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Students of Color at Montana State University: Racial Microaggressions and Protective Factors

Racial microaggressions impact the lives and health of ethnic minorities in the U.S. every day, and college students of color are no exception. Research shows that students of color at predominantly and historically White universities such as MSU experience microaggressions and a more isolated campus climate than their majority-group peers. Perceived discrimination among students of color has been shown to be significantly associated with increased rates of anxiety, depression, and alcohol problems (Blume et al., 2014; Skewes & Blume, 2016), with potentially harmful implications for academic achievement. Despite these challenges, college students of color are resilient and possess protective factors that help them successfully navigate university environments. The present study reports preliminary findings from an ongoing undergraduate research project examining protective factors that might buffer the effects of microaggressions and promote healthy coping among college students of color. The study sample will consist of 50 MSU students who self-identify as ethnic minorities and volunteer to complete a battery of self-report questionnaires about their experiences with microaggressions, mental health, and substance use behavior. Potential protective factors examined in the survey include self-efficacy, authenticity, positive emotions, social support, spirituality, self-esteem, self-compassion, and approach-based coping styles. SPSS will be used to analyze data and explore associations and interactions among hypothesized protective factors and microaggressions, mental health symptoms, and alcohol outcomes. Results will be summarized and discussed along with future research suggestions and interventions to encourage and cultivate protection from microaggressions on campus.