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Daily Racial Microaggressions and Ethnic Identification among  
Native American Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

The current study investigated 114 Native American young adults' experiences of racial microaggressions, and links between microaggression experiences and self-reported ethnic and cultural identification. Microaggressions were assessed using the Daily Racial Microaggressions scale, Short Form (DRM). Ethnic identity and cultural participation were assessed using the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) and the Orthogonal Cultural Identification Scale (OCIS). Participants reported strong identification with their Native/indigenous ethnicity, along with stronger commitment than exploration on the two MEIM subscales. On the OCIS, participants reported moderately strong identification with Native culture and practices, with strong identification with White American culture. Females reported higher White identification than males, and females also reported significantly stronger identification with White culture than Native. On the DRM, 98% of participants reported experiencing at least one type of racial microaggression. Generally, the extent to which participants were upset by the microaggressions was mild, but all types of microaggressions received ratings from "not upsetting at all" to "extremely upsetting." Microinvalidations were significantly more upsetting than microinsults for females, but there was no difference among the forms of microaggression for males. Correlational findings demonstrated that greater Native identification was strongly associated with more microaggression experiences, especially among males. Regression analyses found several identity correlates of microaggression experiences. "Assumption of criminality" and "assumed superiority of White values" were most frequently associated with identity scales. Results are discussed within the context of identity development theory.

Keywords: Native American; ethnic identity; microaggressions; young adult

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“Contemporary racism [...] is more likely than ever to (a) be disguised and covert, and (b) have evolved from overt racial hatred and bigotry, to a form that is more difficult to identify and acknowledge” (Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, & Torino, 2007, p. 272).

Subtle, indirect, and often unintentional discriminatory and prejudicial acts comprise the daily racial microaggressions that negatively affect ethnic minority youth (Marker, 2009). Experiences of discrimination have consistently been linked to poorer psychosocial health and other negative outcomes (Branscombe, Schmidt, & Harvey, 1999; Galliher, Jones, & Dahl, 2011; Major, Kaiser, & McCoy, 2003; Rozin, Lowery, Imada, & Haidt, 1999; Torres, Driscoll, & Burrow, 2010; Wang, Leu, & Shoda, 2011), with some theorists suggesting that the more subtle and confusing forms of discrimination may be even more harmful than overt forms (Major et al., 2003; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). While the literature on daily racial microaggressions has grown exponentially in the past decade (e.g., Kohli & Solórzano, 2012; Ong, Burrow, Ja, Fuller-Rowell, & Sue, 2013; Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007), empirical work assessing microaggressions among Native Americans is lacking. Of the three articles that were found that addressed microaggressions specifically among Native Americans (Clark, Spanierman, Reed, Soble, & Cabana, 2011; Crethar, Dorton-Clark, & Zamora, 2010; Walters, 2009), none were empirical. Native Americans are a relatively smaller ethnic minority population, with a unique history of institutionalized exploitation and discrimination, including formal governmental programs aimed at genocide and cultural annihilation (see: Duran, Duran, & Braveheart, 1998; Moore & Deloria Jr., 2003; Reyhner & Eder, 2006; Taylor & Sturtevant, 1999). Thus, further

empirical examination of microaggression experiences in this particular population stands to contribute substantially to the literature.

A strong, coherent sense of ethnic identification has been posited by a number of researchers and theorists as a positive developmental asset, serving as a buffer against the stressors and challenges faced by ethnic minority youth (Berkel et al., 2010; Galliher et al., 2011; LaFromboise, Hoyt, Oliver, & Whitbeck, 2006; Wakefield & Hudley, 2007). Links among discrimination experiences and ethnic identity development among Native American youth, however, are not fully understood. A number of theorists suggest that discrimination experiences serve to undermine youths' positive identification with their culture, leading to the internalization of negative, harmful stereotypes (Monforti & Sanchez, 2010; Quinn & Earnshaw, 2013). Other researchers, however, have invoked the notion of identity salience to form hypotheses about the links between identity processes and discrimination (Luconi, 2011; Thompson, 1999). A reciprocal relationship is hypothesized, in which discrimination experiences highlight the relevance of ethnic group membership for young ethnic minorities. In turn, the ethnic exploration that is triggered renders individuals more vigilant and attentive to subsequent experiences of discrimination. As such, one would predict positive associations among ethnic identification and perceptions of discrimination. In a sample of Native American late adolescents and young adults, the current study describes the nature and frequency of experiences of daily microaggressions, and assesses concurrent links between ethnic identification and discrimination experiences in the form of daily racial microaggressions.

### **Racial Discrimination in the Form of Daily Microaggressions**

Sue and colleagues (Sue, Becerri, et al., 2007; Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007) revived the

term “microaggressions” to encourage awareness of racial discriminations that are subtle, create inequities, and are often unintentional. Microaggressions are “commonplace verbal or behavioral indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights or insults” and generate significant loss of spiritual and psychic energy in victims (Sue, Becerri, et al., 2007, p. 273). Sue and colleagues classified three categories of microaggressions: microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations. Microassaults are often conscious and deliberate attacks, within limited or constrained settings, and against out-group members (e.g., serving a White patron before a person of color). Microassaults are considered covert because those who deliver them attempt to maintain some form of anonymity when using them in more intimate situations. Microinsults and microinvalidations are generally unintentional, and often unconscious, which is why these two forms of discrimination are so insidious. Microinsults often include nonverbal gestures and verbal messages of explicit or implicit out-group inferiority (e.g., a White teacher ignoring a student of color). Microinvalidations are communications that suggest that outgroup differences are not important, and these communications can often be challenges to one’s identity (e.g., “You’re being oversensitive” or “I don’t see color; I only see human beings”; Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007).

While overt racism and other visible forms of discrimination have decreased significantly due to civil rights work, covert microaggressions have increased (DeVos & Banaji, 2005; Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004). Microaggressions have been assessed in samples of larger minority populations (e.g., Wang et al., 2011; Torres et al., 2010), and with samples of mixed ethnic minority participants (e.g., Blume, Lavato, Thyken, & Denny, 2011), but no empirical studies were located that examined experiences of microaggressions among Native American youth specifically. Other studies have consistently found that higher levels of microaggressive

experiences link with greater stress, depression, alcohol use, and other negative outcomes. Because clandestine racial discrimination is perceived as more harmful than open racism, it is important to bring this issue to the forefront of discrimination discussions (Major et al., 2003). Systemically, microaggressions result from individuals determining that minority group members are less than equals, which is likely closely linked to the process of minority group members' self-identification.

### **Native Ethnic Identity**

In general, contemporary theory identifies the age range from about 18 to 25 years, referred to as “emerging adulthood” or “young adulthood” (Arnett, 2000), to be a critical developmental period for negotiating identity, or a coherent sense of self. Central to most studies addressing identity development among Native people is the construct of ethnic identity development – one’s understanding, commitment to, and sense of connection with his or her Native culture and community (Trimble & Dickson, 2005). Relative to the literatures addressing ethnic identity development among other ethnic minority groups in the United States, the literature on ethnic identity development among Native populations is sparse (Markstrom, Whitesell, & Galliher, 2011). Early theories of ethnic identity development (Cross, 1971) were developed to understand the identity development experiences of African American youth, and the largest portion of ethnic identity research has targeted larger ethnic minority populations within the United States (e.g., African American, Latino, and Asian American populations).

Prominent models of ethnic identity development for Native individuals articulate both the processes of ethnic identity development and the outcomes of identity development (e.g., Oetting & Beauvais, 1991; Phinney, 1992). Drawing from the broader identity development literature (e.g., Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980), Phinney described processes of exploration - active

engagement in understanding one's ethnic roots, traditions, and history - and commitment/affirmation - a sense of belongingness and pride in one's ethnic group. Optimal identity development outcomes are achieved when an individual has engaged in an active exploration period that culminates in a firm sense of commitment and belonging to his or her cultural group. In contrast, the acculturation/identity development model proposed by Oetting and Beauvais (1991) situates individuals with respect to their relative engagement with both traditional culture and White-American culture.

By necessity, nearly all Native people engage in some form of bicultural adaptation, as tribal sovereign nations are embedded within the United States economic, political, educational, and social systems. However, great variability exists in the extent to which Native people learn about and become successful in their own culture and traditions or White American culture. Social dominance theory posits that identity conflict arises within individuals who identify with an ethnic group that has been conquered and/or dominated (Sidanius, Pratto, van Laar, & Levin, 2004). Natives likely experience this conflict on many levels, and frequently they are positioned as subordinate to the majority group and other minority group members (Sidanius et al., 2004). Additionally and more problematically, members of colonized groups (e.g., Natives) ultimately perceive themselves as inferior to members of other groups (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004). Consequently, individuals may be more closely tied to White-American culture and distanced from their own culture (i.e., assimilated) or distanced from both cultures (i.e., marginalized).

### **Links between Ethnic Identity and Discrimination Experiences**

A number of models of ethnic identity development highlight the potential role of discrimination experiences in challenging ethnic identity attitudes, and perhaps catalyzing ethnic identity exploration and growth. Early ethnic identity theories developed for larger ethnic

minority populations in the United States often described an “encounter stage” (Cross, 1971) or an “awakening stage” (Sue & Sue, 2008), in which an ethnic minority individual has an experience that raises awareness of inequity or injustice and makes ethnic identity more salient. Specific to urban Native Americans, Walters (1999) described marginalization and externalization stages, during which Native individuals work to reject negative stereotypes and colonizing attitudes. The increased salience of ethnicity triggered by the heightened awareness of disparities is theorized to precede a period of “immersion” or reconnection to traditional culture. More contemporary theories of ethnic identity tend to be much more contextual and do not rely on linear, stage progressions of development (e.g., Cross & Cross, 2008; Yip, Douglass, & Sellers, 2014); however, the intersection of the salience of ethnic identity with awareness of inequity, social injustice, and prejudice remains a key theoretical feature.

Many researchers conceptualize a positive, coherent sense of ethnic identification as a protective factor or a buffer against the negative effects of discrimination experiencers. For example, in a sample of 125 mixed ethnic minority adolescents, Romero, Edwards, Fryberg, and Orduña (2014) observed that positive ethnic identification moderated the negative effects of discrimination on depressive symptoms and self-esteem. Similarly, ethnic identity achievement was also observed to buffer the effects of discrimination on subsequent externalizing symptoms in a sample of Mexican-origin adolescent mothers (Toomey, Umaña-Taylor, Updegraff, & Jahromi, 2013). Specific to Native American youth, Galliher et al. (2011) found protective effects of Native American ethnic identification in a sample of Navajo adolescents.

Fewer researchers have assessed the relationships between ethnic identification and discrimination experiences directly. As part of a larger review of the literature on ethnic and racial identity, Quintana (2007) noted robust empirical support for both concurrent and

longitudinal links between ethnic identification and discrimination experiences, although the literature focuses heavily on Asian American, Latino, or African American samples. For example, Alvarez, Juang, and Liang (2006) reported moderately sized, significant correlations between reports of racial socialization (explicit discussions in the family about race and racism) and experiences of racism among Asian American college students. Longitudinal work with Latino and African American adolescent and young adult samples also supports links between ethnic identification and discrimination experiences. Sellers and Shelton (2003) observed that racial identity centrality at the beginning of college was associated with increased perceptions of discrimination over the first year of college for African American students. Alternatively, Pahl and Way (2006) reported that high levels of perceived discrimination predicted higher levels of identity exploration over the course of high school in a sample of Latino and African American adolescents. Taken together, existing studies support the notion of reciprocity, in that discrimination experiences may launch identity exploration processes by making ethnicity more salient, and the heightened awareness of ethnic identity that engenders may make one more attentive to subsequent experiences of discrimination.

Gender differences have been observed in the experiences of discrimination among Native American youth (Galliher et al., 2011), such that young men reported higher levels of discrimination than young women. Further, a number of authors have discussed the notion of intersectionality in identity development and psychosocial health (Purdie-Vaughn & Eibach, 2008). Theories of intersectionality most often address the experiences of people who possess multiple marginalized identities, with two possible pathways outlined. The additive risk hypothesis posits a “double jeopardy” scenario, in which minority stress and marginalization compounds across identities. Such a perspective would place Native American women at greater

risk for challenges in the development of a positive sense of self, due to the combined forces of racism and sexism. Alternatively, however, a resiliency perspective would predict that the coping strategies and protective factors developed to cope with one marginalized status would prepare one to manage other marginalized status experiences more effectively. Given the theoretical and empirical support for hypothesizing gendered experiences of microaggressions and identity development processes, gender was included as a primary variable in the current study.

In sum, the focus of this research was to investigate how ethnic identification by Native young men and women relates to experiences of daily racial microaggressions. Specifically, the research questions are as follows:

RQ1) How do Native young men and women identify with racial/ethnic groups, and to what degree?

RQ2) What are the reported experiences of daily racial microaggressions among Native young adults?

RQ3) How does Native identification relate to experiences of daily racial microaggressions?

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

Participants were 114 Native American young adults, with representation from nearly 70 distinct indigenous groups from the contiguous U.S., Alaska, Canada, and Mexico. Ethnicity was reported as 47.4% Native only, 36.8% Native and White, and the remainder identifying as Native and one or more other ethnicity. Fifty percent of participants had spent a portion of their lives living in their reservation community, and 12.3% of participants lived on their reservation at the time of participation. Age of the participants was from 18-25 ( $M=22.4$ ,  $SD=2.33$ ), with 33.3% of

the sample reporting an age of 24-25 and the rest about equally distributed among 18-23. Gender reporting included 72.8% females, 26.3% males, and one did not respond.

The average yearly income for the household in which participants were raised included 15.8% under \$20,000, 32.5% at \$20,000-50,000, 34.2% at \$50,000-100,000, 14% at \$100,000-250,000, and 1.8% reported household incomes of over \$250,000. Personal annual incomes of the participants included 60.5% reporting under \$10,000, 18.4% earned \$10,000-20,000, 14.9% earned \$20,000-50,000, and 5.3% earned over \$50,000. Education of the participants included 2.6% having less than high school completion, 10.5% had only a high school diploma or G.E.D., 54.3% had completed some college (including associate degrees and technical certifications), 21.1% earned bachelor degrees, and 10.5% attended graduate school.

### **Procedures**

Approval and oversight for this study were provided by the Utah State University Institutional Review Board. Data were collected via an online survey that was accessed from an electronically circulated recruitment letter. Snowball sampling was used to distribute the recruitment email through various professional organizations, university/college student groups, internet social networking sites, and personal contacts. The number of potential participants who received information about the survey is unknown, but likely exceeds several hundred. The participants gave informed consent by clicking to continue to the survey items after reading the letter of information. Survey completion took approximately 20 – 30 minutes. As an incentive, participants were offered the choice to enter a random drawing for a gift certificate to an online store by submitting an email address.

### **Measures**

**Demographic information.** A brief questionnaire obtained information, such as tribal affiliation, relationship status, household residence, income, education level, age, and gender.

**Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure.** Self-identification of ethnicity was assessed using the 12-item Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM; Phinney, 1992). The MEIM was developed to assess ethnic identity exploration (5-items) and identity commitment (7-items) through statements such as: “I participate in cultural practices of my own group, such as special food, music, or customs” and “I am happy to be a member of the group I belong to.” The items are scored on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The current version has shown reliability alphas ranging from .81 to .89 for 11 different ethnic groups (Roberts, Phinney, Masse, Chen, Roberts, & Romero, 1999) and .90 for college students. Reliability estimates for this study yielded a Cronbach’s alpha of .91 for the total score, .80 for identity exploration, and .89 for identity commitment.

**Orthogonal Cultural Identification Scale.** Cultural identification was assessed using the 6-item Orthogonal Cultural Identification Scale (OCIS; Oetting & Beauvais, 1991). For this study, each item was rated on both Native culture and White culture for questions such as: “How many traditions does your family have that are based on Native culture?” and “Do you live by or follow the way of life of White culture?” The items are scored on a Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (none at all) to 3 (a lot). This instrument has good reliability, above .80 (Oetting & Beauvais, 1991), and when coupled with the 8-item Indian Activities addendum (which has the same answer options for questions about activity in NA traditions and events), the alpha was above .90. The Indian Activities addendum contains items about traditional activities and beliefs that are worded broadly so that individuals can endorse them while thinking of the specific language, traditional practices, and spiritual activities of their own particular tribal community

(e.g., Do you take part in Indian activities and events?; How much do you want to know Indian legends and stories?; Do you speak an Indian language?). Reliability for this study yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .92 for both the NA and White cultures, while the Indian Activities addendum had an alpha of .89.

**Microaggressions.** Discrimination experiences were assessed using the short scale of Daily Racial Microaggressions (DRM; Mercer, Ziegler-Hill, Wallace, & Hayes, 2010). Items included 14 statements such as: "I was made to feel as if the cultural values of another race/ethnic group were better than my own" and "Someone made a statement to me that they are not racist or prejudiced because they have friends from different racial/ethnic backgrounds." In addition to measuring microaggression experiences, the DRM short-form measures four factors of microinsults (8-items) and three factors of microinvalidations (6-items). The items are scored on a Likert-type scale ranging from 0 to 4 with the following meanings: 1 - "Never happened to me;" 2 - "Happened to me, but I was not upset;" 3 - "Happened to me and I was slightly upset;" 4 - "Happened to me and I was moderately upset;" 5 - "Happened to me and I was extremely upset." The DRM can be scored dichotomously (are experiences reported: 1 = no, or 2-5 = yes) or continuously (how upset by experiences: 2 to 5) with internal consistencies observed at  $\alpha = .95$  and .94. Continuous scoring reliability for this study demonstrated Cronbach's alpha of .87 for the total score, .84 for the microinsults subscale score, and .83 for the microinvalidations score.

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics

**Missing data procedures.** The data were initially reviewed for missing responses or failure to meet inclusion criteria. All participants identified with a tribal community and reported to be 18 years of age or older. The majority of items on the ethnic identity and microaggressions

scales had no missing responses – 9/12 MEIM items, 6/20 OCIS items, 10/14 DRM items. No more than three missing responses were observed for any item. If a participant was missing an item for a particular scale, the scale score was calculated as the mean for the remaining items.

**Ethnic identity.** Average MEIM scores for identification with Native/indigenous ethnicity were near the center of the scale (Table 1). Scores on the commitment subscale of the MEIM were significantly higher than the exploration subscale,  $t(113) = -5.99, p < .001, d = -0.39$ . There were no significant differences between males and females for either MEIM scale.

On the OCIS (see Table 1), participants reported average cultural identification with Native attitudes and practices in the upper half of the scale. No significant differences were detected between females and males for Native identification,  $t(111) = -0.43, p > .05$ . A significant gender difference was found for identification to White culture with females reporting stronger identification than males,  $t(109) = 2.96, p = .004, d = 0.57$ . When comparing participants' identification between Native and White cultures, females reported significantly stronger identification with White culture than with Native culture,  $t(81) = -3.108, p = .003, d = -0.55$ , but no significant difference was found among males,  $t(29) = .645, p > .05$ .

**Daily racial microaggressions.** The means, standard deviations, and frequency percentage of participants who reported that they had experienced microaggressions are presented in Table 1. Ninety-eight percent of participants reported that they were targets of at least one racial microaggression. The average feelings of being upset by the microaggressions was generally on the mild to none end, but each of the seven themes received answers across the full range, from “never happened to me” to “happened to me and it was extremely upsetting.” Although females' means scores on all microaggressions were higher than males', none of the differences were significant in an independent samples *t*-test.

When comparing microinvalidations to microinsults, females' reported that microinvalidations were significantly more upsetting than microinsults  $t(82) = -2.29, p = .039, d = -0.28$ , whereas males reported no significant difference,  $t(29) = -.109, p > .05$ . Findings from a repeated measures ANOVA assessing differences among the seven microaggression subscales indicated that females reported having been significantly more upset by (in descending order from most upsetting) "ascription of intelligence," "myth of meritocracy," "denial of individual racism," and "assumed universality of Native experience" relative to the other three themes,  $F(6, 492) = 5.12, p < .001, \eta^2 = .06$ . All three of the microinvalidations themes were among the four most upsetting themes for females. For males, no significant differences emerged among the microaggressions themes in the repeated measures ANOVA,  $F(6, 174) = .136, p > .05$ .

### **Associations between Microaggressions and Ethnic Identity**

Bivariate correlations between racial microaggressions and ethnic identity components from the OCIS and MEIM are presented in Table 2. In general, stronger Native identification associated significantly with greater experiences of microaggressions, whereas strong White identification associated with fewer experiences of microaggressions. On average, associations were stronger between males' Native identification and experiences of microaggressions than they were for females.

A series of stepwise regressions were conducted, separated by gender. In order to control for the potential influence of important demographic characteristics, age and experience living on the reservation (1 = never lived on the reservation; 4 = lived on the reservation 8 or more years) were included as covariates in all regression analyses. Neither age nor reservation history were significantly associated with any of the identity scales for men. For women, age was related to higher MEIM affirmation, and more years on the reservation were related to higher MEIM

exploration, higher Native OCIS identification, lower White OCIS identification, and greater endorsement of Native practices and activities. In a second step, all seven DRM scales were entered in to the models using a stepwise procedure. Five regressions models were tested, with the two MEIM scales and the three OCIS scales as dependent variables. Table 3 presents only the variables that were entered in to the regression models in the stepwise procedure. The exploration subscale of the MEIM was associated with “assumed superiority of White values” for females and “belief in the myth of meritocracy” for males. The affirmation subscale of the MEIM was associated with “assumption of criminality” for females and “assumed superiority of White values” for males. The OCIS Native scale was associated with two microaggression themes for females; the stronger predictor was “assumption of criminality,” along with “denial of individual racism.” For males, the OCIS Native scale was associated with “assumption of criminality.” For the OCIS White scale, the only variable entered in to the model was “assumption of criminality” for males. Finally, two variables (assumption of criminality and denial of individual racism) were entered in to the model predicting OCIS activities for females, and “assumed superiority of White values” was entered in to the model predicting males’ OCIS activities scale.

### **Discussion**

This study was designed to augment current knowledge of the prevalence of daily racial microaggressions experienced by Native American young adults and to explore links between microaggressions and ethnic identification. This sample reported strong identification with both Native and White cultures. An overwhelming majority of the Native participants in our study reported having experienced daily discrimination, and in fact, only two participants denied being victimized by racial microaggressions. In general, ethnic identification correlated with reports of

microaggressions, with stronger Native identification relating to more experiences of daily racial discrimination.

### **Ethnic Identity Among Native Young Adults**

In general, participants reported high levels of exploration of and commitment to their ethnic identity (i.e., sample means above the mid-point of the scales). Additionally, sense of embeddedness and competence in both White American and Native culture was strong in this sample, and females reported stronger identification with White American culture. A number of authors have discussed the challenges faced by Native youth as they work to retain ties to traditional culture, within the historical context of forced assimilation and ongoing contexts of discrimination and assimilation pressure (Evans-Campbell, 2008; Hill, Kim, & Williams, 2010). In a study of urban Native youth, Kulis, Wagaman, Tso, and Brown (2013) described the complicated patterns of bicultural and “pan-Indian” identification demonstrated by participants. Links to family, tribe, and tradition were important in helping the urban youth retain a sense of connection and pride in their Native ancestry. Half of the participants in our study had not had any experience living in the reservation community of their own tribe, and over one-third reported both White and Native American ethnicity, suggesting that our participants may face many of the same bicultural adaptation challenges as those described by Kulis et al.’s participants. We note that the negotiation of a bicultural identity was gendered in our sample, with females demonstrating stronger efficacy and connection to White American culture. As we discuss below, this finding may best be understood in the context of discrimination.

### **Microaggressions Among Native Young Adults**

Daily microaggressions were experienced almost ubiquitously (98%) by participants in our study, and at slightly higher rates than those reported in some studies among other minority

groups. Specifically, Kessler, Mickelson, and Williams (1999) found that about 91% of Black Americans reported daily discrimination, and about 83% of “other” minorities endorsed experiences of daily discrimination. Seventy-eight percent of the Asian American participants described by Ong et al. (2013) reported experiencing microaggressions over the course of a two-week study period. However, Donovan, Galban, Grace, Bennett, and Felicié (2013) reported that 96% of the Black women in their study had experienced “at least a few” racial microaggressions in the previous year. Thus, despite variability in the prevalence across samples, our results are consistent with the developing consensus that racial microaggressions are part of the fabric of daily life for most people of color.

Microinvalidations were described as more troubling than microinsults for women only. Differences between microinvalidations and microinsults are consistent with theory and previous research suggesting that the subtle, nuanced nature of microinvalidations, in concert with the fact that they are often unintentional, renders victims more confused and less capable of rejecting or contesting the invalidation (Ong et al., 2013; Sue, Becerra et al., 2007). The most upsetting theme of all the microaggressions reported by females was “ascription of intelligence,” which refers to the idea that Natives are not expected to demonstrate aptitude, or are assumed to be less capable and less competent than Whites. Subtle messages that convey lowered expectations and dismiss the successes of Native women have dramatic impact, as demonstrated by the large developing literature on stereotype threat (e.g., Appel & Kronberger, 2012).

Other recent qualitative research has identified microaggressions specifically experienced by Native young adults (Crethar et al., 2012), with the following themes: Native Americans are lazy, untrustworthy, undeserving of assistance, primitive, prone to alcoholism, poor communicators, uneducated and incapable, undeserving of a voice, and second class or invisible.

While many of these are consistent with the more general microaggressions we measured in our study (e.g., untrustworthy, second class), others may be unique to stereotypes of Native people (e.g., primitive, prone to alcoholism). Ong et al. (2013) also observed a number of types of microaggressions that might be unique to the experience of Asian American individuals, suggesting that there is both overlap and uniqueness to the discrimination experiences of different ethnic groups.

### **Links Between Ethnic Identification and Microaggressions**

As participants reported stronger Native identity (across the MEIM and OCIS scales) in this study, they also reported more upsetting incidence of microaggressions targeted at them. The pattern of correlations generally appeared to be stronger for males than females, at least for the scales of the MEIM. Previous research with Native American adolescents (Galliher et al., 2011) observed stronger links between discrimination and psychosocial health for Native adolescent males, relative to females. We suggest that discrimination experiences represent a unique challenge for young Native men, as they work to negotiate a positive, traditional identity. Bicultural adaptation may be a particular challenge for young men; we observed that White identification was negatively linked to microaggression experiences for males only, and we wonder whether young Native men feel particularly pressured to “choose” between White and Native cultures, in terms of identification.

Strikingly, correlations between the MEIM Exploration scale and every form of microaggression were in the medium to large range for both males and females. Classic racial/ethnic identity development theory (Cross, 1991) identified discrimination experiences as a potential catalyst for identity exploration among ethnic minority adolescents. A reciprocal pattern may emerge, in which experiences of discrimination prompt ethnic minority youth to

explore the meaning and impact of their ethnic and cultural context. In turn, the greater awareness of historical and continuing inequity that exploration yields may render youth more sensitive to subsequent and ongoing invalidations. Crethar et al. (2012) also concluded that Natives who more closely identify with traditional attitudes and experiences may be more aware of and/or sensitive to microaggressions against them. Alternatively, in a broader social context that pressures Native youth to assimilate to mainstream White American values, behaving in a more traditional manner may actually place one at greater risk for microaggressive interactions.

As a general rule, microinsults demonstrated stronger and more consistent correlations with ethnic identity variables than microinvalidations. “Assumed superiority of White values” and “assumption of criminality” were particularly relevant microaggressions in the stepwise regressions. As noted previously, microinvalidations tend to be more subtle, more easily dismissed, and more confusing than overt forms of discrimination. Thus, while microinvalidations have clearly been linked to poorer psychosocial functioning in the literature (e.g., Wakefield & Hudley, 2007), links with ethnic identity development may be more nuanced. If, as theory predicts, discrimination experiences catalyze the ethnic identity development process, then the more overt and unambiguous forms of discrimination characterized by microinsults are likely more powerful agents in that process.

### **Limitations and Conclusions**

While we recognize that the descriptive data presented here for our relatively small sample of diverse Native American young adults (representing nearly 70 distinct cultural groups) only scratches the surface of the microaggression experiences of Native youth, we see it is an important piece of the foundation of a growing literature. We recognize that the diversity in terms of cultural background, as well as acculturation and enculturation levels, raises questions

regarding the population to whom our findings are generalizable. Further, recruitment through listservs, Facebook sites, word-of-mouth, and snowball sampling may have resulted in non-representativeness – only 12% of the sample resided on their home reservation at the time of participation, and the large majority of the sample was college going. Our participants, however, were roughly normally distributed across income and education levels. Given the breadth in our sample, we view the medium to large effect sizes observed in our analyses to be even more profound. We do look forward to more longitudinal work with Native samples; our correlational data leave us with only speculation about patterns of influence over time. Ultimately, the findings with this Native sample illustrate the necessity for greater awareness and open dialogue concerning the frequency of microaggressive interactions, and how to reduce the perpetration of microaggressions in the workplace, at school, and in the community. Ideally, this dialogue will continue to bring improvements in awareness of microaggressions, increased acknowledgement of them, and greater efforts to reduce individual and systemic discrimination, not only among Native Americans, but among all marginalized groups.

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Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics: Ethnic Identification and Microaggressions among Females and Males*

	Females		Males	
Ethnic Identification Measures (Range = 1-4)				
	M (SD)			
MEIM Total	3.31 (0.54)		3.09 (0.70)	
Commitment	3.41 (0.57)		3.19 (0.72)	
Exploration	3.17 (0.61)		2.95 (0.72)	
OCIS				
White	3.24 (0.66)		2.78 (0.88)	
Native	2.84 (0.81)		2.92 (0.90)	
Indian Activities	2.65 (0.66)		2.59 (0.87)	
Daily Racial Microaggressions (Range = 1-5)				
	M (SD)			
DRM Total	2.54 (0.84)	98%	2.34 (0.83)	97%
Microinsults				
ascription of intelligence	2.84 (1.43)	69%	2.32 (1.07)	67%
assumption of inferior status	2.34 (1.10)	71%	2.27 (1.25)	67%
assumption of criminality	2.19 (1.43)	43%	2.38 (1.63)	57%
assumed superiority of White values	2.36 (1.03)	72%	2.35 (1.13)	80%
Microinvalidations				
assumed universality of Native experience	2.68 (0.96)	98%	2.35 (0.82)	97%
denial of individual racism	2.62 (1.08)	89%	2.27 (0.82)	83%
myth of meritocracy	2.67 (1.06)	86%	2.42 (0.80)	87%
	2.75 (1.40)	65%	2.37 (1.13)	70%

(Note: Percentages indicate the portion of participants who experienced microaggressions)

Table 2  
*Correlates of Microaggressions Experiences and Ethnic Identifications*

DRM Type		Ethnic Identification Type				
		OCIS White	OCIS Native	OCIS Activities	MEIM Exploration	MEIM Commitment
Total Microaggressions	Female	-.160	.419**	.393**	.434**	.281*
	Male	-.412*	.455*	.469**	.532**	.561**
Microinsults	Female	-.191	.488**	.461**	.399**	.302**
	Male	-.427*	.453*	.453**	.516**	.549**
ascription of intelligence	Female	-.150	.318**	.225*	.282**	.136
	Male	-.197	.365*	.254	.330	.320
assumption of inferior status	Female	-.141	.382**	.362**	.310**	.197
	Male	-.366	.383*	.306	.517**	.549**
assumption of criminality	Female	-.158	.466**	.530**	.299**	.343**
	Male	-.488*	.345	.404*	.409*	.380*
assumed superiority of White values	Female	-.163	.372**	.325**	.397**	.292**
	Male	-.257	.305	.447*	.372*	.503**
Microinvalidations	Female	-.063	.189	.167	.340**	.158
	Male	-.279	.339	.370*	.414*	.429*
assumed universality of Native experience	Female	-.075	.137	.079	.286**	.084
	Male	-.275	.305	.309	.301	.322
denial of individual racism	Female	-.058	.240*	.204	.230*	.107
	Male	-.211	.205	.349	.351	.307
myth of meritocracy	Female	-.027	.102	.122	.304**	.179
	Male	-.275	.373*	.453*	.438*	.438*

\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$

Table 3

*Predictors and Outcomes Identified by Stepwise Regressions between Ethnic Identity Scales and Themes of Microaggressions*

Outcome	Significant Predictor	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> Change	<i>F</i> Change	Beta	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
MEIM Exploration	assumed superiority of White values (females)	.164	14.318	.415	3.784	<.001
	belief in myth of meritocracy (males)	.199	6.323	.521	2.515	.019
MEIM Commitment	assumption of criminality (females)	.090	7.815	.331	2.796	.007
	assumed superiority of White values (males)	.308	10.726	.678	3.275	.003
OCIS Native	assumption of criminality (females)	.102	10.468	.354	3.235	.002
	denial of individual racism (females)	.050	5.418	.224	2.328	.023
OCIS White	assumption of criminality (males)	.393	15.224	-.680	-3.902	.001
OCIS Activities	assumption of criminality (females)	.123	13.703	.386	3.702	<.001
	denial of individual racism (females)	.043	5.114	.208	2.262	.027
	assumed superiority of White values (males)	.202	6.387	.548	2.527	.019