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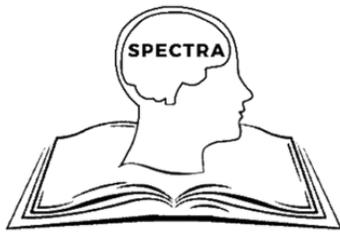
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Asian Americans Experience Microassaults During the COVID-19 Pandemic	
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AC: Analyzed data, drafted the manuscript, made significant edits to the manuscript, and approved the version to be published BK: Analyzed data, drafted the manuscript, made significant edits to the manuscript, generated tables and figures, and approved the version to be published AB: Substantially contributed to the research design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation, and approved the version to be published AK: Substantially contributed to the research design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation, and approved the version to be published GW: Substantially contributed to the research design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation, revised the manuscript critically, and approved the version to be published	
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The authors of this article confirm that all data underlying the findings are fully available without restrictions.	
Conflicts of Interest	
The authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.	
Ethical Considerations	
Proper Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was granted before the start of this study. All participants were required to complete an informed consent form that detailed the purpose of this study, the procedures, risks of participation, and the inclusion criteria. If participants did not provide consent and/or did not meet the inclusion criteria, they were not included in this study.	
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Asian Americans Experience Microassaults During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Microaggressions are typically brief and common behavioral/verbal indignities that communicate a sense of hostility, derogatory, or negative perception towards a targeted group. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we observed an increase in the amount of microassaults, a more intentional type of microaggression, towards the Asian American population. In our study, we used a two-way 2x2 (Race: Asian Americans vs. White Americans; Time: before vs. during COVID-19) analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) with repeated measures on one factor (Time) to determine whether there was a statistical significance between race in the experiences of microassaults before and during COVID-19. We used a self-report survey method to gather data from the participants. Overall, the findings from our study suggest that Asian Americans experienced an increase of microassaults during COVID-19 compared to before the pandemic. Moreover, this change in experiences over time was significantly different for White Americans. This study shows the importance of recognizing this phenomenon, and addresses the issues on inclusivity, cultural-awareness, and compassion. Moving forward, it is important that we are aware of social influences on race-related experiences among Asian Americans, and other marginalized communities.

Keywords: Microaggressions, COVID-19, Asian Americans

The current study aims to measure the frequency at which participants, specifically Asian Americans, are experiencing more blatant racism in the form of microassaults during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our major objective is to determine whether Asian Americans, compared to White Americans, experienced an increase in microassaults, a type of everyday discrimination, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Background: The 2019 novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has presented a ubiquitous economic, psychosocial, and political challenge globally. This global impact has resulted in many different psychiatric manifestations of psychosocial issues such as mass hysteria, increased anxiety, and even increased racism (Dubey et al., 2020). More specifically, an

increased rate of racial attacks including microaggressions towards Asian Americans was observed due to the political and psychosocial implications of COVID-19 (Gover et al., 2020). Despite being one of the fastest growing and most diverse groups in the U.S., Asian Americans are repeatedly discriminated against based on their immigration, language, class, and race (Appel et al., 2014). During the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a political trend towards greater distrust towards Chinese Americans in all aspects of life. The assumed origins of the COVID-19 virus being from China has led to the current widespread anti-Asian sentiment (Bhanot et al., 2020). The literature suggests that there is a negative association between experiencing racial microassaults and the private and collective self-

esteem of Asian Americans ([Thai et al., 2017](#)). Such results place an emphasis on the impact of microassaults on the Asian American community while examining the role of racial socialization in such association.

The term microassaults can be defined as quotidian, subtle or ordinary comments, and actions—intentional or unintentional—that ultimately transmits a derogatory message to people of color. Microinsults and microinvalidations are more subtle and less direct. Furthermore, marginalized communities are often the target of these microassaults. Some examples of microassaults and racial microaggressions are messages suggesting that someone is less than others based on race, denying one's color/racial ethnic experiences, one has a natural predisposition to crime or violence due to the color of their skin, etc. In terms of Asian American's specifically, microaggressions often play a role in denying the racial reality of Asian Americans and strongly perpetuate the “model minority” myth ([Sue et al., 2007](#)).

Significance and contribution(s): By analyzing the effects of COVID-19 on the Asian American population, especially in a social context, we are able to develop a deeper understanding of the complex social constructs in a polarized pandemic. This can be useful to (1) better educate the general public about the social struggles observed in our country during this particular pandemic and (2) establish a basis of understanding for the Asian American population to better prevent such issues.

Research question(s): In this study, we investigated the rate of microassaults/microaggressions across Asian and White American racial groups here in the United States. Specifically, we aimed to examine the rate at which Asian Americans (Chinese, Filipino, Asian Indian, Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese, Pakistani, Cambodian, Hmong, etc.) experienced microassaults before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our main research questions were as follows:

1) *How does the COVID-19 pandemic affect Asian American populations in terms of microassaults?* 2) *Was there a significant change in the amount of microassaults experienced by Asian Americans due to the COVID-19 pandemic compared to White Americans?*

Methods

Design and protocol: In this study, a two-way 2x2 ANCOVA was used to test 2 racial groups, White and Asian Americans by time (before and during the COVID-19 pandemic). This study was done via an online, cross-sectional survey. Participants self-reported the rates of microassaults experienced among different ethnic/racial groups before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants were required to give their name and sign an IRB consent form. The form ensured the participants willingness, the participants age, and their language fluency. Participants were then asked to enter their age, socioeconomic status (SES), race/ethnicity, religious affiliation, political affiliation and all other relevant demographic information (See [Table 1](#)). The Everyday Discrimination Scale (EDS) ([Gonzalez et al., 2016](#)) was used to assess microassaults. The participants were then met with a debriefing screen and thanked for their participation.

Materials and sampling: There was a total of 506 participants recruited in this survey. The participant data was obtained via Qualtrics, an online survey platform. All respondent data was sampled from two US groups: students at a large Southwestern university ($n = 221$) and a nation-wide, non-university group ($n = 285$). The university sample was recruited from an undergraduate student participation pool at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV). The non-University sample was promoted online via social media platforms. In both samples, participants accessed the survey via a direct link and data was collected via self-report. Inclusion criteria required participants to be: (1) over the age of 18, and (2) can read, write, and comprehend written English. A total of 23 participants were removed from the data set for not meeting these criteria, resulting in a final sample size of 483 participants. One hundred and fifty participants identified as Asian, two hundred and fourteen participants identified as non-Asian POC, and a hundred and forty-two participants identified as White. Participants age ranged from 18 to 78 with a mean age of 28. Participants were not given any form of compensation for participating in this study. Students recruited from the University sample were given 1 research credit.

Table 1.
Participant Demographic Characteristics

Demographics	Sample 1 <i>n</i> = 219		Sample 2 <i>n</i> = 264		Full Sample <i>n</i> = 483	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Ethnicity/Race						
Asian	68	31.05	92	34.85	160	33.13
Black/African American	33	15.07	14	5.30	47	9.73
Hispanic/Latinx	62	28.31	71	26.89	133	27.54
White	91	41.55	96	36.36	187	38.72
Other	40	18.26	36	13.64	76	15.73
Gender						
Female	136	62.10	204	77.27	340	70.39
Male	79	36.07	54	20.45	133	27.54
Other	4	1.83	6	2.27	10	2.07
Generational Status						
1 st /1.5 Generation	20	9.13	62	23.48	82	16.98
2 nd Generation	97	44.29	101	38.26	198	40.99
3 rd Generation	30	13.70	26	9.85	56	11.59
4 th Generation/Other	72	32.88	75	28.41	147	30.43
Political Affiliation						
Democrat	102	46.58	171	64.77	273	56.52
Independent	42	19.18	32	12.12	74	15.32
Republican	31	14.16	11	4.17	42	8.70
No Preference/Other	44	20.09	50	18.94	94	19.46
Employment Status						
Full-Time	20	9.13	128	48.48	148	30.64
Part-Time	60	27.40	36	13.64	96	19.88
Unemployed/Other	139	63.47	100	37.88	239	49.48
Yearly Income						
\$0-\$39,999	201	91.78	116	43.94	317	65.63
\$40,000-\$79,999	13	5.94	73	27.65	86	17.81
\$80,000 Or More	5	2.28	75	28.41	80	16.56
Mean Age (<i>SD</i>)	219	20.12 (3.11)	264	34.94 (13.52)	483	28.22 (12.60)

Note. Participants were able to select more than one ethnicity/race, therefore the total percentage exceeds 100. For the mean age row, the means are presented under the percentage columns with the standard deviations inside parentheses.

Measures:

Race

Race played an important factor in the analysis of our study. Participants were allowed to select from multiple races as noted above (see [Table 1](#)). All participants who self-identified as either Asian or White were included in the analysis of the study. Other

participants not included in our analysis self-identified as Black/African American, Hispanic/Latinx, or other. *Microassaults*

Microassaults were measured using the Everyday Discrimination Scale ([Gonzalez et al., 2016](#)). The EDS measures the subjective beliefs and perceptions of the respondent based on observable

aspects of discrimination. The EDS is a 9-item self-report questionnaire that assesses observable characteristics of discrimination. The items are as follows: “Were you treated with less courtesy than other people?; Were you treated with less respect than other people?; Did you receive poorer service in restaurants or stores?; Did people act as if they were better than you?; Did people act as if they were afraid of you?; Were you called names or insulted?; Were you threatened or harassed?; Did people act as if you are not smart?; Did people act as if you are dishonest?”. The scale ranges from 1-4 (1 = *never*, 2 = *rarely*, 3 = *sometimes*, 4 = *often*). For our study, we modified each question by adding the words “Before COVID-19” and “Now during COVID-19” to create a time measure that assessed these experiences at two different time periods.

Table 2.
Bivariate Correlations Between Relevant Factors

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. EDS: Pre-COVID	15.44	5.02	—									
2. EDS: During COVID	15.75	5.67	.786**	—								
3. Age	28.22	12.60	.187**	.072	—							
4. Employment Status	3.16	1.98	-.061	-.015	-.179**	—						
5. Ethnicity/Race	2.02	0.76	.135**	.240**	.000	.024	—					
6. Gender	1.36	0.74	.079	.036	-.002	-.014	-.030	—				
7. Generational Status	3.53	1.23	-.108*	-.125**	-.038	.100*	-.563**	.001	—			
8. Political Affiliation	2.60	1.18	.064	.076	-.095*	.034	.045	.056	-.064	—		
9. SSS-Nation	6.07	1.66	-.089	-.114*	.364**	-.133**	-.015	-.029	.048	-.083	—	
10. Yearly Income	2.50	2.48	.108*	.014	.675**	-.303**	.083	.047	-.120**	-.099*	.412**	—

Note. Bold values indicate statistical significance. EDS = Everyday Discrimination Scale; SSS = Subjective Social Status. SSS-Nation was coded on a 1-10 subjective scale, with 1 being those with the least money, least education, the least respected jobs or no jobs and 10 being those with the most money, most education, and most respected jobs.

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2 – tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.005 level (2 – tailed).

race and the experience of microassaults before (15.41 vs. 13.80) and during (16.96 vs. 13.63) COVID-19 pandemic, Wilks’ Lambda value of .94, $F(1,286) = 17.51, p < .001$, with a moderate effect size of eta squared .06. The main effect of microassaults before and during was trending significance, $F(1,286) = 5.24, p = .023$. There was a significant main effect for race

Time

In order to explore the experiences of microassaults around the time of COVID19 pandemic, we differentiate our time frame between “before COVID” and “during COVID”. For each item of the EDS, we asked participants their experiences before and then during COVID. For example, we asked participants “before COVID were you threatened or harassed?; “now during COVID, were you threatened or harassed?”.

Results

As mentioned earlier, we used a two-way 2X2 ANCOVA with repeated measures to examine Asian vs. White across time of COVID (Race X Time). Covariates were age, gender, social economic status, and college student status. There was a statically significant spreading interaction (See [Figure 1](#)) with

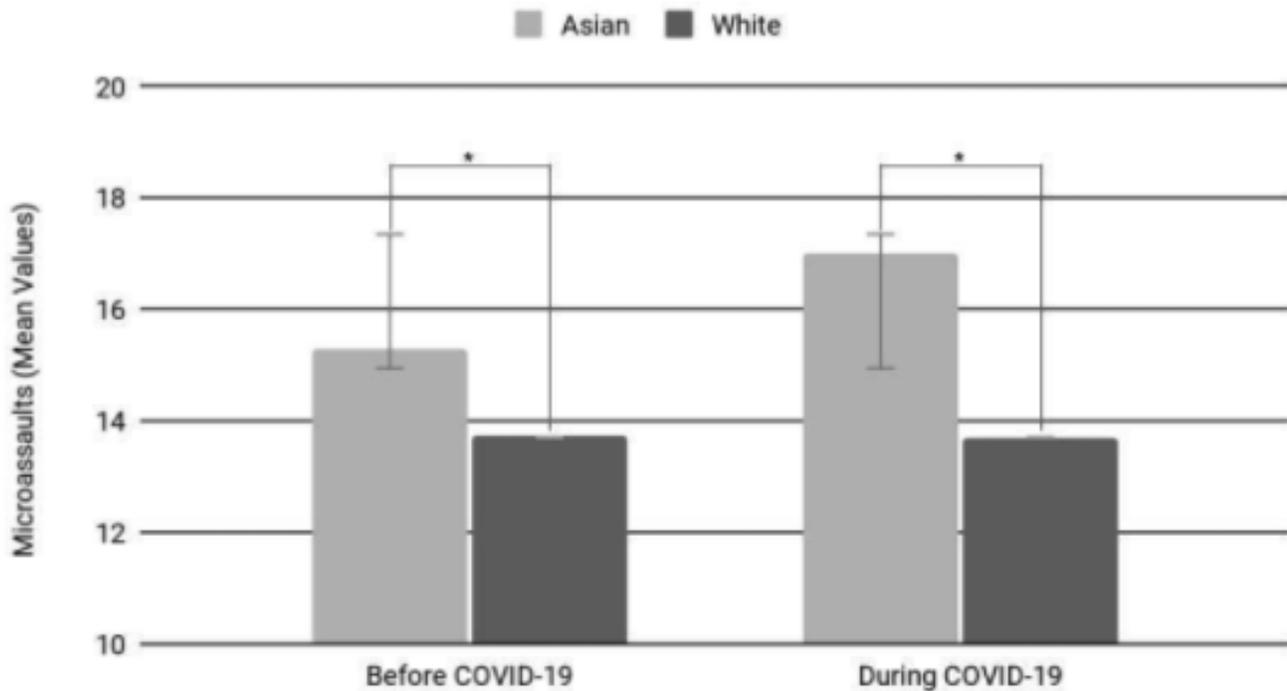
(16.18 vs. 13.72), $F(1,286) = 19.12, p < .001$, with a moderate effect size of eta squared .06. The data supported our hypothesis that Asian Americans experienced an increase of microassaults during the COVID-19 pandemic when compared to White Americans. This indicates that the polarized environment caused by COVID-19 increased the

experiences of microassaults for Asian Americans but not for White Americans. Covariates included in all analyses were age, gender, social economic status, and college student status (See [Table 2](#)) for all correlations. In comparison to Whites, Asian Americans experienced more microassaults before and during the pandemic. Asian Americans saw a significant increase

in microassaults during the COVID-19 pandemic when compared to Whites. This suggests that the microassaults towards Asian Americans increased significantly after the onset of the pandemic ([Figure 1](#)). Overall, the study suggests that Asian Americans experienced an increase of microassaults during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 1.

Microassaults Before and During the Events of COVID-19



Discussion

The relationships for Asian Americans across Whites were different. Asian Americans experienced an increase of microassaults compared to Whites, however, the spreading interaction indicated that Asian Americans experienced more microassaults before the pandemic compared to Whites. This shows that the COVID-19 pandemic amplified the amount of microassaults towards Asian Americans. With that said, some limitations of this study such as the validity of the self-report and enhanced media coverage of increased assaults against Asian Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic could have skewed the data in a biased manner, however, we are confident that these limitations and the issues that may present are moot.

Conclusion

From our data, we can conclude that Asian Americans observed a significant increase in the amount of microassaults when compared to White Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Importance to the Field

It can be concluded that anti-Asian views towards these marginalized populations were greatly increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. Anti-Asian sentiment is not new in America, however, is it often overlooked or hidden around the model minority rhetoric ([Parks & Yoo, 2016](#)). The importance of this work to the field is that it provides a better insight into the broad effects of COVID-19 on Asian Americans. Since COVID-19 is one of the most unique global

circumstances of our time, it is crucial to fully understand the social implications it has on these groups to potentially overcome this model minority rhetoric.

Implications for Future Research

Overall, our study showed that Asian Americans experienced an increase in microassaults during the COVID-19 pandemic compared to other racial groups. This study is among the first to directly examine Asian American experiences of blatant forms of microaggressions. The strengths of this study were in the time it was conducted as well as the diversity in participants. However, further studies are needed to better understand the Asian American experience during the COVID-19 pandemic. On a broader scale, this study provides good insight into how a specific community (Asian Americans) was affected in a highly unique circumstance. Though the chances of the world being in a similar situation in the future are relatively low, it is important to understand the social dynamics at play during the pandemic. The better understanding and education about this particular pandemic have the potential to catalyze new initiatives to better advocate for equal and fair treatment for all marginalized communities.

Future Directions

Some future directions of this particular study include the deeper investigations on how COVID-19 affected the different Asian subdivisions (i.e. Chinese, Korean, Japanese, etc.). Additionally, it may be valuable to investigate how these different Asian subdivisions are affected in different regions of the United States. This intersectionality would provide a better understanding of how different Asian American's were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in the next frame of staging because of the uniqueness of each subdivision.

Additionally, there may be interesting findings in regard to the different socio-economic divisions between Asian Americans during the pandemic. It has been shown that perceived discrimination in racial/ethnic groups, such as Asian Americans, contributes to mental health disorders including major depressive disorder (Levin & Beker, 2010). This coupled with the generalized perceptions on the different socio-economic groups due to wealth

disparities may have had an impact on Asian American's during COVID-19.

Some future research should be dedicated to understanding the effects political parties had on the different ethnic populations during the pandemic. This work could potentially provide some insights on how politics may have affected the Asian American experience during COVID-19. It has been shown that partisanship not only serves as a political cue or identify, but also a social one (Iyengar & Westwood, 2014). More specifically, it has been shown that party polarization plays a significant role in partisan identifiers to discriminate against members of another party or to unfairly favor members of their own party. This group polarization may have impacted the levels of microaggressions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic is during a politically important period since it is an election year. This suggests that the United States is in a highly polarized state indicating a greater effect on social interactions.

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