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Navigating multiple identities in the American workplace: Microaggression and the caribbean diaspora

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Abstract

While the issue of microaggressions has been studied for marginalized groups, research on microaggressions directed at Caribbean and Central American immigrants, a population whose identities are merged in the more visible Latinx, African American or Asian-American identities, is rare. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 participants – fourteen immigrants and six American-born adult children of immigrants. This research explores how ethnic and racial identification of black and brown immigrants and their American born children connect to experiences of daily microaggressions in the workplace. The results revealed that due to their intersecting identities they pay a heavy emotional price to assimilate into the workplace. This research has implications for organizations, human resources and organizational development.

Keywords

Immigration, race, identity, intersectional identities, racism in the workplace, microagressions

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Introduction

The American workplace can be cold, exhausting, and at times, hostile for many people (Maestas et al., 2017) - with African Americans and Latinos reporting that they often feel abandoned by and alienated from their white colleagues (Cigna, 2020). People of color can feel tremendous pressure to be accepted and treated as equals to their white counterparts at work. In addition to being devalued and excluded from critical social networks (Thomas et al., 2020), they have to focus on being successful, maintaining their employment, achieving promotions, and addressing wage disparities while managing their feelings of anger at being debased in an environment that can be inhospitable (Thomas et al., 2018). As a result, people of color, particularly Blacks and Latinos, expend a great deal of emotional energy contending with workplace discrimination while being ostracized, unsupported, and surveilled (Thomas et al., 2018). When applicable, they also face the intersectional experience of gender bias (Lewis and Neville, 2015; Sepand, 2015). Moreover, for many who identify as immigrants from developing countries and have a non-American accent, they have the additional hurdle of xenophobia (Beard, 2013).

This article reports on the findings of a qualitative study designed to explore how Caribbean and Central American immigrants (who identify as Afro-Caribbean, Indo-Caribbean and Afro-Latino) and their adult children experience microaggressions in the American workplace, how they make meaning of it, and how they cope with it. While the issue of microaggressions has been studied for other marginalized groups, such as African Americans (Solórzano et al., 2000; Sue et al., 2019), Asians (Wong-Padoongpatt et al., 2017), Latinos (Ayana et al., 2013), women (Blithe and Elliott, 2020), people in the LGBTQ community (Resnick and Galupo, 2019), and people with disabilities (Lee et al., 2019), that research has not specifically addressed how subtle hostilities, intentional or unintentional, affect Caribbean and Central American populations. The narratives in this article give voice to the daily microaggressions experienced by this population in the workplace.

Literature review

Historical and socio-political context

The Caribbean and Central American immigrant groups at the center of this analysis are living in a contentious social moment in the American social landscape, as anti-Black racism and xenophobia (prejudice against immigrants) have intensified. While some analysts in popular political discourse attribute the rise in xenophobia to a recent increase in the immigration population to 13.7% or 44.9 million people (Budiman, 2020), it is worth noting that contemporary immigrants represent a different phenotype (physical characteristics) than the European immigrants of the 19th and 20th century. For Black immigrants and other immigrants of color, racism and xenophobia are interwoven. However, when compared to other immigrants of color, Black immigrants are faced with the intense level of racism experienced by their proximate host [African Americans]

because they are at the bottom of the hierarchy even among people of color, as described by Wilkerson (2020). This is evident by the increased number of racial incidents against Black people perpetrated by white people captured on camera in Starbucks, Nordstrom Rack, Walmart, gas stations, parks, and colleges (Robertson, 2018) and the extrajudicial killing of Black people by police – such as the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and many others (Cohen, 2020). Also, the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed that the racial disparities experienced by Black and Latinx communities are embedded in systemic racism (Acosta, 2020). In addition to the health and systemic disparities faced by immigrants recently, there has been an increase in anti-immigrant hate crimes as a result of the pandemic as well (Human Rights Watch, 2020). In the United States, if one's identity encompasses a racial and/or ethnic minority and she/he/they is an immigrant, that individual becomes vulnerable to racial/ethnic and xenophobic discrimination by both dominant and nondominant groups (Horowitz et al., 2019).

The systematic response to the influx of Black migrants, many of them Haitians, has included mass deportations by the Biden Administration; in the case of Haiti, they are being returned to a country in political turmoil due to the recent assassination of President Jovenel Moise at his residence last year by foreign assassins; severe poverty, with 60% of its 11 million inhabitants earning less than $2 a day; and the aftermath of decades of natural disasters, including 10 hurricanes and tropical storms since 1998 and the 2010 earthquake that damaged its infrastructure (Social, 2018). One of the most disturbing systematic responses towards Black migrants at the Southern border was that of the U.S. Customs and Border Protection mounted officers corralling them like animals back to Mexico (Sullivan and Kanno-Youngs, 2021). This scene took racism and xenophobia to a new level, triggering many Black people's cellular memories of slave patrols.

The barbaric treatment of Black migrants today can be linked to some White Americans' fear of losing their majority status to people of color (Lee, 2019). Many Americans are concerned that Haitians, Central Americans and other people of color will contribute to the browning of America (Frey, 2018). The fear of being replaced has also led to a resurgence of nativist ideologies among White supremacists and resulted in domestic terrorist attacks. i.e. the killing of 32-year-old Heather Heyer by a neo-Nazi in Charlottesville (Yan et al., 2017) and the attack on the U.S. Capitol on 6 January 2021, that resulted in the assault or death of 140 Capitol and Metropolitan police officers and approximately $1.5 million in damages (Duignan, 2022).

Microaggression theory

The literature on microaggressions includes a broad range of interests. For example: (1) Nadal's (2011) development of the Racial and Ethnic Microaggression Scale (REMS); (2) Basford, Offerman, and Behrend's (2014) empirical investigation of gender differences in third party perceptions of microaggressions against women; and (3) Louis and colleagues' (2016) use of Scholarly Personal Narratives (SPN) to illuminate the experiences of Black faculty members at predominantly White universities with microaggressions in the workplace. Consequently, the subject has become more relevant with widening analyses

of the phenomenon within specific environments, such as the workplace, healthcare, education, and mental health, among others.

Sue et al. (2007) describes three forms of microaggression: micro-assault, micro-insult, and micro-invalidation (also known as "micro-inequities" - the concept defined as a pattern of being overlooked, underrepresented, and devalued on the basis of race and gender). Often, manifestations of one or more of these forms of microaggression are "invisible" to those who perpetrate them and even to the recipients at times. Analyzed within the context of a transformation of racism, Sue et al. (2007) specifically described microaggressions as difficult to identify because, in many cases, micro-aggressive acts can be explained away by other seemingly non-biased, valid, and plausible explanations and circumstances that lend themselves to denial of bias. Nevertheless, micro-aggressive acts are often displayed in plain sight and experienced by the recipients as a sometimes vague, yet strong impression of having been attacked, dismissed or disrespected.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality describes the ways in which race and gender interact to characterize the multiple dimensions of intergroup experiences faced by Blacks in the workplace (Crenshaw, 1989: 139). Crenshaw builds on Hill-Collins' (1986) paradigm of a *matrix of domination* - a sociological concept that explains multiple sources of oppression (i.e. race, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, religion, and other aspects of one's identity) and its interrelatedness with structural power imbalance. The intersectionality framework is a good fit for conceptualizing the study of multiple identities. Intersectionality recognizes the different identities of Afro-Caribbean and Central American immigrants (i.e. race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, culture, and country of origin), which can be sources of oppression. While each identity carries its own individual forms of oppression, when multiple identities overlap so does the structural oppression (Hill-Collins, 2000).

Microaggressions in the workplace

Although the U.S. economy has changed considerably in the last decade as it relates to skills, very little change has occurred in the American workplace as it relates to employee engagement or the relationship between employee engagement and organizational/individual performance (Zuboff and Maxmin, 2000). Tense daily verbal and nonverbal workplace communications which are consciously or unconsciously filled with negative suggestions may have a psychological impact (Priesemuth, 2020). This manifests itself in somatic symptom disorders, such as neurologic problems, gastrointestinal complaints, and other forms of pain (Tye-Williams et al., 2020; Wingfield and Chavez, 2020).

A study consisting of 64,000 employees in 279 companies in corporate America reported that most of the jobs in those companies are held by white men, followed by white women. People of color have very low representation. In terms of entry level jobs, 36% of the positions are held by white men, 16% are held by men of color, 31% are held

by white women and 17% are held by women of color. As for managerial representation, white men hold 46% of the roles, men of color hold 16%, white women hold 27%, and women of color hold 8% (Thomas et al., 2018). The ultimate microaggression is institutional as exemplified in hiring practices, promotional opportunities and the wage gap (Thomas et al., 2018).

Microaggressions against immigrants

The literature on microaggressions with Caribbean and Central American immigrants is sparse. However, as the sample population becomes more diverse the literature increases.

In a qualitative study on Afro-Caribbean immigrant faculty members, Louis et al. (2017) examined the lived experiences of five faculty members working in predominantly white institutions. The study revealed issues of stereotyping, microaggressions and isolation. In a sub-sample of 1621 Black Caribbeans from the *National Survey of American Life*, the analysis of Taylor et al. (2019) indicated that one in 10 Black Caribbeans reported that they were treated with less courtesy and other people acted as though they were better than them, afraid of them, and/or as if they were not as intelligent. Another study on immigrant professionals from several different countries including Central America, Shenoy-Packer (2015) examined the immigrants' work conditions and how these professionals make sense of their situations in the workplace. The findings revealed that they experienced verbal, attitudinal, and professional microaggressions due to their skin color, ethnicity, and national group membership.

Microaggressions and mental distress

In a qualitative study by Venner and Welfare (2019), 32 participants were recruited using snowball sampling technique, with 24 of the 32 declining to participate. The study explored the mental health experiences of eight Black Caribbean adults. The results indicated they are reluctant to seek mental health treatment due to stigma and shame, they valued being able to discuss cultural issues, and preferred to have therapists that are similar to them (race, culture and/or gender). In an earlier study using data from the National Survey of American Life, Williams et al. (2007) examined the prevalence of psychiatric disorders among Black Caribbean immigrants and African Americans. The findings indicated that the experience of being a minority in the United States was associated with higher risks for psychiatric disorders among Black Caribbean immigrants, which possibly reflects increased stress due to a decrease in social mobility associated with being Black in America.

Methods

The study was reviewed and approved by the University of Saint Joseph's Internal Review Board (IRB) to assure compliance with federal and university regulations regarding human subject participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. This is a qualitative study based on in-depth interviews.

Table 1. Study participants.

Demographic information	Number of participants
Immigrants	14
U.S. born	6
Total study participants	20
Racial and ethnic breakdown	
# Of Afro Caribbean	15
# Of Afro-Latinx	3
# Of Indo-Caribbean	1
Mixed race (black and white)	1
Total study respondents	**20**

Recruitment

This qualitative study is part of a mixed-method study. The Co-PIs recruited participants for the quantitative study through an online survey. At the end of the survey, participants were invited to participate in the qualitative study. Participants were instructed to write-in their phone number and a pseudonym if they wished to be contacted for an interview. Fifteen percent of the participants who participated in the survey volunteered to be interviewed. However, of those who agreed to be interviewed, only half completed the interview when contacted.

Participants

The study included 20 participants, 14 immigrants and 6 U.S.-born adults whose parents migrated from the Caribbean and Central America. The six adult children of immigrants were born in the United States and described themselves as very entrenched in their parents' culture in a variety of ways. Of the 20 participants, 17 were female, and three were male. Fifteen (15) participants identified as Afro-Caribbean, 3 as Afro-Latinx, 1 as Indo-Caribbean and 1 as mixed race (Table 1). The immigrant participants were from Jamaica, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Haiti, Barbados, the Dominican Republic, Cuba and Guatemala. At the time of the study, the participants lived in the states of Virginia, Florida, New Jersey, New York and Connecticut. The participants all had at least some college education, with four holding associate degrees, 6 with bachelor degrees, 7 with master's degrees and 3 with doctoral degrees (Ph.Ds.).

Measures/data collection

In-depth interviews were conducted via telephone and were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. The interviews utilized a semi-structured interview guide, which consisted of 29 questions and prompts developed to explore the experiences of microaggressions in the workplace faced by Afro-Caribbean and Central American immigrants and their adult children. The interviews lasted approximately one-and-a-half hours and were conducted

between February and August of 2019. The interview questions were informed by the construct of intersectionality and chosen to explore how the theory of intersectionality manifests itself in the lives of Afro-Caribbean, Indo-Caribbean and Central American immigrants and their adult children in the workplace.

Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Clarke and Braun, 2013) to achieve an understanding of patterns of meaning from data on the lived experiences of micro-aggressions by Caribbean and Central American immigrants and their adult children in the workplace. Thematic analysis is a good approach to research where the researcher is attempting to explicate participants' views, opinions, knowledge, experiences or values using qualitative data, such as interviews. The analysis began with the verbatim transcription of the audio recordings of all 20 interviews. Our methodology required the researchers to meet weekly for several months to familiarize ourselves with the data. That process included reading the transcripts and transferring the transcriptions from a Word document to an Excel spreadsheet (Eliot, 2011) to facilitate notetaking and sorting, with one line of text to each row. The initial division into rows was arbitrary but was refined as the analysis progressed. The spreadsheet used five columns. The first two were for open codes, the next was for each question from the interview guide, the next was for a line number, and the fifth column contained the text. In the first stage of the analysis, members of the research team worked separately on individual interviews, highlighting sections of the text (phrases or sentences), and coming up with shorthand labels or codes to describe the content. These codes allowed us to gain a summarized overview of the main points and common meanings that were found throughout the data. In the next step of the analysis, the codes were discussed and refined in meetings of the entire research team. Then, the text corresponding to each code was placed in a separate spreadsheet to further explore patterns among them and to identify themes, which were then transferred, along with the corresponding codes to a Word document. The next step entailed reviewing the themes to make sure that they were analytically useful and an accurate representation of the data. After the final list of themes were identified and named, they were defined. Naming themes involved developing a succinct and easily understandable term for each theme. Defining themes included formulating what we meant by each theme and deciding how it helped us understand the data.

Results

The analysis of the data revealed several themes: excluded/unsupported; pigeon-holed; the price of assimilation; fear of failure; lack of recognition; and strategies for coping.

Excluded and unsupported

Participants in the study used the following phrases to describe their workplaces when asked how people treat one another in the workplace: *silos*, *cliquish*, *catty*, *tense*, *silent*,

racially divided. The responses had an underlying theme of feeling left out or excluded, as well as experiencing the workplace as hostile.

An Afro-Caribbean female faculty member in a predominantly white university in New England described how subtle forms of microaggressions manifest as cold and hostile in the workplace:

> A lot of silence at my workplace, people don't communicate with each other – mostly they don't communicate with me. There is a lot of tension. People exist in silos. There is no sharing of information. They are cliquish. I am the only Black faculty in the department so I avoid certain situations when I can.

An Indo-Caribbean woman in her forties from Guyana, who works in a child welfare organization, described feeling excluded both during work hours and after-work social networking:

> In my current workplace, I noticed that there are cliques. The minorities usually work and go home. The rest of them [white colleagues] go to happy hour together and they go to each other's homes together.

Pigeon-holed

In response to a question on whether participants feel their racial/ethnic identity or being an immigrant affects how people treat them at work, some of the participants described incidents that made them feel invisible because they are not seen for who they are in their professional role. Instead, they feel that they are pigeon-holed into roles that are stereotypes due to their race/ethnicity/immigrant status and country of origin. An American-born Afro-Latina woman whose parents are from the Dominican Republic described her experience as being judged negatively by her colleagues. She feels her identities are invisible and she is often boxed-in and pigeon-holed by her colleagues.

> People see I'm a woman of color and they assume things before they give me a chance to speak - my work ethic, how elegant I am and my level of success. The world sees me as a Hispanic woman. It hasn't caught up with all of my identities. My race isn't Dominican. It is Black. My ethnicity/culture is Dominican. People ask me how you can be Black if you're Dominican. I tell them that racially I am Black but, ethnically, I'm Dominican because that's my culture.

A Latina social worker, who was born in Cuba and migrated to the U.S. as a child, recently left her job because she was treated as a stereotype in the workplace and currently works as a private practitioner. She recalled one of the many situations she encountered in her previous job:

> …. Well, just the fact that in my last job, my colleagues didn't think I had the knowledge I have, particularly as it relates to theoretical approaches and therapeutic interventions. They

> see a Latina and they don't see my qualifications and experience. There was one situation where I had to list all my post-graduate trainings and where I was trained. That's sad, you know?

The next participant identified as an immigrant from Jamaica and, at the time of the interview, she was a nurse in a predominantly white institution in New England. She shared an incident in her current job where she felt she was not seen and was categorized in a lower position.

> I was getting my picture taken for my badge on my first day of work and an employee who was supposed to put my position on the badge saw me, asked my name and said "so you're the new receptionist?" He didn't ask me what was my position. He automatically assumed I was the receptionist. So, I had to correct him and inform him I was a medical provider.

The price of assimilation

In an effort to assess participants' need to assimilate into the workplace, they were asked whether they had ever felt the need to minimize various aspects of their racial/ethnic culture in order to "fit in" to the culture of their workplace. The women generally went first to matters of their hair, especially when working in predominantly white institutions. Other areas of assimilation include their language/accent, and their clothing. While each respondent had a different story about how they assimilated in the workplace, generally their stories fell within the same categories – looking professional from a Eurocentric perspective. In one situation, a participant shared that assimilation for him means remaining silent. The following statement is from an Afro Caribbean woman who is an administrator in a public child welfare organization where the majority of the staff and clients are Black:

> Of course. I wear my hair natural. I went through a period where I permed my hair to fit in, but I have learned to embrace my natural looks as I get older. I still make a conscious effort to minimize my accent - which always surprises me when people say 'you have an accent.'

The next participant is an Afro-Caribbean woman who is an administrator in a predominantly white institution. This woman reported not feeling comfortable with the attention her natural hair would bring her. She feared she wouldn't be taken seriously or seen as professional.

> I actually will not wear my hair natural to work, just because I feel I will get a lot of attention. I already look different from everybody else and I feel that would add extra onto it. I'm also worried that I wouldn't be taken seriously, you know, professional.

A Latina who is a bilingual/bicultural clinical social worker in a predominantly white institution that provides therapeutic services to a mixed population, shared her experience when she transitioned from straightening her hair to wearing it natural:

> Um, it's so interesting because I went from blow drying my hair to leaving it naturally curly. I was working at this job for about five years when I made the change. And um, there were comments about my hair. One person said, 'well, you know, it's really more professional if you straighten your hair.' So, I said, that's according to who?

A Black male participant in his early 40s, who works in a predominantly white and Latinx community, said assimilation manifests in the way he dresses at work and also by silencing his voice.

> I have to be dressed in professional attire in order to be respected. Also, the way you handle yourself. For example, sometimes at Board meetings where there are rich people, I often don't speak up. Many of them don't even acknowledge me when they walk in the room. I feel they look down or talk down to me. It's hard sometimes because sometimes I feel strongly about an issue and I want to speak up, but then I feel like nothing will change so I don't say anything.

Fear of failure/making mistakes

A U.S.-born male participant of Jamaican ancestry - who is an assistant principal in a school - described his fear of failing. This was in response to the question, "Do you believe that your ideas, contributions and work are respected and valued by your colleagues and management?"

> I feel like when I get things done, its expected, but when I fail, it's like a big thing; The response is, 'Oh, he messed up. We knew he couldn't do it.' When white colleagues fail, they are often told, 'Oh, let's see how we can help you do better.'

An Afro-Caribbean female faculty speaks of the fear of making a mistake as it relates to working in university settings.

> Life in the American workplace for me as an assistant professor isn't easy.
>
> We don't get to make mistakes. Because if we do, we won't recover.

Lack of recognition

This theme was resounding in several of the participants' responses to the question, "Is there anything about your job that makes you feel unappreciated/devalued?" This participant's remarks were lengthy and heart-wrenching to hear/witness as she detailed the pain of her experience. She speaks of not being recognized, not getting support and resources, even when there is tangible evidence of her performance, and watching her white colleague get support, recognition and resources even when her work performance exceeds that of her white colleague's:

> I feel like some of my efforts go unrecognized. Whenever I have an 'ask,' such as more resources for my programs, I have to give evidence that the program worked or I met the outcomes, otherwise I don't get the resources or support. Sometimes, even when I deliver on it, I still don't get the recognition or funding. Priority is sometimes given to another program area which is overseen by a white woman. I don't understand [how] if I show you the evidence, why my white colleague gets prioritized and she gets the resources, when her program isn't getting the results, mine is.

She continued to speak about a 'racial arrangement' of Blacks having to help their white peers, with no recognition for it - while at the same time being left to struggle by themselves without any support. The participant concluded that she may have a shortcoming - blaming herself in order to rationalize her experience:

> There are times when I have been called to the table to help this same white female to succeed and she gets the recognition. When it's time to help a white person, all hands are on deck. I don't know what I'm doing wrong.

Strategies for self-care

Many of the participants in the study use multiple strategies for self-care when experiencing microaggressions in the workplace. These tactics tend to focus on taking care of self, instead of confronting the Micro-aggressor or addressing it with the organization's human resources department. The first response below is one of the most common responses. Participants often seek support outside the workplace:

> I have a good support group/team. They are people outside of work. Many of them are from my professional association.

Some participants are able to access formal/informal groups:

> As a social worker, I am part of the racial equity group in my professional association. There, we get to learn a lot about racism, we invite speakers in and we get to talk about our experiences.

Others are able to access personal relationships, including family and members of the church:

> Connecting with community, being around people you love, your family, church.

Some participants educate themselves about the issue as a way of dealing:

> I read a lot. I also watch different programs on television that can help me deal with this issue - that would clarify what I experience.

Other participants rely on a variety of strategies, including spirituality, nature and even music:

> I meditate and do yoga. I also find myself listening to music and spending time enjoying nature with family and friends.

A few participants, find working out in the gym to be helpful. Below:

> I work out all the time. Going to the gym is helpful, because I get to work my anger and pain out, especially now that I'm into kick-boxing.

A participant that works in a bank reported having a mentor that helps her navigate workplace microaggressions:

> I went to a training that my organization hosted on diversity, and I met a more seasoned Black woman. Even though she doesn't work at my location, we connected and we meet for dinner once a month. That is very helpful. She is my mentor. She has walked in my shoes.

One of the most unique coping mechanisms that was shared by a participant about her self-care strategy included incorporating her hobby of sewing, selecting colors that energizes her, while at the same time wearing an armor for protection:

> I like sewing my own clothes. The clothes I wear are bright colors because it brings my energy up. It's like putting on a shield to protect me.

Of the 20 participants in the study, the one above was the most jarring. This participant experiences her workplace culture as hostile and toxic and consciously uses her clothes as an armor for protection. Participants in the study shared a plethora of strategies for counteracting microaggressions including self-protective rituals, participating in activities outside of the workplace that are self-affirming psychologically, emotionally and physically.

Limitations

The study has two limitations. The first is the small sample size which makes the knowledge generated not generalizable to the larger population of Caribbean and Central American immigrants and their adult children's experiences in the workplace. The second limitation is self-selection as evidenced by the 20 participants who selected to be interviewed because they wanted to tell their story.

Implications

This article has implications for social workers, organizations, diversity, inclusion and equity trainers, human resource directors, and Caribbean immigrants because its content

impacts a growing group of employees in today's workplace - whose identities intersect with race, ethnicity, country of origin, culture, gender (where applicable) and immigration status. This study demonstrates that racial microaggressions in the workplace can add to the Afro-Caribbean and Central American employees' stress, trauma and other psychological issues, such as depression and anxiety. It also demonstrates that the Afro-Caribbean and Central American people in the study experience additional burdens in the workplace because, as Black people and immigrants, they are not readily accepted - at least, not without giving up a great deal of who they are in order to fit in. The assimilation process for Afro Caribbean and Central American requires them to expend a great deal of emotional tax (Travis et al., 2016).

Whether microaggressions are intentional or not, they are harmful. Addressing these issues interpersonally is risky for Afro Caribbean and Central American immigrants in general and especially so for employees who are in lower-level workplace positions. They generally have the most to lose. Consequently, organizations must take the lead in eradicating microaggressions and other forms of discrimination. Organizational leaders must start from a place of admitting that microaggressions do exist, irrespective of the work environment. Organizations must educate their staff, especially senior management about implicit (unintentional) bias and increase awareness of racial and other forms of bias, including microaggressions. Organizations should focus on how microaggressions impact decision-making - promotions, recruitment and hiring practices, as well as formal and informal work-related activities. Most of all, employees should receive assistance in identifying and associating microaggressions with historical and systemic racism that is connected to chattel slavery, genocide of indigenous people, and the indentured servitude of Asians in the diaspora.

Caribbean and Central American immigrants experiencing microaggressions should take care of themselves. Some options include doing meditation, yoga, joining support groups, and participating in religious, physical and social activities. Whenever possible, they should find support both within the organization and outside with a therapist who understands racism and racial microaggressions – instead of isolating or withdrawing. Joining professional organizations where they can have access to mentors is also another form of support. Many of the study participants found formal and informal groups to be helpful. Similarly, peer groups that get together after work have been shown to be helpful to improve gender diversity (Thomas et al., 2018). Remember, if and when one confronts the micro-aggressor, he, she or they may dismiss your experience and suggest you are hypersensitive (Nadal, 2016). Bystanders on the other hand who witness micro-aggressions in the workplace should be allies without shutting the victim's voice down by speaking for them. Bystanders should report what was observed and its impact (Clay, 2017).

Therapists working with Caribbean and Central American immigrants must recognize the severity of the impact of racism and xenophobia. Racism, whether it's institutional or interpersonal, is a form of violence. When working with this population, it is important for clinicians to expand their assessment to include workplace racism and the constant overt and subtle messages of unworthiness and exclusion. Therapists must take this opportunity to learn to become culturally humble - a lifelong process of self-reflection and self-critique

that begins with examining one's own beliefs, social positions and cultural identities. Therapists must develop knowledge of the impact of the legacy of historical and intergenerational trauma, violence and oppression against people of color (Buchanan et al., 2020; Foronda, 2019; Gottlieb, 2020; Tervalon and Murray-Garcia, 1998) and the immigrant experience.

Conclusion

Whether subtle or overt, microaggressions are experienced physically, emotionally and psychologically by recipients (Nadal et al., 2016). When it occurs in the workplace, it is not just an interpersonal incident but one that is imbedded in institutional racism. If microaggressions are allowed to continue, it contributes to a toxic environment for all and, in some cases, leads to high workplace turnover (Triana et al., 2015).

The findings of this study are consistent with previously researched populations on microaggressions as it relates to the significance of feeling excluded, rationalizing to cope, being overlooked and devalued (Berdahl and Moore, 2006; Sesko and Biernat, 2010; Thomas et al., 2020; Washington et al., 2020). The study also revealed new findings, such as being pigeon-holed, and the expectation of supporting their white colleagues' successes. Assimilation into the workplace was highlighted in three areas - professional attire, accents and issues related to hair for women.

At a time when there is a resurgence in conservative populism, white supremacy and media scrutiny of immigration issues and race relations, this article highlights a seldom-discussed aspect of the immigrant experience. The agency (power) of immigrants is often devalued and/or underscored by subtle, biased verbal and attitudinal messages. Microaggressions are a sociolinguistic manifestation of power relationships. Immigrants are cultural ambassadors who bridge the gap between nations and bring valuable human capital. They prefer the convention of a mutually respectful and productive relationship with the host society, rather than one that makes them feel insecure, unwelcomed or feared.

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