



Silent Struggles

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INTRODUCTION

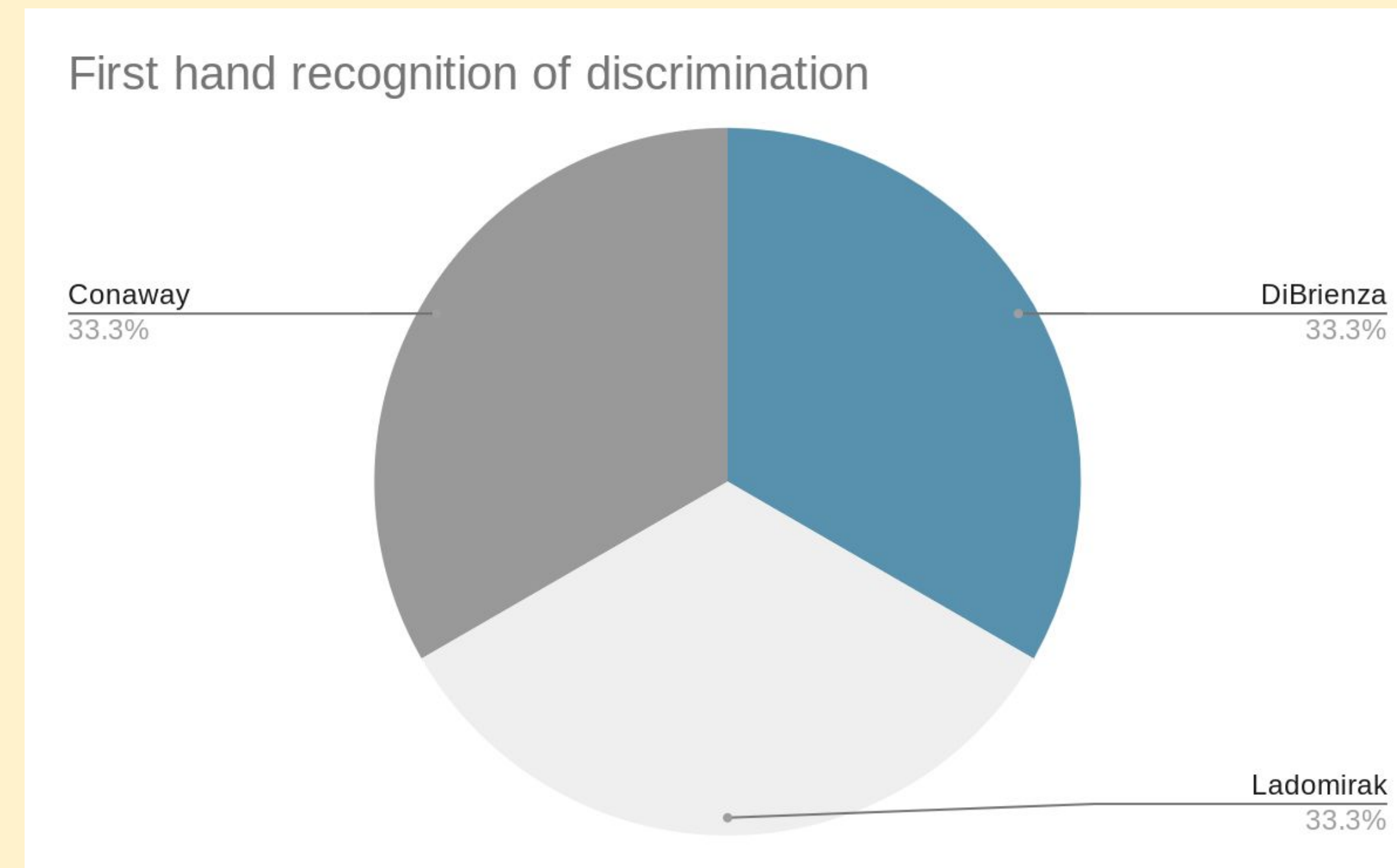
The American education system has a problem. Academic statistics have a clear distinction between race, class, and economic status. There is an overwhelming difference between African American students and white students. One of the issues that affects African American students' academic performance is the constant microaggressions that they face on a day-to-day basis. These are often seen as harmless and non impactful and are overlooked by staff and other students most of the time. But the reality is these microaggressions aren't harmless and may be quite far from that. This topic was chosen because of personal experiences as an African American student in a predominantly white high school system. Being a part of this system made it clear that there is a disproportionate amount of African American students struggling academically in many different areas of education. Furthermore, the data provided below will provide information that ties the negative effects of discrimination towards African American students to their academic experience.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

In order to fill this gap there was a study done to add depth to the understanding of microaggressions and discrimination in education, determine if staff recognize microaggressions in education, and provide more qualitative data for Bay Area schools. The inquiry approach in this study consisted of case study research, chosen for its ability to provide specific experience from the participant. The equipment used was a computer and a built-in microphone. The primary data collection tool was interviews, so that participants could give detailed responses to the questions. And finally, the data analysis technique was coding, making it possible to pull recurring themes throughout the data that's given from the participants. The general population that was studied was African American students in education, specifically those who experience discrimination and microaggressions. The sample was selected based on individuals who have over a year of experience in the field of district education. They were asked a set of questions but also had the option to provide their own input that wasn't directly asked in the questions. The subject was met on Zoom, and while being provided with questions, the data/information that the participant provided was recorded through the computer and written down into a PDF.

CONCLUSIONS AND ANALYSIS

All 3 interviewees answered yes, and strongly agreed with the fact that discrimination and microaggressions are present in the Palo Alto Unified School District.



Yolanda Conaway provided further details about African Americans being falsely classified as disabled. “what we're finding is that our students of color, both Latino and African-American, are much more likely to be identified as having a learning disability as opposed to not having the right learning experiences or environments that create positive learning experiences. So that disproportionality has ripple effects across our entire district”(Conaway).

interviewees use the word “snitch” when all referring to the reporting of discrimination within the district.

“Or my student will be socially shunned and called a **snitch** if we report it” (DiBrienza).

“some students simply don't want to report. I have heard some students say, I don't want to make a big deal about it, or it's just going to get worse if I report it or people won't like me or I'll be called a **snitch**”(Conaway).

“And she's like, oh, I don't want to tell. I don't want to **snitch**”(Lodomirak).

According to Yolanda Conaway, mental health and microaggressions have a link.

“There's a significant link between those experiences of bias and microaggressions and the mental health and well-being of individuals who experience it”(Conaway).

IMPLICATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

According to these findings, it is essential that in the future, educators not just become more informed and sensitive to the ways microaggressions and discrimination actually operate in the classroom, but also receive appropriate training and resources to feel enabled and confident to work on these issues in the moment. This could look like an in person class held on one of the staff days at schools. This would also be a class that is displayed every year since as time goes on discrimination is perpetuated in different ways. Annual classes would also serve as a reminder that racism won't just go away. The class could give examples of different ways to approach discrimination in a school environment and should be taught by someone who has experience with dealing with microaggressions.

“For teachers, not just for teachers to develop their lens, but for them also to be able to have the skills to respond to discriminatory acts and racism as they see it in the classroom among peers”(Conaway).

Each Bay Area School should also have an easy and clear way for students to report small things like microaggressions or unfair treatment without repercussions. This should be an online form so that students don't feel the pressure of reporting face to face. This would also lower the risk of other students finding out about the report from seeing it in person.

“It would just be great if there was a just this whole see something, report something just a way to do that, I think it feels overwhelming for students right now”(Lodomirak).

If we mitigated the discrimination and microaggressions that go on in Bay Area schools, it would improve the work environment for African American students. Having learning environments where African American students aren't constantly bearing the pressure of experiencing discrimination would boost their confidence and help them focus on their academics. This would ultimately lead to African American students' success and close the gap between their success and their White peers.

Work Cited:

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