AN EXAMINATION OF WORKPLACE RACIAL MICROAGGRESSIONS AND THEIR

EFFECT ON EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE

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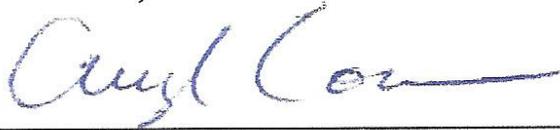Master of Arts in Communication and Leadership Studies

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ABSTRACT

Although laws regulate blatant discrimination in the workplace, researchers have shown that invisible racism occurs through everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental communications. Invisible racism, in the form of microaggressions, includes subtle comments that negate or invalidate the thoughts, feelings, or experiences of a person of color. Microaggressions are words or actions that occur in communication that communicators may be unaware are a form of racism. Racial microaggressions were examined in this study through the lens of symbolic interactionism. This theory studies race as a structural category reproducing inequality, and it illuminates the influence of culture and communication "to reproduce racism and racist practices at all levels" (Musolf, 1992, p.179). This study employed a qualitative methodology, consensual qualitative research (CQR), to investigate the experiences of employees of color and their perceptions of the impact of racial microaggressions in their workplace (Sue, 2010). Twenty self-identified employees of color from a northwestern government employer voluntarily participated in this study and shared their own personal and witnessed experiences with perceived racism within their work environment. The participants indentified eight microaggression domains that relate to interpersonal communication and workplace processes, policies, and procedures. The ninth domain identified the effect of microaggressions on workplace performance, and the tenth domain identified coping mechanisms. The research provided strong support that racial microaggressions occur in the workplace and effect employee performance.

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Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

Importance of the Study

Racism is "inherent in culture and social order...a process that is more than structure and ideology... a process that is routinely created and reinforced through every day practices" (Essed, 2002, p. 177). Racism is harmful and produces negative consequences that oppress and marginalize people of color. Yet, those who practice a subtle form of racism referred to as racial microaggressions may not know it. The term racial microaggressions coined by Psychiatrist Chester M. Pierce in the 1970s, describes "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of other races" (Sue, 2010, p. 271). Individuals may consciously support fair and equitable treatment for all, while unconsciously harboring negative feelings toward people of color. Researchers use this concept to explore how microaggressions "may erode people's mental health, job performance, and the quality of social experience" (Deangelis, 2009, p. 42).

Racial microaggressions manifested within the workplace erect discriminatory barriers that are hard for employees of color to overcome (Rowe, 1990). These types of inequities damage employees in different ways to include how managers and co-workers interpret their attitude, performance, potential for growth, and suitability for advancement (Rowe, 1990; Bielby, 2000; Alleyne, 2004; Constantine & Sue, 2007). In addition, racial microaggressions may manifest as a cold workplace climate, creating a range of emotions in employees of color that aid or promote a non-inclusive and unhealthy environment. The sorting out of feelings about racial microaggressions illuminates differences in culture and contributes to difficult conversations for both white employees and employees of color. Thus, racial conflict adds

complexity to communication about race and complicates resolution to workplace issues (Rowe, 1990; Bielby, 2000; Alleyne, 2004; Constantine & Sue, 2007). The rationalization or denial of microaggressions as racism sustains and keeps racism in force; therefore, an examination of racial microaggressions and their effect is important in determining effective methods of identifying and preventing this subtle form of racism in the workplace.

Statement of Purpose

Essed (2002), introduced the concept "everyday racism" to connect the structural forces of racism with daily routine. According to Essed (2002), many studies identify the dynamics of racism at a societal level, but a need exists to explore the "pervasive impact (of racism) on the daily experiences of blacks" (p. 176). Specifically, there is the need to "make visible the lived experience of racism...and analyze black perceptions about racism in everyday life" (Essed, 2002, p. 176). According to Essed (2002), blacks have a firsthand knowledge of racist ideas through their lived experiences in the dominant culture and their communication about racism within black communities. This study seeks to explore how microaggressions affect the workplace racial climate and employee performance. This study will provide data relevant to the frequency and type of microaggressions that occur in the workplace, as well as provide data on the ways in which microaggressions affect employee's health and performance. The data will provide an understanding of the context of subtle forms of racism in the workplace, and the types of coping strategies developed by employees to deal with racism.

Definitions of Terms Used

Cultural diversity: Representing or demonstrating differences between cultures (Caputo et al., 2002)

Employee of color: An individual employed by an organization that self-reports as non-white.

Employee: An individual employed by an organization.

Ethical communication: Refers to an expression of truth in relationships through avoidance of deceptive or manipulative communication (Caputo et al., 2002).

Microassault: Often-conscious explicit racist remarks or behaviors intended to harm another (Sue et al., 2007, p. 278).

Microinsult: Often-unconscious behaviors or comments that convey rudeness or insensitivity that demean a person's identity or racial heritage (Sue et al., 2007, p. 278).

Microinvalidation: Often-unconscious behaviors or comments that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiences of a person of color (Sue et al., 2007, p. 278).

Racial Climate: Broadly defines the overall racial environment, which includes both perceptions of the workplace in general as well as personal experiences involving discrimination (Bielby, 2000).

Racial Microaggressions: Brief intentional or unintentional, everyday verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and/or insults toward people of other races (Essed, 2002).

Racism: Refers to a process inherent in culture and social order of prejudice or animosity directed towards a person of a different race/culture (Essed, 2002).

Workplace bias: Refers to the difference in career outcomes by gender or race/ethnicity that is not attributable to the differences in skills, qualifications, interests, and preferences (Bielby, 2000).

Organization of Remaining Chapters

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 describes the importance and purpose of the study as well as definitions of terms used. Chapter 2 provides the theoretical basis, the philosophical and ethical assumptions that forms the framework for this study, reviews literature related to this issue, and presents the research questions. Chapter 3 presents the scope of the study and explains the methodologies used for the data collection. Chapter 4 presents the results of the study, and provides discussion regarding the implications of the findings and the relationship to the research questions. Chapter 5 discusses the limitation of this study, recommends areas for further research, and summarizes this study.

Chapter 2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

As long as microaggressions remain invisible or are viewed as innocent and harmless slights, people will continue to "insult, demean, alienate, and oppress marginalized groups" (Sue, 2010, p.19). Through this conduct, oppression directly affects the health and welfare of minorities on a number of levels (Sue, 2010). This exploratory study seeks to understand the dynamics of racial microaggressions in the workplace and their function in marginalizing employees. This review proposes symbolic interactionism as the theoretical underpinning important for understanding how racism affects a person's self-image and perpetuates oppression in visible and invisible ways. Additionally, the philosophical and ethical assumptions provide a framework for considering the shared process of communication as grounded within social identity, ritual, and transcendence. The literature review provides a progressive view of previous research beginning with the racist history of Oregon, continuing through workplace microaggressions, the invisibility of racism through microaggressions, and the effects of microaggressions on employee health and performance.

<div align="center">Theoretical Basis</div>

Symbolic Interactionism

Mead's concept of the social self is integral in the theory later named symbolic interactionism. Social self describes the relationship between the terms "I" and "me." According to Mead (1913), "me" is the person as object, involved as the subject and a presentation of conscious experience, while "I" refers to the recalled image of the self...recalled because once it is presented it has passed into the objective case, meaning that it is no longer "me" (Mead, 1913). Mead (1913) holds that the impression of one's self is derived through introspection and analysis of both the observer and the observed. Thus, people can make judgments about their previous

behaviors and make "I" statements about what their "me's" will and will not do in the future. Connected to "I" and "me," is the running stream of consciousness, a self-awareness, which records stimulations, responses, and memories (Mead, 1913). When people are intensely preoccupied with the objective world, the awareness seemingly disappears, however the experience remains as self-consciousness (Mead, 1913). According to Mead (1913), these stored experiences, sounds, and gestures tend to call out as responses in social interactions. The process of making sense of oneself through introspection and analysis includes the memories retrieved from a person's consciousness, therefore those memories contribute to a person's thoughts about how good or bad they are (Mead, 1913).

George Herbert Mead held that the value in theory is its usefulness in solving complex social problems (Griffin, 2008). Mead's theory, later named symbolic interactionism holds that people act toward others, toward things, and toward events based upon the meaning, they ascribe to them (Griffin, 2008). Essentially, people interpret communication based upon their collective past events such as family beliefs, personalities, work, play, and teachings. Thus, the interaction between a person's combined experiences and the situation helps people construct meaning from the interaction. Meads chief follower Herbert Blumer, categorized the three core principles of symbolic interactionism as meaning, language, and thought (Griffin, 2008). Essentially, meaning relates to how people respond to others based upon the meaning they ascribe to them (Griffin, 2008).   Language relates to how people derive meaning from their interactions with others and their symbolic labeling of that interaction (Griffin, 2008).   Thought relates to how an individual's interpretation of symbols is modified by their own thought processes (Griffin, 2008).

Mead held that people derive their meaning of self by imagining how they look to others, thus the term "looking-glass self" refers to a socially constructed mental self-image (Griffin,

2008, p. 63). Symbolic interactionism holds that humans are not born with a sense of self; therefore, the meaning of self is an ongoing process combining a sense of "I" and "me" (Griffin, 2008, p. 63). The composite product of "I" and "me" is the "generalized other," which represents the organized set of facts people have about the attitudes and expectations of their social group (Griffin, 2008). Mead holds that people refer to the "generalized other" to gain instruction on how to behave or how to evaluate their behavior in social situations (Griffin, 2008).

Symbolic interactionism holds that part of how humans view themselves comes from the image they have of how others see them. Therefore, when a person is repeatedly treated in a racist manner, the image becomes a part of the person's looking glass self. They cannot help but see that image when they consider their collective identity. In this way, oppression continues and weighs upon employees health and performance.

Historically, the post World War II civil rights movement and worldwide migration exposed racism and brought race issues to the forefront (Winant, 2000). This moved racism strategies towards awareness in America and focused on overcoming racial prejudice and discrimination (Winant, 2000). The ensuing approaches increased recognition of racial injustice and inequality, but did not overcome the discriminatory processes (Winant, 2000). According to Winant (2000), sociological perspectives on race have "developed and changed, always reflecting shifts in large-scale political processes" (p. 169). Eliasoph (1999) suggested that drawing attention to the "process of creating contexts" as with symbolic interactionism could add to the previous approaches to race issues, specifically "paying attention to the ways people create real-life contexts" (p. 481). Symbolic Interactionism adds a "dimension that focuses on beliefs, social structures, and on discourses and cultural structures" (Eliasoph, 1999, p. 481).

Understanding racism as a shift in large-scale political processes warrants an examination of power. Musolf (1992) examined power structures through symbolic interactionism and holds that, "power is embedded in the social structure of race, sex, occupations, and everyday interaction and communication" (p. 172). According to Musolf (1992), communication is not just a receipt of information; it is also ritual, associated with a person's "community, communion, fellowship, solidarity, social bonding, and social order" (p. 172). Further, "communication is a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed" (Musolf, 1992, as quoted by Carey 1988, p. 23). Symbolic interactionism studies race as a structural category reproducing inequality. Musolf (1992) points out that symbolic interactionism research includes exploration of the struggle against oppression, and "illuminates the power of culture and communication" to reproduce racism and racist practices at all levels" (p.179). Symbolic interactionism serves as the theoretical underpinning considered in this research.

<div align="center">Philosophical and Ethical Assumptions</div>

This study assumes that communication is multi-modal and takes many forms throughout daily-lived experiences (Caputo, Hazel, McMahon, & Dannels, 2002). Further, that communication is a dynamic process that is ever changing and ongoing within a framework of ever changing and ongoing external factors such as environment and communication partners (Caputo et al., 2002). This study assumes that communication consists of messages sent and received both intentionally and unintentionally, which have shared, unshared, or negotiated meanings (Caputo et al., 2002). Communication as social identity, as ritual, and transcendence provides a philosophical framework with which to explore the dynamic nature of racism in communication.

Communication as social identity holds that understanding individuals occurs over differing levels of abstraction including both personal and social group levels (Harwood, 2006). These levels assist individuals in understanding and judging their personal behaviors in comparison with other individuals and within their social group. Societal influences such as mass communication, group identification, family communication, instructional communication, intercultural communication and electronic/technological communication, assist in forming social identities (Harwood, 2006). When operating at the social group level, individuals tend to separate self and others (deindividuate) which allows for selfless functioning within families, teams, and other group structures (Harwood, 2006). The negative consequence of deindividuating occurs through intergroup conflict and prejudice where racist, sexist, homophobic, and ageist attitudes are the communicative constructs that drive collective action and define identity (Harwood, 2006). In these situations, opposition to the other side is manifested in negative behaviors that draw attention to both sides (Harwood, 2006).

Communication as ritual describes the learned process that allows people to understand and act upon the symbols and cues that direct communication according to normative forms to achieve social ends (Rothenbuhler, 2006). Ritual communication instructs people in both verbal (explicit) and nonverbal (implicit) actions, and construct the daily reality of human life (Rothenbuhler, 2006). Actions and verbal messaging as simple as when to nod or what to say are communicative constructs that carry meaningful or moral implications if dismissed or misread whether or not they were intended (Rothenbuhler, 2006). Thus, thinking of communication as a performance of formal acts highlights the social consequences of communication (Rothenbuhler, 2006, p. 17). Communication as ritual highlights the serious role

of communication, "in a serious world, where form and conduct are as consequential as substance and intention" (Rothenbuhler, 2006).

Communication as transcendence, describes a democratic way of life; one based upon a notion that an ability to experience one another as one experience's self is necessary for a "no essential selves" society (Shepherd, 2006, p. 28). Thus, the implication is that people are not known by their race, culture, or ethnicity, rather by their simultaneous shared experience of self and other. This component describes the physical experience of communication and the associated emotions (Shepherd, 2006). Drawing from communication theorists such as Mead, Shepherd (2006) holds that humans are not born with a sense of self; rather their sense of identity arises from their associations and interactions with others. During the experience of communication individuals feel emotions that become significant about that experience and shape understanding about the interaction (Shepherd, 2006). The experience does not guarantee that the communication is easy or satisfactory, rather communication in racism is hard and dissatisfying (Shepherd, 2006).

This study assumes that workplace communication needs to conform to ethical social and societal practices and processes. Further, that racist communication deviates from those ethical processes both intentionally and unintentionally. The literature review provides a narrative describing a historical perspective of racism in Oregon, workplace racism, the invisibility of racism, and its effects on workplace performance and health.

The Literature

Historical Perspective of Oregon

Historical threads of racism reach deep into Oregon's social fabric. Studies such as *The State of Black Oregon* (2009) and *Communities of Color in Multnomah County: an Unsettling*

Profile (Curry-Stevens & Cross-Hemmer, 2010) detail the continuing racial disparity between whites and communities of color in Oregon. The book *Beyond the Oregon Trail: Oregon's Untold History*, uncovers the climate of racism in Oregon, initiated several years ago by state and federal governments that passed more than 30 laws that intentionally discriminated against non-white citizens (Portland, 2008). Although, legislation repealed outwardly discriminatory laws, the studies revealed the ways in which legal processes has failed to alter the statistical evidence that racism still exists and affects communities of color in Multnomah County, Oregon. Collectively, the studies provide an overview of racial disparity and call for proven and effective methods of eliminating gaps between Whites and people of color related to income, wealth, health, education, and justice (Mundy, 2009). This historical pattern of continuing racial disparity provides a foundation for understanding workplace racial inequity experienced in Multnomah County and its effects on employees of color.

<div align="center">Workplace Racism</div>

Research shows that systems, institutions, and personal attitudes perpetuate workplace bias through laws, policies, processes, and personal value systems (EOC, 2011; Miller & Garran, 2007; Dovidio & Gaertner, 1996; Sue, 2010; Cunningham, 2003). Miller & Garran (2007) examined forms of institutional racism across a web of national organizations, which included housing, education, employment, wealth, health, mental health, criminal justice, politics, and media. They emphasized that the social implications of their research include recognizing and understanding that everyone experiences either privilege or oppression, and that the web of racism affects every organization. Miller & Garran (2007) contend that an overarching web shapes interactions between people and groups, and affects beliefs about fairness and equity in

their respective environments. Thus, racist personal conduct may be an unintentional and invisible implication of the web or culture of institutional racism (Miller & Garran, 2007).

Similarly, Cunningham (2003) looked at the ways in which culture, socialization, and race collide with human thought, emotions, and behavior during conflict situations. The example of the guilt or innocence of OJ Simpson viewed through the lens of 400 years of racial conflict between white and black people provided a backdrop for the polarized viewpoints of America (Cunningham, 2003). According to Cunningham (2003), the socialization of Americans may create a platform for misunderstanding the communication of communities of color. In a moment of conflict, a white person may misunderstand the verbal or physical messages of a person of color. Thus, acting upon the misunderstood messages within the workplace perpetuates racial conflict.

A number of researchers explored racism in terms of its expression of a person's worldview (Sue, 2010; Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000; Miller & Garran, 2007; Constantine et al., 2008; Cunningham, 2003). From this perspective, personal attitudes related to racial and ethnic bias are a part of a person's ethnocentric assumptions, their value system, thus their biases and prejudice reflect in their behavior (Sue, 2010; Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000; Miller & Garran, 2007; Constantine et al., 2008; Cunningham, 2003). The expression of racism emerges subtly through their words and actions, invisibly aggressing against, and marginalizing minorities (Sue, 2010; Alleyne, 2004; Constantine, Smith, Redington & Owens, 2008; Harwood, Huntt & Mendenhall, 2010). These aggressions, referred to as microaggressions are everyday intentional or unintentional slights that communicate an opinion that someone is a lesser human being and does not belong to the dominant group (Sue, 2010; Alleyne, 2004; Constantine, Smith, Redington, & Owens, 2008; Harwood, Huntt, & Mendenhall, 2010). Microaggressions are psychologically

detrimental to people of color affecting their physical, mental, emotional, interpersonal, and spiritual well-being (Alleyne, 2004; Sue, 2010; Miller & Garran, 2008; Sue & Constantine, 2007; DeAngelis, 2009).

<center>Invisibility of Racism</center>

Racism occurs as part of privilege or oppression present in the web of national systems, integrates into social norms through a person's cultural socialization, and contributes to a person's worldview (Miller & Garran, 2007; Dovidio & Gaertner, 1996; Sue, 2010; Cunningham, 2003). Therefore, a person may believe their racist attitudes, remarks, or actions are socially accepted norms rather than intended racial slights. Dovidio & Gaertner (2000) developed the theory aversive racism to describe unintentional racial and ethnic bias. With aversive racism, whites outwardly support all aspects of racial/ethnic equality, yet inwardly harbor unacknowledged negative attitudes about racial/ethnic groups. According to the Dovidio & Gaertner (2000), aversive racism characterizes the racial attitudes of many well-educated and liberal whites in America.

Using the lens of aversive racism, symbolic racism theory, and modern racism, Dovidio & Gaertner (1996) studied the effect of unintentional bias related to employment and advancement of historically disadvantaged people. They examined various studies to identify the subtle nature of contemporary bias in hiring practices, which occurs unintentionally and affects fair and unbiased treatment of disadvantaged groups. They also examined self-reported racial prejudice and bias in selection decisions from an aversive racism framework. This research explored changes over a 10-year period in expressed racial attitudes and patterns of discrimination in hiring recommendations. Dovidio & Gaertner (1996) found that policies designed to protect disadvantaged groups might protect only the overt discrimination while

failing to address subtle issues of biases such as favoritism. As noted in Multnomah County, Oregon racism is seldom visible at the level of policy, and data use obscures or oppresses disparity (Curry-Stevens et al., 2010). The result is "inequitable policy and devastating outcomes for people of color" (Curry-Stevens et al., 2010, p. 5).

Ashburn-Nardo, Morris, & Goodwin, (2008) agree that racism is sometimes committed unknowingly. They suggested that a discriminatory event might not always be recognizable as a discriminatory event by the perpetrator. This lack of recognition may fail to validate for the person receiving the bias, their perception of the behavior as discrimination. Thus, non-recognition of the racist event may contribute to their non-reporting of the incident (Ashburn-Nardo, et al. 2008). Ashburn-Nardo et al. (2008) referred to a racist event as a microaggression. Sue (2010) used this term in his research and categorized microaggressions into groups related to microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations. Microassaults are the obvious intentional discriminatory actions; microinsults are the verbal or nonverbal and environmental communications that subtly express rudeness and insensitively that demean a person's racial heritage, and microinvalidations are subtle comments that negate or nullify the thoughts, feelings, or experiences of a person of color (Miller & Garran, 2008; Sue & Constantine, 2007; DeAngelis, 2009).

Sue (2010) contends that the subtle messages of racism are more harmful than overt acts of racism. Subtle messages are neither illegal nor regulated and the persons committing the microaggression may be unaware that it is a form of racism. The person aggressing may be unaware of the harmful impact of the microaggression. Sue (2010) holds that the experience of racial microaggressions upon people of color is a daily occurrence and often invisible. If a white woman clutches her purse tighter or a white man checks his back pocket for his wallet as they

pass a black man on the sidewalk, they are both sending an invisible message that blacks are thieves. A police officer who stops a Hispanic to check his immigration status is sending the invisible message that Hispanics are in the country illegally.

According to the research cited, racism is often invisible (Miller & Garran, 2008; Sue & Constantine, 2007; DeAngelis, 2009). A person's socialization and cultural conditioning cultivates unconscious biases and misinformation that contribute to racism, which surfaces in the form of microaggressions (Miller & Garran, 2008; Sue & Constantine, 2007; DeAngelis, 2009). As long as microaggressions are viewed as innocent and harmless slights, they remain invisible, and people will continue to "insult, demean, alienate, and oppress marginalized groups" (Sue, 2010, p.19).

The Effects of Microaggressions

The foregoing research suggested that microaggressions negatively affect racial and ethnic groups as well as other socially devalued groups including international, cultural, sexual orientation, transgender, disabilities, class, and religion (Miller & Garran, 2008; Sue & Constantine, 2007; Sue, 2010; DeAngelis, 2009). While the literature suggests that microaggressions occur in any population of marginalized groups, this review focuses on settings that require performance such as work and school, specifically examining the types of microaggressions that occur, the frequency with which they occur, and the effect on employee health.

Alleyne (2004) examined workplace conflict and its negative effects on employee health, self-esteem, and work performance. In this context, workplace conflict refers to multifaceted and enduring racial harassment, such as bullying, scapegoating, and other discriminatory and oppressive practices. In this research, Alleyne (2004) used thirty black employees who answered

questions on a prepared questionnaire designed to help the employees tell their work story. Alleyne (2004) found two main themes, one related to external factors (contact with others) and internal factors (feelings of the employee). Alleyne (2004) found that workplace oppression was not overt, rather existed in subtle comments and behaviors such as failing to notice the employees presence, responding with silence when the employee expected support, refusal to make eye contact when appropriate to do so, habitual exclusion, absence of pleasantries, and use of negative adjectives when referring to people of color. The employees also reported overt acts of racism, related to workplace disparity over issues between black and white employees. Alleyne (2004) found that in response to external factors, black employees experienced stigmatic stress, developed defensive stances, defensive attitudes, experienced a questioning of their identity - a wounding of self, felt harmed from a perceived experience of unfairness, harassment, and victimization. Black employees experienced health problems requiring long periods of convalescence, post-traumatic stress and depression disorders, and career effecting choices to either submit to the abuse or quit their jobs (Alleyne, 2004).

Research by Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso (2000) examined collegiate racial climate and the effect of racial microaggressions on African American students. Their research and findings were similar to Alleyne (2004). In this study, Solorzano et al. (2000) used a focus group of African American students who attended three elite predominantly white colleges. The students covered seven areas of inquiry related to their race related experiences on campus. The racial microaggressions included verbal and nonverbal assumptions about African Americans, which described a tense environment for them both inside and outside the classroom. Solorzano, et al. (2000) found that the study assisted them in uncovering subtle and hidden forms of racism, which included racial microaggressions within the classroom setting, racial microaggressions

outside the classroom setting, and racial microaggression within social spaces on campus.

Solorzano, et al. (2000) found that racial microaggressions in both academic and social spaces have a greater effect on African American students because they affect feelings of self-worth and isolate students. In addition, students must navigate a system of racial stereotypes on a daily basis (Solorzano, et al., 2000).

Constantine, Smith, Redington, & Owens (2008) conducted a qualitative study designed to look at the effect of microaggressions towards black faculty members in counseling and psychology programs. The researchers used interviews and qualitative analyses of twelve black faculty member's narratives to uncover the types of racial microaggressions involved. The interpretation of the interviews revealed seven themes related to ways in which the employees felt marginalized in their workplace. The themes included feelings of invisibility, marginalization and hypervisibility, experiences of others questioning their credentials, experience of receiving inadequate mentoring in the workplace, organizational expectations based upon race, difficulty distinguishing between race and gender discrimination, feelings of self-consciousness regarding clothing, hair and speech, and self-development of coping strategies. The limitations in this study included the small sample, verbal accounts were not included in the results, and the data was subject to the researcher's interpretation. Constantine, et al. (2008) concludes that an understanding of contemporary racism and racial microaggressions can improve the health of employees, clients, and programs.

Research by professors at the University of Illinois assisted by the Center on Democracy in a Multiracial Society explored various forms of racial microaggressions, the effect on students, and the ways in which students cope with microaggressions (Harwood, Huntt, Mendenhall, & Lewis, 2010). The researchers used critical race theory (CRT) as the foundational

basis of the study. Critical race theory explores the historical role of law in constructing and maintaining white social domination and subordination. CRT in this research relates to how the laws of the university, in both spoken and unspoken policies and procedures affect students. Harwood et al. (2010) looked at three forms of microaggressions: microassaults, which consist of verbal or nonverbal behavior intentionally, used to hurt someone, microinsults which consist of normally unconscious behaviors such as subtle demeaning snubs, dismissive looks or gestures, and microinvalidations which "minimize or deny the racialized experiences of people of color" (p. 6). Harwood, et al. (2010) conducted their study in three phases. Phase I and II served to gather qualitative data descriptions of microaggressions through focus groups with students of color. Phase III quantified the types and scope of racial microaggressions through a survey of students of color. The study uncovered four types of racial microaggressions experienced in university housing specifically, 1) racial slurs written in dorms, 2) having a different set of rules, 3) having to listen to racial jokes by roommates and peers, and 4) minimizing racial slurs by persons with authority to help (Harwood, et al., 2010). The study uncovered three types of racial microaggressions experienced in the college environment specifically, 1) perceived segregation, 2) racialization of housing assignments, and 3) perception of the student having lived in the projects (Harwood, et al., 2010). The research uncovered a variety of coping strategies used by students of color in response to their feelings of fear, anger, frustration, disbelief, awkwardness, uncomfortable, isolation and invisibility. The research indentified areas in which changes in policies, procedures, and process resulted in decreased racial microaggressions (Harwood, et al., 2010).

Collectively, the microaggression research called for an in-depth inquiry into the daily lives and events of people of color. Thus, researchers collected data through prepared

questionnaires, focus groups, interviews, and/or surveys. The researchers used qualitative

analysis to indentify the types of microaggressions used, their frequency, the types of feelings

involved, the effect on employee productivity, and coping mechanisms. The researcher used

qualitative analysis to categorize and interpret meaning from the events.

<div align="center">Summary of Literature</div>

The research shows that racism persists in America, perpetuated by systems, institutions,

and personal attitudes through laws, policies, processes, and personal value systems.

Racism occurs as part of privilege or oppression present in the web of national systems,

integrates into social norms through a person's cultural socialization, and contributes to a

person's worldview (Miller & Garran, 2007; Dovidio & Gaertner, 1996; Sue, 2010; Cunningham,

2003). The overarching web of international, state, and local organizations shapes interactions

between people and groups, and affects beliefs about fairness and equity in workplace

environments. Thus, racist personal or employer conduct may be an unintentional and invisible

implication of the web or culture of institutional racism (Miller & Garran, 2007). Research

regarding racial attitudes and patterns of discrimination in hiring recommendations found that

policies designed to protect disadvantaged groups might protect only the overt discrimination

while failing to address subtle issues of bias (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1996). A number of

researchers focused on racism in terms of its expression of a person's worldview. Specifically,

with respect to how their biases and prejudice reflect in their behavior (Sue 2010; Dovidio &

Gaertner, 2000; Miller & Garran, 2007; Constantine et al., 2008; Cunningham, 2003). The bias

or racism referred to in the literature pertains to microaggressions. Microaggressions are brief

intentional or unintentional, everyday verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, that

communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and/or insults toward people of other

races (Essed, 2002; Sue, 2010; Alleyne, 2004; Constantine, Smith, Redington, & Owens 2008; Harwood, Huntt, & Mendenhall, 2010). Microaggressions are psychologically detrimental to people of color affecting their physical, mental, emotional, interpersonal, and spiritual well-being (Alleyne, 2004; Sue, 2010; Miller & Garran, 2008; Sue & Constantine, 2007; DeAngelis, 2009). The researchers investigated microaggressions by collecting data through prepared questionnaires, focus groups, interviews, and/or surveys. The researchers used qualitative analysis in their research to indentify the types of microaggressions used, their meaning, the frequency, the types of emotions experienced, the effect on employee productivity, and the persons coping mechanisms.

The literature provides a theoretical basis for the study and uncovers specific questions for the research:

RQ1: Do employees experience microaggressions in the workplace, and with what frequency do microaggressions occur in workplace communication?

(Dovidio & Gaertner, 1996; Miller & Garran, 2007; Sue, 2010; Cunningham, 2003; Alleyne, 2004; and Constantine, et al., 2008)

RQ2: What are the types of microaggressions that occur in the workplace?

(Dovidio & Gaertner, 1996; Miller & Garran, 2007; Sue, 2010; Cunningham, 2003; Alleyne, 2004; Solorzano, et al., 2000; and Constantine, et al., 2008)

RQ3: How does an experience of microaggression(s) affect the health of employees of color?

(Dovidio & Gaertner, 1996; Miller & Garran, 2007; Sue, 2010; Cunningham, 2003; Alleyne, 2004; Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Solorzano et al., 2000; Constantine, et al., 2008; and Harwood, Huntt & Mendenhall, 2010).

RQ4: How does an experience of microaggression(s) affect the workplace productivity of employees of color?

(Dovidio & Gaertner, 1996; Miller & Garran, 2007; Sue, 2010; Cunningham, 2003; Alleyne, 2004; Solorzano et al., 2000; and Constantine, et al., 2008)

RQ5: What are the coping strategies developed by employees of color who experience workplace microaggression(s)?

(Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2008; Miller & Donner, 2000; Sue & Constantine, 2010; Alleyne, 2004; and Harwood, Huntt & Mendenhall, 2010)

CHAPTER 3: SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

Scope of the Study

Racism in the form of microaggressions occurs in many facets of the lived lives of marginalized people. This exploratory study sought to gain a better understanding of how racist communication occurs in the workplace and affects the workplace climate and performance of employees of color. The methods are consistent with other microaggression research and did not control for the influence of other factors that might contribute to workplace racism. While not generalizable to specific ethnic groups, the data provides a foundation for building future diversity programs and may inform participants of the ways in which they share challenges. The data may provide a means for fostering community and change.

The scope of this study focused on adult employees working full-time or part-time within the field of probation and parole. The researcher probed into the professional lives of adult employees who work for a large public employer in the Pacific Northwest. The research participants were limited to employees of color irrespective of age, sex, race, culture, ethnicity, financial status, job classification, or other social grouping. Since this study used purposive sampling and voluntary participation, the participants represent only those employees who volunteered to share their narratives. The research focused on self-reports of negative racial experiences within the workplace and the resulting effect on employees. The study strives to provide a snapshot of the effect of workplace microaggressions, thus is a qualitative study using semi-structured interview and survey methods. In communication research, the survey approach is widely used to describe or explain the attitudes, opinions, thoughts, and behaviors of people regarding an issue (Rubin et al., p. 218, 2010). Survey research is efficient in gathering data from participants and focuses on actions and reactions of an identified sample of people, and includes

self-reports of feelings and behaviors collected through or by survey questionnaires (Rubin, et al., 2010, p. 218). The four basic methods of data collection in survey research include personal interviews, telephone interviews, mail questionnaires, and self-administered surveys (Rubin et al., p. 218, 2010). This study incorporated all of the survey types.

Methodology of the Study

This study employed a qualitative methodology, consensual qualitative research (CQR), to investigate the experiences of employees of color and their perceptions of the impact of racial microaggressions in their workplace (Sue, 2010). Qualitative methods prioritize lived experiences, social context, and the participant's perspective (Sue, 2010). CQR has been established as an effective methodology for studying racial microaggressions (Sue, 2010 as quoted by Kim, Brenner, Liang, & Asay, 2003; Sue et al., 2007).

This study draws upon the methods of previous research, which identified common microaggression themes, such as questioning the intelligence of an employee of color, color blindness, or thinking of certain races as inherently criminal. Each theme, described an area of thought (domain) based upon its common characteristics within a theme of microaggressions. The previous researchers collected their data through the survey process, not asking about each of the domains, rather asking for a description of the racist event, and allowing the data to emerge naturalistically and unsolicited. Therefore, the researcher also used the constant comparative analysis to compare interview data with the new interview data as it emerged naturalistically to understand its differences and similarities. This progressive process compared the data with previously identified microaggression themes to apply to event to a category, as well as determined any new types of microaggression. The data were obtained through five modes of survey data collection in two phases. The first phase collected data about workplace

racial experiences through a semi-structured questionnaire. The data were collected through face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, email questionnaire, and printed questionnaires returned through interoffice mail. The second phase consisted of a survey by Survey Gizmo (Appendix D) to collect data related to how often racial themes occurred and the racial event affected the employee. The data were collected through completed surveys from the internet link.

The researcher used a grid system to organize the data (see Appendix E & F) into three categories of microaggressions, which includes microinsults, microassaults, and microinvalidations, (Sue, 2010; Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2008; Miller & Donner, 2000; Sue & Constantine, 2010; and Alleyne, 2004). Microassaults are obvious intentional discriminatory actions (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2008; Miller & Donner, 2000; Sue & Constantine, 2010; and Alleyne, 2004). Microinsults are verbal or nonverbal and environmental communications that subtly express rudeness and insensitively that demean a person's racial heritage (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2008; Miller & Donner, 2000; Sue & Constantine, 2010; and Alleyne, 2004). Microinvalidations are subtle comments that negate or nullify the thoughts, feelings, or experiences of a person of color (Sue, 2010; Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2008; Miller & Donner, 2000; Sue & Constantine, 2010; and Alleyne, 2004). The categories correspond to verbal, nonverbal, and environmental manifestations of microaggression, thus each emerging theme corresponds to one of the categories and one of the types of microaggressions.

Participants

Twenty self-identified employees of color from a northwestern government employer voluntarily participated in this study. The researcher used purposive sampling to identify employees of color within the department. Thereafter, the employees received email notification of the study with a request for volunteer participation. The researcher responded only to

employees who requested contact. Sensitive to the revealing nature of data and voiced employee

fear, the research does not include demographic data, which might identify participants. The

common characteristic of the group includes their identification as a person of color, their

employer, and their willingness to share their experiences for this research as a greater good.

Researcher

The researcher is an employee of color, conducting research for the partial completion of

a master's degree, having research experience limited to scholastic studies. The researcher has

gained expertise in cultural competency through participation in study and action groups, which

are associated with cultural competency, oppression, diversity, and social justice. The central

role of the researcher within qualitative research necessitates the exploration of the researcher's

personal values, assumptions, and biases prior to data collections and analysis (Sue, 2010). The

assumptions include the following: (1) The researcher has experienced racial microaggressions

and will be open to speaking about them, (2) The researcher will identify with employees of

color who have had similar experiences, (3) Discussion of racial microaggressions include a

person of color's experiences both inside and outside of work, (4) Employees of color may

understate or overstate their experiences depending upon their perceived status within the

organization. The goal is to understand that bias is inherent in this study and to minimize the

undue influence of research bias, which alters the voice of the participants.

Measures

The researcher developed a semi-structured research interview protocol (see Appendix C)

through a review of literature on previous microaggression research (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2008;

Miller & Donner, 2000; Sue & Constantine, 2010; Alleyne, 2004; and Harwood, Huntt &

Mendenhall, 2010). The researcher led the questions and research. The research protocol

explained the concept of racism and prompted participants to share their own personal and witnessed experiences with perceived racism within their work environment. The personal questions 1- 8 asked questions intended to generate ideas on how participants experience racial microaggressions in the workplace. The setting and action questions 1-12 asked questions intended to determine where microaggressions occur, who the aggressors are, and how the participants responded.

The researcher developed a semi-structured survey (see Appendix D)based upon the responses received through the structured interview of participants consistent with past microaggression research (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2008; Miller & Donner, 2000; Sue & Constantine, 2010; Alleyne, 2004; and Harwood, Huntt & Mendenhall, 2010). The researcher provided the participants with the link to the SurveyGizmo survey. Questions 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11 ask about the frequency of indentified themes. Questions 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, and 12 ask the level of the participants' feelings about this event. Questions 13 and 14 ask the level of participants' feelings about overall racial microaggressions experienced by them and other employees-of-color. Questions 15 and 16 ask participants about the effect of racial microaggressions on their performance and their use of identified coping mechanisms. Question 17 asks participants to choose the ways (identified by participants) that racism remains and perpetuates throughout the workplace.

Cross-sectional retrospective

According to Sue (2010), the core of recent literature on microaggressions has been within cross-sectional and retrospective research designs (p. 326). This research method involves the collection of self-reported data regarding the experiences of racial/ethnic minorities and other marginalized groups (p. 326). Participants in the study share their experiences and depend upon

their retrospective recollection in reconstructing those events (Sue, 2010). The themes collected

from self-report allow researchers to understand the participants' experiences of

microaggressions (Sue, 2010). According to Sue (2010), the defining feature of microaggressions

is the conflict experienced between a subject and other(s), thus there is not a correct recall of the

event, rather understanding the subjective indeterminacy of the experience is important (Sue,

2010, p. 326). The data collected through this research, assesses the prevalence of

microaggressions during the workplace interactions of employees-of-color. The cross-sectional

research method in this study does not determine cause and effect, rather looks at a specific

group of people to see if an activity (microaggressions) occurs that affects their health and

workplace performance.

Confidentiality

This research process was voluntary and participants signed an informed consent form

prior to participation. The consent form named the contact person and discussed the procedures;

risks, alternatives and subject's rights, and confidentiality (see Appendix B). Alternatively,

participants returned the completed survey questionnaires by email or interoffice mail. The

research design protects participant privacy by not divulging personal information and keeping

responses strictly confidential. The research design protects participant confidentiality by not

requiring participants to provide their name, personal identification, position, or any information

that identifies their position within the department. Although the project cannot link individual

responses with specific participants, any notes taken to ensure the accuracy of information were

destroyed following their incorporation into the research report. This research is an investigation

of a sole researcher and personal data is not shared with others on this project or because of this

project.

CHAPTER 4: THE STUDY

Introduction

The data from this study were gathered using five modes of survey data collection in two phases. The first phase consisted of personal contact with participants to gather data about their workplace racial experiences through prepared questions (Appendix C). Some participants met with the researcher personally and completed the questionnaire; others completed the questionnaire through telephone interviews, and some completed the questionnaire by email, or interoffice memo. The researcher developed themes from the data collected (Appendix E & F). The second phase consisted of a survey by SurveyGizmo (Appendix D) that provided specific data related to how often racial themes occurred and how the racial event affected the employee. These methods allowed the researcher to collect data taking the comfort and anonymity of the participants into consideration as well as working with varying schedules and shifts.

Data Analysis

CQR Data Analysis

1. **Domains:** The researcher identified a list of broad themes from the collected data. The themes compared with previously identified themes in microaggression research, (1) Ascription of Intelligence, (2) Color Blindness/Assimilate, (3) Criminality/Assumption of Criminal Status, (4) Denial of Racism, (5) Myth of Meritocracy, (6) Pathologizing Cultural Values/Communication Styles, (7) Traditional Prejudicing and Stereotyping, (8) Environmental Microaggressions, (9) The Effect of Microaggressions on Workplace Performance, (10) Coping Mechanisms.

2. **Core Ideas**: The researcher organized the data received from each participant into core ideas, which are brief, succinct descriptions or quotes.

3. **Cross-Analysis**: The researcher compared themes with previous research conducted by Sue (2010) to ensure that core ideas were appropriately placed.

4. **Stability Check:** The researcher checked data for the emergence of new themes. No new themes surfaced, thus no additional data collection was needed.

5. **Reporting Findings:** Table 1 (see Appendix E) and Table 2 (see Appendix F) were constructed to provide a visual representation of the domains, categories and subcategories. CQR is a qualitative method, but allows for the quantification of the data with frequency labels (Sue, 2010 as quoted by Hill, Thompson, and Williams, 1997). Frequency labels include, never, less than once a day, once or more a day, once or more a week, once or more a month, and once or more a year.

<div align="center">Results of the Study</div>

Ten domains emerged from the analysis. The following section describes each of the domains and their findings.

Domain (1): Ascription of Intelligence

This domain pertains to an assignment of intelligence based upon a person's race, culture, or ethnicity, such as "People of color are generally not as intelligent as whites" (Sue, 2010, p. 32). Nearly half of the participants experienced racial microaggressions in this domain one or more times monthly, one-quarter experienced this once or more a day, one-quarter experienced this once or more a year, while the remaining participants experienced this one or more times a week. Managers, peers, co-workers, and clients delivered microaggressions in perceived conscious and unconscious ways that directly or indirectly questioned the intelligence of employees of color and their ability to do their job. This domain was demonstrated in two of the microaggression categories of microassaults and microinvalidations (see Appendix E).

A microassault includes communication that is explicit such as intentional name-calling or purposeful discriminatory comments related to intellect (Sue, 2010, p. 8). For example, one participant said, "I have been told that I think backwards." When talking more about this with the co-worker, the participant learned that the co-worker was saying Indians think backwards. Another participant reported that a trainer said, "There ain't enough time in the day to teach you how to do this job." This comment not only hurt the participant's feelings, but created great concern about passing probation. One employee overheard the comment, "Well, it would nice to be hired only because I'm bi-lingual, and not have to suffer layoffs...because I'm bi-lingual, and get to keep my job even though everyone does it for me...because I'm bi-lingual." This comment caused the participant to feel a number of emotions to include, anger, sadness, frustration, and indignation. The participant reported still feeling those emotions every time the subject comes up. One comment referred to the racial groups as a whole, "We are grouped together as not as bright and just don't get it...they say you can't explain anything to Indians."

Microinvalidations include communication that negates or nullifies the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality related to intelligence (Sue, 2010 p.8). This is demonstrated in a participant's experience with a manager. Manager: "This is not the correct entry. Participant: Yes, I will change it. Manager: Do you see how this is different? Participant: Yes I do. Manager: But, you didn't see that before and it is the wrong entry. Participant: I see it now and will make the changes. Manager: How can I help you not to make this error again? Participant: (Frustrated) I won't make this error again. I understand how to do this. Manager: Ok, let's back up...I'm just trying to help you. I don't think you understand how important it is to do this right." This participant stated that he/she had already been notified of the error by a lead worker, thus the manager's intensity was frustrating. The participant felt that white employees

did not receive that kind of "double-supervision," nor did the manager embarrass them if they expressed their emotions.

This domain also demonstrated microaggressions behaviorally, without an actual comment made, "If I don't type, write, or move fast enough, I get the look like I am stupid. So, I feel rushed and more afraid to make mistakes." Other slights in this domain involved co-workers or managers pointedly making allowances for employees of color, such as these comments from white employees to employees of color, "This is complicated, why don't I get somebody else to help me," and "It's OK if you can't get this... you don't even read and write English?" According to the participants the co-worker's assumption was that, they lacked the aptitude to figure the tasks out, although they were not given the opportunity. One participant reported a co-worker questioning the value of their education such as, "You have a college degree? Oh...it must be some type of General Ed program." When the participant asked what the co-worker meant by a General Ed program, the co-worker talked around it, but did not explain. Another participant stated that when expressing interest in an open position a co-worker said, "You wouldn't qualify for that job. You have to have at least a BA." The participant explained that the co-worker assumed the participant lacked the qualifications because they were a person of color and/or were working in a lower classification.

One participant reported that a co-worker joked about racist remarks and laughing about it. Co-worker: "You passed the driver's test? (Participant) Why are you so shocked? Co-worker: Hey, I'm joking, it's an online test that nobody fails, but everyone knows you guys can't drive! (Co-worker laughs)." The participant stated that co-worker acted indignant at first and then relaxed before making the "joking" comment. The participant stated DCJ employees do not think they are racist and when making jokes, they think everyone shares the joke. Another example in

this domain includes microaggressions delivered by clients. The agency supervises clients and

one participant reported, "I am bi-lingual and if I have to ask clients to speak clearly and spell

their name they sometimes yell it back at me slowly...I'm not deaf or stupid. It happens all the

time."

Domain (2): Color Blindness/Assimilate

This domain pertains to statements that a white person does not want to acknowledge

race, and that it is better to assimilate within the dominant culture in both personal behaviors and

within the organization. This includes statements or thoughts such as "When I look at you I don't

see color," "Denying a person's racial/ethnic experiences," or "Assimilate/acculturate to the

dominant culture" (Sue, 2010, p. 32). Over one-third of the participants experienced racial

microaggressions in this domain one or more times monthly, slightly less than one-quarter of the

participants experienced this less than once a year, slightly less than one-quarter of the

participants experienced this once or more a week, while the remaining participants experienced

this one or more times a day or never. Managers, peers, co-workers, and clients delivered

microaggressions in perceived conscious and unconscious ways that directly or indirectly

demonstrated color blindness and a need to assimilate into the dominant culture. This domain

was demonstrated in three of the microaggression categories to include microassaults,

microinsults, and microinvalidations (see Appendix E).

Microassaults in this domain refer to explicit intentional name-calling or purposeful

discriminatory comments (Sue, 2010, p. 8). One participant reported, "A coworker told me that I

dress nicely because I'm trying to feel equal (to white people)." The participant explained that

dressing nicely is part of her professional image, but it is also part of her upbringing. Further,

that it has nothing to do with "trying to feel equal." Another participant reported a coworker

asked, "Isn't it good that you can pass for white?" The implication in these statements is that the participants are not equal to the white employees and have barriers trying to assimilate into the white culture.

Microinsults refer to comments that convey rudeness, insensitivity, and demean a person's racial heritage or identity (Sue, 2010). For example, some participants stated, "Some work sites are very "white" and managers and co-workers stare at employees of color, and scrutinize their work in obvious ways." Similarly, a participant stated, "I was introduced as an Indian to explain my jewelry and style of dress." This participant stated that co-workers or peers do not understand boundaries and actually touch jewelry or clothing as if it is acceptable behavior. Several of the participants made comments such as "It's better to tone down, don't act your culture...be subdued, "or "There's a requirement of don't act black...take off your black...they don't want to see color." Some participants stated that speaking their first language was an issue in the workplace, "Co-workers and managers discourage us from speaking in our native tongue while on break."

Microinvalidations in this domain refer to comments that negate or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality related to color blindness/assimilation (Sue, 2010, p. 8). Participant statements such as, "Culture is dismissed...it seems like others don't want to hear about difference," demonstrate this domain. In addition, "There is an unwritten requirement to have white attitudes...a requirement to fit in and act white." Some participants stated "Managers don't like the conflict racism brings so don't want to deal with it." The dismissal of participants' feelings about microaggressions sometimes included body language, which the participants interpreted as a look of frustration, a look of disgust, a sense of impatience, rolling eyeballs, and/or sighing.

Domain (3) Criminality/Assumption of Criminal Status

The domain pertains to statements or actions that presume that a person of color is dangerous, criminal or deviant based upon their race, culture, or ethnicity such as "You are dangerous," " A white person waits to ride the next elevator when a person of color is on it," or "You are a criminal," (Sue, 2010, p. 32). Nearly one-third of the participants experienced racial microaggressions in this domain one or more times monthly, nearly one-third experienced this once or more a year, while the remaining participants experienced this one or more times a day, or one or more times a week. Managers, peers, and co-workers demonstrated this domain in perceived conscious and unconscious ways that directly or indirectly demonstrated criminality or an assumption of criminal status. This domain was demonstrated in the microaggression category of microinsults (see Appendix E).

Microinsults convey rudeness, insensitivity, and demean a person's racial heritage or identity as it relates to character (Sue, 2010, p. 8). For example, a participant stated, "I can tell people are suspicious of me when they leave the room rather than be alone with me." The participant explained that a person leaving the room because it is time for them to leave is different than leaving because they are in the room. The participant explained that there is usually a pleasantness exchanged such as eye contact, a nod, or a smile, not just a quick escape. Another participant stated, "I had a blond female co-worker who always acted like I was a threat to her, so I don't get into situations where I'm alone with white women." This participant also indicated a feeling that the co-worker felt some fear. One participant wondered what the logic was behind a managers concern about teaming up with another black employee, "I had a manger who didn't want me to team up with a black woman." The employee did not know what the

manager was thinking and wondered if the manager felt the public would be afraid if there were two black people teaming up.

Some participant comments reflected their historical response to microaggressive behavior, "I think that some people are afraid of people of color...I think they just naturally move away from them, stay in well-lit rooms or in areas with other white people." Other participants experienced reactions from others in their workplace if the congregated together, "Sometimes when a bunch of us gets together in a break room, you'll see a white person take one look and leave. Sometimes, I think we are too loud and they close the door if there is one."

Some comments in this domain related to the employees perception of the participant's knowledge of criminal activity. For example, participants reported co-workers asking if they knew how to commit criminal activity or assumed that they knew how to commit crimes."A co-worker talked to me like I am an expert in car theft. I don't know how to steal a car." Similarly, "Some peers and co-workers think I have gang involved family and kind of ask around about whether or not I might have gotten involved in gangs." Other comments reflected an indirect connection to the criminal element such as, "I am bi-lingual and translate for other employees on just little matters. Sometimes I have to clarify words, especially if there is a difference in dialect and it must look like we are having a personal conversation. I have been told that it's rude to do that (not translate every word) and once I felt like the employee was suspicious of me. He asked how I knew this client! ...like I'm hanging out with criminals!" Additionally, the build of a participant evoked concern, "I'm kind of big, so I'm perceived as a threat."

Domain (4) Myth of Meritocracy

This domain pertains to statements or actions that race, culture or ethnicity does not play a role in life success such as "I believe the most qualified person should get the job," People of

color are given extra unfair benefits because of their race" (Sue, 2010, p. 33). Nearly half of the participants experienced racial microaggressions in this domain one or more times yearly. Nearly one-third of the participants experienced this once or more a month, while the remaining participants experienced this one or more times a day or never. Managers, peers, and co-workers demonstrated this domain in perceived conscious and unconscious ways that directly or indirectly demonstrated a myth of meritocracy. The myth of meritocracy was demonstrated in the microaggression category of microinvalidations (see Appendix E).

Microinvalidations are comments that negate or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality related to meritocracy (Sue, 2010, p. 8). For example, one participant stated, "My manager mentioned that affirmative action doesn't allow managers to provide the best employee for the job. I feel like the manager was saying that I wasn't the best for the job, but was expecting to be transferred due to affirmative action." Similarly another participant stated, "I feel as if managers don't think I had to work as hard to get hired...maybe they think I am not as qualified...and I think that they don't see me as promotable because of that." Some participants commented about employees are chosen for assignments. For example a participant stated, "Managers say that training, transfer for special assignment, and employee development opportunities are merit and need based, but I never seem to get any." These comments demonstrate how workplace reality negates and/or nullifies participant reality about what meritocracy means.

Some comments in this domain referred to a thought that employees of color have special privileges. For example a participant stated, "Some of my co-workers seem to have the idea that I didn't have to work as hard to get an education and they question whether or not I'm as qualified." The participant explained that co-workers think that people of color get scholarships

and tutors in the "dumb-downed classes." Similarly, "White people always think employees of color and those from a different culture have special privileges." Some comments refer to a thought that employers or managers receive compensation for choosing employees of color, "I have heard a co-worker say that having a racial or cultural status ensures more hiring or promotional points for the employee and the manager gets diversity points... without even considering that I am highly qualified." Another participant stated, "I have heard others (in their workplace) say, 'Just play your race card,' but they also think that this department accepts a "race card."

Domain (5) Pathologizing Cultural Values/Communication Styles

This domain pertains to thinking that values and communication of the dominant white culture are ideal and that something is wrong with non-white culture and communication such as "Asking a black person why they have to be so loud," or "Dismissing racial or cultural practices within the workplace" (Sue, 2010, p. 33). More than half of the participants experienced racial microaggressions in this domain once or more a day, nearly one-third experienced this domain one or more times per week, while the remaining participants experienced this domain one or more times a month or never. Peers and co-workers demonstrated this domain through perceived conscious and unconscious ways that directly or indirectly demonstrated racial and cultural values and communication styles as abnormal. This domain was demonstrated in three of the microaggression categories, specifically microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations (see Appendix E).

Comments in the microinsult category convey rudeness, insensitivity, and demean a person's racial heritage or identity related to a thought that cultural values and communication styles other than white are abnormal (Sue, 2010, p. 8). For example, a participant stated, "I have

heard statements by co-workers regarding the inability of certain races to fit in, like Indians are stubborn, African Americans are ignorant, Africans are stand-offish, or they are considered as acting better than African Americans. So they must be saying something about me." This participant extrapolated racism from the comments overhead in the workplace. Similarly, "We have clients from different races and my co-workers make jokes about how they talk or act, and they forget... or they don't care... that I'm from that same race and I talk and act that same way!" Another participant reflected a similar thought in the statement, "I think it is very immature for co-workers to mock accents and laugh about it." One participant talked about the questioning of cultural practices, "White culture is emphasized as normal...I've been asked about my cultural practices like what I do is not normal."

Microassaults in this domain include explicit intentional name-calling or purposeful discriminatory comments (Sue, 2010, p. 8). For example, a participant stated, "One Easter time, a co-worker asked what I did to celebrate Easter. The co-worker said 'we know you guys are pagan and don't believe in God. Indians are savages and non-believers." Another participant experienced this in terms of daily habits that were criticized, "I use different words, and do things differently because I learned to do things differently. I want to do it their (white co-worker, manager) way, but I think some managers and co-workers think I am not learning on purpose, maybe I'm stubborn, maybe I'm resisting fitting in, maybe I don't understand how important it is to fit in. But...I am different, I can't argue with them." The participant explained that agreeing that there are differences (in cultural habits) seemed like admitting a wrongdoing, thus it was confusing.

Microinvalidations include comments that negate or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality related to cultural values and communication styles (Sue, 2010, p.

8). One participant stated, "It doesn't come up often, but it seems like if there is a conversation about our personal religious and philosophical beliefs, I feel like I'm always defending what I practice to my co-workers." One participant remarked about having their communication mocked. "I don't like it when people mock my accent or words I always mispronounce...it's embarrassing." One participant was unaffected by mocking and stated, "There is always some joking about my accent...I think it's kind of funny."

Domain (6) Traditional Prejudicing and Stereotyping

This domain pertains to the event that occurs when expectations of traditional roles or stereotypes are conveyed such as assumptions that people have about race and culture (Sue, 2010, p. 33). Nearly half of the participants experienced racial microaggressions related to this domain one or more times yearly, over one-third felt that this domain occurred one or more times weekly, while the remaining participants felt that it never occurred. Co-workers and peers demonstrated this domain in perceived conscious and unconscious ways that directly or indirectly demonstrated traditional prejudicing and stereotyping. Traditional prejudice and stereotyping was demonstrated in two of the microaggression categories of microinsults and microinvalidations (see Appendix E).

Microinsults convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person's racial heritage or identity as it relates to prejudice and stereotyping (Sue, 2010, p. 8). Participant comments that relate to this domain include the reporting of a stereotype such as, "There's a stereotype about Native Americans that they don't handle their money well and I had a co-worker repeating this stereotype and always asking if I had any money saved." Another participant stated, "I think people think if you have been friendly with them...they can bring up all the stereotypes about your race and discuss it with you like you are friends. I don't want to talk about the religious

stereotypes of my race, whether or not I was on public assistance, had legal problems, or had constant family drama. Starting that conversation with a person of color is a relationship changer...not in a positive way."

Microinvalidations in this domain include comments that negate or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality related to cultural values and communication styles (Sue, 2010, p. 8). For example, a participant reported, "Co-workers make statements to others that an employee of color from a particular race or culture could answer questions about that race/culture, but sometimes they are wrong about what that person's race is!" Similarly, a participant stated, "Co-workers made statements about the stereotypes and assume it applies to you, or they ask you if it applies to you...that ignores me, the person."

Domain (7) Denial of Racism

This domain pertains to statements or actions by others that deny their ability, intent, or capability to act on bias such as "As an employer, I always treat employees equally," (Sue, 2010, p. 32). The participants experienced this domain in the context of their workplace processes and contributors of workplace climate and culture. The microaggressions are listed as environmental microaggressions in Domain (8).

Domain (8) Environmental Microaggressions (workplace climate and culture)

This domain pertains to microaggressions manifested on systemic and environmental levels corresponding to workplace processes and workplace climate and culture (Sue, 2010, p. 8). The microaggressions related to four categories to include denial of racism, color blindness/assimilate, ascription of intelligence, and pathologizing cultural values/communication styles (see Appendix F). Participants pointed out the ways in which racism occurs through workplace practices despite the departments assertion that it does not.

Denial of Racism: The comments reflected a concern about different workplace processes. For example the agencies hiring practices, "We have a number of candidates who are people of color, but they don't seem to get hired." Regarding the agencies retention success a participant stated, "New-hires are on probation and performance measures are vague. But, more employees of color are fired than white employees." Some participants remarked about biases surrounding promotional or transfer opportunities, "Background investigations from classification to classification are different and prevent employees from promoting. You can have a long-term employee working for you with good reviews and when they try to promote...they don't pass the background." A number of participants made comments such as the following comment about suggested bias in policies and procedures, "Processes like policies and procedures promote inequity. We need minorities at the table."

Some of the participant's concerns relate to client supervision, "If best practices say our employee base should match our client base...it doesn't." Some participant's comments reflected concern about diversity training, "Management does not require diversity training for all employees...it's as if they think that some people don't need it." "Procedures such as not requiring diversity training for all employees send a message that being culturally competency is not a foundational value."

A part of this domain related to the processing of complaints, "Managers don't hold racist employees accountable for their behavior. I have made complaints and nothing came of them." "Some managers have the opinion racism doesn't occur and that the issue is just employee conflict...a personality clash. That is so far from the truth." Thus, there were comments about the diversity training and departmental culture, "The prejudice is in the predominantly white female workplace." "The current administration provides only white female trainers for diversity

training. White females don't understand the black culture." "Training piloted by white females sends the message that the white female perspective is the correct perspective." Collectively, participants demonstrated a disconnection between the department's view of diversity and how best to effect diversity training.

Color Blindness/Assimilate: The comments in this domain reflected concern about the dominant culture consisting of white females, therefore producing a white female perspective. "The department is dominated by white females, thus the thoughts and processes within the department are dominated by that perspective." "The white female perspective is not shared by all employees of color thus it limits who knows the "correct" responses."

The participants provided comments related to assimilation such as "Managers allow peers and co-workers to make racist statements by routinely dismissing the complaints. Managers say that your feelings about the racism are your fault, you are too sensitive, or they say you have misunderstood. They want you to blend in and not be seen." Similarly, "Managers want employees of color to act white, to assimilate, and just get along with everyone and follow the example of certain existing managers of color. They were chosen because they did assimilate, but they sacrificed their racial identity and they hold less power in decision-making than their white counterparts." Some comments in this domain related to participant concern for their clients and their clients' success. "The employer can't see the differences that diversity brings to the clients, and they suffer because they cannot establish a relationship with a white employee."

Ascription of Intelligence: This category relates to participant statements about workplace processes that question the employee's intelligence by failing to train. For example, "There is a lack of competent training during probation." One participant stated, "The existing processes allow employees of color to work with deficient skills without notifying them of the

deficiencies until they are disciplined or fired." Similarly, as is it relates to employee development, "There is a lack of job skill development and leadership opportunities, thus employees of color are more often demoted and fail to promote.

Pathologizing Cultural Values/Communication Styles: This category relates to a thought that the values and communication styles of employees of color are abnormal. Further, that showcasing difference appears to have highlighted that it is not the normal form of workplace communication. For example, "The positions that require bi-lingual or specific-race employees set people up to be ridiculed as the token. They are teased and ridiculed by other employees who think their bi-lingual skills protect them from layoff." A number of participants stated that comments such as "We need our own Hispanic," disrespects the employee. They stated they would rather hear that the department provides clients with services appropriate for their language and culture (rather than objectify the employee).

According to some participants, the diversity training fails to normalize difference, "The diversity training addresses white privilege which makes white employees feel guilty around employees of color and that doesn't help to build us as a team." Another participant held an alternate view, "The diversity training addresses white privilege which also makes white employee angry at employees of color and it isn't our fault. We can't take it (color) off." Along the same vein, "The training does not create a more inclusive environment or create space for opening communication styles."

Participants commented about worksites where cultural diversity was abnormal, such as demonstrated by the statement, "Management has to know that work sites differ in degree of comfort for people of color. Some places are very white." Other participants made similar statements to the following comment, "Managers seem taxed by racist matters, and give the

impression that dealing with diversity in the workplace is an ordeal. It feels like they are blaming us for being black."

Domain (9) The Effect of Microaggressions on Workplace Performance

This domain describes the effects of microaggressions on the workplace performance of employees of color. Those interviewed predominantly identified stress because of experienced microaggressions in the workplace. They associated specific emotions or actions with stress and explained how that might have affected their workplace perception of themselves, their perception of others, or how others may perceive them. Those measures were listed in the survey to gauge frequency and were ranked by participants according to type with (1) being the greatest impact to employee health and (8) representing the least impact to employee health (see Appendix G Table 3). This section lists those responses by order of the most pervasive response.

Ranking

(1) Sadness: Some participants felt that feeling sad might skew their perspective of how others perceive them. Some employees stated that when confronted with a manager's logical reasoning about an alleged racist act; it made enough sense to create questions about their own thinking. This created conflict for them because they internally felt victimized by racist treatment, but confused by a logical explanation.

(2) Caution: The practice of taking caution and acting cautious ranked second as an emotion that may affect how confident employees appeared to co-workers and managers. Some participants expressed a feeling that they had to walk on "egg shells" which caused them to ask for direction more frequently or clarify procedures.

(3) Look for another job: Some participants did not identify feelings, rather stated that it affected them so profoundly that they continually looked for another job through transfer to another job site or employment elsewhere.

(4) Hopelessness: In this statement, hopelessness refers to an emotion that saps their enjoyment of working. Some employees reported they felt lucky to have their job, but struggled to get through each day.

(5) Angry: Anger is an emotion that participants reported created problems in both their professional and personal lives. Participants felt that talking about it alienated co-workers and emotionally drained their families. Participants internalized their anger, but felt that it may appear to others as a bad attitude.

(6) Depression: Feeling depressed occurred sporadically; however, during a depressed state they often felt one or more of the other factors in this domain and feel it affected their productivity and their relationships.

(7) No Effect: Some participants who experienced racial microaggressions reported they were not affected by it.

(8) Other effects: Some participants reported other emotions such as feeling that people were too ignorant to be taken seriously, feeling hopeful that something would change, or feeling greater appreciation for their family and friends.

Domain (10) Coping Mechanisms

This domain describes the methods that participants used to cope with the impact of microaggressions. These measures were developed through the personal interviews and were listed in the survey to gauge frequency with (1) as the most frequent choice and (7) being the

least frequent choice (see Appendix G). The participants ranked coping mechanisms according to type.

(1) Get involved in groups or committees to address racism in the workplace ranked equally with (2).

(2) Internalize the emotion and use it to enhance skills and abilities.

(3) Talk with friends or co-workers about what happened only if the person is likely to understand how the participant felt about it. Participants used this method to vent, gain a different perspective, or to ask advice.

(4) Internalize the emotion and think about quitting the job ranked equally with (5).

(5) Educate the racist person or group. Both positive and negative methods of educating the racist person or group surfaced. The negative methods developed out of the conflict in the situation and involved argumentative conversations that sometimes damaged relationships.

(6) Ignore the racism. It is better not to "make any waves or chance negative labels" for speaking up about it. Some participants were quite aware of their experience of racial microaggressions, but reported they were so used to it happening that it is easy to ignore. Some participants did not feel that the racist events were serious enough to acknowledge, thus ignored it.

(7) Other methods of coping included finding support outside of work through religious affiliations, family, friends, and recreational activities.

Discussion

Scholars have demonstrated that racial microaggressions occur in the workplace to employees of color and produce harmful effects to the workplace performance and the health of employees (Solorzano, et al., 2000; Constantine et al., 2008; Harwood et al., 2010). This research builds on the literature by examining employee perceptions regarding five issues. (1)

The frequency and occurrence of racial microaggressions reported in the workplace. (2)

Determining the type of microaggressions experienced. (3) Determining the manner in which the

experience of microaggressions affects employee health. (4) Determining the manner in which

microaggressions effects the employees productivity. (5) Determining the types of coping

strategies employees developed to address workplace racism.

Research Questions

RQ1: Do employees experience microaggressions in the workplace, and with what frequency do

microaggressions occur in workplace communication?

The research showed that microaggressions occur in the workplace with employees-of-

color experiencing them on varying levels (see Appendix G).

RQ2: What are the types of microaggressions that occur in the workplace?

The research showed that seven types of microaggressions occur to include traditional

prejudicing and stereotyping, ascription of intelligence, colorblindness/assimilate

criminality/assumption of criminal status, denial of racism, myth of meritocracy and

pathologizing a values and communications styles (see Appendix G).

RQ3: How does an experience of microaggression(s) affect the health of employees of color?

The research showed that the experience of microaggression affects the health of

employees of color primarily in the form of stress with related emotions that complicate the

effects (see Appendix G).

RQ4: How does an experience of microaggression(s) affect the productivity of employees of

color?

The research showed that the experience of microaggressions affected the productivity of

employees primarily in three ways. (1) Participants felt that workplace processes, policies, and

procedures appear to limit employee development and advancement. (2) Participants felt that managers perpetuated racism by demonstrating, allowing, or failing to address racial microaggressions at worksites. (2) Participants felt that the lack of diversity training for all employees perpetuated a need for assimilation and pathologized racial and ethnic mannerisms. Collectively, these processes created conditions that effect employee productivity (see Appendix F & G).

RQ5: What are the coping strategies developed by employees of color who experience workplace microaggression(s)?

The research showed that employees developed coping strategies that included seven methods. (1) Employees joined groups or committees to address workplace racism. (2) Employees internalized their emotions and used it to enhance skills and abilities. (3) Employees talked about the racism with friends or co-workers. (4) Employees internalized their feelings about experienced microaggressions and thought about quitting their job. (5) Employees educated the racist person or group. 6) Employees ignored the racism. (7) Employees employed other methods of coping including, finding support outside of work through religious affiliations, family, friends, and recreational activities (see Appendix G).

Theoretical and Philosophical Considerations

In this research, participants identified specific types of racial microaggressions and named specific modes of delivery, which were consistent with previous research. Many of the reported microaggressions perpetuated by managers, peers, co-workers, and clients seem visibly racist to the participants, and consciously or unconsciously delivered. Thus, the microaggression events are consistent with their description as visible and invisible. The study used symbolic interactionism as the lens with which to view racial microaggressions and it aids the

understanding of how the power of culture and communication reproduce and allow racist processes to evolve and perpetuate. This research assumes that communication as social identity evolves over differing levels of abstraction from both personal and social group levels and assist individuals in making sense of their behaviors in comparison with others (Harwood, 2006). The following examples provide a glimpse of racial microaggressions within the theoretical and philosophical framework.

"Isn't it good that you can pass for white?" This comment demonstrates the symbolic interactionism basic perspective that people act toward others, toward things, and toward events based upon the meaning they ascribe to them. It is clear that the aggressor comes from a perspective that white is better, and is seemingly unaware that the participant might not agree. Symbolic interactionism holds that part of how humans view themselves comes from the image they have of how others see them, thus the participant who received this comment derives a view of themselves as non-white, thus not as good in the eyes of the aggressor. Through the symbolic interactionism process, this event streams into the participant's consciousness and remains a memory for support regarding other similar comments and adds to social identity. During communication with the aggressor, the participant remembers the microaggression and draws upon differing levels of abstraction from both personal and social group levels to determine how to structure their communication.

Comments such as *"If I don't type, write, or move fast enough, I get the look like I am stupid,"* indicate a history of microaggression, thus the statement that followed, "*So, I feel rushed and more afraid to make mistakes*," indicates how the level of abstraction effects the participant's performance. This participant has internalized past microaggressions, and now a 'look' is the symbol sufficient to evoke a social identity as 'stupid.' Communication as social

identity holds that people draw from other sources, such as mass communication, group identification, and family communication to compare and judge personal worth and value. Therefore, if work standards require the participant to work quickly, any indication of sub-standard works supports a social identity of "stupid."

The less visible microaggressions such as in the comment, *"The department is dominated by white females, thus the thoughts and processes within the department are dominated by that perspective,"* reveal a power dynamic. According to Musolf (1992), symbolic interactionism holds that" power is embedded in the social structure of race, sex, occupations, and in everyday interaction and communication" (p. 172). Communication is a receipt of information, but it is also ritual associated with the social order of the workplace and as such, is "a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed," (Musolf, 1992, p. 172). In this case reality is transformed as white female perspective, thus white female perspective becomes a structural category reproducing inequality in that other perspectives are dismissed (Musolf, 1992).

This statement, *"The white female perspective is not shared by all employees of color, thus it limits who knows the 'correct' responses,"* reveals the complexity of navigating different racial, cultural, or ethnic environments with insufficient information. According to Mead (1913), a person's perspective develops through personal introspection of their current and past reality in connection with their continuing stream of consciousness. Thus, perspectives and social identities between individuals and groups expectedly differ on varying levels. In this manner, it follows that a white female perspective differs from the perspective of an employee of color and that there are correct responses according to individual and group realities.

These examples provide a limited reference for examining how racial microaggressions recur within the lens of symbolic interactionism. They demonstrate the importance of understanding worldview, which may assist with cultural competence. According to Sue, Nadal, Capodilupo, Lin, Torino & Rivera (2008), learning to be aware of one's worldview is essential in developing cultural competence. Sue et al. (2008) holds that it is difficult to achieve competence because Americans have developed an aversion to racism. Americans tend to view racism as overt acts committed by white supremacist, the Ku Klux Klan, or the skinheads, which they find objectionable, thus overlook or are unaware of how their subtle actions and behavior perpetuate racism towards people of color (Sue et al. 2008).

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARIES AND CONCLUSIONS

Limitations of the Study

Although this study allowed the identification of seven racial microaggression themes that occur to employees of color, care should be taken in generalizing the findings to all employees of color. The sample size included only twenty employees selected through purposive sampling that required self-reports of racial experiences within the workplace. Thus, the research findings are a representative sample of some, but not all of the employees of color. The retrospective design of this study might pose limitations given that participants were asked to recall and describe situations that previously occurred to them. Thus, the participant's verbal inflections, articulations, and body language are not present in the analysis of the data. The verbal inflections, articulations, and body language may have given a deeper picture of the depth and strength of racial microaggressions. In addition, the study is limited to one set of data, thus the scope is limited to the extent that it is based solely upon participant testimony. Although the researcher attempted to account for bias, the qualitative methodology, consensual qualitative research (CQR), assumes some possible limitation through researcher bias. In this study, researcher bias may appear in the type of questions formulated for the interviews and survey. The researcher attempted to account for bias, by asking questions formulated from previous microaggression research.

Recommendations for Further Study

Despite the limitations, the study provides for strong support that racial microaggressions occur between employees of color and their managers, peers, and co-workers. Further, the study provided strong support that employees experience detrimental effect to their health and workplace performance though the experience of microaggression communication. This study

provides a foundation for the ways in which a select group of employees articulated workplace racism and respond to it, but does not provide a comprehensive picture of how racial microaggression affects all employees of color, nor does it investigate how to effect change in white populations and establish inclusive workplace policies and procedures. The study raised a number of questions that merit exploration as it relates to improving communication between employees of color, their managers, peers, and co-workers as well as improving the workplace processes. Thus, further study may illuminate factors that would benefit the employee and employer.

Further study needs to consider any barriers to data collection. In this study, the employee's perception of safety surfaced as an issue with potential participants in this research who felt that participating would negatively affect them. The researcher initially sent fifty-six email notices of this research and had thirty-one responses. Of the eleven employees who contacted the researcher, but did not participate, five employees offered verbal support of the research, but declined involvement citing safety reasons. Those employees felt that providing testimony would not bode well with their managers or co-workers and may jeopardize their jobs or relationships. The perception of safety regarding reporting microaggression also surfaced in some participant reports. Some participants felt that talking about microaggressions was therapeutic given its anonymous nature, but they would never openly report what has happened. Some participants voiced their desire for positive change in workplace communication, but said they would never initiate any action to change it within the workplace. Anonymity, was an important aspect in collecting this research, however change requires the collective voice of the people in identifying the ways in which racism occurs in the workplace. Future recommendations include addressing employee safety concerns through dialogue to allow open communication

about the collective effect of microaggressions. The important consideration regarding dialogue is that poorly handled discussions may result in anger, hostility, silence, complaints, and misunderstandings, while skillfully handled discussions promote growth, improved communication, and understanding (Sue & Constantine (2010).

Conclusions

The study showed that racial microaggressions are a real and lived experience in the workplace interactions of employees of color. Further, that the experiences relate to specific themes and involve specific processes within the workplace. The employees of color perceived the occurrence of racial microaggressions as both conscious (visible) and unconscious (invisible) events. Further, those racial microaggressions occurred as part of personal interactions with managers, peers, co-workers, and clients as well as workplace processes and procedures. The employees of color have mixed feelings about the benefit of reporting racial microaggressions, and tend to believe that reporting does not change the workplace climate.

The research demonstrated that the experience of racial microaggressions affects the health and workplace performance of employees of color in varying ways. Further, that the effect is predominantly in the form of stress with specific related emotions. The frequency of workplace stress for nearly three-quarters of the participants is as frequent as one or more times a month, one or more times a week, and one or more times a day. Hearing about the effects of racial microaggressions on friends and co-workers within the workplace exacerbates employee stress. In addition, employees predominantly felt that their response to racial microaggressions might negatively affect how others perceive them in the workplace. Thus, workplace performance is impacted by their emotions about racist treatment. The study indentified a few

ways in which employees cope with racism in the workplace, however some methods support ignoring the racism and using resources outside the workplace to address their stress.

The experience of racial microaggressions occurs through workplace processes, policies, and procedures related to hiring, retention, and promotion opportunities, but also through policies that support diversity by requiring employees of color with special language or skill-based proficiencies. The employees felt that their workplace climate requires them to "act white," thus forcing them to "tone down" their racial and cultural mannerisms. Further, that the cultural base is predominantly white female, thus influenced by the white female perspective, which differs from that of the diverse cultural affects of employees of color.

Finally, many of the participants in this study held a concern that management is not educated sufficiently to recognize the existence of racism or understand the implication. Participants suggested that those involved in creating a positive work environment with a safe cultural climate, such as managers, peers, and co-workers, may benefit from increased cultural competency. Cultural competency requires an understanding of the dynamics of difference as well as increasing self-awareness, increasing knowledge of the other person's culture, and adapting professional skills to the conflict situation for informed resolution (Cunningham, 2003).

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APPENDIX A

MENTOR AGREEMENT

MENTOR AGREEMENT (To be submitted with Thesis or Project Proposal)

Mentoring: A deliberate pairing of a more skilled or experienced person with a lesser skilled or experienced one, with the agreed-upon goal of having the lesser skilled person grow and develop specific competencies.

You have asked to serve as a Mentor for <u>Ronee Hunter,</u> who is completing the requirements for her Masters Degree in Communication and Leadership Studies. As a mentor, you are asked to share ideas with this student and read the next to final draft of their thesis. You are not expected to directly supervise this student's work but rather meet with them as a 'young colleague." If you are willing to serve as a Mentor for her, please sign this agreement. Your mentee will provide you with full guidelines of their requirements.

I am willing to serve as a Mentor for <u>Ronee Hunter</u> as she completes her thesis or project. As a Mentor, I will provide help in the way of suggestions, ideas, and resources and am willing to review drafts of their work. I also agree to read the next to last draft of the student's thesis or project and will sign my name on the signature page of their final draft. My signature on the thesis only indicates that I have read it and is no indication of the quality of the work. I will not be asked to assign a grade or make any evaluative comments to the course convener.

Signature _Cheryl Coan_

Title _Faculty_

Email and telephone number _414-305-1310   coanc@gonzaga.edu_

Date _9-4-11_

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

An Examination of the effect of Racial Microaggressions on Workplace Racial Climate and Employee Performance

Consent Form

Introduction/Purpose:[1]

I am a Multnomah County employee currently conducting an exploration of the effect of racial microaggressions on employees of color. While Multnomah County and the Department of Community Justice (DCJ) are aware of this research, I am not acting on their behalf. This research satisfies a requirement for completion of a Master of Arts in Communication and Leadership degree through Gonzaga University.

I am contacting you regarding this exploration entitled, 'An Examination of the Effect of Racial Microaggressions on Workplace Racial Climate and Employee Performance.' I am conducting an interview of individuals associated with DCJ who self-identify as a person of color including those employees identified as having experienced racism in the workplace, and those who have reported racism in the workplace. I am conducting site observations where DCJ employees of color work, which will not interfere with department activities and employee responsibilities, or identify you as a participant in the study.

The interviews and observations will help me measure the frequency and type of microaggressions occurring in the workplace, as well as the effect of microaggressions on the health and performance of Multnomah County employees. The data will provide a collective view of the racial climate in which employees work, the types of racial microaggressions that employee's experience, and the effects of microaggressions on an employee's heath and workplace performance.

Procedures:

You are invited to consider participation in the project. As a voluntary, anonymous participant in this study, I will ask questions about your experiences at Multnomah County. If you choose to participate, you may refuse to answer any individual questions and you have the right to withdraw your participation at any time. The phone or face-to-face interview will take about 30 minutes of your time or you can respond via e-mail. The information collected during this interview will remain with the researcher. If you have any questions about any aspect of your participation in this study, you may call Ms. Ronee Hunter or contact her via email at ronee.l.hunter@multco.us.

Risks:

Participation is not expected to cause any harm or adverse effects, however in the event that you become upset or offended by any questions, you may choose not to respond, or you can discontinue your participation in the study. To aid me in recording your answers, I may ask your permission to take notes. The notes will be destroyed when the information is aggregated with previous data.

Arrangement for financial responsibility for adverse effects:

No adverse effects to participants is expected, however any expenses incurred by the participant because of perceived adverse effects are the responsibility of the participant.

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[1] This form is adapted from research by Harwood, Huntt, & Mendenhall (2010)

Benefits:

A potential benefit of your participation is that you may learn more about the overall experiences of subtle forms of racism in Multnomah County. In addition, the data may inform the Multnomah County administrators in the ways that microaggressions may be unintentionally harming the well-being of employees of color.

Alternatives and Subject's Rights:

Your participation is voluntary and you can choose not to participate in this research study at any time. You can also skip any questions that you prefer not to answer.

Confidentiality:

The research process protects your privacy by not divulging personal information about you. All of your responses will be strictly confidential. You are not required to give your name, or provide personal identification. The researcher will destroy all notes taken during the research process.

Contact Persons:

Direct any questions you may have about this study to Ms. Ronee Hunter (503) 988.5042 ext 22994. Please direct any questions about research subjects' rights to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Gonzaga University. The IRB is a review board that monitors the research process and ensures the ethical and legal conduct of human subject research at Gonzaga University.

Consent:

I have read this form, and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions, and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. If I have additional questions, I have been told who to contact. I agree to participate in the research study described above. I may be contacted at a later point as a follow-up to this study; however, I will be given an opportunity to provide consent to that aspect of the study at that time.

I understand that I will receive a copy of this consent form.

Thank you for your time and I sincerely appreciate your participation.

_____ _____

Participant's Signature   Date

_____ _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   Date

_____ _____

Investigator's Signature   Date

APPENDIX C

RESEARCH PROTOCOL

An Examination of the effect of Racial Microaggressions on Workplace Racial Climate and Employee Performance

Qualitative Assessment Protocol

Gatekeepers: The members of the organization that approve research and collection of empirical data are the Chair of Multnomah County Jeff Cogen and the Director of the Multnomah County Department of Community Justice, Scott Taylor.

Opening Statement[2]

People of color often have experiences in which they feel invalidated, discriminated against, and uncomfortable because of their race. In answering the following questions, think about your daily experiences at Multnomah County. Can you describe a situation in which you witnessed or experienced discrimination because of your race?

Personal Questions

1.   What are some of the ways that people treat you differently because of your race?

2.   Describe a situation in which you felt uncomfortable, insulted, or disrespected by a comment that had racial overtones.

3.   Think of some of the stereotypes that exist about your racial group. How have others subtly expressed their stereotypical beliefs about you?

4.   In what ways have others slighted you or put you down because of your cultural values?

5.   In what ways have people subtly expressed that being white is better?

6.   In what subtle ways have others expressed that they think you're a second-class citizen or inferior to them?

7.   How have people suggested that you do not belong in America because of your race?

8.   What have people done or said to invalidate your experiences of racial discrimination?

Setting and Action Questions

1.   In what work settings are these experiences taking place?

2.   Are there places on the Multnomah County campus where you do not feel welcomed?

3.   Are there places on the Multnomah County campus that make you feel uncomfortable because of your experiences?

4.   Who have been perpetrators of these forms of racism in your workplace?

      a.   Peers/Co-workers that you know

      b.   Peers/Co-workers that you do not know

      c.   Managers or lead workers

      d.   Community partners

      e.   Vendor/ Contract workers (such as sales or equipment repair personnel)

      f.   Clients/Client families

5.   What are some of the short-term ways that you dealt with these experiences?

6.   What long-term methods do you use to cope with these experiences?

      a.   Did you file a formal complaint?

      b.   Did you actively do something—such as speak up about it?

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[2] This form is adapted from research by Harwood, Huntt, & Mendenhall (2010)

       c.   Did you talk to other people about it?

       d.   Did you ignore it?

       e.   Did you confront the perpetrator in a physical altercation?

7.   What do you think the overall impact of your experiences has been on your life?

8.   How have these experiences affected you physically and emotionally?

9.   Do you feel like you are a part of the Multnomah County community?

10.   Has the experience(s) made you consider leaving the employment of Multnomah County?

11.   Have you discouraged others from working from Multnomah County because of your experiences?

12.   Have you sought involvement in county affinity groups, held a union position, or engaged in other activities to fight against these forms of racism and discrimination?

Ending Questions

1.   Is there anything you would like to add?

2.   What would you like to see happen with this research?

APPENDIX D

RACIAL MICROGAGGRESSION

Hello,

I am completing my MA in Communication at Gonzaga and am researching "The effect of racial microaggressions on workplace climate and employee performance." I have completed Phase I, which consisted of personal interviews with employees.

Welcome to Phase II of my research. This involves a voluntary, confidential, and anonymous survey regarding specific themes that Phase I (Personal Interviews) uncovered.

Phase I has highlighted how deeply personal and sensitive this subject is and I am so honored to have received your help. I am requesting that you complete the quick survey.

When complete, I will email the results and ask if you wish to share the information with DCJ management.

Please call if you have questions.

Thanks so much!

Ms. Ronee Hunter

Racial Microaggressions

"Racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color" (Sue, 2010)

"Perpetrators of microaggressions are often unaware that they engage in such communications when they interact with racial/ethnic minorities" (Sue, 2010).

"Microaggressions seem to appear in three forms: microassault, microinsult, and microinvalidation" (Sue, 2010).

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1. How often have you felt that your intelligence was in question while employed at DCJ?
(Example: People mention racial stereotypes to you in various ways to give the message that certain races are smart and certain races are dumb.)

Never	Less than once a year	Once or more a year	Once or more a month	Once or more a week	Once or more a day

2. How much does it bother you that you have felt your intelligence has been questioned?

It does not bother me at all	It bothers me a little	It bothers me somewhat, more than a little, but not a lot	It bothers me a lot	It extremely bothers me

3. How often have others indicated to you during your employment at DCJ (through words or action) that is better for you or for them not to acknowledge your color and/or culture?
(Example: A person says something to you like, "When I see you I don't see color." Or they dismiss your voiced feelings about race or culture by saying you are overreacting. Or they let you know through words or actions that they feel uncomfortable hearing you talk about it.)

Never	Less than once a year	Once or more a year	Once or more a month	Once or more a week	Once or more a day

4) How much does it bother you that you have felt that people dismiss your race and/or culture?

It does not bother me at all	It bothers me a little	It bothers me somewhat, more than a little, but not a lot	It bothers me a lot	It extremely bothers me

5) How often have you thought that people felt threatened by your race or culture while employed at DCJ?
(Example: People seem concerned if people-of-color congregate together. People of color seem to be the likely suspects of thefts or are blamed for things that go wrong. Through words or actions, Men-of-color are told that they should not be left alone with a white female.)

Never	Less than once a year	Once or more a year	Once or more a month	Once or more a week	Once or more a day

6) How much does it bother you that people felt threatened by your race and/or culture?

It does not bother me at all	It bothers me a little	It bothers me somewhat, more than a little, but not a lot	It bothers me a lot	It extremely bothers me

7) How often have you felt that you or other people of color have been denied advancement, transfer to specific assignments, training, or other employee development opportunities because of race?
(Example: White, less qualified employees are chosen, people of color who "act" less ethnic are chosen, or the person of color is deemed incapable of learning the skills for the job, etc.)

Never	Less than once a year	Once or more a year	Once or more a month	Once or more a week	Once or more a day

8) How much does it bother you that you or other people are denied advancement because of their race and/or culture?

It does not bother me at all	It bothers me a little	It bothers me somewhat, more than a little, but not a lot	It bothers me a lot	It extremely bothers me

9) How often have you felt that you must assimilate to the dominant culture while at work?
(Example: People of color (according to race) are thought to be too "loud, quiet, flamboyant, timid, aggressive, etc" and must act "white" to be heard or accepted.)

Never	Less than once a year	Once or more a year	Once or more a month	Once or more a week	Once or more a day

10) How much does it bother you that you feel you must assimilate to the dominant culture?

It does not bother me at all	It bothers me a little	It bothers me somewhat, more than a little, but not a lot	It bothers me a lot	It extremely bothers me

11) How often have others mentioned or reminded you of the negative stereotypes associated with race and/or culture?
(Example: People think Native Americans are drunks and do not believe in God, black men covet white women, people-of-color steal or have other criminal tendencies, etc.)

Never	Less than once a year	Once or more a year	Once or more a month	Once or more a week	Once or more a day

12) How much does it bother you that others mention or remind you of negative stereotypes associated with race and/or culture?

It does not bother me at all	It bothers me a little	It bothers me somewhat, more than a little, but not a lot	It bothers me a lot	It extremely bothers me

13) How often do you feel stressed out because of your negative racial experiences at DCJ?

Never	Less than once a year	Once or more a year	Once or more a month	Once or more a week	Once or more a day

14) How often do you feel stressed because of the negative racial experiences of friends or co-workers at DCJ?

Never	Less than once a year	Once or more a year	Once or more a month	Once or more a week	Once or more a day

15) Which of these coping mechanisms do you use?
- Ignoring the racism
- Internalizing the emotion and thinking about quitting
- Internalizing the emotion and using it to enhance skills and abilities
- Talking to friends/co-workers about it
- Educating the racist person or group
- Getting involved in groups or committees to address racism in the workplace
- Other (religion, family, friends, & activities)

16) If you feel stress as a result of racism, how has that affected your performance at DCJ?
- I am not affected by it
- I am affected and feel cautious, which might affect someone's view of my confidence
- I am affected and feel angry, which might affect someone's view of my attitude
- I am affected and feel sad, which might affect how I think others perceive me
- I am affected and feel depressed, which might affect my productivity and relationships
- I am affected and feel hopeless, so just try to get through each day, glad to have a job.
- I am affected and continually look for another job
- Other

17) DCJ predominantly demonstrates racism through the following ways:
- Policy and Procedure inequity
- Racial issues through one-on-one interactions with managers
- Racial issues through one-on-one interactions with known/unknown employees and co-workers
- Work site politics such as the site must have an employee-of-color there (employee is treated as a token)
- Work site preferences where there is an unspoken desire for white or white-acting personnel
- Lack of job skill development
- Lack of leadership opportunities
- Lack of representation on boards and committees
- Lack of culturally competent diversity trainers (traditionally white female trainers)
- Lack of mandatory diversity training for all employees
- Failure to cultivate diversity by providing employees the assistance needed to pass probation
- Failure to promote diversity by requiring "white attitudes" or "take off your black" requirements
- Other

APPENDIX E

Table 1	Racial Microaggressions[3] Theme Grid Common verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, intentional or unintentional, that communicate antagonistic, derogatory or negative racial insults to people of color	
↓	↓	↓
Microinsult (Often Unconscious) Convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person's racial heritage or identity	**Microassault (Often Conscious)** Explicit intentional name-calling or purposeful discriminatory comments	**Microinvalidation (Often Unconscious)** Negate or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings or experiential reality
Color Blindness/Assimilate - Some work sites are very "white" and managers/co-workers stare at employees of color, scrutinize their work in obvious ways **Criminality/Assumption of Criminal Status** - Comments that employee may know how to steal a car, take drugs, has participated in gangs - Co-workers and managers are threatened by employees of color and/or threatened by a grouping of employees of color - Co-workers think it's rude/suspicious if an employee of color talks with clients in their native tongue and doesn't translate meaningless dialogue **Pathologizing Cultural Values/Communication Styles** - Co-workers make statements about stereotypes in casual conversation and laugh - Co-workers mock accents and laugh about it - Culture is emphasized - others ask about your cultural practices like what you do is not normal - Statements regarding one's looks as exotic, or calling attention to certain features, eyes, hair, manner of dress - Voiced statements by co-workers regarding inability of certain races to fit in, stubborn, ignorant, stand-offish, acting better **Traditional Prejudice & Stereotypes** - Statements by co-workers citing their assumptions about how different races/cultures handle personal matters such as money, medical attention, religious beliefs, public assistance, past legal troubles, family dynamics, abortion, sex, and marriage - Statements to others that an employee of color is a particular race/culture and could answer questions about that race/culture	**Ascription of Intelligence** - Statements re lack of intelligence and/or can't do the job **Color Blindness/Assimilate** - Co-workers make remarks that it is better to be light-skinned than dark **Pathologizing Cultural Values/Communication Styles** - Co-workers make racist remarks and are not joking - Co-workers make racist remarks and say they are joking	**Ascription of Intelligence** - Can't do the job because hired for race or culture - Must prove intelligence - education & experience equal or better than co-workers **Color Blindness/Assimilate** - Co-workers and managers discourage employees from speaking in their native tongue while on break - Culture is dismissed - seems like others don't want to hear about difference - It's better to tone down, don't act your culture - be subdued - Managers don't like the conflict that racism brings so don't want to deal with it - Require "don't act black," "take off your black" - don't want to see color - Require "white attitudes" - Requirement to fit in and act like the dominant culture **Myth of Meritocracy** - Co-workers/managers assume hired due to affirmative action - Didn't have to work as hard to get an education - question credentials - Didn't have to work as hard to get hired - not as qualified - Race/Cultural status ensure more hiring or promotional points - White people think employees of color/culture have special privileges **Traditional Prejudice & Stereotypes** - Co-workers make statements about the stereotypes and assume it applies to you or ask you if it applies **Pathologizing Cultural Values/Communication Styles** - Must defend religious and philosophical beliefs to inquiring co-workers

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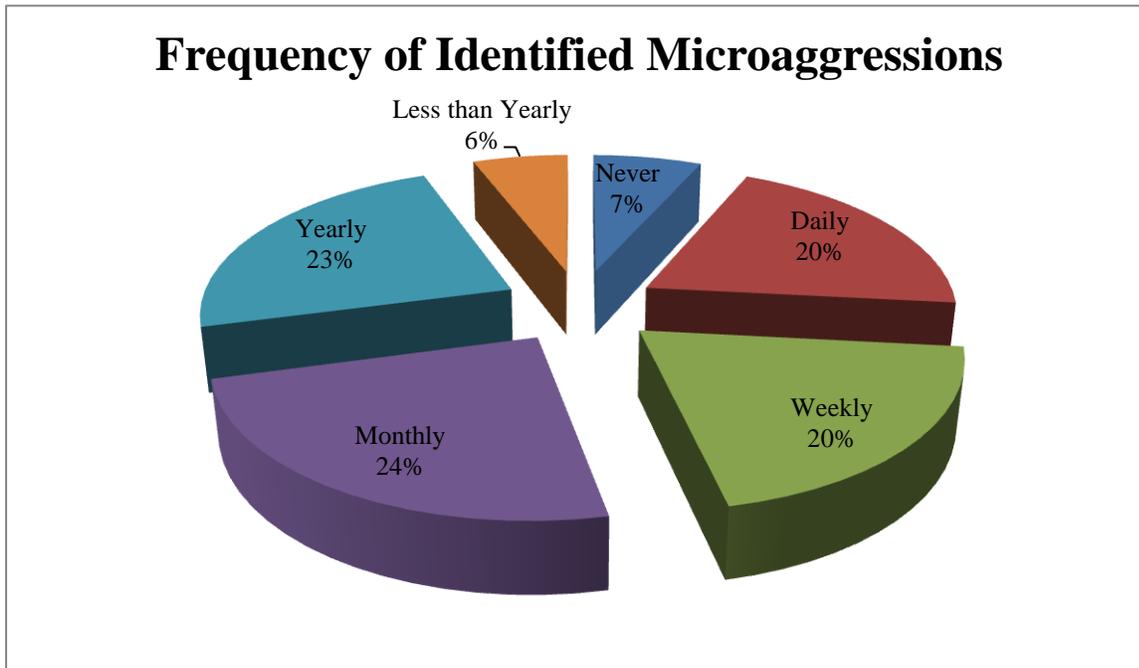[3] Categories and Relationship of Racial Microaggressions - adapted from Sue e al. (2007, p. 278)

APPENDIX F

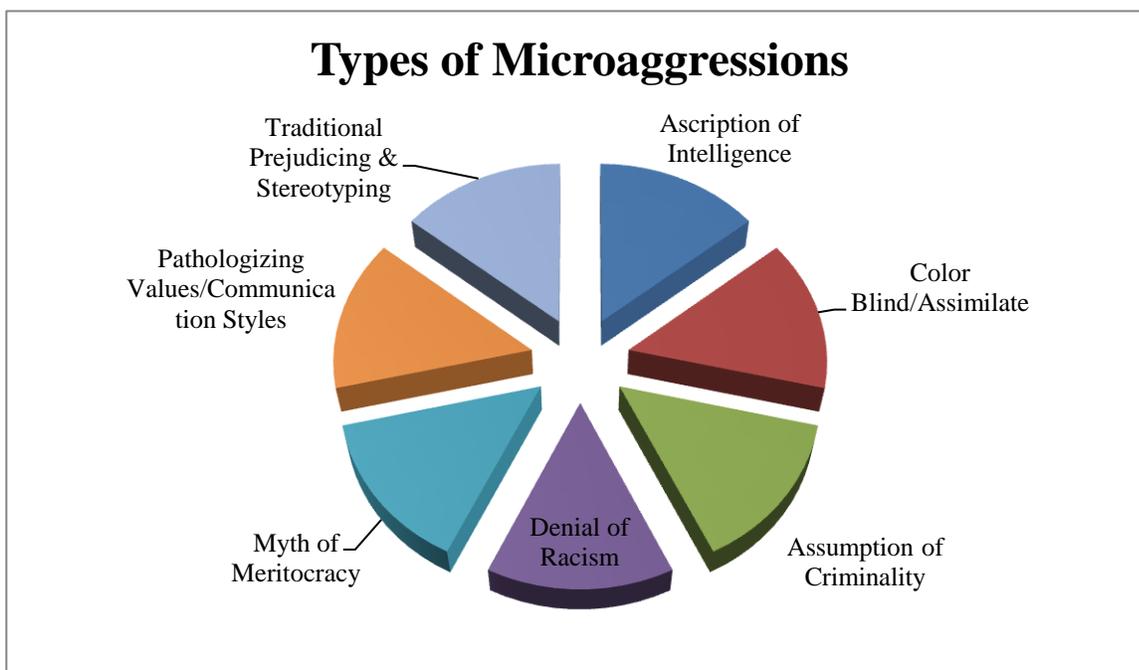| Table 2	**Environmental Microaggressions[4]** (Macro-level Theme Grid) Manifested on systemic and environmental levels: Workplace Processes and Climate/Culture		
Hiring/Retention/Promotion Processes	**Service Delivery**	**Employee Development**	**Workplace Culture**
Denial of Racism - Background investigations from classification to classification are different - prevent employees from promoting - Employee base does not match the client population - Hiring process seems to exclude people of color - Performance measures are vague - more EOC fired than white - Processes like policies and procedures promote inequity - need minorities at the table	**Color Blindness/Assimilate** - Department is dominated by white females - thus thoughts & processes dominated by that perspective - Employer can't see the differences - clients suffer because they cannot establish a relationship with a white employee - White female perspective is not shared by all employees of color thus limits who knows the "correct" responses	**Ascription of Intelligence** - Allow employees of color to work with deficient skills and/or training and then tell them they are not competent - Demote or fail to promote employees of color - Lack of competent training during probation - Lack of job skill development - Lack of leadership opportunities	**Color Blindness/Assimilate** - Co-workers make racist remarks and nothing comes of the complaints - Managers say that your feelings about the racism are your fault, you are too sensitive, or say you have misunderstood **Denial of Racism** - Management does not require diversity training for all employees - Managers don't hold racist employees accountable for their behavior - Provides only white female trainers for diversity training -Managers have opinion racism doesn't occur and it is just employee conflict **Pathologizing Cultural Values/Communication Styles** - Managers make racist remarks and say they are joking - Positions that require bi-lingual or specific-race employees set people up to be ridiculed as the token - Training addresses white privilege which makes whites feel guilty around employees of color -Training addresses white privilege which makes whites angry at employees of color - Work sites differ in degree of comfort for people of color

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[4] Categories and Relationship of Racial Microaggressions - adapted from Sue et al. (2007, p. 278)

APPENDIX G

RQ1: Do employees experience microaggressions in the workplace, and with what frequency do microaggressions occur in workplace communication?

Frequency of Identified Microaggressions

Less than Yearly 6%
Never 7%
Daily 20%
Yearly 23%
Weekly 20%
Monthly 24%

RQ2: What are the types of microaggressions that occur in the workplace?

Types of Microaggressions

Traditional Prejudicing & Stereotyping
Ascription of Intelligence
Pathologizing Values/Communication Styles
Color Blind/Assimilate
Myth of Meritocracy
Denial of Racism
Assumption of Criminality

RQ3: How does an experience of microaggression(s) affect the health of employees of

color?

Effect of Microaggressions on Employee Health

No Effect 7%

A Little Stressful 20%

Extremely Stressful 33%

Somewhat Stressful 19%

A Lot Stressful 21%
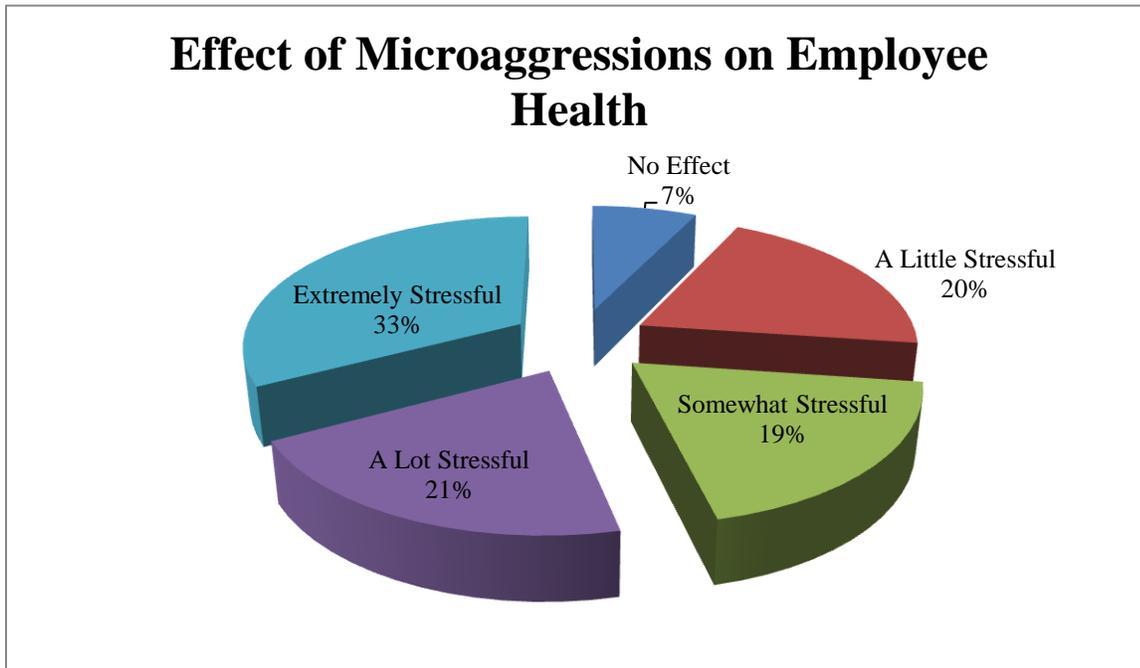
RQ4 (A & B): How does an experience of microaggression(s) affect workplace productivity

of employees of color?

Table 3 Effects of Stress	Ranking
Sad: May affect how I think others perceive me	1
Cautious: May affect someone's view of my confidence	2
Affected: I continually look for another job	3
Hopeless: Try to get through each day - glad to have a job	4
Angry: May affect someone's view of my attitude	5
Depressed: May affect my productivity and relationships	6
No Effect	7
Other effects	8

RQ5: What are the coping strategies developed by employees of color who experience

workplace microaggression(s)?

Coping Strategies for Employees of Color

- Groups/Committees to address workplace racism
- Internalize emotion/use for self-improvement
- Talk with Friends/Co-workers
- Other: Religion, Family, Friends, Activities
- Educating Racist Person
- Ignoring the Racism
- Internalize emotion/think about quitting