

Study finds Asian-Americans often feel racial 'microaggressions'

April 25 2013, by Karene Booker

(Medical Xpress)—Asian-Americans experience considerable everyday prejudice and discrimination, reports a Cornell study published in the *Journal of Counseling Psychology* (Vol. 60:2). The study is one of the first to document the prevalence and effects of racial microaggressions – subtle forms of racial bias and discrimination – in the lives of Asian-Americans.

"Our findings suggest that exposure to day-to-day racial microaggressions is common and that seemingly innocuous statements, such as being asked 'Where were you born?' or being told 'You speak good English' can have an adverse effect on Asian-Americans, in part, because such statements often mask an implied message that you are not a true American," said Anthony Ong, associate professor of human development in Cornell's College of [Human Ecology](#), co-author of the study with Anthony Burrow, assistant professor of human development at Cornell.

"The combination of having one's racial reality questioned, and having to decipher mixed messages, is a core feature of the microaggression experience," Ong added.

For two weeks, 152 Asian-American college freshmen in the study completed a daily evaluation of their experiences, emotions and [physical health](#), including a checklist of 20 racial microaggression events.

The researchers found that approximately 78 percent of the participants

reported some form of racial microaggression within the two-week time frame. Overall, participants experiencing more [racial bias](#) events had more [negative emotions](#), fewer positive emotions and more symptoms of [physical discomfort](#) (e.g., headache, stomach ache, sore throat).

For individual participants, the racial bias events were associated with higher levels of negative emotion and more physical symptoms that day and the day after, suggesting that the experience of these daily [stressors](#) may influence health and well-being over time. The researchers also found that racial invalidations (e.g., being treated like a foreigner or overhearing racially biased sexual stereotypes) were more prevalent and harmful than racial microinsults (e.g., being told an offensive joke or comment concerning how Asians talk).

The results have important implications for the field of mental health, the authors said. "Unintentional microaggressions, coupled with the public belief that Asian-Americans represent a model minority, may act as major barriers to effective counseling and lead to premature termination [of therapy] among Asian-American clients," said Ong.

"It may also be important for counselors to understand that some of the effects of racial microaggressions may not be immediately evident," Burrow added. "Specifically, we found that reported microaggressions negatively impacted health on the following day, thus complicating counselors' ability to identify the experiential sources of problems that may arise for those targeted."

Ong and Burrow co-authored the study, "Racial Microaggressions and Daily Well-Being Among [Asian Americans](#)," with Thomas Fuller-Rowell, Ph.D. '10, University of Wisconsin-Madison; Cornell graduate student Nicole Ja; and Derald Wing Sue, Columbia University.

Provided by Cornell University

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