focus of Trump’s campaign was to spread fear, animosity, and hostility towards historically marginalized groups and immigrants from Mexico, Latin America, and the Middle East. Trump characterized immigrants as being the catalyst for the social and economic downfall in America and labeled Mexican immigrants as “rapists”, “drug dealers”, and “criminals” (Konrad 2018; Bell 2019). He encouraged his supporters to be physically violent towards those who opposed his ideology, was accused of sexual harassment, and many white supremacist groups endorsed his presidency (Bell 2019). Continued police brutality and killings against Black and Brown bodies sparked a resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement. Not only is the United States battling racial and social injustice, but it is also being ravaged by the coronavirus pandemic. The Trump administration received heavy backlash and criticism for their handling of social justice movements and the pandemic. When asked to condemn white supremacy and militia groups during the 2020 presidential debate, Trump diverted answering the question by claiming he only sees violence from the “left wing media” (McCammon 2020). When the moderator pushed him to answer the question, he said “Proud Boys, stand back and stand by, But I’ll tell you what: Somebody’s got to do something about antifa and the left” (“NPR”, 00:00:45-00:00:54). The federal government and Christopher Wray, Director of the FBI, classified white supremacists as being the most serious domestic threat facing the United States “racially motivated violent

extremism” (McCammon 2020). As the president continues to go unpunished for making bigoted statements, it sends a message that it is acceptable to have discriminatory opinions.

Multiple studies have concluded that the 2016 presidential election was psychologically traumatic for young people and people of color. Hagan et al. (2018) concluded that one out of four college students displayed clinically significant distress because of the 2016 presidential election. Hoyt et al. (2018) surveyed 300 college students and found those who did not believe Trump was fit to be president and marginalized groups, such as people of color and women, had increased stress before and after the election. Although there was a “general mood recovery” following the election, for some groups there was still an increase in biological stress (Hoyt et al 2018). Ten days following Trump winning the 2016 election, the Southern Poverty Law Center, an organization dedicated to tracking bias motivated harassment and intimidation, reported that approximately 900 hate crimes occurred with most perpetrators invoking Trump’s name during their assault (Southern Poverty Law Center 2016). Shockingly, the Southern Poverty Law Center stated that most of these reported assaults occurred in K-12 schools. A national survey conducted on 2,000 K-12 teachers reported that over half of the respondents said that after the 2016 presidential election, students felt “emboldened” to use slurs, name calling, and say bigoted and hostile things towards students of color, immigrants, and Muslims (Williams and Medlock 2017). In this same study, 67 percent of respondents said that many students, especially children of immigrants, and Muslims, were fearful of their family’s future in the United States. Black students were showing concern that enslavement would return, or they would be sent back to Africa (Williams and Medlock 2017). Since research has shown young people have been significantly affected by the 2016 presidential election, the purpose of this study is to understand how the livelihoods of college students have been impacted by the Trump administration

specifically examining racial microaggressions, hyper vigilance, school and work environment, friendships, and family relationships.

2 RACIAL MICROAGGRESSIONS

Racial microaggressions experienced by people of color are often not acknowledged which means research must go beyond studying explicit forms of racism and prejudice. By doing so, it validates these everyday lived experiences which will help others recognize the challenges people of color face in academic, professional, and their everyday environments as well as their mental and physical health (Pérez Huber and Solórzano 2015). Racial microaggressions are characterized as “everyday conscious and unconscious manifestations of racism that people of color encounter within their public and private lives” (Pérez Huber and Solórzano 2015). By applying the critical race theory, they explain that “racial microaggressions are a form of systematic racism that (a) are verbal and non-verbal assaults directed at people of color, often carried out automatically or unconsciously; (b) are used based on a person of color’s race, gender, class, sexuality, language, immigration status, phenotype, accent, or surname; and (c) are cumulative--taking a physiological, psychological, and academic toll on those targeted by them” (Pérez Huber and Solórzano 2015, 1). Sue et al. (2007) creates three subcategories of racial microaggressions: microinsults, microassault, and microinvalidation (Sue et al. 2007, Figure 1, p.278).

Figure 1
Categories of and Relationships Among Racial Microaggressions

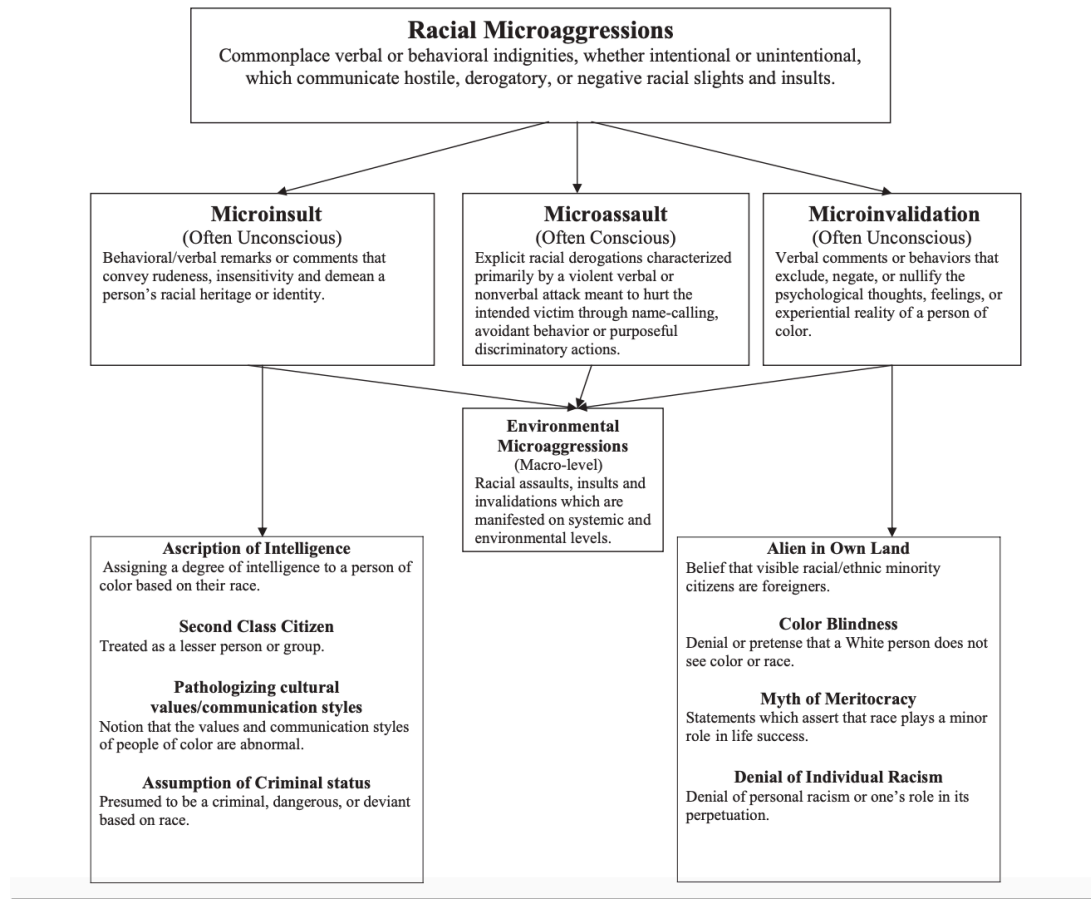


Figure 1. Racial Microaggressions Chart (Sue et al. 2007, Figure 1, p. 278)

Microinsults are often unconscious and are behavioral/verbal comments that are rude, insensitive, and degrade a person's racial heritage and identity. These include assigning a certain level of intelligence based on a person of color's racial identity, treating a person of color as a second-class citizen, thinking cultural values and communication styles are abnormal, and assuming a criminal status on someone because of their race. Microassaults are usually conscious and are explicit racial verbal/non-verbal attacks with a discriminatory purpose. Some examples are avoidant behavior and name-calling with the goal of discriminating. Lastly, microinvalidations are verbal comments or behaviors that ignore, invalidate, or deny the realities

of people of color. Believing racial/ethnic minorities are foreigners, denying seeing color, asserting that race is not a major factor contributing to success, and denying individual racism are ways that invalidate the realities of people of color (Sue et al. 2007, Figure 1, p.278). There are also physical health consequences from these subtle forms of racism which consist of high blood pressure, anxiety, depression, cardiovascular disease, and increased death rates among people of color (Solórzano and Pérez Huber 2015).

Microaggressions stem from social dominance, pathological stereotypes, avoidant behavior, racist, colorblind, and symbolic attitudes and beliefs. There could possibly be a relationship between Trump's presidency and a rise of racial microaggressions against people of color. Examining the relationship between microaggressions towards Black students from white college students concluded that microaggressive behavior is more likely to be executed by people who have racist, color-blind, and symbolic attitudes and beliefs, and have negative feelings about Black people (Kanter et al 2017). Along with being rooted in consciously held stereotypical views and social dominance, microaggressions are also in the form of avoidance, exclusion, and ostracization. Williams (2017) describes these behaviors of avoiding people of color by having pathological stereotypes, few cross-racial interactions, and/or thinking a racial mistake will result in a harsh response. This underlying desire to avoid interactions with people of color reinforces the social separation of racial groups. The politicization of racial resentment among white voters, negative partisanship, and the changing demographics of the United States has led to the increasing racial tensions and hate crimes.

3 RACIAL MICROAGGRESSIONS AND TRUMP

Trump's utilization of dog whistle politics with racist, offensive, and discriminatory rhetoric has garnered support among white Americans, far-right conservatives, and white

supremacists. Although people believed racism was no longer in existence because of Obama's presidency, López (2015) argues that racism is adapting into a new form of coded racial language that subtly manipulates hostility towards people of color. Instead of using coded language, Trump was explicit with his statements regarding marginalized groups and went unpunished for his discriminatory actions. The acceptance of his behavior empowered others to become vocal about their bigoted opinions without the fear of social repercussions (Sullivan et al. 2016). In return, this has been extremely harmful in the way that people of color are treated and perceived in the United States. Along with Trump's rhetoric, his endorsement of right-wing populism with strict immigration reform, a Muslim travel ban, racially charged remarks, and reducing the United States international involvement was a magnet for the far right. In August of 2017, a white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia was characterized as a "major outburst of American racism" from the build-up of white supremacist ideology gaining substantial support since Trump took office (Pei 2017). Additionally, the increasing incidents of white supremacy led to severe racial discrimination, and questions of equality in the United States because of Trump's actions as president (Pei 2017). Pei (2017) argues that the white supremacist rally reflected the social and racial conflicts deriving from the Trump era. Other studies have determined that the drastic demographic changes in the United States have alarmed white Americans and conservatives about the diminishing white population and increasing cultural diversity leading to changes in norms (Huber 2016). In 2014, the Pew Research Center reported 73 percent of political conservatives' felt immigrants "burden our country" and take away our jobs, housing, and healthcare (Pew Research Center 2014). As a result of increasing racial tensions, exclusion of groups and fear of the out-group rising in dominance, there could be an increase in experiencing racial microaggressions.

Presently, there has been a rise in hate crimes against Asian-Americans due to the Covid-19 pandemic and Trump and other Republican officials labeling the virus as the “Chinese virus.” The non-profit organization, Stop Asian American and Pacific Islander Hate, reported 3,795 incidents of discrimination between March 19, 2020 to February 28, 2021. Asian women reported hate incidents 2.3 times more than men. (Stop AAPI Hate National Report 2021). The most common reported harassment was verbal harassment/name calling with many incidents happening to elderly Asian-Americans and Asian-American youth. Similarly, Lee and Waters (2020) findings echo the increase of racial discrimination against Asians due to the Covid-19 pandemic which include hate crimes, microaggressions, discrimination, and self-reported mental and physical health. Trump and his supporters blaming Asian people for the pandemic has caused an increase in racialized hate crimes and microaggressions. Choi et al. (2020) reviewed multiple studies examining how Latinx Americans experience racism and concluded that Latinx Americans experienced racial microaggressions that consist of assuming lower intelligence, being treated as a second-class citizen, presumptions of engaging in criminal behavior, being invalidated with their Spanish accent, and believing that they were not born in the United States. Different racial groups are likely to be victims to different forms of racial microaggressions than others, which is an important examination.

4 COLLEGE STUDENTS AND THE TRUMP PRESIDENCY

Rising hate crimes and legislation targeting marginalized groups has made many students feel as if they have a constant target on their backs for simply existing. To them, Donald Trump is the embodiment of white supremacy, racism, capitalism, patriarchy, xenophobia, and many other forms of discrimination (Castrellón et al. 2017). Trump’s actions not being punished signaled to others that it was acceptable to have explicit prejudice and discriminatory opinions

(Crandall et al. 2018). For some students, it was a wakeup call that racism was still alive and thriving in American society (Gomez and Perez-Huber 2019, 7). DACAmented Latinx college students (children of undocumented immigrants who are protected from deportation) shared their experiences of being targeted by their white peers, feeling fearful, defeated, and hyperaware of their surroundings, as well as feeling empowered to share their experiences and achieve their academic and career goals due to Trump's election (Gomez and Huber, 2019). International students expressed similar feelings of being "anxious, apprehensive, scared, and uneasy due to Trump becoming president" (Kit 2018, 433). One student expressed how he had to miss walking his sister down the aisle at her wedding because of the possibility he would not be let back into the United States (Kit 2018, 434). There was also a common theme of international students not sharing their thoughts and opinions in class because of their immigration status and how other students would perceive them (Kit 2018).

Male college students of color expressed how they faced racialized situations of prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination from white students, faculty, and staff stemming from the 2016 election (Lott and Love 2016). Some students, even professors, were not able to continue their day because the 2016 election results left them feeling distraught, hopeless, and in despair. A student, describing himself as usually having a positive attitude, discussed how the election affected his academic performance by not being able to mentally prepare for class. He also stated that his professor had cancelled a test that day because she was feeling the mental turmoil from the election (Lott and Love 2016, 209). Research examining racial/ethnic discrimination and mental health among women college students since the 2016 presidential election concluded that women of color experienced more racial/ethnic discrimination and consistent symptoms of depression than white women college students (Daftary et al. 2020). The

researchers also reported that women saw a resurgence of racism, white supremacy, nativism, hate, conflict, and division. From these experiences, it is important to validate and understand how impactful a hostile political environment can be on the livelihoods of college students. From this literature, I have curated the following hypotheses:

H1= College students of color will experience an increased amount of racial microaggressions during the Trump presidency.

H2 = Racial microaggressions and the political climate will negatively affect college student's academic performance, environment, and social relationships during the Trump presidency

H3 = College students of color will experience heightened vigilance, more than white students during the Trump presidency.

5 METHODS

5.1 Participants

The analysis was conducted on a sample of 272 college students attending Georgia State University, an accredited institution known for its racial diversity. The racial makeup of the sample consisted of 93 Black/African Americans (34%), 81 Asians (30%), 66 whites (24%), 21 Multi-Racial persons (8%), and 11 students who selected "other" because they did not belong to any of these racial categories (4%). Regarding age, 228 respondents ranged between 18-20 (84%), 30 were between 21-29 (11%), 9 were 30-39 (3%), 4 ranged from 40-49 (1%), and lastly, 1 was 60 or older (0.3%). A total of 38 respondents reported being Hispanic/Latinx. 17 racially

identified as white (45%), 10 “other” (26%), 6 Multi-Racial (16%), 4 Black/African American (11%), and 1 Asian (2.6%). There were 211 respondents identifying as female (78%), 58 male (21%), 2 gender variant/non-conforming (0.7%) and 1 transgender female (0.3%). Most respondents identified as straight or heterosexual (n = 220, 81%), 18 as bisexual (7%), 13 as questioning/unsure (5%), 8 preferred not to answer (3%), 6 as lesbian (2%), 5 as pansexual (2%), and 2 as queer (0.7%).

5.2 Procedure

Georgia State University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and approved this study, the informed consent forms, and recruitment materials. Once approved, students enrolled in Introduction to American Government (POLS1101) were recruited to be in the Political Science Research Pool (PSRP). They would then be placed in a subject pool and informed of ongoing studies conducted each semester by faculty and graduate students in the Political Science Department. Students who attended supplemental instruction sessions for American Government were notified to sign up for the PSRP. Students were given extra credit for their American Government course for their participation. The online data was collected through Qualtrics survey software. Before beginning the online survey, respondents were shown a recruitment script with general information about the study, the requirements to participate in the study, and information about giving consent to participate. Following the recruitment script, they were shown the informed consent form. Respondents were advised that this study was voluntary so the survey can be stopped at any time without penalty. Students had up to an hour to complete the survey.

5.3 Variables

The independent variables of the hypotheses are Trump's presidency (H1, H3), racial microaggressions and the political climate (H2). The dependent variables are experience of racial microaggressions (H1), academic performance, environment, social and familial relationships (H2), and heightened vigilance (H3).

5.4 Measures

Demographic Questionnaire

Participants completed a demographic questionnaire about their racial and gender identities, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, and other demographics.

Racial Microaggressions

The Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale (REMS) was used to measure various microaggressions. Similar questions from Nadal (2011) were implemented in the questionnaire that focused on workplace and school microaggressions, microinvalidations, and exoticization. These questions were measured on a 5-point frequency scale with the options of "always", "often", "sometimes", "rarely", and "never".

Heightened Vigilance

The heightened vigilance scale was implemented to understand how respondents are attentive to their identity and how others perceive them. An example question in the survey is, "I think in advance about the kinds of problems I will experience because of my racial identity" (Williams 1997). These questions were measured on a 5-point frequency scale with the options being "always", "often", "sometimes", "rarely", and "never".

Social and Familial Relationships

There are two questions asking if familial and social relationships have been affected by differing political opinions. Similarly, they were measured on a 5-point frequency scale with the options of “always”, “often”, “sometimes”, “rarely”, and “never”.

Open-ended Questions

After the multiple-choice questions, participants were asked to freely share their experience living under a Trump presidency and any additional significant changes they have encountered.

6 RESULTS

Table 1. Simple Linear Regression of Racial Microaggressions and Control Variable

	Black	Asian	Multi-Racial	Other
Heightened Vigilance				
I think in advance about the kinds of problems I will experience because of my racial identity.	2.25 (.18)***	1.25 (.19)***	1.10 (.28)***	1.55 (.36)***
I think in advance about the kinds of problems I will experience because of my gender identity.	.63 (.21)**	-.23 (.21)	-.52 (.33)	-.24 (.42)
I think in advance about the kinds of problems I will experience because of my sexual orientation.	.19 (.19)	-.10 (.19)	-.25 (.30)	-.08 (.38)
I try to prepare for possible insults before leaving home.	.42 (.17)*	.35 (.18)	.02 (.27)	.73 (.35)*
I try to avoid certain social situations and places.	.73 (.17)***	.01 (.17)	.26 (.26)	.85 (.34)*
I always have to be careful about my appearance (to get good service or avoid being harassed).	.82 (.20)***	.24 (.21)	-.02 (.32)	.77 (.40)
School and Workplace Microaggressions				
An employer or co-worker treated me differently than white co-workers.	1.03 (.16)***	.83 (.16)***	1.04 (.25)***	1.08 (.32)***
Someone assumed that my work would be inferior to people of other racial groups.	.79 (.16)***	.62 (.17)***	.54 (.26)*	.73 (.33)*
In classroom discussions, people ask me what I think about a topic related to race/ethnicity.	.60 (.18)***	.34 (.18)	.03 (.28)	.68 (.37)
My opinion was overlooked in a group discussion because of my race.	.78 (.15)***	.57 (.15)***	.24 (.24)	.91 (.30)**
An employer or co-worker was unfriendly or unwelcoming toward me because of my race.	.68 (.15)***	.51 (.15)***	.28 (.23)	.59 (.29)*
Microinvalidations				
Someone told me that they "don't see color" and/or race.	.27 (.20)	-.32 (.20)	.22 (.31)	.53 (.40)
Someone told me that people should not think about race anymore.	.15 (.19)	-.08 (.19)	.41 (.29)	.11 (.38)
I was told people of color don't experience racism anymore.	.47 (.20)*	.08 (.21)	-.05 (.32)	.21 (.40)
I was told I complain about race too much.	.60 (.17)***	.13 (.17)	.12 (.26)	.53 (.33)
I was told that people of all racial groups experience the same obstacles	.48 (.17)**	.12 (.18)	.42 (.27)	.45 (.35)
People assume that I'm not from the United States.	.42 (.17)*	1.60 (.18)***	.59 (.28)*	.87 (.36)*
Racial Microaggressions				
Racial microaggressions are verbal and non-verbal behaviors that are hostile, derogatory, or negative towards racial/ethnic minorities. How frequently have you experienced this?	1.21 (.16)***	.77 (.17)***	.90 (.26)***	1.05 (.33)**
I am often asked my perspective on things because of my race.	.85 (.18)***	.55 (.18)**	.69 (.28)*	1.30 (.36)***
Relationships				
I have lost friends because of opposing political opinions.	-.62 (.19)***	-.82 (.19)***	-1.13 (.29)***	.19 (.37)
I don't speak to some family members because of their political opinions.	-1.01 (.18)***	-.77 (.19)***	-.74 (.29)*	-1.05 (.37)**
Microassault				
I have experienced nonverbal harassment (e.g. dirty looks, being given "the finger") because of my race/ethnicity or national origin.	1.06 (.18)***	.79 (.19)***	.76 (.29)**	1.00 (.37)**

Signif. codes: 0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*'

Note. These are ordinary least squared regressions (OLS) with standard errors in parentheses. White students are the reference category in the regression which is why they are excluded from the table.

Table 1. Simple Linear Regressions

Linear regressions were utilized to establish significant correlations between the frequency of racial microaggressions experienced and the racial identities of students of color. The regressions for minority students are being compared to white students (see Table 1). Because this study's focal point is examining the correlation between race and racial microaggressions, only one control variable (racial identity) is incorporated. Other control variables did not have a significant effect on experiencing racial microaggressions

The first hypothesis, "students of color will experience an increased amount of racial microaggressions due to Trump's presidency", is supported by the survey results. These questions specifically asked if racial microaggressions have occurred within the last five years (see table 1). Students of color are significantly more likely to experience microassault, school and workplace microaggressions, and microinvalidations. Black students had the highest statistical significance when experiencing school and workplace microaggressions, nonverbal harassment, colorblindness, having their realities invalidated, being asked their perspective because of their racial identity, and assumed to be a foreigner than other students of color. Specifically, Black students had a coefficient of 1.03 meaning they increase a level more than white students when being treated differently than their white co-workers. Asian students had the highest statistical significance and a level of 1.60 than any other students have people believe that they are a foreigner. There are instances when white students were more likely than Asian and Multi-Racial students to be told by someone that they are colorblind, and that people should not think about race anymore. Similarly, white students were more likely than Multi-Racial students to report experiencing being told that people of color do not experience racism anymore. Although these negative correlations suggest that white students experience microinvalidations, it must be remembered that racial microaggressions are specifically targeting people of color.

The qualitative findings from a white student in the survey may explain their situation of when being told colorblind statements from others. For example, a white student discussed how they have been dismissed by other white people when discussing racism in the United States.

"As a white person the impact on me has been mostly second hand. (no one has made any racialized attacks on me, for example) The conversations referenced in the questions above asking, for example, if I've been accused of complaining too much about racism, have happened. My desire to talk about how racist the systems in this country have always been has been met with dismissiveness and condemnation from other white people, and on the other hand I've been concerned that I might appear to be performative. Though I have not been accused of that directly, where best to stand in a conversation of racism, while being white is a delicate navigation, but I feel its important to stay engaged in the conversations. A little discomfort is nothing compared to the constant navigation of being Black in this country, especially during and in the aftermath of the trump presidency "

Here, the white student discusses never being targeted for their race but instead being met with dismissiveness from other white people when discussing racism. I suspect there may be generational differences of ideology between the younger and older white generations that can explain these occurrences (Fisher 2020). Besides these negative correlations, Asian and Multi-Racial students have a positive correlation for encountering nonverbal harassment, school and workplace microaggressions, microassault, being a foreigner, and being asked their perspective because of their racial identity.

Many of the open-ended responses coincide with these findings with most respondents stating Trump emboldening his supporters to be outwardly hostile to people of color has resulted in amplified harassment and racial microaggressions. One student reported that they had to move states because of the increasing hostility towards minorities and their Muslim mother being threatened. Other Black students emphasized these occurrences with racial microaggressions including school and workplace microaggressions, microinvalidations, and microassault due to Trump's presidency with these statements:

“People became more outwardly racist, it has become overwhelming. I've had Caucasian men and women walk right into me as if I don't exist without the slightest acknowledgment of me standing there. I've had racist people attempt to run me off the road, racist have become entitled during trump's presidency. In 2019 I worked as a loan processor. I had to fight tooth and nail for my manager...to approve black people for installment loans. Often times regardless of employers verifying the individual's pay, check stubs, and etc he would state, "someone that looks like that can't make this much money". Often times I find myself debating that notion of what someone in the upper middle class looks like, his answer is always white. It got worse over time as he became more bold leading to me and the customer calling corporate to report the incident so they can get approved. It didn't stop there he used his privilege to sexually harass black women on the job publicly because he knew management would not care about us being sexually harassed. Eventually, I quit due to the racism once I found out white people with the company was paid more than black people solely based on their skin color. They didn't care who had a degree, more experience, better customer service, more annual sales, nor a higher collection rate; just skin color. I would love to say racism didn't play a huge part in my life but it has.”

Similarly, another responded stated,

“I work at Chick-fil-A. A restaurant known for their conservative views. The guests I get were more hostile towards me in the midst of the election and I noticed how bold these white folk were starting to get with their Trump Pride. Bumper stickers, hats, micro-aggressions etc. It was annoying. People outside my store would protest and the guests would talk down on them to my co-worker's face. Mind you these two co-workers were darker than me. You begin to see the racism come out of the wood works all because Trump normalized it. It's shameful. I'm a very outspoken person when it comes to my black pride so I also get into debates over social media and people would call me dumb, slow, they'd tell me to go back to middle school and learn some history like I was the one in the wrong. In school we would do socratic seminars and this one girl who was conservative would go home and post on her spam about how everyone was attacking her in class that day because of her political ideology. Like if you're willing to put your conservative self out there, be prepared for the reaction you're going to get or don't say anything at all if you're going to get that overly butt-hurt. Same applies to everyone of every political ideology.”

While another respondent expressed,

“I lost a lot of friends because of my negative comments towards Trump (I did not care one bit, they were racist anyways), a student came to school with a confederate flag on his truck which led to multiple other students bringing them to school as well as that student waving that flag around campus while we were in class. I also got called racists names because of my hair and how big it was. I was in many fights due to racist white kids that then later on went on another racist rant on social media after the fight. These were verbal and physical fights.”

Hate crimes among Asian Americans dramatically increased when Trump said the coronavirus pandemic was caused by Asian people and called it the “China virus”. Results from the first hypothesis conclude other literature examining the rise in Asian hate crime stemming from the

Covid-19 pandemic (Wu et al. 2020; Lee and Waters 2020). An Asian student explained their experience with racial microaggressions intensifying after Trump was elected and even more when he made prejudiced remarks about Asian people being responsible for the pandemic.

“As I am a Vietnamese person, I have received dirty looks, insults, been spat towards, and many other insults. Why you ask? One word. China virus. Over the past 4 years, although it's probably because I've grown a lot older, I also have received a lot more racist remarks. I also want to mention that Trump's presidency in my eyes has been a couple steps back. From how he handled the coronavirus, domestic affairs, foreign affairs, his lack of empathy for POC, and more. It's been a hell of a 4 years, and I've disliked it.”

Since Trump has ushered in tolerance for expressing intolerant opinions towards marginalized groups, there has been a rise in racial tensions, intolerance, and fear of out-group dominance leading to a substantial increase in the racial microaggressions faced by college students of color in their everyday lives. (Crandall et al. 2018; Albright and Hurd 2020).

Table 1 shows that the second hypothesis asserting that the racial microaggressions and the political climate will negatively affect college student's academic performance, environment, and social relationships due to Trump's presidency can be accepted. Racial microaggressions and the political climate did negatively affect minority student's academic performance and their environment but were less likely to affect social and familial relationships than white students. White students were significantly more likely to have the political climate negatively affect their friendships than Black, Asian, and Multi-Racial students. Students who identified as “other” had a positive correlation with losing friends because of political opinions than white students. Additionally, white students are significantly more likely to not speak to family members because of political opinions than students of color. Many open-ended responses from white students indicated themes of losing friends, seeing the effect Trump had of historically marginalized groups, and not speaking to family members who support Trump and his ideology.

One white student even stated that they were told by others that they were “submitting to “brainwashing by the liberal elite” for attending college. This response explains a white student’s experience in losing friends due to opposing ideologies.

“When he was first elected, my white friends didn’t understand how he could be racist/sexist/homophobic and thought I was crazy to think of him that way. They said I needed to accept that he was our president and deserved respect. I lost one friend because of arguments about this a few months later. The other one tried to make it seem like our very different political/moral beliefs were just a small issue in our friendship and was in and out of my life for about two years. In my high school U.S. History class, there was one boy who was very open about being a Trump supporter. We were on the topic of slavery, and he proudly exclaimed that his family had owned many slaves. The rest of the class was uncomfortable.”

These findings were emphasized by respondents of all racial groups demonstrating consistent themes of suffering increased anxiety, fear, and other mental and physical issues, losing friends and family members due to differing political opinions, and seeing the Trump presidency’s effect on marginalized groups and immigrants. Regarding mental health consequences, the following are responses from Asian students discussing how their psyche has been affected by Trump.

“Before the presidency, I was already depressed and had anxiety issues. During the presidency, those issues were exacerbated. I don't think the root of those issues was caused by his presidency but the political climate and the way his victory empowered people to become more hateful and openly racist had pushed these mental issues even further. To cope with all the feelings I had, instead of speaking to a therapist or friends, I bottled the emotions up and eventually developed an eating disorder. However, some positive changes would be that I felt more inclined to help people and stand up for other people and injustice when I see it. It made me not tolerate ignorance and microaggressions anymore and I've cut a lot of people out of my life because I didn't agree with their racist views.”

Additionally, another respondent commented,

“I have gotten significantly more insecure, during those years I was afraid to speak out and just wasn’t myself. I got harassed a lot. but towards the end I found myself and I wish the way I react to these type of situations now, I did then too. I lost years of my life to that sadness.

Contrary to the other predictions, the third hypotheses cannot be fully accepted. The results do show that Black students and students who selected “other” are more hyper vigilant

about their gender identity than white students. Black students are the only minorities to have statistical significance with being vigilant about their gender identity. Additionally, Black students think about their sexual orientation more than any group of students. These indicate aspects of intersectionality in how minority students consider the role their racial and gender identity play in their lives. Furthermore, it is important to note the high statistical significance of students of color being increasingly vigilant about their racial identity than white students. Particularly, Black students had a coefficient of 2.25 meaning that they rose approximately two levels from 'never' to 'sometimes' when asked about their awareness of their racial identity and how it can affect their future. Likewise, Asian, Multi-Racial, and students identifying as "other" increased about a level. The following responses exemplify how attentive students of color are to their intersecting identities during the Trump presidency:

"My experience hasn't been negative because I live in a minority populated area. However watching all the negative stories online show that there is clearly a problem. As I could be in that position if I lived in those areas. I am barely 18 so I don't leave home much nor do I go places and I keep my head down because of my skin color. I try my best not to make a scene because I am afraid to follow into stereotypes."

One Asian American lesbian respondent had this to say regarding her experience with Trump's presidency and her intersecting identity,

"I think my overall experience was negative but not as negative as other people may have experienced for the past five years. I'm a closeted first-generation Asian American lesbian so I personally felt like Donald Trump's presidency was a clear indicator that I wasn't welcome in this country because I'm Asian but also because I'm a part of the LGBTQ+ community and it definitely took a toll on my mental health and perspective of my sexuality. I was already scared of coming out/anyone finding out that I was gay but it was even more escalated when people were confidently voicing their distaste for the LGBTQ+ community. I felt like the racial divide was obviously even bigger as well-I could see it not only on TV but also in my high school as well and honestly even in my own friend group-I live/went to a very diverse high school but I found that people tended to prefer to stick to their own ethnicity group when picking friends. I don't think it was deliberate but I think the political climate created an atmosphere where people, specifically people of color, felt weary of communicating to those outside of their race. Seeing Trump supporters also felt like a punch in the gut, I just felt like they really disliked Asians and thought that we "stole their jobs" and there was an increase in violence against Asian senior citizens during COVID-19 and it really left a bad taste in my mouth. I think the overall

view of Asians from others has been negative because of how Trump had reacted to the pandemic and it makes me anxious to go outside-I feel like I've been given dirty looks because of his comments.”

Another interesting finding is white students being more mindful of their gender identity than Asian and Multi-Racial students. Also, white students are a bit more likely to be careful of their appearance than “other” students. This response from a white student may explain why there are negative correlations in the regression table.

“I have blocked plenty of family and friends on social media for their disgusting views on human rights and have gone so far as to keep my home address from my family members who voted Republican. Being a lesbian non-binary person in a family full of confederate-flag waving hillbillies has increased my concern for my physical health. I have experienced higher levels of prejudice and discrimination based on my gender presentation (masculine nonbinary female) due to Trump's insane ability to make prejudiced people feel as if they are in the right. I have had problems with my gender identity plenty in the past, but since Trump was elected it seems those who disagree with my "lifestyle" are more confident in publicly shaming or harming me.”

With the above statistical and qualitative findings, this study can conclude that the Trump presidency has significantly impacted college students in their personal, professional, and academic life. Along with their racial identity, students revealed how their skin complexion, intersecting identities and immigration status amplified their concern over their well-being under the Trump administration. These results strengthen and solidify the argument that the Trump presidency has negatively impacted the lives of college students.

6.1 Limitations

Since this study was conducted at Georgia State University, a racially diverse institution, there may be significantly different responses from those who attend a predominately white institution (PWI) versus a racially diverse institution. Therefore, this study should be extended to

PWI's to understand the different experiences of college students in PWI's and racially diverse universities. Although the sample was diverse, there was not much variation in age range, sexual orientation, or gender identity. Since recruitment was done in an undergraduate Introduction to American Government class, most respondents were between the ages of 18-20 and only 15 were above the age of 30. Future research should expand the study to include graduate students or gather a large sample of older students. There may be generational differences with younger and older generations of college students in experiencing racial microaggressions while living under the Trump presidency that would be beneficial to study.

Linear regressions were used to establish a correlation between race, racial microaggressions, hyper vigilance, and social and familial relationships. Further research should utilize multiple regressions that include controls for various identities. Also, implementing questions from the Gendered Racial Microaggressions Scale (GRMS) tailored to different women of color will highlight their unique experiences and how they have been impacted during Trump's presidency (Lewis and Neville 2015; Keum et al. 2018; Chavez-Dueñas and Adames 2020). This will aid in understanding if there is a correlation between experiencing racial microaggressions and intersecting identities.

Although there was a section on the survey for a free response, it cannot make up for a complete qualitative approach. Conducting focus groups and in-depth interviews could greatly encourage respondents to share more personal experiences, lessen ambiguity of responses, and clear up misunderstandings with questions. This will allow a deeper understanding of obstacles students face with the Trump presidency.

7 CONCLUSION

The aim of this study is to validate and acknowledge the racialized experiences people of color face and to understand how the Trump presidency has affected the livelihoods (e.g., social and family relationships, academic performance, environment, and mental and physical health) of college students. The results indicate that most students of color are more likely than white students to experience racial microaggressions, school and workplace microaggressions and be hyper aware of their identity and how others may perceive them, due to the Trump presidency. Many of the respondents discussed how prominent racial tensions have risen in the United States because of Trump enabling his supporters to be discriminatory and hostile towards marginalized groups. These findings are consistent with other literature pertaining to how the Trump presidency has impacted college students (Gomez and Perez-Huber 2019, 7; Lott and Love 2016; Pérez Huber and Solórzano 2015). Students have even stated that the political climate has caused them to develop serious mental and physical issues such as eating disorders, anxiety, depression, and insecurity. Previous literature has found that subtle forms of racism and the 2016 presidential election have physical and mental health effects on college students and people of color (Hagan et al. 2018; Pérez Huber and Solórzano 2015). Asian students reported that they have been victims of racialized harassment stemming from the Trump administration and Republican officials blaming the pandemic on Asian Americans which coincide with the findings of Lee and Waters (2020).

An interesting conclusion to this study is that white students were more likely to experience other negative effects of the Trump administration than Asians, Multi-Racial, and “other” students. White students were significantly more likely to have the Trump presidency negatively impact their friendships and relationships with their family members. This may be

explained by the generational differences among the younger and older generations. Matters relating to same-sex marriage, racial issues, the environment, role of government, and immigration and diplomacy. Millennials are the only generation to hold consistent liberal ideologies across these matters while the Silent Generation are mostly conservative (Pew Research Center 2018). Fisher (2020) stated that generational tensions came to fruition during the Trump era with “appealing to everything that the Millennial generation and Generation Z is not” (Fisher 2020, 41). The younger generations are overall more than 40 percent non-white, ideologically liberal, tolerant towards immigration, and were supportive of the Obama administration (Pew Research Center 2018; Fisher 2020). As millennials are being brought up in a colorblind society, Desante and Smith (2020) demonstrate how white millennials display lower levels of racial prejudice but still have strong racial resentment meaning they use “reverse discrimination”, hold stereotypical views, and are less likely to support policies on racial equality. This could possibly explain why some white respondents said they lost respect for certain family members and lost friends because of their support for Trump and their dislike for marginalized groups.

A continued study on how the Trump presidency has impacted college students of color and white students would be insightful for future findings. It is crucial to understand that the 2016 presidential election did more than just elect the 45th president. It brought deeply prejudiced beliefs into the light and tarnished people’s mental and physical health, friendships, families, and school and workplace environments. Although there were damaging effects from the Trump presidency, the respondents said that they became more politically conscious and aware of the plight of marginalized groups. Continuing to examine the longitudinal effect of the younger generations journey in awakening their political mind would be another area for future studies.

APPENDIX

Survey

Directions: Please select the answers that you most identify.

1. Which category below includes your age?

- 18-20
- 21-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60 or older

2. Which racial identity do you most identify?

- Black or African American
- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian
- White
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- Multi-Racial
- Not listed (please specify)

3. Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?

- No, not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin
- Yes, Mexican, Mexican American
- Yes, Puerto Rican
- Yes, Cuban
- Yes, another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin (please specify)

4. Which gender identity do you most identify?

- Female

- Male
- Transgender Female
- Transgender Male
- Gender Variant/Non-Conforming
- Questioning or unsure
- an identity not listed (please specify)
- Prefer Not to answer

5. Which sexual orientation do you most identify?

- Straight or heterosexual
- Gay
- Lesbian
- Bi-sexual
- Pan-sexual
- Queer
- Questioning or unsure
- an identity not listed (please specify)
- Prefer not to answer

6. As you know, people display a wide variety of physical characteristics. One of these is skin color. Displayed below is a skin color scale that ranges from 1 to 10. The 10 shades of skin color are represented by a hand of identical form but differing in color. Which hand shown below comes closest to your skin color?



- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7

- 8
- 9
- 10

7. Which marital status do you most identify?

- Single
- Married
- Widowed
- Divorced
- Separated

8. What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

- Less than high school degree
- High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)
- Some college but no degree
- Associate Degree
- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- Doctoral Degree

9. Which of the following categories best describes your employment status?

- Employed, working 1-39 hours per week
- Employed, working 40 or more hours per week
- Not employed, looking for work
- Not employed, NOT looking for work
- Retired
- Disabled, not able to work

10. What is the primary language spoken in your home?

- English
- Spanish
- Korean

- Chinese
- Japanese
- German
- Italian
- French
- Russian
- Vietnamese
- Language not listed (please specify)

11. Which political ideology do you most identify?

- Strongly Liberal
- Somewhat Liberal
- Liberal
- Moderate
- Conservative
- Somewhat conservative
- Strongly conservative
- Ideology not listed (please specify)

12. How often do you pay attention to government and politics?

- Always
- Most of the time
- About half of the time
- Some of the Time
- Never

13. Did you vote in the 2016 presidential election?

- Yes
 - No
 - No because I was not eligible to vote
- a. Why did you vote in the 2016 presidential election?
 - b. Why did you NOT vote in the 2016 presidential election?

14. Which candidate did you vote for in the 2016 presidential election?

- Hillary Clinton
- Donald Trump
- Other

15. Did you vote in the 2020 presidential election?

- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. No because I was not eligible to vote
- a. Why did you vote in the 2020 presidential election?
 - b. Why did you NOT vote in the 2020 presidential election?
16. Which candidate did you vote for in the 2020 presidential election?
- Joe Biden
 - Donald Trump
 - Other

Directions: For every statement, please select the frequency of your experiences for the past FIVE years. The options are “always”, “often”, “sometimes”, “rarely”, and “never”.

- 17. I have experienced nonverbal harassment (e.g., dirty looks, being given “the finger”) because of my race/ethnicity or national origin.
- 18. I have lost friends because of opposing political opinions.
- 19. I don’t speak to some family members because of their political opinions.
- 20. Someone told me that they “don’t see color” and/or race.
- 21. Someone told me that people should not think about race anymore.
- 22. I was told people of color don’t experience racism anymore.
- 23. I was told I complain about race too much.
- 24. I was told that people of all racial groups experience the same obstacles.
- 25. I am often asked my perspective on things because of my race.
- 26. People assume that I’m not from the United States.
- 27. In classroom discussions, people ask me what I think about a topic related to race/ethnicity.
- 28. I think in advance about the kinds of problems I will experience because of my racial identity.
- 29. I think in advance about the kinds of problems I will experience because of my gender identity.
- 30. I think in advance about the kinds of problems I will experience because of my sexual orientation.
- 31. I try to prepare for possible insults before leaving home.
- 32. I try to avoid certain social situations and places.
- 33. I always have to be careful about my appearance (to get good service or avoid being harassed).
- 34. An employer or co-worker treated me differently than white co-workers.
- 35. Someone assumed that my work would be inferior to people of other racial groups.
- 36. My opinion was overlooked in a group discussion because of my race.
- 37. An employer or co-worker was unfriendly or unwelcoming toward me because of my race.

38. Racial microaggressions are verbal and non-verbal behaviors that are hostile, derogatory, or negative towards racial/ethnic minorities. How frequently have you experienced this?
- a. If you are comfortable, please share any significant experiences of facing racial microaggressions.

Directions: For the following questions, please give a detailed explanation for your answer.

39. What has been your personal experience, positive or negative, to Donald Trump's presidency?
40. What was your reaction to Donald Trump winning the presidency?
41. If you are comfortable, please share any significant changes you have experienced since the Trump administration took office.

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