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THE IMPACT OF RACIAL MICROAGGRESSIONS ACROSS EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS

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ABSTRACT: While separate bodies of research have emerged regarding racial microaggressions in postsecondary settings and the relationship between race-related stressors and health outcomes for African Americans, there is a dearth of empirical investigations that test the effects of "general happiness," "job satisfaction," and race-related stress based on the educational attainment of African Americans. This study examines the experiences of 3,320 African Americans who participated in the National Survey of American Life (NSAL) conducted by the Program for Research on Black Americans at the University of Michigan. Using a multigroup structural equation modeling approach, findings suggest that experience with more racial microaggressions tends to lead to less general happiness. Furthermore, greater racial microaggressions lead to less job satisfaction regardless of educational attainment. Findings demonstrate that racial microaggressions are entrenched in many parts of society that impact the health and education of African Americans. Authors provide suggestions for addressing racial microaggressions and disrupting whiteness.

OBJECTIVES

African Americans face extreme challenges and barriers that are not often buffered by what is believed to come from an investment in human capital or employment. African Americans and other People of Color are reporting racial microaggressions in higher education institutions and the workforce (DeCuir-Gunby & Gunby Jr., 2016; Franklin, 2019; Smith, 2004; Smith, Mustaffa, Jones, Curry, & Allen, 2016). It is in the American lexicon that workplaces are settings of meritocracy where a person can succeed despite their race, gender, or other identifiers. While this may be true in some cases, plenty of research demonstrates that workplaces are rife with discrimination and racism (Wingfield, 2007). Racism and discrimination do not end in the lifetime of historically marginalized groups but is instead a continuum of constant adverse outcomes.

In the college context, individual and focus-group interviews demonstrate that African Americans continually express that their experiences, cultural traditions, sense of belonging, and opinions are questioned, challenged, and negated in the form of racial microaggressions (Davis et al., 2004; Feagin & Vera, 1996; Hill, Kobayashi, & Hughes, 2007; Picca & Feagin, 2007; Smith, 2009; Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2006; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Swim et al., 2003). As African American students enter into increasingly non-Black environments on historically White campuses, they are reporting increasingly hostile racial climates. For example, Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) found it very hard for African American undergraduate students to escape racial microaggressions because they faced it in every domain they associated in: (1) within classroom settings, (2) outside of classroom settings, and (3) within social spaces on campus. Moreover, when and where they try to socialize, they were met with police harassment. Additionally, African American students report campus environmental cultures that do not value their experience. Mills (2019) investigated Black undergraduate experiences with environmental racial microaggressions while attending a historically white campus. These findings showed that Black students experienced

six types of environmental racial microaggressions: (a) segregation, (b) lack of representation, (c) campus response to criminality, (d) cultural bias in courses, (e) tokenism, and (f) pressure to conform. In hostile climates and cultures, African Americans, in addition to their peers of color, have been and will continue to report racial microaggressions and macroaggressions whether they are interpersonal, social, institutional, or environmental (Mills, 2019; Smith, Yosso, Solórzano, 2006). Consequently, racial microaggressions will impact not only African American students' sense of belonging at an institution (Hurtado & Carter, 1997) but also their academic and health outcomes (Johnson et al., 2014). While racial microaggressions impact the retention and graduation rates of African American students, many still manage to persist and graduate despite these extra barriers (Harper, 2012; Johnson et al., 2014).

When African Americans graduate from higher education institutions and enter the workforce, research demonstrates that racial microaggressions continue to plague them in their professional life (Holder, Jackson, & Ponterotto, 2015; Pitcan, Park-Taylor, & Hayslett, 2018; Smith, 2004; Franklin, Smith, & Hung, 2014; Quaye, et al., 2019). Holder, Jackson, and Ponterotto (2015) investigated racial microaggressions reported by Black women managers. Their study revealed that Black women experienced various forms of environmental racial microaggressions in their workplace, including rigid stereotypes of being treated as intellectually inferior and being rendered invisible despite being the most senior-ranking person. In similar research, Pitcan, Park-Taylor, and Hayslett's (2018) study of Black men discovered that their participants were often frustrated with subtle attacks of racism versus being overtly attacked. They also believed that Black men were hypervisible and "that their performance must be beyond reproach to maintain a positive representation of all Black men, as well as to protect against differential responses toward errors between them and their White peers" (p. 311). These Black men also adopted "John Henryism"—prolonged high-effort coping enduring psychosocial stressors—as an effort to confront workplace discrimination and accepted working three times as hard as their white counterparts in order to be successful. Last, all participants recognized those workplace racial microaggressions came with an emotional and psychological cost.

These stressors, over time, may cause African American men and women to lose hope about their lifelong overall satisfaction and take racial microaggressions as a given without formally knowing their detrimental effects (Carroll, 1998; Pierce 1974, 1975a, 1975b, 1995). Other research has demonstrated the negative impact of racial microaggressions on the psychological, physiological, and behavioral stress responses of African Americans (Smith, 2004). While we are learning more about the negative impact of racial microaggressions, few empirical investigations test the effects of "general happiness," "job satisfaction," educational attainment, and race-related stress in the lives of African American college graduates as a result of racial microaggressions. The purpose of this study is to examine, empirically, the role that racial microaggressions have in predicting African American college graduates' general happiness and job satisfaction at three levels of educational attainment. This study has implications not only for current African American undergraduate and graduate students but also for African American students who are soon to enter the workforce. Finally, the articlewill investigate how universities can address racial microaggressions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

RACIAL MICROAGGRESSIONS AND RACIAL BATTLE FATIGUE

Racism is structured into the rhythms of everyday life for African Americans (Feagin, 2000). Chester Pierce (1970) defined racism as a "public health and mental health illness," based on the delusion or false belief, despite contrary evidence, that innate inferiority correlates with dark skin color (p. 266). He argues that, in examining racism, "one must not look for the gross and obvious. The subtle, cumulative miniassault is the substance of today's racism" (Pierce, 1974, p. 516). Pierce describes these assaults as racial microaggressions. In adapting Pierce's work, we define racial microaggressions as, but not limited to: (1) subtle and blatant verbal and nonverbal insults, often automatically or unconsciously; (2) layered insults based on one's race and race-gender group; and (3) cumulative insults, which cause unnecessary stress (Pierce, 1970, 1974, 1989, 1995). We define racial microaggressions in its original intent; racial microaggressions help us understand the racist microlevel aggressions that

People of Color experience. Scholars have expanded on Pierce's research to address how African Americans are experiencing and responding to racial microlevel aggressions within and beyond the academy (see Carroll, 1998; Smith, 2004; Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). For example, Grace Carroll (1998) extended Pierce's work to describe that being Black in the United States means living in a society permeated by mundane and extreme racism that is punctuated by incessant racial microaggressions. She finds that African Americans are faced with living in conditions reflective of mundane extreme environmental stress—MEES. Smith (2004, 2009a, 2009b) focused on the stress aspects of racism, explaining that constant exposure to MEES reveals the cumulative effect of racial microaggressions. He argued that the stress associated with racial microaggressions caused racially marginalized groups to experience various forms of mental, emotional, and physical strain—defined as racial battle fatigue.

The stress ensuing from racism and racial microaggressions leads people to exhibit various psychophysiological symptoms, including suppressed immunity and increased sickness, tension headaches, trembling and jumpiness, chronic pain in healed injuries, and elevated blood pressure (Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999; Mays, Cochran, & Barnes, 2007; Smith, Allen & Danley, 2007; Smith, et al., 2016). Furthermore, other symptoms of racial battle fatigue include constant anxiety, ulcer, frustration, insomnia or sleep broken by haunting conflict-specific dreams, rapid mood swings, and emotional and social withdrawal in response to racial microaggressions or while in environments of mundane racial stressors (Soto, Dawson-Andoh, & BeLue, 2011). Ultimately, these symptoms may lead to a loss of self-confidence, a questioning of one's life's work, or self-worth.

Indeed, continually battling racialized stress takes a toll on the lives of People of Color. In some groundbreaking research, Carroll Izard (1972, 1977) documented that African Americans perceive incidents of racism as personal threats. This perception led to increased emotional stress levels. Nancy Krieger and Stephen Sidney (1996) reported in their Coronary Artery Risk Development in Young Adults (CARDIA) study that 80 percent of 1,974 Black women and men experienced racial discrimination,

and self-reported attempts to respond to unfair treatment. This study showed that both experiences of discrimination and efforts to respond to the unfair treatment were associated with increased blood pressure. Similarly, in their review of the literature on discrimination and health, David Williams, Harold Neighbors, and James Jackson (2003) concluded that perceptions of discrimination appear to induce physiological and psychological arousal. Systematic exposures to such psychosocial stressors are proving to have long-term health consequences.

Experiencing racial discrimination as a stressful life event can reduce one's sense of control and elicit feelings of loss, ambiguity, strain, frustration, and injustice (Brown, Williams, Jackson, Neighbors, Torres, Sellers, & Brown, 2000). Smith (2004) concluded that this activates a stress-response system, evolved initially for responding to acute physical and emotional emergencies. However, given the pervasiveness of racism in US society and its institutions, this emergency stress-response system has been "switched on" to cope with chronic racial microlevel aggressions and macrolevel aggressions.

Therefore, the accumulative stress responses from racial microaggressions produces racial battle fatigue. The result of unavoidable race-related stress leads People of Color to feel mentally, emotionally, and physically drained. Indeed, throughout a lifetime, the stress from racial microaggressions can become lethal when the accumulation of physiological symptoms of racial battle fatigue where few empirical investigations test untreated, unnoticed, misdiagnosed, or personally dismissed (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011).

COPING

Although racism on campus can take a toll on students of color, they continue to persist in higher education and graduate school in increasing numbers. Coping with racism can play a critical role in the experiences of students of color on historically White campuses. When studying racism-related stress resulting in racial battle fatigue, it is critically important to investigate buffers or defenses that attenuate the harmful impact of stress on both mental and physical health. According to Lazarus (1990), coping mediates the relationship between a stressor and the experience of stress. Coping is the

mechanism by which individuals understand, reframe, or react to events. How an individual appraises racialized events and uses effective coping strategies can determine the intensity the experience stresses the person.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) proposed a phenomenological model of stress that consists of cognitive processes. Lazarus and Folkman stated that "psychological stress is a particular relation between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being" (p. 19). As a result, they conceptualize coping as a set of flexible responses to a specific situation and argue that coping is meant to be evaluated within a specific context and in response to a specific stressful situation. First, an individual establishes whether an event is stressful or nonthreatening, and then he or she assesses available coping responses with the potential efficacy given the situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Kessler (1979) found a historically underrepresented group status has been shown to limit one's access to coping resources. Research has demonstrated that dealing with racism-related stress requires distinctive responses compared to those dealing with general life stress (Clark et al., 1999; Feagin & Sikes, 1994; Shorter-Godden, 2004). Individuals who infer experiences as stressful and those that are unable to implement proper coping responses suffer from poor long-term mental and physical health (Williams, Spencer & Jackson, 1999; Williams, Yu, Jackson & Anderson, 1997; Williams, Neighbors & Jackson, 2003). Engagement coping or an attempt at gaining either primary or secondary control over a stressful situation is a type of coping strategy often cited in racism literature (Compas et al., 2001; Miller & Kaiser, 2001; Wei et al., 2010; Brondolo et al., 2009; Harrell, 2000). Changing the stressful situation is referred to as primary control coping, and secondary control coping refers to adapting to stressful events (Crocker et al., 2007; Miller & Kaiser, 2001). Coping responses that do not attenuate stressful experiences are considered maladaptive, while those that mitigate the effects of stress are referred to as adaptive coping strategies (Clark et al., 1999).

EMPLOYMENT AND DISCRIMINATION AND JOB SATISFACTION

As with higher education, racial discrimination and the workplace are not mutually exclusive. Research demonstrates that African Americans and

other historically marginalized groups face racism and discrimination in the workplace despite their seniority (Fox & Stallworth, 2005; Wiecek & Hamilton, 2013; Wingfield, 2007). Scholarship demonstrates that discrimination has adverse effects on work-related outcomes (Hughes & Dodge, 1997), physical well-being (Darity Jr., 2003), and mental health (Noh, Kaspar, & Wickrama, 2007; Rospenda, Richman, & Shannon, 2009). There are also psychological outcomes to discrimination in the workplace such as a lack of self-esteem (Motoike, 1995; Noh et al., 2007) and more significant depression (Crouter, Davis, Updegraff, Delgado, & Fortner, 2006). Hughes and Dodge (1997) found that African American women reported that predominantly White workplaces were more likely to be perceived as racist. Interestingly, Hughes and Dodge (1997) also found that more institutional discrimination was perceived more by service, semiskilled and unskilled workers than women in professional occupations.

Discrimination impacts not only the psychological and physiological well-being of people but also other factors in a person's life. Hughes and Dodge (1997) found that discrimination was associated with decreased job satisfaction among African American women and lower earnings. In a study of perceptions of fit, Lyons and O'Brien (2007) found that perceptions of fit predicted job satisfaction for all Black employees.

METHODS

PARTICIPANTS

The data for this study comes from the National Survey of American Life (NSAL), which was conducted by telephone and personal interviews by the Program for Research on Black Americans at the University of Michigan. Out of our participants, 64.4% were female, 65% were employed, 85.8% were very religious, 70.3% attended church 1–3 times a month (see Table 1). Among them, approximately 40% received a high school diploma or equivalent, 56% held a college degree, and 12% had served in the military. Since we were interested in investigating how racial microaggressions related to general happiness and job satisfaction across educational levels among African Americans, we included only African

Americans in our study and categorized them into three groups: (A) those who had 9 to 12 years of education or at least some high school training or a diploma, N = 2,036; (B) those who received 13 to 16 years of education or some college, N = 1,086; and (C) those who had at least 17 years of education or at least a college degree, N = 198. As such, the effective sample size for this study was 3,320 African Americans.

Table 1 Demographics

Variable	*n*	%
Gender		
Male	1,181	35.6%
Female	2,138	64.4%
Employed		
No	1,162	74.0%
Yes	2,158	26.0%
Religious		
Very religious	1,116	33.6%
Fairly religious	1.723	51.9%
Not too religious	365	11.0%
Not religious at all	106	3.2%
Frequency of Attending Religious Services		
4 or more times	189	5.7%
At least 1–3 times a week	1,139	34.3%
1–3 times a month	830	25.0%
A few times a year	624	18.8%
Less than once a year	289	8.7%
N/A	249	7.5%
Served in the Military		
No	2,921	88.0%
Yes	398	12.0%
Have a College Degree		
Yes	1,895	56.0%
No	1,461	44.0%

ANALYTIC METHOD

Our independent variable consisted of the factor "racial microaggressions." Racial microaggressions measured African Americans' perceived discriminatory life experiences. The stem question was: "In your day-to-day life, how often have any of the following things happened to you?" The items included: (1) You are treated with less courtesy than others; (2) You are treated with less respect than others; (3) You receive poorer restaurant service than others; (4) People act like you are not smart; (5) People act afraid of you; (6) People act like you are dishonest; and (7) People act better than you. The response was recoded and ranged from 0 (never) to 5 (almost every day). Our dependent variables consisted of two items: "general happiness these days" and "satisfaction with your jobs." The scale for "general happiness these days" was from 0 (not happy at all) to 3 (very happy), for "satisfaction with your jobs" was also from 0 (very dissatisfied) to 3 (very satisfied) (Table 2).

We used structural equation modeling to conduct our statistical analysis. First, we checked whether the factor, "racial microaggressions" had adequate fit using confirmatory factor analysis. A factor should have reasonable fit in order to assure the related set of items measures a common construct. Next, we constructed a multigroup structural equation model (see Figure 1) to test our hypotheses. Our hypotheses included: (1) Do racial microaggressions predict general happiness across different educational levels among African Americans?; and (2) Do racial microaggressions predict job satisfaction across different educational levels among African Americans?

RESULTS

Overall, the factor "racial microaggressions" had a fairly good model fit (CFI = 0.886; TLI = 0.829; SRMR = 0.053), indicating that the items associated with this factor were properly specified and the set of items measured a single construct. As such, we could start testing our hypotheses using structural equation models. Our main findings are summarized in Table 3. African Americans in group A or with 9 to 12 years of education (b = -0.139; p = 0.000) and those with 13 to 16 years of edu-

Table 2 Study Variables

Variable		N	%
Treated with Less Courtesy			
	Almost every day	96	3%
	At least once a week	163	5%
	A few times a month	375	11%
	A few times a year	793	24%
	Less than once a year	1086	33%
	Never	760	23%
	Don't know	50	2%
Treated with Less Respect			
	Almost every day	80	2%
	At least once a week	136	4%
	A few times a month	312	9%
	A few times a year	793	24%
	Less than once a year	1059	32%
	Never	890	27%
	Don't know	50	2%
Received Poor Service			
	Almost every day	60	2%
	At least once a week	86	3%
	A few times a month	279	8%
	A few times a year	837	25%
	Less than once a year	1072	32%
	Never	940	28%
	Don't know	46	1%
People Act Like You Are Not Smart			
	Almost every day	206	6%
	At least once a week	176	5%
	A few times a month	342	10%
	A few times a year	697	21%
	Less than once a year	883	27%
	Never	963	29%
	Don't know	53	2%

People Act Afraid of You			
	Almost every day	123	4%
	At least once a week	96	3%
	A few times a month	206	6%
	A few times a year	428	13%
	Less than once a year	923	28%
	Never	1491	45%
	Don't know	50	2%
People Act Like You Are Dishonest			
	Almost every day	110	3%
	At least once a week	73	2%
	A few times a month	186	6%
	A few times a year	435	13%
	Less than once a year	993	30%
	Never	1474	44%
	Don't know	50	2%
People Act Better Than You			
	Almost every day	375	11%
	At least once a week	216	7%
	A few times a month	435	13%
	A few times a year	764	23%
	Less than once a year	657	20%
	Never	813	25%
	Don't know	60	2%
Job Satisfaction			
	Very satisfied	784	24%
	Somewhat satisfied	989	30%
	Somewhat dissatisfied	256	8%
	Very dissatisfied	129	4%
	Don't know	1162	35%
General Happiness			
	Very happy	933	28%
	Pretty happy	1889	57%
	Not too happy	458	14%
	Not happy at all	20	1%
	Don't know	20	1%

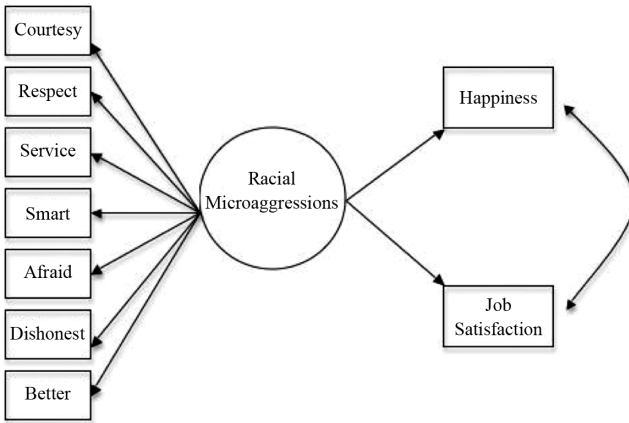*The Impact of Racial Microaggressions*   **81**

FIGURE 1 Path model for all groups.

Table 3 Racial microaggressions predicting general happiness and job satisfaction. Numbers outside of parentheses represent unstandardized regression estimates. Numbers inside of parentheses represent p-values.

	Group A: 9–12 years education	Group B: 13–16 years of education	Group C: 17 years or more education
General happiness			
RACMICRO	−0.139 (0.000)*	−0.115 (0.000)*	−0.105 (0.087)
Job satisfaction			
RACMICRO	−0.090(0.006)*	−0.204 (0.001)*	−0.337 (0.024)*

Note: *p<0.05. CFI = 0.878; TGLI = 0.870; SRMR = 0.057.

cation (b = -0.115; p = 0.000) tend to experience less happiness as they experience more racial microaggressions. Across all three groups, increasing racial microaggressions leads to less job satisfaction (For group A: b = -0.090, p = 0.006; For group B: b = -0.204, p = 0.001; For group C: b = -0.337, p = 0.024).

DISCUSSION

The findings for this study reflect the everyday life experiences and public discourses regarding the lives of African Americans, not only in the

entire educational pipeline but also in the workforce (Museus & Jayaku-mar, 2012). African Americans experience various degrees and intensities of race-related stress from the time they are born and throughout their lifetimes (Anderson, et al., 2015). As expected, we found that as racial microaggressions increases, participants express less happiness. We found that participants with fewer years of education demonstrate less happiness as a result of racial microaggressions. These findings are consistent with prior literature in education and the workforce that racial microaggressions have a negative impact on African Americans. Racial microaggressions give the impression that certain students and individuals are not welcome in a given setting. Racial microaggressions, whether intended or not, present a specific image to historically underrepresented and marginalized groups that they are not welcome which impacts fit and satisfaction. Although higher education institutions tout their welcoming environment for students of color and workplaces highlight their diversity and inclusion policies, their predominantly White culture are settings still enable racial microaggressions and discrimination toward African Americans (Smith, 2004, 2006, 2009a, 2009b; Smith, Altbach, & Lomotey, 2002; Smith et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2007). Pierce (1995) stated, "in and of itself a microaggression may seem harmless, but the cumulative burden of a lifetime of microaggressions can theoretically contribute to diminished mortality, augmented morbidity, and flattened confidence" (p. 281).

We found that increased racial microaggressions predicted less job satisfaction among African Americans. While we know from the literature that discrimination, such as racial microaggressions, impacts the physical, psychological, social well-being of Blacks, we also know job satisfaction is associated with economic well-being. As the level of education increases, participants were less satisfied with their jobs. Participants may be experiencing racial battle fatigue as there is a cumulative impact of microaggressions (Smith et al., 2007). African Americans are resilient with generations of adaptive coping strategies, yet they are not superhuman. Their bodies can breakdown from a prolonged barrage of racial microaggressions (Brondolo et al., 2009). This research supports prior literature that finds that racialized stress negatively impacts the psychological re-

sponses of African Americans (Clark et al., 1999; Harrell, 2000; Smith, 2004; Utsey, Chae, Brown, & Kelly, 2002). Higher levels of depression, higher blood pressure, and a greater risk of heart disease are evidence of this attack (Blascovich, Spencer, Quinn, & Steele, 2001). As our findings suggest, this is not a phenomenon exclusively for higher education institutions to consider, but also in the workplace as African Americans are not satisfied with settings that are filled with racial microaggressions. Racial microaggressions and race-related stressors manifest in the in K–20+ education settings and the workforce, and thus, racism is a structural, systemic, and institutionalized pipeline disease. Both the majority of workplaces and educational settings are historically and predominantly White, and therefore, are catalysts for increased systemic racial microaggressions. Our findings demonstrate the structural embeddedness of racial microaggressions, given that racial microaggressions negatively impact job satisfaction regardless of the level of educational attainment. More significantly, this impacts African Americans who have higher levels of educational attainment. Furthermore, racial microaggressions have an adverse impact on the general happiness for individuals who received some high school to a bachelor's degree.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADDRESSING RACIAL MICROAGGRESSIONS
Both higher education institutions and workplaces need to implement programs and policies that help address racial microaggressions and the race-related health for People of Color if they genuinely want a more racially diverse learning and workforce. It would be ideal if higher education and businesses worked together to understand the impact of racism on their students and employees. Neither institution operates in a vacuum that shields them from structural discrimination. As pillars of society, these two institutions operate as a place where people spend the majority of their time and life. It would be beneficial for students and employees if higher education institutions and the business sector come together to combat racism. Institutional policy interventions generally do not consider the impacts of racism or subtle racism. Often educational and workplace policies directed toward the betterment of People of Color have focused on overt racism as opposed to subtle racism. Neither higher

education nor the work sector can ignore the growing diversity of the workforce and institutionalized racism that awaits People of Color.

In the cases of universities, they have been interested in getting students of color on campus, but they have not provided as much focus on making sure Students of Color stay and feel welcomed. The same argument can be made regarding the workplace. Institutional policies and programs that address racial microaggressions and institutionalized racism would not only be something that may attract students, but it may improve the academic outcomes of Students of Color and perhaps their overall experience (Johnson et al., 2014). In the short term, such policies and programs may improve the everyday experiences of all students. In the long term, such programs may assist in addressing the perceived hostile culture of higher education institutions toward historically underrepresented students. A single program or institutional policy by itself will not address the climate and culture of higher education institutions or work settings, but several targeted policies that improve the experiences of People of Color would be welcomed and is needed. The racialized experiences of People of Color on campuses and in the work environment are multifaceted and health is only a single component of possible outcomes in college, but it is an important outcome that can impact a person for the rest of their life.

It is apparent that racism in society is not disappearing anytime soon and institutions should actively address the needs of all individuals. While universities and institutions need to address White racism, they also need to confront the everyday racism and its impact. Therefore, institutions should have counselors that are trained to assist and help those that have been impacted by racial microaggressions. Race-conscious counselors and programs should address racial battle fatigue and racial microaggressions and provide constituents suggestions about coping strategies and other strategies to resolve the situation within the institution. Counselors should be trained to identify situations in which racial stress may be amplified and how to proactively address such situations. In addition, employees should be similarly trained; that way they can recognize when fellow employees may be impacted by racism. In this fashion, it removes the responsibility from the person who is under attack and places responsibility

in the hands of the institution. It is an excellent sign that institutions are taking steps to educate students more about microaggressions. However, systemic and institutionalized racism must be recognized and removed from the culture of our institutions.

Finally, the workplace is diverse, but it is often still segregated. In the case of higher education, structural diversity can play an essential role in how students perceive the campus climate and their experiences with racism (Ancis et al., 2000). In order to more effectively address the hostile campus racial climates and how it produces racial battle fatigue for People of Color, universities must focus on hiring and enrolling students, faculty, staff, and administrators from historically underrepresented groups. Universities can do a great deal to address racial microaggressions and racial battle fatigue experienced by African American, American Indian, Asian American, Latinx, and Pacific Islander students by increasing faculty and staff from similar backgrounds who respect and support their cultural perspectives and multiple identities while making it less beneficial to stay for those who do not. Therefore, priority hiring should be given to all faculty and staff who are social justice advocates with experiences in multiple cultural competencies. Universities can implement socially just-conscious policies and programs, educate students and faculty about racial microaggressions and racism, create admissions policies that reward students who have a proven commitment to anti-oppression experiences, and finally hire and enroll more individuals from historically underrepresented groups.

DISRUPTING WHITENESS

Programs are often created with the dominant student population in mind without regard for the experiences of people of color (Harper et al., 2009; Museus & Jayakumar, 2012). A colorblind approach to policies is harmful to people of color (Bonilla-Silva, 2004, 2010; 2010; Leonardo & Porter, 2010; Swim et al., 2003). Institutions can utilize the findings of this study along with other research to create race-conscious programs for students of color and people of color in the workforce, but also programs for whites that help address and dispel prevailing negative stereotypes of people of color that lead to racial microaggressions and resulting racial

battle fatigue. Policymakers can also create opportunities for whiteness, racism, and white supremacy to be disrupted. Institutions should encourage and develop more moments in which white students can participate in race-conscious programming (Cabrera, Franklin, & Watson, 2017). The same can be created for administrators. Therefore, this might look like disrupted white physical spaces, intergroup dialogues in which there is open dialogue free from racism, but periods of frustration due to unlearning racism.

Educating whites about racism often comes at the expense of people of color via cross-cultural dialogues that often turn into non-safe spaces (Cabrera, Watson, & Franklin, 2016; Leonardo & Porter, 2010). Institutions can utilize best practices to help whites grapple and learn about their privilege. Therefore, institutions should provide opportunities that encourage whites to learn, address, and dismantle white privilege and examine how subtle racist actions may negatively impact the climate of the institution. Furthermore, institutions can institute cross-cultural dialogues that are safe spaces for people of color. Instead of creating policies and programs that are absent from discussions of race and considerations of racism, institutions should recognize that students have varying experiences on their campuses.

CONCLUSIONS

By many accounts, while the US society, workforce, and education system are losing a generation of African Americans due to structural deficits, African Americans are losing a lifetime of health, opportunity, and happiness. Our findings, in conjunction with the distressing national labor and education statistics, a coronavirus pandemic, and protests against police violence occurring across US cities all paint a bleak and unfavorable picture for overall African American happiness, health, and success. Despite differences in the ways that African Americans experience discrimination and racism, depending on various identities, we know that too many experience racial microaggressions that cause racial battle fatigue. These stressors can impact their behavior, emotional, psychological, and physiological well-being (Smith et al., 2007). Furthermore, racialized stress is

associated with morbidities including hypertension, obesity, and cardio-vascular disease (Goosby, Cheadle, & Mitchell, 2018). African American experience discrimination in the workplace that contribute to a lack of job satisfaction and they experience barriers to upward mobility in the workplace (DeCuir-Gunby, & Gunby Jr, 2016). This narrative permeates and reaches all institutions in the United States and a fundamental and drastic change, of course, is needed. Though a more substantial structural shift needs to occur, it is more likely that small groups and individuals can make an immediate difference and they will need to step up in their community, place of employment, and the classroom to address racism, race-related stressors, and their consequences. We believe that evidence like what is presented in these findings is necessary to tell another side of social reality and challenge the post–civil rights, colorblind narrative.

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