Microaggressions in Higher Education

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Abstract

This thesis examines the racial hardships that most minorities undergo by studying at a predominately white institution. This project will go into depth on certain racial situations that made me feel inferior and questioned my belonging at Saint Mary's College of California. Through my endeavor, I underwent and surpassed racial microaggressions that could have hindered my process at school or even could have made me drop out. These microaggressions made me a stronger person and allowed me to further examine myself and my institution in order to understand where these racial tensions were coming from. The central aspect of this thesis focuses on my encounters with numerous staff members that unknowingly or knowingly tried to oppress me. The questions that I kept asking myself throughout this thesis are; why do minorities in predominately white Institutions undergo these racial battles with students and staff? Is there a way to change that?

My research and experience is strictly in higher education in predominately white institutions. My research shows that these struggles are real and affect minorities throughout the entire nation. Many students of colors drop out because not only do they have the pressure to succeed, they have the pressure to educate those that have oppressed minorities for a long time. Not only does this thesis show my real life experience and struggles against these microaggressions and how I reacted, I also look at these situations from a Critical Race Theory lens that allows me to analyze the situation in a non-bias way in order to further explain what is happening to me in that situation. The CRT lens explains to the reader what type of microaggression occurred and how I responded because every situation is different.
depending on the student. Let me make this clear, I have had more encounters with different staff, but I chose these four stories because they directly relate to my research. There are times where a student of color can encounter different kinds of microaggressions at the same time, but I separate my stories in order to help my reader understand because these encounters are hard to read and comprehend. This project will assess and criticize Saint Mary's College inclusive community policy that was not applied to me during one of my encounters. This project develops from personal experience and me wanting to give a name "to the pain."
Introduction

In everyday life, people make certain decisions based on certain situations and circumstances. For example, someone might have to choose to fill up on gas before going to work or after. For students of color, the choices and circumstances are not that simple within an academic inclusive private catholic college because we undergo hardships and subtle forms of racism, that take away time from focusing on academics. Race is a huge obstacle to overcome and understand. Of course, some students of color do not have grades, but even those that do make it to college struggle because of the inequality in institutions. Race also plays an important role in higher education because the color of one's skin can bring problems. This should not be an issue in higher education because everyone should be seen as equal. Students of color are clearly isolated and segregated because most people think they do not belong in higher education. If they are in higher education, most people do not believe that they made it through grades. We always hear people say that students of color are in higher education because they play sports, this is not always the case. There are truly some intelligent students of color that make it to college because of their mental capacity. Even though higher education should bring people closer, racism is at its all-time high in predominately white colleges as will be shown later in this thesis. This thesis will analyze my experiences in college. I use CRT (Critical Race Theory) to understand how race intersects with my experience in school. In these short stories, I examine the journey of my four years at Saint Mary's College of California. I experienced this journey as fragmented and disjointed in many different ways; therefore I follow a feminist writing style which
intentionally is constructed to reflect experience (Anzaldua, Quijada, 1983). Through this writing, the reader will encounter discontinuous narratives to call attention to institutional racial microaggressions that I have experienced. These are true stories that I have encountered in my four years at Saint Mary's College. As will become clear, my experience has led me to believe that racism still exists in subtle forms. Students of color undergo hardships every day based on their color. Many students of color become fatigued by the battle of constantly educating or feeling inferior to the oppressor. "Battle fatigue takes a toll on the body of a student thus not letting them put forth all their effort in school" (Smith, Yosso, Solorzano, 2006). There is constant confrontation, and coalition between students of color, faculty/staff and brothers. Through my stories, you will see real life encounters of racial microaggressions that hindered my personal, academic and professional growth; it also challenged me to think differently about higher education and the hardships that students of color encounter every day. I have a name for the pain. Even though I did encounter these hardships, it only pushed me to persevere and try harder so that I would not continue to be oppressed by the higher education institutional system. However, not all students are able to do this. Many students are pushed out of school and these hardships are so real and painful, that they choose to get away instead of focusing on their future.

**THE STORY**

In the story, there are a myriad of different forms of microaggressions which are “Subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously (Solorzano, 2000). Within the bigger context of microaggressions, there are also microinvalidations which are communications that subtly exclude negate or nullify the thoughts, feelings or experiential reality of a person of color. Microassaults are conscious and intentional discriminatory actions: using racial epithets, displaying White supremacist symbols—swastikas, or preventing one’s son or daughter from dating outside of their race. Microinsults are verbal, nonverbal, and environmental communications that subtly convey rudeness and insensitivity that demean a person’s racial heritage or
identity (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, Esquilin, 2007). (see appendix A).

All of my stories are written in first person in order for the reader to understand that these are real life experiences that I underwent. After each story, I will discuss the racial tension or microaggressions I have experienced. I separate my Critical Race Theory lens portion by a line after each story. In this section, I purposely write in third person because these stories represent more than my own experiences. I choose to highlight the microaggressions more than my feelings and emotions I experienced. In my post-script, I share my reactions to the microaggressions and how I felt at the time of the incident. Most of my analysis comes from Daniel Solorzano and Wing Sue because they have studied these racial biases and behaviors at their respective institutions. CRT “provides a useful tool to identify, analyze, and challenge racism in education and society. Through the CRT lens, “the ongoing racism on college and university campuses comes into focus, revealing race conditions” (Ceja, Williams, Solorzano, Yosso, 2006). I begin each story with a picture, quote, definition or asterisk. The pictures will directly be related to the story presented. The quotes are guides indicating how the story will be read. Some quotes will be those that influenced me or can be directly related to the topic I will be presenting in my stories.

**My Background**

My name is Alejandro Lopez, but I mostly go by the name of Alex. My brother named me after an actor on a soap opera. I live in Pittsburg, CA which is 30 minutes from Moraga and Saint Mary’s College. I was born in Walnut Creek on December 14, 1990. I live with my father Sergio, my mother Diana, my older brother Sergio Jr. and my two younger sisters Vanessa and Elizabeth; yes, I am the middle child. Even though I was born in the United States, I do not consider myself an American. Instead I self-identify as Mexican because I grew up following the traditions and customs of the Mexican culture and not of the United States. My first language is Spanish. I chose English as my major because I wanted to challenge myself. Throughout high school, my teachers always doubted my
ability to articulate myself to a English proficiency. When I chose Saint Mary's, I knew that I wanted to challenge myself. English has taught me how to communicate effectively and has also to better tutor my father back home. I chose my minor because I knew that I was different. Back home, Latinos were the dominant group. However, once I stepped foot into Saint Mary's, I knew I was different because of the looks and the way people acted towards me. I found out that Ethnic Studies was a minor that studied the oppression of minorities and how to overcome stereotypes. Ethnic Studies has taught me a lot about myself, my identity, my race and ethnicity. Not only did I challenge myself with English, Ethnic Studies forced me to talk about difficult encounters and situations that students of color have to undergo. I am writing about microaggressions to bring awareness to predominately white institutions and to students of color that racism still exists even in higher education where everyone should be seen equal because everyone has earned the right to study and have worked hard to accomplish and graduate. I am also writing to give a voice to those minorities that have encountered these kinds of behaviors, but do not stand up and fight for what is right. To those minorities, use my encounters to help you surpass and guide you, it can be done.

**Story Selection**

There are four different stories in this thesis even though I have had other encounters that I wanted to write about. I chose these four stories because they directly relate to my research. The four microaggressions I will be discussing are; Interpersonal, microinvalidations, microassaults and microinsults. Each one of my stories touches upon a different microaggression. Even though a student of color can undergo all of these different kinds of microaggressions all at once, I have purposely separated each story to solely highlight one microaggression at a time.

**Microaggressions in Higher Education**

Every day, minorities undergo subtle forms of racism called microaggressions. These microaggressions can be verbal or non-verbal which make students of color feel inferior and invisible.
These microaggressions make students create counter spaces where they feel comfortable enough to
talk about their racist encounters. (Solorzano, 2000). By encountering these racist subtle actions and
behaviors, the student is forced to make academia secondary. By fighting these battles every day,
students become vulnerable to racial battle fatigue that takes a toll on the body and the mind of the
student (Smith William, Yosso Tara, Solorzano Daniel, 2005). In order to understand
microaggressions, everyone needs to understand the intersectionalities of race, racism and white
supremacy (Solorzano, D. &Perez Huber, L, 2012).

In the 21st century, we now have more than just microaggressions, we have smaller subtle racist
actions such as microinvalidations which are communications that subtly exclude negate or nullify the
thoughts, feelings or experiential reality of a person of color. Microassaults are conscious and
intentional discriminatory actions: using racial epithets, displaying White supremacist symbols -
swastikas, or preventing one's son or daughter from dating outside of their race. Microinsults are
verbal, nonverbal, and environmental communications that subtly convey rudeness and insensitivity
that demean a person's racial heritage or identity. (Derald Wing Sue, Christina M. Capodilupo, Gina C.
Torino, Jennifer M. Buccheri, Aisha M. B. Holder, Kevin L. Nadal, and Marta Esquilin, 2007). Many
racial microaggressions are so subtle that neither target nor perpetrator may entirely understand what is
happening. The invisibility of racial microaggressions may be more harmful to people of color than
hate crimes (Derald Wing Sue, Ph.D., and David Rivera, 2010). The perpetrator is usually a person that
has power and privilege that subjugates minorities and people of color (Lozon, Hannah, Uhrig Janet,
2012). For example a perpetrator might believe that people of color were special education admits just
so that the institution could diversify the campus. This can make a person of color feel inferior and can
hinder their experience in school and grades (Shaun R. Harper, Sylvia Hurtado, 2006). Even though
there is research that microaggressions exist on college campuses, some researchers choose not to talk
about it or acknowledge that this is truly happening on college campuses. Some researchers say they do
not use the words microaggressions because it based on “false assumption that we understand the motivations of those surface, micro behaviors.” (Troiano, Jessica, 2007). Furthermore, even though there are those that do not believe, truly there is evidence that microaggressions are present on college campuses. “Some whites find it hard to believe that they benefit from the system and that they are privileged. It is hard for many white folks to talk about racism because most of them have never encountered anything of this sort because of their power and privilege (Derald Wing Sue and Madonna G. Constantine, 2007)”. There are true life stories about these incidents on college campuses and there is plenty of research to counter those that do not believe in racism. These stories that come next are real life experiences that I have gone through that demonstrate and document that microaggressions do exist. Furthermore, racial microaggressions make it harder for students of color to concentrate on their academic work when they constantly have to think about the subtle racist battles in their everyday lives.

Using Critical Race Theory (CRT) researchers have studied microaggressions on predominately white college campuses. CRT provides a useful tool to identify, analyze, and challenge racism in education and society. Through the CRT lens, the “ongoing racism on college and university campuses comes into focus, revealing race conditions have not improved in the 21st century” (Ceja Miguel, William Smith, Solorzano Daniel, Yosso Tara, 2009).

CRT is based on broad literature base in law, sociology, history, ethnic studies, and women's studies. CRT is based off of 5 tenants: 1. “The intercentricity of race and racism. 2. The commitment to social justice. 3. The challenge of dominant ideology. 4. The centrality of experiential knowledge. 5. The interdisciplinary perspective.

Tenant one focuses in education that starts “with the premise that race and racism are endemic to and permanent in U.S. society (Bell, 1992; Russell, 1992) and that racism intersects with forms of subordination based on gender, class, sexuality, language, culture, and immigrant status.” The
commitment to social justice (tenant 2) exposes the “interest convergence” of civil rights gains, such as access to higher education (Bell, 1980, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Taylor, 2000), and works toward the elimination of racism, sexism, and poverty as well as the empowerment of People of Color and other subordinated groups” (Freire, 1970, 1973; Lawson, 1995; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001a). The challenge to dominant ideology (tenant 3) “challenges claims of objectivity, meritocracy, color blindness and equal opportunity and the privilege of dominant groups” (Solorzano, 1997). The centrality of experiential knowledge (tenant 4) “recognizes the experiential knowledge of People of Color as legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination (Carrasco, 1996; Delgado Bernal, 2002). For example, CRT explicitly listens to the lived experiences of People of Color through counter-storytelling methods such as family histories, parables, testimonios, dichos (proverbs), and chronicles” (see Bell, 1992, 1996; Delgado, 1989, 1993, 1995b, 1996; Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Espinoza, 1990; Love, 2004; Olivas, 1990; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2002; Yosso, 2006). The interdisciplinary perspective (tenant 5) “extends beyond disciplinary boundaries to analyze race and racism within both historical and contemporary contexts” (e.g., Calmore, 1997; Gotanda, 1991; Gutiérrez-Jones, 2001; Harris, 1994 pp. 4).

**MY ENCOUNTERS**

_You never know what someone's intentions are, but I could just say that it definitely is harder for minorities here . . . It's definitely harder if you're the only Person [of Color] in there. It's hard for other people to relate to you based on your differences: how you look, how you speak, how you act, and what you like to do when you're not in class._ (Latina undergraduate participant in Solorzano's study, 2005).
"Are you in the wrong class? This is seminar in case you did not know. Take a chair and sit outside of the circle because there is no room for you," said the professor.

I could not sleep the Sunday night before my first day of college. I tossed and turned in my bed. The adrenaline running through my body kept me awake. Even though I had my window open and it was cold, I did not cover myself with my blanket of La Virgen de Guadalupe in her green tunic. I was too hot and sweaty for that. I kept waking up my roommate because I could not rest. As I zoomed in and out of sleep, I looked at the clock and saw it was time to get ready for class. It was 6:45 am. I jumped out of bed with all of my adrenaline running through my brown skinned body. I walked energetically towards the shower. I waited about three minutes in my bathrobe for the water to turn hot. Eventually, I jumped into the shower. When I came out, the restroom looked as if it were a steam room. I had laid out my clothes the night before. I had to hurry because I still had to eat breakfast. After breakfast, belly full, I walked to class. I still had ten minutes before class started. When I walked in, there were no more empty chairs. I thought I had gotten there early enough to grab a chair and claim a space for myself. When there were no more chairs, I looked around in agony. I looked from left to right. As I slowly walked, counting my steps, everyone became silent and looked at me as if I was some kind of exotic animal. I kept looking for an open seat. I was so scared that my goose bumps had become more like pimples on my arms. I did not know what to do next. Finally, out of my peripherals I noticed that there was one empty seat left isolated in the left hand corner of the room. Little did I know that the lone chair on the far left would become my permanent seat for this class for the duration of the semester. I walked towards it thanking God that I had found an empty seat; unfortunately, it was outside the inclusive seminar circle. I grabbed the chair, as I made contact, the chair's slick movement almost made me stumble until I applied more pressure. I could feel my hand adding downward pressure to the chair as it stayed in place. I grabbed it and turned around, walking with it as if it were my pet
dog. “Excuse me”, I said to one of the guys that were sitting in the circle. He turned and looked at me and nodded. He was not going to move. I moved with the chair about 4 inches to try and squeeze in between two women. They also did not budge. I eventually said, “Excuse me.” Nobody moved a single muscle as if they were zombies. At this time, the professor walked in and said “Wow! We have a full house”. She was unaware of what had happened and proceeded to tell me to sit down. I said, “There is no room.” She turned her head and continued passing out the syllabus. For the rest of the semester, I was isolated in that corner as if I were on timeout.

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**CRT LENS**

**Interpersonal Microaggression**

This story focuses on a professor that was unaware of the harm that she was either unintentionally or intentionally doing to the student. Before the professor had come in, the student had already received subtle forms of racism because the white students did not let him sit within the circle. The fact is that the student was denied being part of the class. He was denied the ability to feel comfortable, included in the conversation, and having a sense of belonging. Were they acting like this because of the color of his skin? This student had encountered a microaggression. Microaggressions are “Subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously (Solorzano, 2000). Furthermore, Daniel Solorzano would categorize this microaggression as an Interpersonal Racial Microaggression, a “verbal and nonverbal racial affront directed at Latinas/os from students, faculty, teaching assistants, or other individuals in academic and social spaces. “These incessant interpersonal attacks lead Latinas/os to feel that their presence disrupts the “natural” state of being on campus” (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, Solorzano, 2009). The fact that the student of color was never acknowledged really plays into the quote introduced in the previous sentence. Why wouldn't the student feel as if his presence disrupted the “natural” state of the class? It is normal for
him to feel that way because of his "invisibility" to his peers and professor. Reader put yourself in his shoes. Wouldn't you feel excluded? This is actually what Solorzano is implying by saying that the student of color disrupts the flow and that is why the professor never paid attention to him. Disrupting the flow of class means that the student would have brought a different perspective to the class. Since the student comes from a different background, it is safe to say that he would have brought a different mentality to the class that would have benefitted everyone. In this case, the professor said "there was no room for him in the circle." This was a verbal affront to the student. The professor knew that the student was there, but she never cared enough to help him feel as if he belonged. This interpersonal microaggression came directly from the students and the professor. They isolated him in a corner and made him feel less than everyone else. Much like the quote before the story says, "everything was different about the colored student." Through every microaggression that a student of color encounters, their response changes from situation to situation. In this circumstance, the student chose not to talk; he was in denial which also ties into the fact that Solorzano says that denial is a primary reaction for students that encounter racial microaggressions. Denial can have strong effects on a student's success in college. Upon coming to college all students have a perception of what to expect from the people and the environment. When a microaggression such as this one occurs it is hard for the student to fully comprehend why things such as this are occurring since they often do not fit into the criteria of expectations they had for college. Because the student has to deal with the mental process of denying to themselves that they are being a victim of such microaggressions it may be hard for them to focus on the more important college factors such as academics. If the student has to worry more about how they are going to be treated by the professors and fellow students and fear not feeling safe in their classroom it hinders their capability of actually focusing on the classwork and homework they have to do for that course.

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Lopez 10
“You for sure are a student on Academic Probation right? Are you here on a scholarship? How did you get into Saint Mary’s College, it’s a white school.”

I remember this day as if it were yesterday. Two nights prior to meeting my advisor, I had declared my major. I was excited to become an English major with a minor in Ethnic Studies. I was only a sophomore soon to be Junior when I clicked submit; a rush of adrenaline filled my body because I was a step closer to graduating and starting a major that challenged me mentally and physically. After I clicked submit, I emailed my advisor and told her I wanted to meet for a two year plan so that I would be on track to graduate. The next day, Professor ________ replied and said, “I am happy to meet with you, stop by my office in the third floor of Garaventa hall at 3:30.” I thought to myself, “she seems nice.” It was 3:15 when I got out of class. I twitched as I walked towards Garaventa Hall. I was nervous. I began to sweat as if I had just run five miles. My hands were trembling. My stomach hurt as if I was to see my partner after not seeing her for 2 years. I counted the steps to Garaventa Hall from Dante. I was trying to occupy my mind so that I would not be nervous, but it was no use. I was nervous because I had taken a big step towards my future and I was excited to meet the person that would help me achieve success by helping me choose my courses required for my major and minor. My heart pounded and almost came out of my chest. Zooming in and out of stream of consciousness, I counted 30 steps until I reached the third floor, but I was so nervous that I could hardly count. I opened the door, looked left and right. I saw the sign (like the ones in hospitals that direct traffic) that said Rooms 3 ---> and Rooms 3 <---. I turned left, the hall was narrow. The carpet was blue and it looked claustrophobic. I found her office; I could feel and hear my heart beating.

Finally, the time had come to meet my advisor. I stepped closer, right foot, left, right, and left. My feet and legs were trembling. I felt as if I had to ask my legs to move forward because they did not budge. Then I said, “Hi Professor ______. How are you today?” She answered, “I’m doing well.” Then she said it, “You must be on Academic Probation.” She was unprepared and hadn’t even looked at my
Academic Evaluation. She would have seen that I take my education seriously. For god sakes, I had a 3.4 my sophomore year in college and she was asking me if I was on academic probation. I said to her, "Professor _________ with all due respect, I have a 3.4. Is that considered academic probation? She had a looked of bewilderment. I walked out of her office knowing as little as I came in. I immediately went to talk to Angelica Garcia. Angelica told me to be persistent and persevere and that one day, I would prove her wrong. The day went by slow after that because I kept reminiscing about what had happened.

CRT LENS

Microassault

The important aspect of this short story is the interaction between the advisor and the student. The student clearly describes his intent to be nonjudgmental and is happy to meet this professor that was supposed to be an ally for him. He is excited to meet her until she states that she thinks he is on Academic Probation. Using a CRT framework, one can see that the student had just encountered a racial microaggression and stereotype. The advisor had clearly thought certain things about the Latino Student. First off, she thought that he was not smart enough to get into school without some kind of sports scholarship because she asks him how he was accepted into college. Secondly, she questioned his ability to perform at a high level (in a white institution). Thirdly, she never even once looked to see if he had good grades. This is an example of a microaggression called microassault where the advisor clearly verbally attacked the student. According to Derald Wing Sue, a professor that studies microaggressions describes microassaults as “racial derogation characterized primarily by a verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions” (DW Sue, 2007). This is clearly what is happening to the student of color with this advisor. The advisor is implying on a deeper level that she does not think that the
student of color was capable of being accepted into a prestigious school like Saint Mary's. The advisor automatically assumed that he was on Academic Probation because of the color of his skin. She categorized him into those Latinos that do not care about education. The student of color responded differently to the racist encounter this time around. He created a counter-space, which is a space where, "students of color can vent their frustrations and cultivate friendships with people who share the same or many of the same experiences" (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, Solorzano, 2009). The Latino Student went to the Academic Advising Center where he knew he would feel safe and was able to confide in someone. Solorzano highlights that many students of color respond to microaggressions this way. Through CRT, the reader can see that this student was in a hostile environment where he was indirectly being questioned about his ability and his skin color which is a racial microaggression.

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I felt good about myself the night before I encountered my racial battle. I had finished all of my readings for seminar and I understood what Dante meant by the different stages of hell in *Inferno*. Dante categorizes the sins of humans and puts them in a certain circle in hell depending on the severity. *Inferno* has a bright red book cover. Little did I know that I was going to be the one to turn bright red much like the cover of the book. As we continued to read and discuss (which is what seminar is supposed to be about) one of my classmates raised her hand and said, "Where would a murderer land?" I answered the question by saying that a murderer would land in circle 7 because he/she had used violence on another human being. After this question, someone asked, "where would a gangster land?" I wasn't sure how to answer this question. It caught me by surprise. Everyone including the professor seemed to understand what a gangster was and what a gangster looked and behaved like. The student never said if the gangster killed anyone or if they were in a gang because they were seeking love in the wrong places. The ex-president of the school looked around the class. I could see his eyes scanning the circle of students from his left to his right. When his eyes reached me he said,
“Alex is going to tell us all about that lifestyle. Surely he knows what a gangster's life consists of.”

Everyone in the class started chuckling except for my colleague Elisa that is also an Ethnic Studies minor. I put my head down and looked to my jeans as if they had the answer to this question. I waited a minute (I counted 1,2,3,4,5. in my head hoping that someone would pick up the conversation and move on to a different question). Then I proceeded to say, “Sorry I can't tell you about that lifestyle, I was never a gangster. Yes! I do live in a town where there are lots of gangsters, but I have never joined a gang and not interested in anything that they do.” To this, the ex-president of the school said, “How rude of you to not help the class and make your voice heard.” I stayed silent and did not speak for the rest of class or for the last three weeks remaining in the semester.

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**CRT LENS**

**Microinvalidation**

The student underwent another racial microaggression by the ex-president of the school whom is also a brother. A brother is supposed to be a resource for all students. They are religious figures on campus that stand for the Saint Mary's mission of Lasallian principles which are: Concern for the Poor and Social Justice, Faith in the Presence of God, Quality Education, Respect for all Persons, and Inclusive Community. The important aspect of this story is the interaction between the professor and the student. Did the brother know what he was saying? Maybe he did, maybe he didn't. The important aspect of this story focuses on the fact that the ex-president of the school assumed that the student would be able to talk to the class about how it is to be a gangster. The professor never asked the student if he was willing to share or if he know a little bit about the gangster life. It is evident that the student did not know how to handle the situation. Once again, the student does not know how to react as he
counts a whole minute in his head before proceeding to talk to the professor. This microaggression is called microinvalidation because the professor thinks he knows the experience of the student without giving him a chance to answer any of his questions. Microinvalidations are “characterized by communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color (Wing Sue, 2007). The professor drew on the student’s experiential reality because he had thought that the student would be able to answer the question about the gangster when the student had never been part of a gang. He touched on the aspect of race and ethnicity to categorize the student. The student felt attacked because he was one of two student of color in the class. According to Daniel Solorzano, when a student encounters these microaggressions, it hinders their growth and academic ability (Solorzano, 2009). According to the student, we never know what his grade was, but he says that he keeps to himself for the rest of the three weeks which cannot be good for his grade. The student encountered another microaggression that may have been unintentional, but through the story, we can see that he was affected not only by the racist comment, but by the fact that the professor was a brother and the ex-president of SMC. Seminar is based off of 50% discussion and participation, lucky for the student, there were only about three weeks left in the semester. The difference between all of these encounters was the fact that this microaggression came from the ex-president of the school and a brother. He is supposed to be someone that students trust and look up to, but yet, he became just like the others by racially discriminating the professor.

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A Microinsult is “Verbal and non-verbal communications that subtly convey rudeness/insensitivity and demean a person’s identity” (Wing, Sue 2007).

The Summer Bridge Program at Saint Mary's College is one of the most difficult programs I had ever been through. As a freshman, I was accepted into this program which taught me how to
become a better college student. It was a program that took place three weeks prior to the beginning of school; I did not want to go to Summer Bridge because I wanted to enjoy my last summer before going off to college. The program helps first year, first generation, low income students get acclimated to the college campus. I would also call this program a “three week boot camp to college where you cram different seminar and English assignments and become a better college student.” Towards the end of my first year, I applied to be a mentor of the program. I wanted to give back because it really helped me straighten my academic focus. I received a Peer Mentor job in the summer the following year. A peer mentor is a tutor to the upcoming freshman that will be in the program. Ever since then, I have been a mentor in the program. My last summer which was the summer where I would become a senior at Saint Mary's College, I encountered another microaggression. I remember it was 11:00 am and the peer mentors usually do not start tutoring and helping the students until 4:00 pm. I was on my way to the gym for my daily run and lifting routine when I saw these two older white women looking for a building. I asked if they needed help finding anything. It is in my nature to help those that I can because I believe in making people's lives easier. I saw them walking slowly as if they were asking each leg to lift up and finally hit the floor. Both of them were hunched over, I'm guessing because they had bad posture. As I approached them, the eyes of the lady on the left became bigger as if she had increased magnification. Eventually, I knew I would have to pass them. The other lady was dragging along a roller backpack. As I approached them, I had my earphones on listening to my Banda mix because that is what I work out too. Banda is Mexican music that has an upbeat tempo and always makes me want to jump. I was nodding my head because I was feeling the music. These actions must have triggered these women because both began scrambling to put there Coach purses in the rolling backpack. These ladies could hardly walk, but once they saw me approaching, they instantly became rejuvenated, turned around quickly, bent down quickly and put their purses away. They say that when someone is scared, there body moves quicker, I guess that was the case for these women. I came up to them and asked,
“Good morning, I noticed that both of you ladies look lost, may I help you find something?

“We don't need help from a person like you, we can find it ourselves,” said the lady in the left.

“I would rather be lost than get help from you,” said the lady on the right.

To these responses, I did not answer. I left and went about my business. As I ran, I recalled the incident and chuckled to myself. This incident did not affect me because I was going into my senior year and Ethnic Studies prepared me for encounters like these.

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**CRT LENS**

**Microinsult**

In this particular incident, the student did not care about what happened. He says that he has had more experience and that Ethnic Studies prepared him for encounters like this one. These women created a microaggression called micro insult. The definition is “Verbal and non-verbal communications that subtly convey rudeness/insensitivity and demean a person’s identity.” With their actions, the ladies implied that the student was a thief. They quickly moved to hide their belongings as he approached. On top of that, they said “they did not need help from a person like him.” Does that mean that if a white person would have asked them if they needed help, would they have asked for directions? It sure seems like it with the way they were acting. These women implied that the student was a thief by putting their stuff away. They also racially categorized him because one of the ladies says that they do not want help from a person like him. This means that they categorized him and in their mind thought that a brown person could not be of assistance. Maybe these ladies did not know what they were doing, but either way; there actions were a microinsult in which they were rude and conveyed rude message to the student.

**DISCUSSION**

Utilizing a CRT frame, I have demonstrated that I navigated through a hostile environment
where shocking racial assaults in a predominately white college campus were surpassed. As a dynamic framework, CRT allows us to challenge the racist injuries and identify their origins. In my stories, I never said that any of my professors were racist. I did think of it, but I never accused them. Maybe, they did not know what they were doing and that is why I am bringing awareness to the campus. Naming the types of microaggressions that students of color confront, outlining their effects, and highlighting ways in which they respond provides a sense of hopefulness for the future where students of color will have stronger voices (A way to name their pain). Through these stories, I became empowered to speak out and challenge the institution. I became an ally to those other students of color that endure the same racial microaggressions. I overcame four different types of microaggressions; Interpersonal Racial Microaggressions, Microinvalidations, Microassaults and Microinsults. These racial affronts caused me added stress. Battling Racial Microaggressions drained me emotionally, physically and mentally. These racial acts and behaviors also left me feeling isolated with a sense of not belonging. Though I was injured and scarred for life because of these microaggressions, I did not let them bring me down completely. I created counter spaces where I knew people would understand. I felt safe in these environments and it was typical of me to seek and find places where I could be myself. Further research is necessary to fully understand and comprehend the effects of microaggressions in higher education. Racism is multilayered; it can come in any way, shape, or form. I have two simple solutions to these problems. Saint Mary's needs to diversify their professors because that is the only way students of color will feel more comfortable. They want to feel a space where they can talk, be themselves and be understood. Usually, white older professors (males and females) cannot comprehend the struggles of students of color. Another possible solution is to make professors take a course or take a day to study these kinds of microaggressions. There can be a facilitator and they can try to learn the harm that these racial battles do to the students (even if they do not experience them). A third solution would be to educate students that race is socially constructed and that the battles among
races are not made up and that other people have experienced racial battle fatigue. Daniel Solorzano says, “Beyond portraying a racially diverse group of students in recruitment brochures, historically White universities do not necessarily commit to providing equal access and opportunities for Students of Color” (2005). Inclusiveness is something Saint Mary's strives for, but they simply do not do a good job. Saint Mary's says on their brochures that they are diverse but it is one thing to be diverse on paper and then come to campus and see the real thing. Being the only brown person in a class is scary. Reader I hope that you have learned some valuable lessons and learned from my experience. These are only a couple of stories I have. I hope that you enjoyed the read. Don't forget, for everyone’s sake, continue educating those that need to be because this is the only way to advance towards equality even if your fatigued with reiterating the same things. Be strong and just know that there is a “name for the pain,” you are not in this alone. No matter what race or ethnicity one is, being successful is the most important part of life. I went through hardships, but they only made me a stronger and a better person academically and mentally.

Post-Script

First off, I want to make it clear that these were true incidents that have happened to me at Saint Mary's College. In the story, I write in first person to personalize the story. In the next section, I write in third person because I don't want to be biased and I try to stay central and neutral without blaming anything or anyone. My analysis only shows that racism and microaggressions do indeed exist in higher education. Even though I write in third person, it is still my story, but I am analyzing it through a different lens. Also, I have had many other encounters of racism, but I told these stories because of the research that I found on these particular issues. I chose these stories to further emphasize and recognize that people are researching these incidents and hopefully my stories are further proof that these encounters do exist. In this post-script, I go through each incident and indicate how I felt. I want the reader to understand my personal reaction. Since I write in third person in my analysis, I cannot go into
depth about how I truly felt. These next paragraphs will show my rage, over the racism I endured.

When I had to sit outside of the seminar circle, I felt isolated, oppressed and without any kind of eagerness to do anything in that class. I was quiet and never talked. I was invisible to my peers, but more importantly to my professor. I felt denied, betrayed, segregated, isolated, and I knew that my color was part of it. Even though I say she didn't mean it, in my mind I believe that she did not care the same for me because of the color of my skin. I believe the professor did not care if I passed or failed. Since I was the only brown person in my class, I felt as if nobody could understand me. Everyone looked at me differently and all I wanted to do was fit in. I remember turning red, embarrassed and I dreaded opening the door to that classroom. I felt like getting up and screaming to the professor that she did not know what she was doing to me internally. I wanted to hit the guy and the girl that did not let me sit within the circle. I did think about man handling both of them, grabbing them and moving them myself. I felt such rage that I was willing to sock the wall knowing that my fist would go through the sheet rock. These students did not welcome me. Quite frankly, I still think today that I was not welcomed because of the way they looked at me. Every time I opened the door, I felt goose bumps going down my whole body. I hated that class. I hated the professor and all the white students for making me feel inferior. Every morning before class, I tried telling myself countless times that it would be fine, but once I stepped into class, those thoughts went out the door. I felt weak, depressed and sad. For the entire semester, she never knew my name, she did not care to show any respect towards me. I was taught that one had to give respect to earn it, so I do not and will never respect that professor. I cannot describe the terror that I felt when I stepped into that class room. It was like watching a scary movie, but ten times worse because it was real and it was about me. It was a nightmare that I thought would never end. I felt physical pain in my chest, heart and mind. I learned again that racist encounters happen every day to students of color.

My second encounter was the toughest because I was actually right next to my advisor. I could
see her eyes, her smirk on her face as if she was making me feel this way on purpose. She wanted to feel superior to me and she did a great job in illustrating that she was in control of the situation. I felt like a thirsty puppy without water, waiting for my owner to decide when I would drink and eat. I was waiting for her to help me, but instead she chose not to. She threw me under the bus. I felt like she did not care and questioned my abilities because of my skin color. WOW! I cannot believe that I am still angered over this as I write. I felt defeated. I was once again reminded of how the color of my skin brought me too many problems. I questioned myself and my ability. I asked myself, do I belong here? It took a lot for me not to cuss her out or disrespect her. I heard my mother in my mind say, “respeta your elders mio,” so that is what I did. I remember even crunching my fist and thinking about how hard and how bloody her face would be. When she said those words to me, I could not contain myself. My face turned red, I felt my ears hot and I was ready to lay my hands on her. I know that I should have never thought that, but she knowingly insulted me. She knew that she was categorizing me and she did not care. She made me feel inferior. The good thing is that I contained myself, or else I would have been kicked out of school and she would have had a broken nose and teeth. I do not want to sounds like an angry person of color; I am just being honest about what I thought in this certain situation. I now understand what it means to control my rage but I think how others in my community endure this pain and cope with oppression.

I cringe when I think about this incident especially because brothers are supposed to be a resource for students. The brother associated me with criminal life even though I was in higher education. What kind of a leader is he? The ex-president of the school was stereotyping students of color. This makes me concerned for the future of Saint Mary's College. I felt inferior and it took a lot not to go up to the brother and hit him in his jaw. Until now, every time he sees me, he says hi to me as if he never hurt me. As if nothing occurred, but to him I say, I forgive you for not knowing that your comments hurt me and I will move past this once I graduate. I forgive you because I have learned to
deal with this pain. I was traumatized by his assumptions in class. I thought to myself “How dare he say something like this to me in front of the class, I want to kill this mother fucker.” No lie, I really thought this and these reactions surprised and scared me because I am not a violent person. I was humiliated and embarrassed in front of the whole class. He simply looked at me and thought that I was a gangster. In my analysis, I try to give him the benefit of the doubt, but I know that he intentionally made me feel the way I did in class. On purpose, he told the class that I was a gangster. Intentionally, he embarrassed me and humiliated me. I don't have anxiety, but I was hyperventilating in class and I felt as if I couldn't breathe because I was so mad and embarrassed. Since he was sitting far away from me, I cooed myself down. I wanted to tell the professor, FUCK YOU because of what he made me feel. I wanted to confront him and ask him what his problem was not only with me but with minorities in general. It took a lot for me to remain sitting in this class. I wanted to scream at him and tell him that he was a racist. I talked to other brothers about the situation and they said that he has always been a racist. So even though I give him the benefit of the doubt, other brothers have told me that he is ignorant to the struggles and quite frankly he does not care to be educated.

“What is it about me that scared these women? Did they have the right to judge me on my appearance? The last encounter I wrote about does not really affect me because by my junior/senior year I knew how to handle all these situations. When these white ladies grabbed their belongings and hid them, I knew exactly why they were doing it. I don't blame them. I understand that they are ignorant. I understand that they are manipulated by the media and how they construct people of color. Despite my awareness, I wish that white people would give us the chance to show them that we are just like them, just a different color. We are humans too and we have feelings. I really did not have a reaction, I laughed it off and continued doing what I had to do throughout my life. As I progressed through Saint Mary’s, I learned how to cope with these situations and how to stand up for myself. These stories, are a way for me to stand up for myself, but also for those minorities that are oppressed or that
have encountered what I have and do not have a voice. Even though I did question myself and my color, I was able to move past that quickly because I learned that it is not my fault, it is there fault for acting in such a manner. All I have to do is keep educating and I will do it until I drop. Hopefully the world changed one day. Reader I hope you have learned a lot and I hope that you can see that racism still exists even in higher education where we are all there for one purpose, to graduate.
Appendix A

Interpersonal

Microaggressions

Microinsults

Microassaults

Microinvalidations
Annotated Bibliography

1. Solorzano, D. & Perez Huber, L. (2012). “Microaggressions, Racial.” In J. Banks (Ed.) Encyclopedia of Diversity in Education (pp. 1489-92). Thousand Oaks, Ca: Sage Publications. This article is about the responses to microaggressions. In my stories, I react in these ways as a way of coping with the situation. The article also talks about the history of microaggressions and gives examples of these aggressions in education.

2. Solorzano, D. “Microaggressions, and Campus Racial Climate: The Experiences of African American College Students.” Journal of Negro Education, vol 69 (60-73). Howard University. This article provides a diagram in the responses of those minorities that receive the micro aggressions. There are different responses, and in my stories, I also act upon these responses.


5. Sue, Wing Derald, Capodilupo, Christina, Torino C. Gina, Buceri, M. Jennifer, Holder M.B.
Aisha, Nadal L. Kevin, and Esquelin Marta. “Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Implications for Clinical Practice.” American Psychology Association. Vol 62. NO 4. (pp. 271-286). Teachers College, Columbia University. This article brings forth even more vocabulary terms that I can use in my stories and in my CRT part of my analysis. For example, these authors state that there are more than just microaggressions. Some other vocabulary is

Microinvalidation- When Asian Americans (born and raised in the United States) are complimented for speaking good English or are repeatedly asked where they were born, the effect is to negate their U.S. American heritage and to convey that they are perpetual foreigners.

Microassault- In other words, people are likely to hold notions of minority inferiority privately and will only display them publicly when they (a) lose control or (b) feel relatively safe to engage in a microassault. Microinsult- When a Latino couple is given poor service at a restaurant and shares their experience with White friends, only to be told “Don’t be so oversensitive” or “Don’t be so petty,” the racial experience of the couple is being nullified and its importance is being diminished.


http://advising.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/Microaggressions%20and%20Our%20Students%20-%20Advising_0.pdf. This is a power point that talks about some solutions to help face microaggressions on college campuses.

http://pages.gscis.ucla.edu/faculty/chang/S07/Week10/Harper_Hurtado.pdf. Hurtado talks about the Latino perspective on a white majority campus. She says that “no matter how smart the Latino may be, if they fell inferior or have no sense of belonging, than he/she will most likely fail and grades will go down.


http://www.startribune.com/lifestyle/12307851.html?refer=y. This newspaper article talks about the history of racism and how subtle racism really effects the receiver and not the perpetrator.
