

Racialization: How Does It Affect Latinx Immigrant Students?

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Abstract

Universities have pushed to become diverse and inclusive; it is important to know how students are being treated in the educational spaces. This project is based on students' experiences of racialization, and how it will affect their feelings of belonging in educational institutions. A campus cannot become diverse if students of color feel neglected and discriminated against, especially in Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) like CSU Stanislaus. For my expected results, I anticipate that students have had experiences with racialization, which turn into shame or insecurity on being a university student. Which will then provide evidence that my two hypotheses are correct. The responses will hopefully lead to more exposure on the treatment of students at the CSU Stanislaus campus.

Introduction

Living in the US for people of color can be challenging. People of color may face obstacles and challenges due to policies and laws set against them. Being a student of color who is also an immigrant only increases those challenges. For those reasons I have chosen two hypotheses for my research project: 1) Latinx students who experience fewer microaggressions will feel safer and 2) Latinx students who have experienced more microaggressions will feel that their concerns on racism will not be taken seriously. "People of color must navigate important spaces and institutions, including educational settings, that are often white controlled" (Ballinas, 2017). Individuals with features such as different hair texture, eye shape, nose shape, skin color and darker eye color. Typically, students who have these characteristics are targeted for microaggressions and racialization. Microaggressions are statements or actions that are subtle discriminations towards a person. "Naming and challenging them is also extremely difficult because the person suffering the micro-aggression may not realize it in the moment or may withdraw confused about the awkward interaction" (Espitia, 2016). Microaggressions can be difficult to recognize. Some examples are a bit more obvious such as "You are so articulate", "What are you?" and "All Lives Matter". Students can face these types of questions from time to time. Racialization occurs when a race or ethnicity is assigned to a person, usually due to their physical appearance.

Immigrant Latino students who happen to be undocumented will have an additional

hindrance. Their legal status is a cause of marginalization. These students are not able to have the same opportunities as students who are citizens of the US. Not only will their legal status hold them back, but their ethnicity could be used against them. "Consistent with this, many surveys show that there is generally less support for immigration from those who look different from a majority of White Americans, that is, those with darker skin and less European features" (Ostfeld, 2017). No matter if they have been raised here in the US, immigrant Latinx students will have "ambiguous belonging" (Bjorklund, 2018). They are in a state of belonging and not belonging because they are not fully integrated into society. The immigrant students have been kept on the fringes for a long time. "Students expressed feelings of intense shock, fear, stigma, grief, anxiety, shame, embarrassment, confusion, stress, depression, confusion, and frustration on learning about their status" (Bjorklund, 2018). Those feelings of helplessness stem from the fear of their status being explained to them. There are examples of undocumented immigrant students learning of their status. Their options are severely limited compared to students who are citizens. Their fear of being exposed can affect their social relationships as well. The relationships with their peers, friends and professors could be limited. "Fears of being outed frequently limit interactions with teachers and peers, leading to lower motivation for pursuing higher education" (Bjorklund, 2018). Continuous interactions with people might have people feeling paranoid or anxious due to keeping their statuses a secret.

Immigrant students may not know who they can trust.

It can become complicated for a Latinx student to be in a University where there are not many people that look like them. “The whiteness of these spaces is a consequence of their histories, structures, practices, and discourses that reproduce racial inequalities as well as the assumed superiority of whites and assumed inferiority of people of color” (Ballinas, 2017). Universities and even high schools can be predominantly white. It is in these institutions that Latinx students may be wary of attending or continuing their education. Not only have Latinx immigrant students are worried about the cost of attending Universities. Immigrant students may not fulfill their full potential because of the cost of schooling. Undocumented students are not able to use the same resources that citizens can. “Ineligibility for federal and state financial aid programs creates yet another barrier for undocumented Latina/o students pursuing higher education” (Huber and Magalon, 2007). It is another burden that Latinx undocumented students must bear due to their status. Students may feel inferior or excluded due to the reactions from their white peers. “Some other students felt unwelcomed through the many ‘stares’ and ‘weird looks’ they received from white students on campus and in the town when they were together with other Mexican students” (Ballinas, 2017). Latinx students live in a society that racializes and stigmatizes them. This experience from Latinx is one that is not uncommon for students of color. “This process of dividing people into dehumanizing categories seems ever present” (Espitia, 2016).

Methods

My research project was survey based and targeted Latinx immigrant students from CSU Stanislaus. In order to find my respondents, students were recruited through the Dreamers Project coordinator, a personal contact and through my professors. An online survey of 28 questions including demographic questions were sent to the respondents who fit the criteria. Due to the limitations of the criteria, the sample size was relatively small with only 28 respondents. The online survey was sent out to CSU Stanislaus students between the ages of 18-40 years old. The survey was kept completely anonymous since some of my respondents are part of the Dreamers program. The survey questions will refer to two different types of racialization a student may face: in general, and within an educational

institution. The survey was filled with close-ended questions, the three demographic questions were the only ones that were open-ended.

Results

As mentioned before the survey taken by respondents was 28 questions long. The questions range from questions on their general experiences being racialized to questions within an Educational system. The following questions that I have used were questions that fulfilled my two hypotheses. My independent variables were questions about their experiences with microaggressions. My two dependent variables were their feelings of safety and whether they would have been taken seriously. The first two questions are about experiences students could have faced on a day-to-day basis on Figure 1. Question 4 asks whether students have been called a racial slur, of which 71.4% of respondents said yes, students have been called a racial slur. Question 6 asks respondents about a certain microaggression that can be common, 67.9% of respondents said yes, students have faced this exact microaggression.

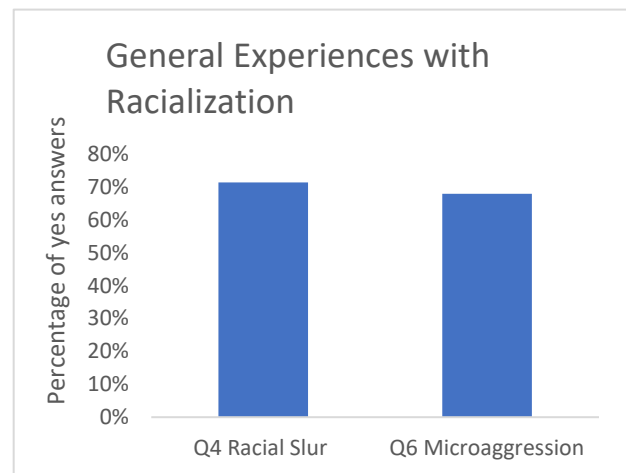


Figure 1- Question 4: Have you ever experienced a racial slur? Question 6: Have you ever been asked 'what are you'?

The following 2 questions cover experiences that could have occurred on campus. Question 9 asks students if faculty have made assumptions on their race, 71.4% of respondents said yes, faculty have assumed the race of their students. Question 10 asks students if they were enrolled into an English learner program without needing to be, 64.3% of respondents said yes,

students were put into ESL programs without needing the classes. This is a very specific question included in the survey because of a personal experience. As a Latina student, I was automatically enrolled into an ESL program regardless of my proficient English. Latinx students are being racialized and deal with microaggressions in a space that should be safe. Students should be supported in the educational institutions where they are present daily.

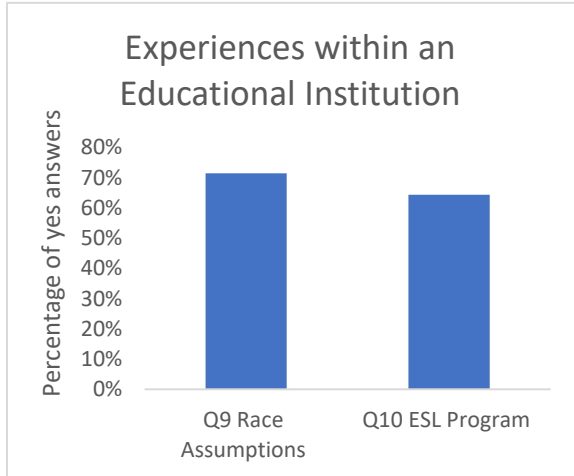


Figure 2- Question 9: Has a student or faculty member ever made assumptions about your race? Question 10: As a student were you automatically put into an English learner program (such as ESL) even though you were already an English speaker?

The following two questions, on Figures 3a and 3b, have been included together due to the similarity of the questions. Both questions 20 & 21 will ask respondents the same premise, but within different timeframes and education institutions. Question 20 questions students about racism or racial inequality concerns and whether they were taken seriously. In their younger years, 46.4% students felt that they could not speak about their concerns. Question 21 covers their concerns within their current education institution. 75% strongly agreed that they could speak about their concerns on campus, but more could always be done to help immigrant students.

Figure 3a

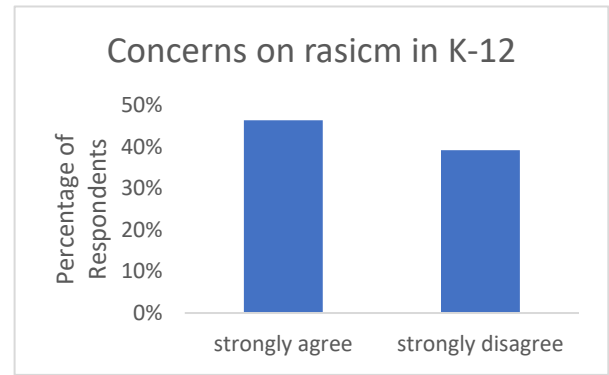


Figure 3b

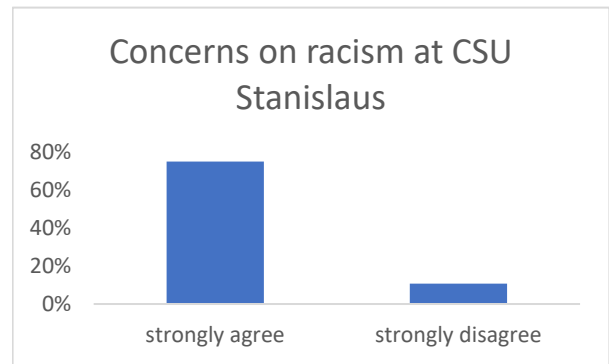


Figure 3a- Question 20: I feel that concerns about racism or racial inequality were or would have been taken seriously by teachers/administrators in my elementary, middle, or high school. Figure 3b- Question 21: I feel that concerns about racism or racial inequality will be taken seriously by faculty/administrators in my current educational institution.

The following two questions have been included together on Figures 4a & 4b, have also been put together because it asks respondents how they feel about their safety and care on campus. Question 24 asks respondents whether they feel safe being at the CSU Stanislaus campus. 75% of students strongly agreed that they felt safe being on campus. Question 25 is based on their feelings of the policies CSU Stanislaus has against student discrimination. 64.4% of students strongly agreed that there are adequate policies against student discrimination.

Figure 4a *.89

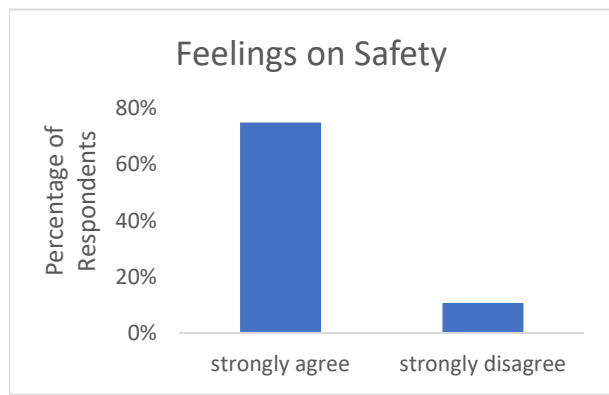


Figure 4b **.66

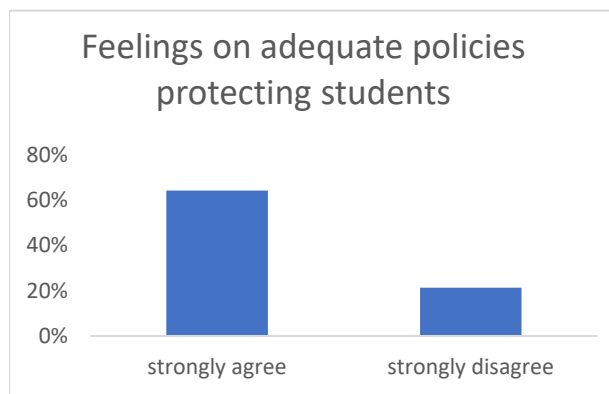


Figure 4a- Question 24: I generally feel safe when I am on campus. Figure 4b- Question 25: I feel that there are adequate policies on campus to help protect me from discrimination or racial violence. *p-value = .89 ** p-value = .66

Lastly, I have included the results of comparing students' experiences to microaggressions and their feelings of being on campus. My two hypotheses were split between my independent variables and my dependent variables. My first 4 questions were my independent variables that measured the microaggressions students may have faced. My dependent variables were their feelings of safety and their feelings on being taken seriously. For my results, I have a composite score from the responses of the students who have faced microaggressions before. I have compared that to Q24 and Q25. Q24 asks students about their feelings of safety which gave a gamma score of .211 (p value = .89) which means that there is a correlation between students who have faced microaggressions and their feelings of safety on campus. The next result was from Q25 which asked students about their feelings about policies protecting students against discrimination. Q25

had a gamma score of .489 (p value = .66) which means that there is a high correlation between students who have faced microaggressions and their feelings of being protect by the policies on campus.

Discussion

Latinx students are being racialized within educational institutions. From the previous data shown, students have faced discrimination within K-12 schools. Within CSU Stanislaus, an HSI, students feel more comfortable. 56.7% of the student body identify as Hispanic/Latino attending CSU Stanislaus, but there could be a difference for students who do not attend a University with high percentage of Latinx students (CSU Stanislaus, 2020). From the previous graphs shown, Latinx students have faced some difficult situations that cause them to feel ashamed and voiceless. Their educational experiences from their student careers will carry on into the future. Their social relationships will be affected as well as their motivation to continue onto higher education. Changes should be made for Latinx immigrant students to fulfill their full potential. "Student organizations, diversity/multicultural offices, undocumented student centers, and the like can help students create supportive networks and contribute to their success and persistence" (Bjorklund, 2018). All types of Latinx students, who do not identify as immigrant students, need to have support systems in place to provide the aid they need. Additional recommendations by Huber and Magalon include implementing better transfer culture, providing resources, guidance, and preparation to transition to a university, outreach for parents' support and having college materials in both Spanish and English (2007). Implementing these recommendations can be incredibly beneficial to Latinx students and can better their completion of their education.

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