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How Naturalized African-Americans Experience Racial Microaggressions in U.S. Federal Agencies

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Casimir Yem Bilong

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Walden University
2018

Abstract

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Federal Agencies

by

Casimir Yem Bilong

MSM, Minnesota School of Business, 2011

MECAM, Pigier Côte d'Ivoire, 2002

BTS, Université Nationale du Bénin, 1999

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

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February 2018

Abstract

The Civil Rights Act was enacted more than 5 decades ago, and its provisions forbade

discrimination on the basis of race in hiring, promoting, and firing. Yet some researchers

argue that racial discrimination issues are still prevalent in the United States. They

contend that modern racial discrimination is more covert and takes the form of racial

microaggressions, which are subtle conscious or unconscious insults and derogatory

attitudes directed towards minorities. Researchers have not fully addressed the prevalence

of racial microaggressions in U.S. workplaces, however. The purpose of this qualitative

phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of naturalized African-

Americans regarding racial microaggressions in U.S. federal agencies. The research

problem was examined through the lens of critical race theory. Ten participants from the

Social Security Administration were selected using snowball sampling. Data were

collected through semi structured phone interviews and then examined using thematic

content analysis to identity key concepts and develop a coding structure, from which 9

themes emerged. Findings revealed that participants experienced racial microaggressions

in the form of bias, prejudice, false assumptions, nepotism, favoritism, and unfair denial

of opportunities for promotion and professional development while at work, which

affected their morale and productivity. This study may contribute to positive social

change by helping leaders of U.S. federal agencies to understand their multicultural and

diverse workforce and work environment. U.S. government officials could also use this

study as a basis for policy decisions that may improve racial relations in U.S. federal

agencies.

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Dedication

This doctoral research work is dedicated to Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior, who gave me the vision to embark in this journey, who taught me that I can achieve anything through Him, who strengthens me on a daily basis, and who will use this work for His glory. GLORY BE TO HIM!

To my dear wife of 13 years Sandrine, who joined me in this vision the Lord gave me, and has been supportive all the way. Thank you for your love for me.

To my children, Willy, Yvan, Joy, and Grace, who did not fully understand why I was always in front of a computer, but whose complaints, whining, interruptions…and laughter reminded me of the grace I possess to have them in my life.

To my parents, who taught me that the sky was my limit and always encouraged me to achieve my academic endeavors and go as far as possible.

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I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my dissertation chair, Dr. Michael Knight, whose amazing patience and advice guided me throughout this journey. Thank you for always being available, and for providing words of encouragement when I needed them. I also thank my committee member, Dr. Morris Bidjerano, and my University Research Reviewer, Dr. Dianne Williams, for their feedback, insights, and support throughout the phases of the dissertation process.

I would like to acknowledge Ms. VOD for volunteering to transcribe all the interviews. Your help was tremendous, and I cannot thank you enough. Only the Lord will reward you.

Special thank you also to Ms. NCT and Ms. AM who endeavored tirelessly to help me obtain approval to collect data at the Social Security Administration.

Finally, I would like to appreciate the 10 research participants who agreed to freely share their lived experience of the research phenomenon, in spite of the sensitive nature of the research topic. May the Lord reward you properly.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

In July 1964, U.S. lawmakers enacted the Civil Rights Act and created the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission with the purpose of suppressing discrimination and injustice and promoting racial equality (National Archives and Records Administration, 2016). However, new forms of race-based inequalities have emerged which have affected the social inclusion of African-Americans. Because of the long history of slavery and associated social constructs, many individuals within U.S. society have an aversion to Blacks (Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2007). Racial categories are a social construct that causes interracial relations to be challenging and usually not peaceful. The great divide between African-American and Caucasian communities has been the topic of several studies in the U.S. academy (Kim, 2004).

There is an important opportunity gap between Blacks and Whites, which spans areas such as education and health care (Tuck, 2008). Race-based discrimination, though not openly practiced, has a negative influence on African-Americans' ability to enroll in higher education institutions, for instance (O'Hara, Gibbons, Weng, Gerrard, & Simons, 2011). In 2009, African-Americans made up about 14% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011); however, in corporations, they represented only 11% of managerial positions (Stainback & Tomaskovic-Devey, 2009). Covert racial discrimination is prevalent in various areas, including private and public organizations (Rocco, Bernier, & Bowman, 2014). Managers of these organizations have not properly addressed covert racial discrimination. There is an assumption that workplace policies are

neutral, yet inadequate practices are being implemented. For instance, there are still salary disparities among races, various forms or harassment, and a race-based and gender-based glass ceiling (Rocco, Bernier, & Bowman, 2014).

This study provided a new understanding of the dynamics of racial relations and their influence on the social inclusion of ethnic groups in a work environment. In Chapter 1, I clarify the problem statement; explain the purpose of the study; present my research questions; discuss the theoretical foundation and nature of the study; present key operational definitions; and consider the assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study. The chapter concludes with a summary of key points.

Background

Various authors have studied different cultural/ethnic groups and how they experience racial microaggressions. Torres-Harding and Turner (2014) examined the reliability and validity of a racial microaggressions scale that they developed. They identified six types of experiences involving racial microaggressions: foreigner, criminality, sexualization, low-achieving, invisibility, and environmental microaggressions. Torres-Harding and Turner concluded that the impact of each microaggression experience is different for each racial group and depends on the extent to which the target perceives the experience to be stressful. Yosso, Smith, Ceja, and Solorzano (2009) used critical race theory (CRT) to demonstrate how Latino/a students responded to racial microaggressions on campus by developing critical skills that helped them to be socially empowered. Minikel-Lacocque (2013) also studied racial

microaggressions in the context of higher education. She expounded on how negative words can affect the motivation of Latino/a students at a predominantly White university. Minikel-Lacoque argued that microaggressions are misunderstood in academia because researchers typically focus on the established framework of success to analyze their effect on the victims. She explained that using passing grades and graduation rates often leads researchers to incorrect findings. In her conclusion, Minikel-Lacoque suggested that universities should implement programs that are specifically aimed to address both overt and covert racism.

These studies illustrate the focus by researchers on racial microaggressions in different areas including education, healthcare, or sports. However, according to my review of the literature, there have been few studies of how the phenomenon of racial microaggressions occurs in the workplace. Rocco et al. (2014)'s research is among the few studies. They studied the application of CRT in the workplace and observed that not addressing covert racial discrimination in the workplace may result in the implementation of inadequate workplace policies and practices by managers. In spite of Rocco et al.'s (2014) research, there is still a gap in knowledge about racial microaggressions in the workplace. In conducting this study, I sought to provide a new understanding of the dynamics of racial relations and their influence on the social inclusion of ethnic groups in a work environment.

Problem Statement

The United States Congress enacted the Civil Rights Act in 1964 with the goal of outlawing and eliminating discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national

origin (National Archives and Records Administration, 2014). Although the Act has resulted in several changes, some researchers argue that racial discrimination issues are still prevalent but are manifested in a more covert way. They state that modern racial discrimination usually takes the form of microaggressions, which are subtle conscious or unconscious insults and derogatory attitudes directed towards minorities (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). The views about the very existence of racial microaggressions and their impact on the social and professional inclusion of minorities are varied. Some authors assert that racial microaggressions are part of human relations, and a result of perceived discrimination that always needs to be proven. However, they can lead to important emotional consequences (Wang, Leu, & Shoda, 2011). Other scholars posit that, while some researchers tend to give more consideration to overt racial discrimination, subtle discrimination is equally important and consequential, especially in the workplace (Jones, Peddie, Gilrane, King, & Gray, 2013). Covert racial discrimination in the workplace is very important because it is hard to prove, particularly when it happens between supervisors and supervisees.

Although a few authors have noted the importance of racial microaggressions in the workplace (see Jones, Peddie, Gilrane, King, & Gray, 2013; Rocco & al., 2014), the issue is still understudied, especially as it relates to naturalized African-Americans, based on my review of the literature. Basford, Offermann, and Behrend (2014) examined perceptions of various microaggressions in the workplace and found that men and women perceive the phenomenon differently. They stated that men tend to notice less discrimination at work than women, especially when it is covert discrimination. Basford

et al. concluded that there is a need to research and gain a better understanding of microaggressions in the workplace as well as raise awareness of negative outcomes. Shenoy-Packer (2015) used the framework of microaggressions to examine the work realities of immigrant professionals in general; these professionals represent about 16% of the U.S. workforce. According to Shenoy-Packer, immigrant professionals may experience prejudice, verbal, and attitudinal microaggressions that affect their workplace productivity. He suggested that future researchers should examine if and how immigrants from specific ethnicities experience microaggressions.

Purpose of the Study

This study was qualitative with a phenomenological design. The purpose was to explore the lived experiences of naturalized African-Americans regarding racial microaggressions in public agencies. To answer the overarching research question, I selected a sample of naturalized male and female African-Americans who worked for a federal agency and lived in the Washington, DC, metro area. I then interviewed participants about their perspectives of racial microaggressions.

Research Questions

To explore the lived experience of naturalized African-Americans toward racial microaggressions in public agencies, I sought to answer one central research question and three subquestions. The central research question was, how do naturalized African-Americans experience racial microaggressions at the Social Security Administration? The subquestions were:

1. What strategies do naturalized African-Americans use to overcome racial microaggressions at the Social Security Administration?

2. How do racial microaggressions affect the work environment at the Social Security Administration?

3. How do racial microaggressions affect the ability of naturalized African-Americans to provide effective public service at the Social Security Administration?

Theoretical Foundation

In performing this study, I drew from the lens of CRT because the tenets of this theory were aligned with my study topic and research questions. Scholars using CRT assert that the concept of racism is not new in the United States; rather, it originates from the history of slavery and discrimination in the country and is culturally enrooted (Mills, 2009). Critical race theorists also view the promotion of colorblindness as a solution to the issue of racism as being irrelevant, adding that the phenomenon goes beyond the difference of skin color and involves unconscious feelings (Mills, 2009). Moreover, these theorists assert that racial equality is an ideal that cannot be achieved overnight but must be achieved through a permanent quest (Mills, 2009). Understanding how naturalized African-Americans experience microaggressions was important to determine the real scope of racial exclusion in the United States. In conducting the study, I was able to assess the pertinence of critical race theorists' contention that colorblindness is not relevant to find a solution to racism.

The various concepts of CRT were helpful to me in conducting this study because they provide a framework for finding new strategies to fight against racism. Researching

naturalized African-Americans' lived experiences of racial microaggressions provided

me with the opportunity to explore and better understand some new forms of inequality

that African-Americans as a whole are confronted with in the workplace. I was able to

find out that naturalized African-Americans have their own identity within the larger

ethnic group of African-Americans, and they experience a phenomenon that is generally

unknown because it is currently understudied.

Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, and Crenshaw (1993) summarized six major tenets

of CRT. These tenets provided a justification for my use of this theoretical perspective in

this study. The points are, as follows:

1. "Critical race theory recognizes that racism is endemic to American life"

(Matsuda et al., 1993, p. 151). My findings related to naturalized African-

Americans' experiences of racial microaggressions revealed the omnipresence of

racism in U.S. workplaces, especially in federal agencies.

2. "Critical race theory expresses skepticism toward dominant legal claims of

neutrality, objectivity, color blindness, and meritocracy" (Matsuda et al., 1993, p.

151). The existence of racial microaggressions in federal agencies contradicts

contentions of neutrality and colorblindness in workplace policies and practices

from various scholars (Rocco, Bernier, & Bowman, 2014). Instead, it confirms

that there are still numerous disparities among races at work.

3. "Critical race theory presumes that racism has contributed to all contemporary

manifestations of group advantage and disadvantage along racial lines" (Matsuda

et al., 1993, p. 151). In conducting my investigation, I uncovered some race-

based differences among federal employees, which were due to racial microaggressions. For instance, I discovered that naturalized African-Americans are victims bias and prejudice about their intellectual capabilities from some of their coworkers from other ethnic groups.

4. "Critical race theorists insist on recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of color and our communities of origin in analyzing law and society" (Matsuda et al., 1993, p. 151). In this study, I focused on the experience of racial microaggressions from the perspective of a specific group of people of color.

5. "Critical race theory is interdisciplinary and eclectic" (Matsuda et al., 1993, p. 151). CRT was initially used by scholars in the field of education (see Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). However, because of the potential prevalence of racial microaggressions in all areas of knowledge and practice, its tenets are applicable to fields such as public policy and administration.

6. "Critical race theory works toward the end of eliminating racial oppression as part of the global goal of ending all forms of oppression" (Matsuda et al., 1993, p. 6). As a social change implication, this study may allow leaders in federal agencies to create a more inclusive, racial microaggressions-free work environment by understanding how a specific group of minorities among their employees experiences subtle forms of racial discrimination.

These six tenets of CRT are relevant to the purpose of my study and explain why I chose this theoretical framework.

Authors such as Solorzano, Yosso, and Parker explained why CRT is appropriate in race-related qualitative research. Solorzano and Yosso (2002) focused on the area of education. They contended that the use of the CRT in race-related qualitative studies is important for the following reasons:

- CRT theorists considers that race and racism are prevalent in society and justify social differences and different experiences of the law,

- CRT theorists challenge the current paradigm of a colorblind postracial society with equal opportunities

- CRT theorists seek to promote social justice, and

- CRT theorists considers that recounting the lived experience of people of color is essential to understand racial discrimination, through qualitative methods such as storytelling and narratives.

Parker (2015) used the initial work of Solórzano and Yosso (2002) to study the relationship between CRT and qualitative research. He posited that CRT has improved qualitative research as a whole because it has provided a methodology and process to study all forms of racism. In Chapter 2, I will expound more on the tenets of CRT and show how they relate to the topic of this study.

Nature of the Study

The nature of this study was qualitative. In qualitative studies researchers are interested in finding the meaning of a social phenomenon for which little research has been performed (Creswell, 2009). The purpose is to uncover new knowledge that will add to existing paradigms. Research involves "complex reasoning through inductive and

deductive logic" (Creswell, 2009, p. 45). approach is inductive. In this study, my goal was to understand the meaning that naturalized African-Americans give to racial microaggressions in federal agencies, and how their work satisfaction and productivity were affected.

Throughout my research I analyzed the experience of the phenomenon of racial microaggressions from the perspective of members of a social group. Therefore, I chose phenomenology as the appropriate research design for the study. Phenomenologists focus on the meaning that a social group gives to a commonly experienced phenomenon; their aim is to use the views of participants to provide a collective meaning to the concept being studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p.3). I interviewed a group of naturalized African-Americans, who were purposefully selected within the population of African-Americans at the Social Security Administration. I performed a thematic content analysis on data I collected, using the constant comparative method (Harding, 2013) to sort key concepts and develop a coding structure. I then analyzed and interpreted the information.

Operational Definitions

The following terms are defined due to their importance to the study:

African-Americans: Persons (male or female) living in the United States and having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa (United States Census Bureau, 2011).

Federal agency: An organizational unit, which is part of the Executive Branch of the U.S. government (Official Guide to Government Information and Services, 2017)

Microaggressions: Subtle conscious or unconscious insults and derogatory attitudes directed towards minorities (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000).

Naturalized U.S. Citizen: Foreign citizen or national who is granted U.S. citizenship after he or she fulfills the requirements established by Congress in the Immigration and Nationality Act (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2017)

Race: Self-identification as member of a socio-cultural group or national origin as recognized in the U.S. (United States Census Bureau, 2017).

Assumptions

The following were the assumptions for this study:

Ontological Assumption

For this study, I used a phenomenological design. Research participants shared their lived experiences of racial microaggressions. While the studied phenomenon was the same, each participant brought his or her own perspective, based on the individual experience. They each expressed their experience using different words, expressions and attitudes. This diversity of views generated various themes, and led to different findings throughout the research.

Epistemological Assumption

According to Creswell (2013), a qualitative researcher needs to be close to research participants in order to get the best understanding of the studied phenomenon. I personally performed semi structured interviews over the phone with employees of the Social Security Administration. I assumed phone interviews did not create too much

distance and did not affect the genuineness of participants' views as they expressed their lived experience of racial microaggressions.

Axiological Assumption

My personal background is similar to that of the research participants. I am a naturalized African-American working for a federal agency. This was conducive to possible bias. Throughout the research process, I stayed objective and avoided bias. Research findings and conclusions were based on the practical experience of participants. I endeavored to provide a logical and unbiased interpretation of research findings.

Methodological Assumption

In this qualitative study, I used an inductive approach. I assumed semi structured phone interviews were the best data collection method that would lead to objective findings. The assumption was also that phone interviews would ensure the confidentiality of study participants.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of the study was limited to naturalized African-Americans living in the Washington, D.C. area and working for a federal agency. African-Americans born in the U.S. were excluded from the study. For the purpose of this study I excluded all Defense agencies because of the coexistence of military and civilian personnel. Moreover, Defense agencies appeared difficult to access for qualitative interviews. With the exclusion of Defense agencies, I initially intended to select participants from three federal agencies, which greatly differed in term of size (percentage of the federal workforce). I wanted to select a big, a medium, and a small size agency to ensure maximum variation

sampling and increase the likeability of a diverse sample with respondents from different agencies. According to the Annual Report of the Federal Workforce published by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC, 2014), and based on the aforementioned criteria, the following were the three federal agencies I intended to select, which represent a different percentage of the federal workforce: the United States Postal Service-USPS (21%), the Department of Veterans Affairs-VA (12%), and the Department of Homeland Security-DHS (6.5%). Ultimately, I selected participants only from the Social Security Administration (SSA) because I did not receive permission or letters of cooperation from any other agency. SSA, which is the agency I currently work for, represents 2.26% of the federal workforce (EEOC, 2014). All other federal agencies were excluded from this study.

Limitations

This qualitative study had four major limitations. The first limitation was the exclusive use of phone interviews. Because I used semi structured phone interviews, I was not able to observe the nonverbal reactions of research participants. I did not take note of their behavior, and any attitude, gestures and facial expressions that might have provided further meaning to their answers.

Secondly, because I used a small number of participants working for the same agency, the results cannot be generalized to a wider population. Results and findings may only be applicable to naturalized African-Americans working for the Social Security Administration.

Thirdly, there was potential for social desirability. Participants may have not been truthful in their responses. They may have provided customized answers that they believed I wanted to hear and would not consider wrong.

The fourth limitation pertained to the researcher himself. I endeavored to stay objective throughout the study, and provided a logical and unbiased collection of data and interpretation of research findings. However, I performed the interviews myself and my personal background is similar to that of research participants. Therefore, my personal beliefs and my own experience of the studied phenomenon might have influenced some probing questions during interviews, as well as my interpretation of data and findings from the study.

Significance of the Study

This study provided a new understanding of the dynamics of racial relations, and their influence on the social inclusion of ethnic groups in a work environment. The study raised awareness on microaggressions as a potential civil rights issue in America, in a context of a general belief in a post-civil rights era and post-racial society. From a theoretical perspective, the study addressed the contentions that racism is predominant in America, and colorblindness inadequate as an approach to solving the issue (Mills, 2009). The study may help civil rights organizations to update the strategic orientation of their advocacy policies, so they will consider the needs of the community of naturalized African-Americans.

From a public policy and administration standpoint, the study was helpful to determine if racial microaggressions in the workplace exist, and how they negatively

affect the work environment and the efficiency of a minority group. The study may help public managers in federal agencies to understand their multicultural and diverse workforce. Public managers may ultimately create an inclusive work environment free of racial microaggressions, and this may bring about positive social change.

Summary

The U.S. Congress enacted the Civil Rights Act in 1964 to eliminate all forms of discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin (National Archives and Records Administration, 2014). According to a number of researchers, racial discrimination issues still exist in covert forms. They argue that modern racial discrimination takes the form of microaggressions, which are subtle conscious or unconscious insults and derogatory attitudes directed towards minorities (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). While authors examined racial microaggressions in different fields, the issue is understudied in the workplace. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the lived experience of racial microaggressions in public agencies, from the perspective of naturalized African-Americans. The theoretical foundation of the study was the Critical Race Theory (CRT). I used a qualitative phenomenological design. Phenomenology focuses on the meaning that a social group gives to a similar phenomenon they experienced, and aims to use the views of participants to provide a collective meaning to the concept being studied (Creswell, 2009). In the following chapter I reviewed the existing literature that pertains to the theoretical framework of the study, the Critical Race Theory (CRT), as well as racial microaggressions. I also highlighted the literature gap that justified the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of racial microaggressions in public agencies concerning naturalized African-Americans. To study the issue of racial microaggressions, several authors have used the theoretical framework of CRT (see Solorzano and Yosso, 2002; Parker, 2015). CRT is useful for uncovering the influence of racial discrimination and other forms of racial oppression in the lives of minorities in the United States (Parker & Lynn, 2002; Pérez Huber, 2010). CRT was initially and principally used in the area of education, but, today, it is being used in other areas of knowledge such as human resources, health care, and sports, because of its interdisciplinary nature (Matsuda et al., 1993). In this section I first examine the historical foundations and major tenets of CRT through an engagement with some seminal and foundational works. Secondly, I provide definitions of racial microaggressions. I also consider their consequences for victims, their manifestation in the workplace, and some proposed solutions.

Literature Search Strategy

To develop this literature review, I used the Walden University Library databases EBSCOhost, ProQuest, and SAGE Premier. I also used the reference section of some of the articles I found to identify similar articles that pertained to the topic of racial microaggressions. Some key words and expressions used to perform the article search included *race, racial*, *microaggressions*, *racial microaggressions*, *critical theory*, *critical race theory*, *African-Americans*, *workplace*, *federal agencies*, *naturalized*, and

immigrants. I also used information from government websites such as the U. S. National

Archives and Records Administration, the U.S. Census Bureau, and the Equal

Employment Opportunity Commission.

Theoretical Foundation

CRT originated from the works of Alexis de Tocqueville, a French author and

philosopher who visited the United States in 1831 and summarized his trip in a book

titled *Democracy in America* (de Tocqueville, 1835). In this book, de Tocqueville (1835)

presented his view of racial relations in America. He contended that due to the history of

slavery, there is a natural tendency for Whites in America to despise Blacks because the

latter have been considered their inferiors for centuries. He explained that there are

longstanding marks of slavery that have created prejudice and belief in Whites'

superiority over Blacks. Even in areas where Blacks had the right to vote, the

institutionalization of White superiority denied them their right in practice (de

Tocqueville, 1835). Therefore, wherever there was equality by law, there was still

inequality in behaviors and conducts, because many Whites have always considered

Blacks to be inferior and would not accept mingling with them (de Tocqueville, 1835).

De Tocqueville (1835) further clarified that following the abolition of slavery,

Blacks were not provided with lands and did not have the right to land ownership.

Consequently, they remained dependent upon their former masters, which contributed to

perpetuating the belief in White superiority over Blacks (de Tocqueville, 1835). Talking

about the newly freed slaves, de Tocqueville observed that "the emancipated Negroes and

those born after the abolition of slavery…remain half civilized and deprived of their

rights in the midst of a population that is far superior to them in wealth and knowledge, where they are exposed to the tyranny of the laws and the intolerance of the people… and they cannot claim possession of any part of the soil…The Negroes are… lost in the midst of an immense people who own the land" (pp. 39-40). Thus, the abolition of slavery did not provide the Blacks with all the resources they needed to be really free.

Moreover, de Tocqueville expanded on the concept of White pride, which means "the White citizen of the United States is proud of his race and proud of himself" (p. 47), and ready to use all possible means to keep his privilege (de Tocqueville, 1835). He explained that for centuries Blacks were denied the opportunity to learn and were brainwashed and treated as brutes. Therefore, Blacks developed very low self-esteem. Based on his observations, de Tocqueville drew three major conclusions that are similar to the main assumptions of modern CRT (Tillery, 2009). These are that (a) racial differences between Blacks and Whites emanate from the legislation and social relations, (b) the idea of White supremacy and privilege over Blacks is historic and prevalent, and (c) racial relations in America are favorable to Whites (Tillery, 2009). These conclusions complement the seminal work that constitutes the theoretical foundation for this study.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts

Major Tenets of Critical Race Theory

Modern CRT arose in the 1970s among legal researchers following the advent of the civil rights movement (Ross, 1990). Legal scholars researched the impact of racial inequality in famous legal cases such as *Brown vs. Board of Education* (Ross, 1990). Some researchers consider CRT as controversial because critical race theorists usually

belong to a minority ethnic group. Their study results pose credibility issues because of

possible biases (Tillery, 2009). However, Tillery (2009) pointed out that the main tenets

of CRT are similar to the findings of Alexis de Tocqueville.

- There are "connections between the law, racial hierarchy, and democratic

  politics" (Tillery, 2009, p. 643), which give Whites precedence over Blacks

  when it comes to exercising democratic rights.

- The U.S. legal system is biased to protect an endemic White privilege and

  superiority over Blacks.

- The necessity to perpetuate White privilege is socially constructed.

- Racial equality in America is an unreachable ideal because it requires a

  systemic cultural change.

Tillery's conclusions also complement the seminal work that constitutes the theoretical

foundation for this study.

Seminal and Foundational Works on Critical Race Theory

Authors of seminal and foundational works on CRT agree on the existence of

prejudice and systematic and institutionalized racial discrimination against Blacks in the

United States. Bell (1988) contended that because of racial discrimination Blacks do not

have the same rights to opportunities as Whites, especially democratic and property

rights. He explained that there is a widespread prejudice against Blacks and a belief in

White superiority, which finds its origins in slavery. He introduced the idea of a White

conspiracy against Blacks, which is supported through legislation. He stated that racism

and racial discrimination in the United States are institutionalized as an inherent

component of society and a regulative force of growth and stability for Whites. He stated there is a strong cultural resistance in social change. Bell concluded that in modern society, the civil rights movement should endeavor to move Blacks from the quest for delusory constitutional rights to the promotion of actual economic rights.

Crenshaw (1988) drew similar conclusions to Bell (1988). He performed a socioeconomic analysis and contended that having civil rights legislation is not enough because there is still a significant socioeconomic divide between Blacks and Whites and because most governing politicians are hostile to the genuine emancipation of Blacks. While authors such as Bell (1988) questioned the relevance of the civil rights movement, Crenshaw contended there has to be a shift from merely fighting for legal rights to securing true social change. Blacks should be more conscious of their racial identity and fight to improve their socioeconomic conditions (Crenshaw, 1988). He posited that the idea of equal opportunity is irrelevant because it focuses on overt discrimination without considering non-obvious factors that prevent Black people from emerging socially. White supremacy, Crenshaw said, is reinforced thanks to stereotypes and beliefs that aim to legitimize the situation of African-Americans.

From a legal standpoint, Ross (1990) examined most legal decisions made after the civil rights movement and challenged their fairness. Ross explained that racism and segregation stem from centuries of stereotypes about Blacks. He added that legal decisions made for years following the Civil Rights legislation were tainted with unconscious racism, as Blacks have always been dehumanized and portrayed as impure, sinful and sexual defilers, as opposed to the alleged innocent Whites. Ross believes this

explains why for years, it has been challenging to expect empathy from most Whites, because they cannot relate to the situation of Blacks. He concluded that a solution is to change our discourse on race by promoting narratives and storytelling, because this will allow a better understanding of the condition of African-Americans. According to Harris (1993) whiteness has not only defined racial identity, but also racial property, because of the many privileges associated with being White. Harris (1993) contended that the situation has not quite changed since the civil rights movement and still affects how the Supreme Court makes some decisions regarding affirmative Action cases. He added that the Supreme Court in some cases has found Affirmative Action unconstitutional, as an attempt to protect the property rights of Whites.

In more recent years, CRT was used in various areas of knowledge such as human resources, education, and sports to explain the experience of racial discrimination and provide solutions. Parker and Marvin (2002) viewed CRT as a means to express the experience of racism in the lives of minorities in the United States. Rocco, Bernier, and Bowman (2014) suggested that CRT is interested in equity among all races and ethnic groups. From a human resource perspective, this requires systems and organizational changes that promote equal advancement and career development opportunities among employees (Rocco et al., 2014). In the area of education, CRT is concerned with the experience of exclusion of People of Color on the basis of their race, class, gender, sexual orientation, etc. (Pérez Huber, 2010). Scholars using CRT refute the idea of colorblindness and consider race as a social construct which is used to justify White supremacy over other races (Pérez Huber, 2010). In sports, CRT theorists aim to establish

social equality and eliminate racism. Racial abuse is the most common form of racism in

sport, but there are other more covert forms that use daily jokes and apparent amusement,

and their accumulation can have a very negative impact on the individual (Hylton, 2010).

Hylton (2010) explained that CRT does not focus on legal and educational issues, but its

scope covers all social contexts where racial relations represent a challenge for

minorities. He argued that action is necessary for social change, instead of mere speeches

on racism.

Olson (2002) used the lens of CRT to expound on a new concept. He suggested

that racial discrimination still exists in subtle forms. He stated that the civil rights

movement ended the era of "herrenvolk democracy" (p. 386), which provided social and

democratic privileges to Whites only, to the expense of other races. However, Whites in

some areas found a way around. Olson said they used some of the principles of

democracy, such as decentralization or community participation in schools, to reject the

inclusion of other races into their communities, and by doing so they perpetuated White

privilege and racial discrimination in a more covert form. Such subtle and covert forms of

racial discriminations are known as racial microaggressions (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso,

2000).

A Definition of Racial Microaggressions

Sue et al. (2007) defined microaggressions in general as "brief and commonplace

daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or

unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults"

(p. 271). According to Labidi (2012), theorists of a postmodern racism ideology use

covert forms of racial discrimination through media and technology to influence public opinion about target minority groups and reinforce some socially constructed beliefs in racial differences and hierarchy. Labidi added that they promote the end of anti-racism activism and stipulate that racism is no more in the U.S. They also use racial microaggressions to stigmatize groups such as African, Arabs and Muslim American communities. Labidi used as illustration the fact that during President Obama's first election campaign and throughout his presidency, media have used subliminal and subtle racial microaggression messages to lure the opinion in believing in his anti-Americanism and lack of patriotism, due to his alleged Muslim faith and identity. Racial microaggressions are "brief, commonplace, and subtle indignities (whether verbal, behavioral, or environmental) that communicate negative or denigrating messages to people of color" (Constantine, M., Smith, L., Redington, R., & Owens, D., 2008, pp. 348-349). For Huber and Solorzano (2015), they are day-to-day acts of racism and racial discrimination that stem from institutionalized racism, which is founded in the concept of White supremacy. Therefore, racial microaggressions only constitute a manifestation of the deeper phenomenon of White supremacy. Forrest Bank and Jenson (2015) divided racial microaggressions into three major categories: *microassaults*, *microinsuts*, and *microinvalidations*. They explained that microassaults are "acts of racism or discrimination that are enacted knowingly toward others." (p.143). Microinsults are "messages relayed interpersonally or environmentally that relay negative, degrading, or exclusionary messages" (p.143). Microinvalidations occur when people pretend that color does not matter, and they behave as if racism did not exist. Forrest Bank and Jenson

explained that microaggressions originate from a history of oppression. They are responsible for de-motivation and dissatisfaction in the workplace; they are very harmful, and they negatively impact the mental health of minorities and non-White youth. Each minority and/or ethnic group has a different experience of racial microaggressions. Non-White racial groups experience racial microaggressions to a very limited extend because of a different perception of racial microaggressions events. Intervention is necessary in academic and professional settings to prevent covert racial discrimination. Jones and Galliher (2014) added that the microaggressions experience is correlated with the sense of ethnic identification among each cultural group (i.e. Native Americans young adults), and the negative perception of racial microaggressions depends on the specific category (microassaults, microinsults, or microinvalidations). According to Vida Estacio and Saidy-Khan (2014) racial microaggressions can be intentional or unintentional. They reflect deeply rooted prejudice and are hard to combat because they are usually unconscious. They have to be uncovered and made visible to be addressed. They may consist of exclusion or humor, but in the workplace, they have damaging consequences on employees' emotional health.

Consequences of Racial Microaggressions for Victims

Several authors examined the consequences of racial microaggressions, especially as they pertain to the physical and emotional well-being of victims. Wang, Leu, and Shoda (2011) studied the emotional consequences of racial microaggressions. They determined that the perception of race-based discrimination is highly associated with negative emotional consequences, even when other discrimination factors can be

relevant. Nadal (2011) found that racial microaggressions were associated with high blood pressure, depression, drug abuse, sleeping and eating disorder, and posttraumatic stress disorder. Nadal, Griffin, Wong, Hamit, and Rasmus (2014) further posited that a negative significant relationship existed between racial microaggressions and mental health. They added that victims of racial microaggressions have a high propensity to be depressed and anxious, to have low self-esteem, and to be bitter. Asian Americans are among the minority groups that experience racial microaggressions on a daily basis. In a study of their well-being, Ong, Burrow, Ja, Fuller-Rowell, and Wing Sue (2013) explained that racial microaggressions are associated with poor health quality for Asian Americans. They stated that the most devastating racial microaggression for Asian Americans is a microinvalidation which consists of denying them any experience of discrimination, and referring to them as aliens and strangers, whether they are US-born or not.

Racial Microaggressions in the Workplace

Other authors studied workplace discrimination, and found microaggressions to be detrimental in many aspects. Jones, Peddie, Gilrane, King, and Gray (2013) contented that workplace discrimination is responsible for employee turnover and high litigation costs. They believe diversity and equal employment initiatives only target overt discrimination, and there is a clear regulation that targets overt discrimination in the workplace. However, the law does not clearly prohibit subtle interpersonal discrimination. Subtle discrimination is then difficult to identify and assess, and the experience of victims is more negative because they have no clear way to prove or report

it. The authors eventually found that subtle discrimination is at least as equally detrimental as overt discrimination. Because of the higher frequency of subtle discrimination, it is responsible for a lot more chronic stress.

Microaggressions in general, are not limited to race. According to Ross-Sheriff (2012) they span to gender, ethnicity, status, or sexual orientation. However, their damages for the individuals targeted, and for the workplace are devastating. Basford, Offerman, and Behrend (2014) worked specifically on gender-based workplace microaggressions. Their analysis revealed that gender-based workplace microaggressions are due to stereotypes, and a biased perception of women. Women are subject to covert discrimination based on their gender, with negative consequences on their productivity and motivation. They have a higher propensity than men to identify workplace gender-based microaggressions.

In regards to racial microaggressions in the workplace, Offerman, Basford, Graebner, Jaffer, Basu de Graaf, and Kaminsky (2014) expounded the concept, and insisted on colorblindness, which they defined as a belief "that race does not and should not matter" (p.2). They contended that among the three categories of racial microaggressions, colorblindness is by nature a microinvalidation. They found a negative correlation between colorblindness and perceptions of racial microaggressions in the workplace. Therefore, they believe organizations need to find strategies to address racial microaggressions, or they would be perpetuating the illusion that racial discrimination issues are no longer relevant.

Victims of racial microaggressions are essentially minorities. Constantine and Wing Sue (2007) argued that racial microaggressions prevail between White supervisors and Black supervisees. They explained that because of deeply enrooted racism in American culture, Black supervisees are typically victims of biases and prejudice from White supervisors, who are not specifically trained to handle diversity issues, and the situation is worsened by lack of communication on racial issues. They concluded that White supervisors use unconscious racial microaggressions, which have a negative effect on supervisees, depending on how they perceive each individual interaction. Shenoy-Packer (2015) studied Immigrant Professionals (IPs) as an important target of workplace racial microaggressions. He contended that Immigrant Professionals (IPs) are victims of microaggressions in the workplace because of their race, national origin, and prejudice. Such microaggressions can be verbal or attitudinal. IPs, he believes, are singled out due to their appearance, accent, foreign sounding name not typically "American", or country-specific stereotypes. He said microaggressions exacerbate stress and anxiety on IPs in the workplace, because they are already struggling to adjust to a new cultural environment. Shenoy-Packer (2015) found that IPs' quest to be accepted and assimilated could be hindered if they felt discriminated against, because they may become demotivated and discouraged. In response to workplace microaggressions, Shenoy-Packer (2015) concluded that IPs manage to rationalize and make sense. They take ownership by self-blaming, which is more destructive psychologically and detrimental to the work environment.

In academia, racial microaggressions are detrimental to both students and faculty. Franklin, Smith, and Hung (2014) found a correlation between racial microaggressions and psychological, physiological, and behavioral stress for students of color, especially Latina/o. Constantine, Smith, Redington, and Owens (2008) observed that Latino/a students developed coping strategies such as seeking support from relatives and peers, prayer and spiritual engagement, distancing from faculty believed to perpetrate racial microaggressions, or resignation/acceptance of racial microaggressions as an endemic reality that cannot be overcome. According to Constantine, Smith, Redington, and Owens (2008), the racial composition of faculty in most universities in the US is predominantly White. Therefore, Black faculty in the field of counseling psychology experience racial microaggressions. They experience marginalization, scrutiny over the authenticity of their credentials, inadequate mentorship in the workplace, and self-consciousness about the way they dress or speak. Pittman (2012) performed a similar study at predominantly White universities. He posited that African-American faculty experience microinvalidations from White faculty who behave in a way that makes them feel excluded and unwelcomed. He said they are stigmatized and labeled for their attire, and there is a belief that their scope of expertise is limited to racial issues. From White students, they experience microinsults. Pittman (2012) argued that Black faculty reported several incidents where students assumed they were janitors or work-study students because of their race. In response, African-Americans faculty manage to use the opportunity to bring about social change in the field of race relations.

Proposed Solutions to Racial Microaggressions

Authors presented some solutions to address the issue of racial microaggressions. In academia, Minikel-Lacocque (2013) proposed that there should be programs designed to specifically address racism and racial microaggressions for students of color in predominantly White universities. While their graduation rate might indicate their ultimate probability to succeed, it does not address their daily experience of racial microaggression throughout their undergraduate years. It does not address either, the corresponding negative effects on their mental and psychological health. Minikel-Lacocque (2013) suggested that specifically addressing racial microaggressions would enable to understand any resulting disturbing behavior of the victims, without labeling the behavior as pathological.

At the individual level, Ross-Sheriff (2012) suggested that victims should to identify and acknowledge the microaggression first, and then attribute the cause and responsibility to the perpetrator and not to themselves. This should avoid long-term damages to their well-being.

Burrow and Hill (2012) contended that the existence of a racial microaggression in a specific situation depends on the perception of the target minority person, because it is impossible to determine the initial intention of the perpetrator. They presented dispositional forgiveness as a condition to limit the negative psychological effects of racial microaggressions, because predisposition to forgiveness is negatively correlated with the propensity to negatively perceive the microaggression experience.

Summary and Conclusions

For this study of racial microaggressions from the perspective of naturalized African-Americans, the theoretical foundation was the Critical Race Theory. This theory originated from the foundational works of Alexis de Tocqueville (1835) who contended that racism has been socially constructed in America through the history of slavery. Tillery (2009) compared de Tocqueville's work with publications from critical race theorists and highlighted the main tenets of the CRTs as follows: (1) there are "connections between the law, racial hierarchy, and democratic politics" (Tillery, 2009, p. 643), which give Whites precedence over Blacks when it comes to exercising democratic rights. (2) The U.S. legal system is biased to protect an endemic White privilege and superiority over Blacks. (3) The necessity to perpetuate White privilege is socially constructed and part of beliefs that span from the times of slavery. (4) Racial equality in America is an unreachable ideal because it requires a systemic cultural change. Critical race theorists Bell (1988), Crenshaw (1988), Ross (1990), Harris (1993), Parker and Marvin (2002), and Olson (2002), agreed through their various research works on the existence of prejudice, systematic and institutionalized racial discrimination against Blacks in America in different forms, including covert racial discrimination.

Sue et al. (2007) specifically studied microaggressions, which are covert forms of racial discriminations. They defined microaggressions in general as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults" (p. 271). Authors such as Wang, Leu, and Shoda (2011), Nadal (2011), Nadal,

Griffin, Wong, Hamit, and Rasmus (2014), Ong, Burrow, Ja, Fuller-Rowell, and Wing

Sue (2013) determined that racial microaggressions are associated with physical, mental

and emotional consequences on the well-being of victims. In the workplace, Jones,

Peddie, Gilrane, King, and Gray (2013), Ross-Sheriff (2012), Basford, Offerman, and

Behrend (2014), Offerman, Basford, Graebner, Jaffer, Basu de Graaf, and Kaminsky

(2014), found that racial microaggression span to gender, ethnicity, status, or sexual

orientation, and victims are essentially minorities. In academia, both students and faculty

are affected, and there is a correlation between racial microaggressions and

psychological, physiological, and behavioral stress for students of color (Franklin, Smith,

& Hung, 2014). To solve the issue, Ross-Sheriff (2012), Burrow and Hill (2012), and

Minikel-Lacocque (2013) proposed individual and self-awareness actions, but also

programs designed to specifically address racism and racial microaggressions in

academia and the workplace.

   This literature review illustrates that racial microaggressions have been a topic of

concern to many researchers. Scholars have been interested in discovering the effect of

racial microaggressions on the well-being and health of minorities. Some authors have

studied the manifestation, and the impact of racial microaggressions in the workplace,

mainly in the field of education and psychology. Most studies target African-Americans,

Latinos, and Asian Americans. The literature does not address racial microaggressions in

federal agencies, and especially towards naturalized African-Americans.

   The following chapter reviews the overall methodology I used to collect, analyze

and interpret data. It includes the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher,

a methodological section, and a discussion of trustworthiness and ethical issues

pertaining to the study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of naturalized African-Americans regarding racial microaggressions in public agencies. I collected data through semi structured interviews of 10 naturalized African-Americans who worked for the Social Security Administration at the time of the study. Data collected were analyzed thematically using the constant comparative method, which consists of identifying similarities and differences within a dataset (Harding, 2013). The purpose of the constant comparative method is to identify patterns in qualitative data that will result in major themes (Harding, 2013). This chapter includes the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, a methodological section, and a discussion of trustworthiness and ethical issues.

Research Design and Rationale

Research Questions

To explore the research problem, I posed the following primary research question: How do naturalized African-Americans experience racial microaggressions at the Social Security Administration? I also sought to answer three subquestions:

1 What strategies do naturalized African-Americans use to overcome racial microaggressions at the Social Security Administration?

2 How do racial microaggressions affect the work environment at the Social Security Administration?

3 How do racial microaggressions affect the ability of naturalized African-Americans to provide effective public service at the Social Security Administration?

Research Design and Rationale

This doctoral study was qualitative in nature. Creswell (2013) contended that qualitative researchers aim to provide an understanding of a social phenomenon from the perspective of individuals or groups. At the beginning of this study, little was known about the research topic, so I used an inductive approach. I used interviews to collect data in the participants' natural setting; I then analyzed the information and looked for patterns and themes that explained the lived phenomenon. I also used open-ended questions, and the answers typically reflected the opinion of participants. Therefore, the appropriate design for this study was phenomenology. According to Creswell (2013), in a phenomenological design the researcher is interested in the meaning and structure that a group of individuals give to a phenomenon they lived in common. The concept of phenomenology has a strong philosophical connection; the theoretical approach is inductive and retrospective. The researcher needs to know how individuals actually experienced the phenomenon and how their feelings and emotions were impacted. (Creswell, 2009). In this study, I focused on the experience of the phenomenon of racial microaggressions within the social group of naturalized African-Americans. I used individual perspectives (obtained through individual data collection) to generate a collective perception of the phenomenon. I used semi structured interviews to determine what naturalized African-Americans have experienced and how they are still experiencing the phenomenon. A phenomenological design was suitable for my research

because according to Creswell (2009) it is used when the researcher intends to understand

the experience of participants in order to develop policies and practices. Thus, my study

results may help staffers at U.S. civil rights organizations to adjust their advocacy

strategy to be more effective and in line with current discrimination and exclusion issues.

Role of the Researcher

According to Creswell (2013), phenomenological studies typically require that the

researcher be personally involved and develops a strong relationship with the

participants. Patton (2002) explained that participation is not guaranteed because the

researcher does not necessarily have the ability to experience the studied phenomenon in

the chosen setting. During the data collection process, I recruited participants by e-mail,

and performed semi structured interviews over the phone. Phone interviews were

conducted because of the sensitivity of the issue of racial microaggressions, and also

because they preserved the identity of participants. All participants knew that I worked

for the Social Security Administration, and most were not ready to meet me in person.

Creswell (2013) recommended that researchers should turn the interview into an

open collaborative discussion instead of a one-way question and answer session.

Although interviews were performed over the phone, I managed to develop rapport with

study participants and understand the genuine meaning of their experience during

interviews. Once the information was collected, I requested help from an external

transcriber, and then used interview transcripts to code, analyze, and interpret the

information using thematic content analysis. Throughout this process, creating and

maintaining a relationship of trust with study participants was challenging because I

expected them to disclose personal information about a sensitive issue. To address this issue, I explained the scientific usefulness of the study and assured them of the confidentiality of the information they would provide.

Creswell warned that a close relationship between the researcher and participants might be the source of personal biases that need to be acknowledged. I am a naturalized African-American who works for the Social Security Administration. Therefore, I managed to avoid collecting data in a way that could have influenced participants. The phone interview method was helpful because participants were unable to see my facial expressions, which might have revealed my personal emotions. I remained calm and objective throughout the process. In the "Limitations of the Study" section of Chapter 5, I further discuss this topic.

Methodology

In this methodology section I aimed to explain the strategy I used to select participants and choose a sample, the instrument I used to collect data, and the procedure I used to analyze and interpret data.

Participant Selection Logic and Sampling Strategy

I initially intended to select participants for this study from three federal agencies that differ considerably in size, as far as the number of employees is concerned, with the exclusion of Department of Defense agencies. However, I eventually selected participants only from the Social Security Administration because I was not able to obtain permission and letters of cooperation from any other federal agency. The Social Security

Administration represents 2.26% of the federal workforce (EEOC, 2014). The EEOC

estimated that in 2014 the federal workforce amounted to 2,915,858 employees.

Creswell (2013) explained that in qualitative inquiry researchers mainly use

purposeful sampling. The researcher intentionally selects study participants who "can

purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon"

(p. 156). Patton (2002) contended that purposeful sampling is symbolic of qualitative

inquiry because researchers focus on the in-depth study of a small sample and does not

rely on statistics and probability. The principle of intended focus constitutes strength in

qualitative research with the selection of "information-rich cases for study in-depth" (p.

230). These select cases allow the researcher to gather detailed information (Patton,

2002). Unlike quantitative inquiry, the goal is not to generalize the findings but to get a

full understanding of the studied phenomenon from various perspectives (Patton, 2002).

The study of how naturalized African-Americans working for federal agencies

experience racial microaggressions may not be generalizable. However, purposefully

choosing the sample ensured that I was able to obtain a comprehensive understanding of

the context of participants' experience, as well as the feelings and emotions associated

with their experience of racial microaggressions. Among purposeful sampling strategies,

snowball sampling is typically used for hard-to-reach populations (TenHouten, 2017).

This sampling method was particularly appropriate within the context of this study,

because I encountered difficulties in recruiting participants and obtaining approval from

federal agencies including the Social Security Administration (SSA). Snowball sampling

allowed me to collect shared patterns that emerged from the sample, and in-depth information about each participant.

In this phenomenological study, I aimed to collect in-depth information about lived experiences, and the study focused on naturalized African-Americans. They constitute a specific group within the U.S. population, and a subgroup within federal agencies, but each participant was unique because they had experienced racial microaggressions at a different time and within a different context. This phenomenological study brought participants together as they shared their common in-depth experience of racial microaggressions. I sent a letter of cooperation request to each agency on focus for approval of the study (see appendices A, B, and C and D). I did not receive a positive response from any federal agency. Even the Social Security Administration did not formally endorse or approve the study. The agency instructed me to identify participants on my own and send a single email at their government's email address and then provide a non-government email address and/or telephone number to conduct further communications with potential participants. Upon an approved change in procedure from Walden University's Institutional Review Board, I eventually used the public databases of members of SSA's Black Affairs Advisory Council (BAAC) to recruit research participants. I sent each potential participant a letter of invitation for participation in the study (see Appendix A) by email. The request included the selection criterion of being a United States citizen, male or female, living preferably in the Washington, D.C. area, who came to the U.S. as an immigrant, and acquired U.S. citizenship through the naturalization process. With this sampling strategy, equal gender

representation was possible. The study was performed with a group of 10 naturalized

African-Americans, purposefully selected within the population of African-Americans at

the Social Security Administration.

Regarding sample size, Patton (2002) explained that there is no set rule in

qualitative inquiry. The size depends on the purpose of inquiry, the nature of the research

and availability of time and resources. He further posited that a sample size of one (in a

case study for instance) might provide more in-depth information than a sample size of

ten. In the case of my research study, I contacted 20 employees. Fourteen initially

accepted to participate, but only 10 were actually recruited for the study.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

The research design for this study was phenomenology. Therefore, the data

collection method was semi structured interviews. I used an interview questionnaire with

open-ended questions (see Appendix B). With the consent of participants, the interviews

were audio taped, and data exclusively provided from interviews transcripts.

Procedures for Data Collection

To comply with Walden University policies and federal regulations, I completed

the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research Web-based

training course "Protecting Human Research Participants" in 2013. I sent a letter of

cooperation request to the Social Security Administration. Once I received their response

and the approval of Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct

research, I recruited participants through the public databases of members of the Social

Security Administration's Black Affairs Advisory Council (BAAC) by sending them a

letter of invitation by email. Each potential participant was asked to provide the non-professional email of any Social Security employee who might be interested in participating in the study.

Once an employee agreed to participate, I would email him or her, a consent form that included background information about the study, the procedure, the nature of the study, the risks and benefits, and a confidentiality clause. For each participant, the interview was performed upon receipt of the electronically signed consent form. Participants were provided with my non-professional contact information so they could ask questions before signing the consent form. Once the consent form was electronically signed I would set up a time and date for the interview. An electronic signature was accepted in lieu of a wet signature, and was required before the phone interview. Each interview lasted between 40 minutes to one hour. I used the service of an external transcriber. Upon transcription of each interview, a copy of the transcript was emailed to each participant to verify its accuracy. This served a quality control purpose. Likewise, a copy of the study results and conclusions were sent to each participant.

I performed the entire data collection, storage, analysis, and interpretation process, so I was the only person to have access to the full information. The external transcriber signed a confidentiality agreement. This was helpful to ensure the integrity and confidentiality of the information collected.

Data Analysis and Interpretation Plan

The next step upon collection of the information was the storing and handling of data. Creswell (2002) suggested that all data collected should be backed up in different

computer files. This aims to prevent losing all the information should an accident occur. I stored the information in a Windows and a Macintosh computer. Because the study is a phenomenological inquiry, I used the information collected to develop a list of significant statements that translated the experience of participants, and then grouped the statements into significant themes. Based on those themes I wrote a summary of what participants experienced, as well as the setting and context in which they experienced racial microaggressions (Creswell, 2013).

Patton (2002) proposed a data analysis technique that he believes is typical to most phenomenological studies. Using the interview transcripts, I (1) located and drew a list of key statements that directly represented experiences of racial microaggressions, (2) performed an interpretation of the statements, (3) reread the transcripts to compare my interpretation to the participants' statement, (4) find a key explanation about the lived phenomenon, (5) provided a summary that synthesized the experience and meaning of the phenomenon for each participant.

An important step in this process involved coding. Harding (2013) defined codes as notes that are made in the margin of interview transcripts, and they can take the form of words, abbreviations, numbers, or a combination. Upon writing a summary that synthesized the experience and meaning of the phenomenon for each participant, I revisited the transcript to identify initial categories and create codes in the margin of the transcript that would allow comparing and contrasting the information on each transcript. The coding process resulted in the selection of categories and themes that I used to identify findings that were eventually interpreted.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Issues of trustworthiness for this study included the validity of the study and ethical procedures.

Validity of the Study

According to Creswell (2013), the idea of validation of a study, which includes quality, trustworthiness and credibility, is an attempt to assess the accuracy of the findings as best described by the researcher and the participants. However, there are various standards for validating and evaluating the quality of qualitative research, and the chosen validation strategy sometimes depends on the researcher's background and philosophical inclinations. The absence of validation standard agreed across the board limits the possibility to perform an objective assessment of the validity of a qualitative study.

Creswell (2013) suggested various validation strategies that can allow the researcher to assess the quality, trustworthiness and credibility of a study. He contended that the researcher needed to spend a prolonged time in field observation in order to build trust with participants and get a good understanding of the context of the study. The researcher may also compare data from different sources (triangulation) to make sure they correlate. Another validation method is to have the research data checked and peer-reviewed, to ensure that independent observers assess the accuracy of the process. For this study, I performed member check by sharing interview transcripts and findings with research participants. This enabled me to validate the accuracy of the transcription and conclusions, based on feedback received.

Ethical Procedures

One important ethical concern of the study was confidentiality. I guaranteed confidentiality by assigning nicknames to participants. I also respected all informed consent procedures. Participants were given a human subjects consent-to-participate form to sign. The form described the purpose of the study, its voluntary nature, the right of participants to withdraw at any time, and any associated risks. Participants were selected from the Social Security Administration. In order to collect data, I ensured the conditions prescribed by the agency were strictly respected. I also made sure I received formal approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (Approval # 08-16-16-0401895). The other ethical concern was personal biases. To avoid interfering with the study, I did not share any personal experience of racial microaggressions with participants during the interviews. Being a naturalized African-American myself, having experienced racial microaggressions to some extent, and working for the Social Security Administration, I was able to relate to the stories and empathize with participants. However, I used personal emails to recruit participants in order to limit any possibility of identifying the researcher. I also conducted the interviews over the phone, and this contributed to eliminate any direct interaction that could have negatively impacted the research.

Summary

To answer the research question pertaining to how naturalized African-Americans experience racial microaggressions at the Social Security Administration, I performed a qualitative phenomenological study. Data were collected using semi structured phone

interviews. I purposefully selected a group of 10 naturalized African-Americans within the population of African-Americans at the Social Security Administration. Upon data collection, I performed a thematic content analysis, and used the constant comparative method to develop a coding structure and sort key themes, then analyzed and interpreted the information. To ensure the validity of the study, I performed member check by sharing interview transcripts and findings with participants. This enabled me to validate the accuracy of my transcriptions and conclusions, based on the feedback received. The next chapter presents the conclusions and findings of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of naturalized African-Americans regarding racial microaggressions in public agencies. I collected data through semi structured interviews with 10 naturalized African-Americans working for the Social Security Administration. I aimed to answer the following central research question: How do naturalized African-Americans experience racial microaggressions at the Social Security Administration? To answer this question, I used three subquestions:

1 What strategies do naturalized African-Americans use to overcome racial microaggressions at the Social Security Administration?

2 How do racial microaggressions affect the work environment at the Social Security Administration?

3 How do racial microaggressions affect the ability of naturalized African-Americans to provide effective public service at the Social Security Administration?

In this chapter I discuss the results of the analysis of all semi structured interviews. The chapter includes a description of the research setting to provide an overview of the general context of the study. In the demographics section I explain the natural characteristics of study participants. In the data collection and analysis sections I aim to explain how data were collected and analyzed. I also discuss issues of trustworthiness to highlight the validity and reliability of the results. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings.

Setting

Participants were selected from SSA, which is headquartered in Baltimore, Maryland. SSA is an independent federal agency that employs about 60,000 employees nationwide (Social Security Administration, 2017). SSA officials did not formally endorse the study, but accepted data collection under the condition that it did not occur during work hours. Therefore, I ask each participant where he or she wanted to be interviewed outside of their work hours. For confidentiality reasons, most participants indicated that they did not want the interviews performed in their office setting. Therefore, all interviews took place over the phone after the workday, at a time that was convenient to study participants, which was usually when they were already home. Most interviews were performed in the evening on a weekday while some were performed during the weekend.

Demographics

Ten full-time employees of SSA participated in this study. They were all naturalized African-Americans. In this study, I did not examine the influence of gender, but I interviewed six men and four women. To ensure confidentiality, I used RP for "Research Participant" to code participants, followed with a number from 1 to 10. Most participants occupied a nonmanagerial function, except for RP4 and RP5 who were supervisors. Six of the 10 participants had worked with SSA for less than 6 years (60%). Three study participants (30%) had between six and 10 years of service (30%) while one study participant (RP5; 10%) had 16 years with the agency.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants

Participant identifier	Gender	Years of service	Management position	Interview date
RP1	Male	3	No	Feb 18, 2017
RP2	Male	3	No	Feb 20, 2017
RP3	Male	3	No	Feb 22, 2017
RP4	Male	7	Yes	Feb 22, 2017
RP5	Male	16	Yes	Mar 01, 2017
RP6	Female	1	No	Feb 20, 2017
RP7	Female	3	No	Feb 22, 2017
RP8	Female	8	No	Feb 22, 2017
RP9	Female	8	No	Feb 25, 2017
RP10	Male	2	No	Mar 06, 2017

Data Collection

Recruitment of Study Participants

I began recruiting participants upon receipt of final approval from Walden University's IRB. The final approval was received on February 8, 2017 (IRB Approval # 08-16-16-0401895). I first received conditional approval (contingent on the approval of federal agencies) from Walden University's IRB on August 16, 2016. I did not receive letters of cooperation or approval from any of the federal agencies where I initially intended to perform the study. These agencies included the United States Postal Service, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Department of Homeland Security. The only agency where I was able to conduct the study was SSA, which was the alternate agency in my list because it is the agency for which I work as a government employee.

SSA did not formally endorse or approve the study. Agency officials instructed that in order for me to conduct the study, I would need to identify the prospective

employee participants on my own and send one email to them at their government

ssa.gov email address. In the e-mail, I would need to introduce myself and explain that

SSA did not endorse the research and that the research was not part of my official duties

or the official duties of research participants. I would then need to explain that

participation was voluntary and that, should they choose to participate, participants would

not be able to contact me on SSA time or equipment. Finally, SSA officials instructed me

to provide a non-government e-mail address and/or telephone number to conduct further

communications with potential subjects.

Based on SSA's instructions, Walden University's IRB advised me to submit a

revised invitation letter (see Appendix A) and a request for change in procedures. In the

letter, I explained how the contact information of the SSA employee participants would

be obtained, how I would identify whether they met the inclusion criteria, and where the

interviews would take place (since they could not be done at the SSA office). In this

letter, I also confirmed that the interviews would not be done during work hours, so as to

ensure compliance with the conditions stipulated by SSA.

In order to recruit research participants, I used the public databases of members of

the SSA's Black Affairs Advisory Council (BAAC), which is a Council of SSA

employees. BAAC membership and activities are independent of the Social Security

Administration (BAAC, 2017). The role of the Council is to promote the advancement of

minorities within SSA, especially African-Americans (BAAC, 2017). Members of BAAC

are mostly African-Americans. Those belonging to the headquarters chapter easily met

the inclusion criteria which was to be a United States citizen, working for a federal

agency, male or female, over 18, living in the Washington, DC metro area, who acquired U.S. citizenship through the naturalization process, and who identified as African-American.

The public databases of members of BAAC mainly contain contact information for leaders of the organization. I sent an invitation to participate in the study (see Appendix A) by e-mail to each leader of the organization listed in the databases. The invitation to participate included a request advising potential participants to provide me with nonwork contact information (i.e., the nonwork e-mail) for other BAAC members and SSA employees who met the inclusion criteria. Some leaders of BAAC responded to the initial invitation by providing the nonprofessional e-mail of other BAAC members or SSA employees who they believed would be interested in participating. In the invitation to participate, I requested each potential participant to refer another SSA employee by providing their nonwork e-mail in their response form, so that I could contact them.

From subsequent referrals, I received responses from 14 SSA employees who agreed to participate in the study. This recruitment method is called snowball sampling and is typically used for hard-to-reach populations, but also to ensure that data collection is anonymous (TenHouten, 2017. This sampling method was particularly appropriate within the context of this study, given the difficulties encountered in obtaining approval from federal agencies (including SSA), and recruiting participants. For anonymity and confidentiality purpose, the 14 potential participants were first coded as they agreed to participate, using the letter P for "participant" followed with an alphanumeric subcode: a second letter and a number in the alphanumerical order (PA1, PB2, PC3, etc.).

Ultimately, four participants withdrew from the study because they did not want the interview to be audiotaped. Therefore, remaining 10 actual participants were re-coded using the letters RP for "research participant" followed with a number in the numerical order: RP1, RP2, RP3, RP4, RP5, RP6, RP7, RP8, RP9, and RP10.

Interviewing of Study Participants

I performed semi structured phone interviews within a period of three weeks, between February 18, 2017 and March 06, 2017. The first step was to send an email invitation to participate in the study with a few demographic questions and request for contact information. Upon receipt of the participant's initial response and based on answers to the demographic questions, I assessed the participant's compliance with the inclusion criteria, then emailed him or her a consent form that included background information about the study, the procedure, the nature of the study, the risks and benefits, and a confidentiality clause. For each participant, the interview was scheduled upon receipt of the signed consent form. All participants were requested to sign the consent form electronically by responding with the words "I consent."

Interviews were scheduled at a time and date that was convenient to the study participant, typically in the evening after work. I personally interviewed all the study participants. Each interview lasted between 40 minutes to one hour. With consent from the participant, each interview was audiotaped. The first interview served as a pilot-interview, as it allowed me to understand the general dynamic of the interview process, but also to rephrase some of the interview questions. I also realized from the first interview that I would need to ask some probing questions on each interview to help the

participant to freely express his or her experience of racial microaggressions. Upon completion of each interview, I sent the audiotape to a professional transcriber for a subsequent verbatim transcription of the interview.

Data Analysis

The data analysis method that I used to analyze data from the semi structured interviews was a thematic analysis. For clarity of the analysis and considering my lack of experience with qualitative data analysis software programs, I chose to perform a manual analysis of my data. I did not use the software program NVivo as initially planned. According to Harding (2013), a thematic analysis starts upon transcription when the researcher attempts to make sense of the transcript. This requires that the researcher reads and re-reads the transcripts thoroughly to make sure no section of the transcript is overlooked when performing the analysis.

Member Checking

The transcriber provided me with one transcript at a time, which allowed me to review each transcript in detail. I listened to each audiotape to ensure the transcription was accurate. Once I was satisfied with the transcription and made any applicable modifications, I sent the transcript by email to the corresponding participant, requesting that he or she also reviewed the transcript for accuracy, as part of the member-check process. Once the participant returned the transcript with his or her amendments, I would start the actual thematic analysis.

Summary of Transcripts

Harding (2013) contended that a thematic analysis involves summarizing each transcript. The summary is a four-step process. To summarize each interview, I started with identifying the research question that each section of the transcript was most relevant to. Then, I assigned a color to each of the four research questions, and using markers of different colors, I highlighted the pieces of information and opinions on the transcript that were most relevant to each research question. The third step consisted in identifying all details that were not to be included in the transcript summary, but also all repetitive statements and opinions that needed to be regrouped. Finally, based on the information from the first three steps, the last step consisted in writing a brief summary on each section of the transcript corresponding to a specific research question.

Data Coding

Harding (2013) suggested that codes are important to identify commonalities within a dataset for the purpose of comparison. He defined codes as notes that are made in the margin of interview transcripts, and they can take the form of words, abbreviations, numbers, or a combination. Upon writing a summary of each section of the transcript, I revisited the transcript to identify initial categories and create codes in the margin of the transcript that would allow easily comparing and contrasting the information on all the transcripts. I then reviewed the list of codes and the list of categories to decide which codes would appear in which category.

The following 16 categories were selected based on questions from the interview protocol:

- Demographics

- Existence of racial microaggressions (RMAs)

- Rationale for belief in the existence of RMAs

- Personal experience of RMAs

- Witnessed RMAs

- Frequency of RMAs

- Types of perpetrators

- RMAs perpetrated by coworkers

- RMAs perpetrated by supervisors and managers

- How RMAs make me feel

- My feelings about SSA

- Coping strategies

- Direct impact of RMAs on public service

- Impact of RMAs on the work environment

- Rationale for belief/non-belief in an overarching solution

- Recommendations

Upon coding the data in the margin of each transcript, I used Microsoft Excel to develop a data analysis sheet (see Appendix C) that included codes and categories for each study participant, allowing me to compare and contrast the statements.

Constant Comparative Method

Harding (2013) explained that a thematic analysis also involves using the constant comparative method, which means identifying similarities and differences within a

dataset. He contended that the purpose of the constant comparative method is to identify patterns in qualitative data that will result in major themes. Upon creating the first Excel sheet that summarized codes and categories for each participant, I created a different sheet for each category that examined commonalities and differences in the codes I had identified (based on statements made by study participants). This process allowed me to identify three types of codes. The first type were codes that were repeated and applied to a sufficient number of participants to be considered an emerging theme. The second type were codes that stood out because they did not apply to a sufficient number of participants to constitute a theme; these codes were not excluded from consideration, but I included them as part of the findings, considering the small number of study participants. The third type were codes that applied to a good number of participants, but could not be included in any of the initial categories. These codes were part of unexpected findings (Harding, 2013) and constituted a new emerging category called "Broad context of race relations at SSA".

The following is the list of themes that emerged from data coding and the constant comparative method:

(1) RMAs are a covert and unconscious phenomenon that is part of the American culture of diversity and racial prejudice.

(2) Naturalized African-Americans are victims of nepotism, favoritism and unfair denial of opportunities for promotion and professional development

(3) Naturalized African-Americans are not acknowledged and they are victims of false assumptions and prejudice about their intellectual abilities

(4) RMAs result in negative emotional feelings for naturalized African-Americans

(5) The promotion of naturalized African-Americans is not based on merit and performance

(6) To cope with RMAs naturalized African-Americans ignore the issue; they focus on performing well at their job or find a mental break

(7) RMAs result in demotivation, discouragement, low employee morale and low productivity

(8) RMAs have no direct impact on public service

(9) RMAs can be curtailed by raising awareness on the issue and training employees on racial and cultural differences

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Elo et al. (2014) suggested that it is usually a challenge to assess the trustworthiness of a qualitative study because of the various data collection methods. They explained that trustworthiness in a qualitative study typically refers to its credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability, and authenticity. The goal is to make sure the data collection and analysis process is understandable to the reader, logical, scientific and valid.

Credibility

Credibility is established when the data collection method used properly answers the research questions, and research participants are properly identified and described (Elo et al., 2014). To ensure credibility for this study I collected data using semi structured interviews, which according to Creswell (2013) is one of the most appropriate

and most used data collection methods in qualitative inquiry. I structured the interview guide to make sure that interview questions answered the research questions. Moreover, I selected a suitable unit of analysis. Each participant identified as a naturalized African-American working for the Social Security Administration and potentially exposed to the experience of racial microaggressions. To ensure that answers to interview questions were properly transcribed, I sent a copy of the interview transcript to each study participant and considered the feedback before using the transcript. This further reinforced the credibility of the study (Elo et al., 2014)

Dependability

Elo et al (2014) suggested that dependability is achieved if data is stable over time and other researchers can easily follow the data collection method and trail. For this study, I explained in detail how data were collected. The interview guide and all interview transcripts are available in paper and electronic format. All interviews were recorded and audiotapes are also available for any audits, peer-review or future post-analysis. I performed manual data analysis, and kept paper and electronic copies of all data analysis sheets.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the objectivity of data, which means data should represent the exact opinion of participants and not come from the imagination of the inquirer; and such accuracy should be able to be confirmed by other researchers (Elo et al., 2014). To ensure confirmability, I did not analyze any non-verbal communication such as sighs, laughers or silences. As previously mentioned, I made sure interview participants reviewed their

transcripts and provided feedback. Moreover, an independent transcriber who was not familiar with the study accurately transcribed the statements of interviewers without any additions. To reduce the possibility that the researcher influences participants, I only performed phone interviews, which means there was no visual contact between the interviewer and the respondent during each interview. This allowed participants to freely express their genuine experience of racial microaggressions.

Transferability

According to Elo et al. (2014) a study is transferable if it can be extrapolated, meaning study results can be transferred to a similar or different group. This study is about the experience of racial microaggressions from the perspective of naturalized African-Americans working in federal agencies. Because the study is qualitative, generalization is not its main purpose (Creswell, 2013). However, purposefully choosing the sample of 10 participants allowed to get a comprehensive understanding of the context of their experience, as well as the feelings and emotions that pertain to their experience of racial microaggressions. The entire data collection and analysis process was explained in details and is replicable. While data were collected only at the Social Security Administration (due to authorization constraints), the same process can be used at any other federal agency to explore the experience of racial microaggressions in a similar or different racial group. Therefore, transferability is achieved for this study.

Authenticity

Authenticity aims at making sure the researcher faithfully presented the reality of the phenomenon as described by study participants (Elo et al., 2014). I essentially

achieved this requirement by using an external transcriber and performing member-check. Upon receipt, I compared each transcribed interview with the corresponding audiotape, and then sent the transcript by email to each participant, requesting that he or she reviewed the transcript for accuracy. I also used phone interviews as my data collection instrument to limit personal interaction between the researcher and study participants.

Results

From the thematic analysis and constant comparative method used to analyze data, eight major themes emerged that answered the research questions. However, a category emerged that did not directly answer a research question, but it constituted unexpected and unforeseen findings, as it explained the broad context of racial relations at the Social Security Administration.

Broad Context of Racial Relations at the Social Security Administration

Naturalized African-Americans consider diversity as an asset for the agency: RP1 and RP5 explained that being naturalized African-Americans is an asset for the agency. They believe that being born outside of the United States and having experience from a foreign country provides them with some additional skills (such as knowing a foreign language) that the agency can use. RP1 contended, "Being a bilingual speaker is actually more than an asset". He added that because he was bilingual, his coworkers usually approached him for assistance with certain aspects of his job that require bilingual skills. RP5 stated that compared to U.S. born employees, naturalized African-Americans brought "a lot to the table" in part because they spoke "more than one language".

Employees tend to congregate by ethnicity: RP7 observed that there was a pattern of "club mindset" at the agency. RP2 confirmed this statement by explaining that employees were getting along and congregating based on their ethnicity. He noted, "What I've noticed at work is that, you know, there are groupings of people—of people from African descent—they congregate together from different nationalities… It's very rare that you have this interaction voluntarily that, you know, that will include foreign-born citizens in the workplace"

Naturalized African-Americans are not in leadership and there is a divide between U.S. born and naturalized African-Americans: RP5 observed that naturalized African-Americans were not part of leadership at the agency. He once filed a complaint with the agency's Office of Civil Rights and Equal Employment and contended, "I did put in a complaint, and I asked them to check in my area—all the agency's offices, and check to see if there's any (foreign-born) Black person who's in any area of management. And there were none". He also mentioned that U.S. born African-Americans considered naturalized African-Americans to be a threat to their professional advancement. This is how he described his experience:

> There's a push to push Black people … so-called African American people, and when you're (from foreign country of origin), it doesn't belong to you. You're not part of that, African... It doesn't matter how many credentials you have, whether you outshine the other person, you've done the job before, you're very experienced in that, a Black (U.S. born) African American is gonna get the job, and not you.

He added, that he believed the enemy of the naturalized African-American was the U.S. born African-American because "they feel threatened by us, you know. So, I found more friendliness among White people".

Research Question 1 (Main research question): How do naturalized African-Americans experience racial microaggressions at the Social Security Administration?

Participants answered this question through themes 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.

Theme 1: RMAs are a Covert and Unconscious Phenomenon That is Part of the American Culture of Diversity and Racial Prejudice

Participants were asked if they believed racial microaggressions (RMAs) existed at the Social Security Administration (SSA). RP1 and RP4 said RMAs did not exist at SSA. The other eight participants answered affirmatively, and explained the rationale for their answer. Half of them stated that RMAs were mainly covert and performed unconsciously, because they are an integral part of an American culture of longstanding prejudice.

According to RP2 "it is not overt… It's kinda difficult to say that it is practiced overtly". RP3 added insisted on the unconsciousness of the phenomenon from perpetrators. He said, "Ignorance is my contention. I think it's mainly been because of ignorance. People might perpetrate that act unknowingly because they don't know when they are—that they are actually expressing racial microaggression. And, I think, primarily, that they're ignorant… Not necessarily—just because people are rude, in that kind of way, but I believe they are—they're ignorant of the fact—of the fact that they are indeed perpetrating or expressing racial micro-aggression. RP8 insisted that the

phenomenon is part of the American culture of racial prejudice. His rationale for believing that RMAs exist at SSA was "…'coz it's an embedded part of American culture and the systematic racism that we have in this country, so… for sure, it's there". RP9 viewed the phenomenon from the diversity's perspective and contended, "I think it exists because there are so many of us … that have come together, and we're all working in the U.S. coming from a foreign country"

RP5 based his belief in RMAs on his "personal experience with this agency", and so did RP7 who also mentioned that the phenomenon was covert. Referring to his seniority at the agency he said, "Because I've been there for, like I said, two and a half years—almost three, at my specific location. I mean, not that it's obvious…" RP10 heard about others who experienced the phenomenon. He explained "I've heard of instances, but, personally—no. I haven't had any experience".

Theme 2: Naturalized African-Americans are Victims of Nepotism, Favoritism and Unfair Denial of Opportunities for Promotion and Professional Development.

Half of the study participants were straightforward in acknowledging that they had personally been victims of RMAs. RP6 and RP9 said they were unsure about the nature of their experience, but the details they provided confirmed they had also experienced RMAs. RP1, RP4 and RP10 did not personally experience RMAs, but all 10 participants were positive that they had witnessed or had heard about coworkers who had been victims or RMAs.

Almost all participants who personally experienced RMAs believed they occurred at their agency on a regular basis (6 out of 7). They added that supervisors and employees

in a position of authority were the main perpetrators of RMAs. The most frequent form of

RMAs from supervisors appeared to be the unfair denial of opportunities for promotion

and professional development. Explaining how easily U.S. born African-Americans are

promoted in his office as opposed to naturalized African-Americans, RP5 stated:

> We bring languages; mostly we speak more than one language, of course, because
>
> we're from another country… You know, English and French or English and
>
> Spanish and maybe a third language. We also—for us coming to the United
>
> States, we think—OK, I would like to work for the government. So, in order for
>
> me to do that, I need education. I need higher education. So, most of us, like in
>
> the office where I work—most people from (country of origin) have master's
>
> degrees, or the smallest we have is a bachelor's degree. And then you compare us
>
> with master's degrees, languages, multiple—more experience compared to born—
>
> let's say, African-American that may not have any degree, but with no degree and
>
> maybe just a little college, and less experience, one language, that person will
>
> become promoted. And we won't be promoted.

RP5, who is currently in a management position, believes he was promoted to that

position because he did not interview face-to-face. He said because his name does

not sound foreign, his application was selected based on his actual skills. He

shared:

> I was never interviewed. The interview was my answering the questions.
>
> Nobody spoke with me—they didn't hear my voice. Nobody looked at me to see
>
> whether I was Black or not, you know what I mean? So, I just sent everything in.

And then, I was chosen. So… —like right now, I'm up in line for (the) next

position forward. I have to do the same thing I did now because of all the jobs

that I applied for all over the United States, I've been through ninety positions,

and I interviewed for thirty positions. So, out of them all, that was the one where

they didn't hear me, they didn't see me. And that's how, I believe that's how I

was chosen.

RP10 did not personally experience this phenomenon, but he heard about

employees who had a similar experience as RP5's: "Well, I've heard instances of people

getting bypassed in terms of promotions and certain job offers in the agency. You know,

solely because of the color of their skin, you have other people who are not, who are

not—non-colored people, who may not have the kind of experience or qualifications of

the colored ones who get, you know, the kind of position that the other person got… It

kinda varies. It varies, you know. You hear all these things".

The participants suggested that the unfair denial of opportunities for promotion

and professional development from supervisors was justified and aggravated by a

tendency towards covert nepotism, favoritism and a club mindset. According to RP7, it

appears as though naturalized African-Americans were not promoted because supervisors

prefer to promote employees from their ethnic group. RP7 stressed, "It's just like, it

seems like one ethnic group seems to always get promoted every time there's a

promotion. And ever since I've been there and the number of people that are there, it

seems like certain groups of people tend to not be able to move up within the agency for

whatever reason. And it seems to be the same—you just see a pattern, like a pattern of, like, a certain racial group that tends to stay stagnant".

RP8 confirmed this contention by explaining that supervisors were friendlier and more indulgent with employees of a similar racial background, who were not held to the same standards of professional conduct. He summarized his experience with the following statement:

> I had an experience where I had a manager who saw me in the kitchen—the break room. And then after they went and did what they had to, they came back and called me to their desk and said they didn't want to see me in there. And then, at that same time, that same manager also told me about lunchtime having to be at a certain time. And then when I would go by the lunchroom, I would see that manager specifically sitting with people that look like them, and it was past the lunchtime. I had another manager who also—I sat on the other side of their desk. And I often overheard things where they seem to particularly pick only a certain type of employee. And they never were engaging in the—the same way that they were with those employees… To the point that sometimes there was favoritism that was showing—you'd rarely see any of the African Americans be treated the same way or favored or even get the promotion that the other one got.

RP9 made a similar observation and added that supervisors ensured that employees from their racial and ethnic background were ready to be promoted when an opportunity arose. He said:

I've noticed that some of the supervisors possibly coming from another country—they treat the same individuals from their same country a little differently, with a little bit extra…I guess more, more—how I can put it—more advantages, if they come from the same country. It's just been my experience that I've been noticing the past eight years —I'm talking about the promotions. They can ensure that they're given the correct teaching and the correct classes in order to be available for a promotion that may be coming.

A few additional categories appeared that participants did not mention frequently enough to be considered a theme. RP5 and RP7 noticed the *prevalence of racial bias among supervisors*, and RP10 contended that typically *supervisors would not recognize the professional and academic abilities of naturalized African-Americans*. RP8 experienced that *supervisors did not develop a personal, close and friendly relationship with naturalized African-Americans*. She said: "I would see that manager specifically sitting with people that look like them. And it was past the lunchtime. And… they just would treat me a very certain way. Or when I would be at my desk and they would greet someone else, they were not very—they sometimes either would ignore me or they were very short with me. But with the other people, they would talk to 'em or to speak to 'em very long. They just were never really—they just didn't treat me the same way that they treated others".

RP2 had health issues and was denied a request to work from home when a similar advantage was granted to employees of other ethnicities.

Theme 3: Naturalized African-Americans are not Acknowledged and They are Victims of False Assumptions and Prejudice About Their Intellectual Abilities

Participants mentioned that while less frequent, RMAs were also perpetrated by coworkers in various forms. They observed that for coworkers RMAs mainly consisted in not acknowledging them in public and having preconceived ideas and false assumptions about their intellectual abilities.

Participants experienced that their coworkers would behave towards them in public as if they did not exist, or as if they did not want to have a close relationship with them. RP4 noted, "sometimes you may encounter someone and— 'coz usually I'm pretty friendly, and I would be smiling… And then, you maybe encounter someone on your path, like in the hallway and they just ah—you're trying to acknowledge them or just to smile, and they just turn their face away, to the opposite side. And you're like—OK, well, that's fine—and just keep on going your way". RP7 had a similar experience. When asked about his experience of racial microaggressions from his coworkers he questioned whether his coworkers did not acknowledge him because of the color of his skin. This is what he responded:

Sometimes you think—I think about it, is it because of my color? Or is it because—I don't know… Is it because of the cultural differences between us, or whatever the case may be, that they act a certain way towards me or towards my friends? I don't know. You know… I don't know why. But sometimes you feel that way; you're treated a certain way. Someone might not acknowledge you…

Or you'll say hello to someone, and they'll just, like, continue walking as if they

didn't hear you. But you're like a—two feet away from that person.

Two participants (RP3 and RP6) explained that because they were born outside of

the U.S., their coworkers assumed their intellectual abilities were lower than normal

(including their ability to speak proper English or learn quickly), and they expected them

to behave a certain way.

RP3 shared "I've experienced it, and I think that one was more—how should we

say, consequence of prejudice, long-standing prejudice. What I'm getting to is that—

people assuming, by default, that because of the way you look, because of the way you

sound—you have an accent, therefore, you probably don't understand English as much,

as well as someone who express themselves without an accent." He added, "The person's

attitude was related to either the way I look or the way I sound. They assumed that,

basically, you needed, for instance, a little bit more help, a little bit more explanation to

get—to understand what was being taught". RP6 shared the following, "this particular

person thinks that all (name of the national origin) behave a certain way when it's not so.

So, maybe because of that, she may treat me a certain way. And, she may speak to me a

certain way".

The following two categories emerged from the participants' expression of their

experience of RMAs with coworkers, but they were not frequently mentioned enough to

constitute a theme.

Covert denial of professional support: RP2 noticed that some of his more

experienced coworkers were reluctant to answer his work-related questions when he

asked for help. He said "there are certain attitudes that—or questions when I ask people who have been on the job longer than I have… the response that I get is quite different. It seems that, you know, I'm always referred to 'go back and read this; go back and read that.' But, when some other people ask, they provide the answers that they were looking for". He said the attitude was different when the same coworkers dealt with U.S. born employees, "the person that was supposed to show you the job and, at least, help you understand the job a little bit better to perform at the optimal level… the way that this person was dealing with me was quite obvious…that it was not right. And I see the same person interact with other people—specifically, US-born citizens—that was quite different from, like, the way the person dealt with me"

Rejection of cultural differences: RP8 explained that his coworkers willfully refused to acknowledge his cultural identity. His first name is a foreign equivalent of an American name. It is spelled and pronounced in a foreign language, but the coworkers chose to spell and pronounce it in English, so he was constantly reminding them of the correct spelling and pronunciation. RP8 believed his coworkers did not want to accept him the way he is.

Theme 4: RMAs Result in Negative Emotional Feelings for Naturalized African-Americans

All participants who experienced RMAs where asked how the experience made them feel. They were unanimous in acknowledging that they developed negative feelings that impacted them psychologically. The feelings that were mentioned more frequently were *disappointment, frustration, injustice, anger,* and *unfairness*

RP3 expressed his disappointment and frustration in these terms, "

"Well, it is frustrating. It is disappointing just because it was not the first instance, and it's not something that's new to me. It's no news that those prejudice exist, you just have the feeling of—well, here we go again! That's how it made me feel"

RP2 was so discouraged that he thought about resigning from his job. He expressed it this way, "I was really, really disappointed. I felt humiliated; I felt belittled… To the point where I, I decided to—actually, I even wanted to quit"

RP10 believes we should not experience racial microaggressions in this time and age. He shared, "Well, certainly it shouldn't happen with … promotions and all these other things. It should be based on merit. Nobody should be treated otherwise because of the color of your skin or, you know—or the origin of their nationalities. I think it's a sad thing to be happening in 2016 and -17 and going on"

RP9 expressed unfairness by suggesting, "It makes me feel like I could possibly be put in a box. I could be overlooked, regardless of the work that's done. So you do feel as though you were—are not treated fairly in some ways."

Other feelings that participants expressed as a result of their experience of racial microaggressions are discouragement, humiliation and belittlement (RP2), tiredness and the need to prove oneself (RP3), confusion and demotivation (RP7), sadness (RP10), and exclusion (RP9).

Theme 5: The Promotion of Naturalized African-Americans is Not Based on Merit and Performance

The study participants were asked to explain how RMAs made them feel about the agency. Most of them responded that they believed promotion at SSA for naturalized African-Americans was not based on criteria of merit and job performance. RP5, who was recently promoted to a management role, believes he was promoted because the application process did not require a face-to-face interview, and his first and last name sound "American". He explained that for a naturalized African-American to be promoted "you have to make connections with people at very higher level or interested in moving you forward". RP7 expressed his frustration about not being able to be promoted through conventional means because of racial bias from the manager. He said:

> "Like, now I'm stuck if this person shows some kind of racial bias towards me, I'm kind of stuck in this situation. Like, how do I even get promoted now? You know what I mean? You feel that way—you feel, really like, you're not getting anywhere. You know what I mean? You're just stuck at this position because this manager has a racial bias towards you."

RP7 further explained he believed the agency was rotted by institutional racism, and because of this situation he was ready to work for a different agency if he had the opportunity. RP9 expressed the same feeling and added that he was working for the agency at this point just to make a living. He stated, "It does make you feel like you go there to just get a paycheck…it does give you a feeling of staying—not staying power. It gives you a feeling of just not being able to move forward within the actual agency. You

would have to, to me, post out to a totally different agency rather than internal, in the same agency...It's horrible to say but…It's evident"

Research Question 2: What strategies do naturalized African-Americans use to overcome racial microaggressions at the Social Security Administration?

Participants answered this question through theme 6.

Theme 6: To Cope with RMAs Naturalized African-Americans Ignore the Issue; They Focus on Performing Well at Their Job or Find a Mental Break

Participants were asked what strategies they used to overcome racial microaggressions. From the answers they provided, it appears that most of them (RP2, RP3, RP4, RP5, RP7, RP8, and RP9) chose to ignore the issue and focus on improving their performance at work. They might also find a way to deter the effect of RMAs with a personal mental break.

RP4 said he focuses on his job and performs a mental exercise. He shared, "I just keep on… Just like I said, I typically walk a lot, and usually I do that same thing to—just like, a mental break—it's break time; it's a mental break. Usually, I have my headphones on, just listening to music—usually I do—it's like a stress-relieving thing, and just being in that mode of being stress-free relieves stress. I just keep on moving along—that's all"

RP5 came up with an alternate activity that helps him forget about the issue of RMAs. He found his relief in writing. He explained, "I try to do other things, you know. Like, I wrote a novel. So, I thought maybe—let me just go into writing; so, I went into writing. I wrote a 300 plus-page novel."

RP7 feels bad about the experience, but as a coping strategy he accepts the situation the way it is and tries to keep a positive attitude while hoping to leave the agency some day. He said, "Honestly, I try to not make me feel any kind of way 'coz I try to make it, like, positive for myself on a day-to-day basis. I mean, it does make you feel like, 'OK, you need to get out of it.' It makes you feel bad, honestly. And you wanna leave the agency, you know, kinda find another job and just leave so… You just kinda go along with it every day until you find something better"

RP9 also waits for a better opportunity, but he works harder in order to get noticed if possible. He said, "I continue to do the best that I can and hoping that there's an open door somewhere. And just kinda waiting, making sure that I put my—get my best foot forward, as I do my work to the best of my abilities so that somebody would notice it".

From the analysis of data, additional category emerged that explained how naturalized African-Americans manage to overcome racial microaggressions.

Report the issue anonymously: Some participants explained that a coping strategy would be to report the issue to upper management anonymously to expect a smooth resolution. RP1 suggested that he would use existing channels to repot the issue without anyone knowing. He explained he would "communicate with the person's immediate supervisor … And I believe that there's some hotline that they could—without identifying themselves, you know, to communicate certain instances. I think using those channels to, you know, record those incidents… Notify, you know, the proper authorities to keep…to make the necessary adjustments"

Adjust behavior to please the perpetrator: Some participants chose to not confront the perpetrator, but instead adjust their own behavior, hoping this would prompt the perpetrator to change their perception. RP2 declared, " I talked to my management, and I changed. I tried a different technique on my own to be, you know, cautious or present… You know, present myself as humble as possible. Changing my own behavior—that's the way that I addressed the person, the way I approached the person was, I guess, above and beyond politeness. But, I still got the same result"

Confront the perpetrator: Confrontation is another coping strategy that naturalized African-Americans use to overcome racial microaggressions when the behavior is repeated. RP3 explained, "at first I will not take things personally 'coz I just give people the benefit of the doubt. I assume that they're just ignorant, or they're not necessarily out to be rude. They're not ill intended. I don't take things necessarily personally. I just deal with it the best way I know, without being too confrontational. If it persists, of course, I'll let you know". RP8 choses to either ignore or confront, depending on the seriousness of the situation. In one instance he confronted the perpetrator. He explained, "With one I confronted them a few times where I would call out and let them know that I was aware of what they were doing. And speak up…"

Refuse to socialize and develop a closer relationship with other naturalized African-Americans: RP7 and RP8 contended that one strategy they used was to avoid socializing with their coworkers, so they would not get in trouble; instead they get closer to employees of their ethnic background. RP7 stated:

"I basically just sit at my desk most of the time, except for, like, break. That's
when I get up and, you know, laugh. I just have two other friends that I really
take my break with and eat lunch with. I talk to everyone else in the unit though,
of course, but I just try to stay in my cube…'Coz it seems like, the more you walk
around and, you know—let's say, you just talk to other people, you become social
within the workplace, then they make judgments and stuff like that. So, I just
stay, you know, to myself and stay under the radar, kind of. And that way, you're
not seen, you're not heard, and it won't affect you."

Explaining how he handled perceived RMAs from a supervisor, RP8 shared, "I
just kinda was, like, direct and say, oh hello; OK, bye. You know, I wasn't very extra
friendly. I just—get them to get out of my space as soon as possible. I didn't trust them;
I didn't really feel comfortable or safe really. Because I was so suspicious—like they
were off to try and find something wrong or something to report."

Research Question 3: How do racial microaggressions affect the work
environment at the Social Security Administration?

Participants answered this question through theme 7.

Theme 7: RMAs Result in Demotivation, Discouragement, Low Employee Morale and Low Productivity

Participants were asked if and how RMAs affect the overall work environment at
their agency. Most of them (6 out of 10) responded that RMAs affected their motivation,
affected productivity, and lowered the morale of employees at SSA. RP2 summarized his
experience as follows:

When I was going through that intensity with the supervisor, I was not productive at all. As a matter of fact, I shut down to the entire unit. I didn't talk to anybody for several weeks. And everybody was wondering what was happening. So, if people take time to think about that or talk about that, in fact, I think that affects the productivity because if you had to spend ten minutes talking to people about what's going on with a colleague, that's ten minutes that could have been devoted to the job

RP5 insisted on how RMA affected his motivation to work. He explained that RMAs have a negative effect on the work environment and "when it has a negative effect—everything, the whole thing about working and accomplishing work is motivation. So, when you go to negativity and you lose motivation, your work suffers, and your environment also suffers".

RP7 explained that RMAs cause him to get discouraged at work. He takes more breaks than usual and spends less time doing actual work and more time worrying about his own future. He would not participate in office celebrations and social gatherings. From the perspective of RP8, RMAs cause divisions between coworkers and cause others to be unhappy to come to work. He said the situation "caused a real deep friction that you could still feel (it) today—It was the first time that a lot of the people were talking about how they weren't happy about coming to work. There was a time where they enjoyed coming to work, but they no longer were happy to come and do their job because of the environment that they've created." RP9 noted that employees were overall discouraged because they knew they would not get the promotions they desired because they felt they

were "being overlooked regardless of some of the achievements that you may have had in the division".

One additional category that emerged from the analysis of data on the impact of RMAs on the work environment is *frustration towards management*. Naturalized African-Americans eventually do not trust management anymore because they believe they do not get the support they need, given that managers are the first perpetrators. RP6 mentioned that frustration towards management leads to increased absenteeism. He said, "people do not come to work. They take days off because of a particular person". RP2 added that managers make them feel as if they did not belong to the team.

Research Question 4: How do racial microaggressions affect the ability of naturalized African-Americans to provide effective public service at the Social Security Administration?

Participants answered this question through theme 8.

Theme 8: RMAs Have no Direct Impact on Public Service

Most study participants explained that racial microaggressions do not directly impact how they serve the American public. Respondents appeared to have joined the government because they love public service. Therefore, they find ways to keep providing the best possible service regardless of their experience of RMAs and regardless of personal feelings towards the agency. RP2 said public service is a duty, and he knows how to interact professionally with the public no matter what. He shared "I knew how to talk to people…I didn't project to the public that I was having issues at work that could affect my own behavior. So I tried to serve the public as fairly as possible". RP4 and RP7

also said they considered public service as a respectable duty. RP7 insisted "I love what I do –you know, like talking to claimants, helping them-that's why I am in civil service." RP8 acknowledged that even when he does not want to serve the public properly, he feels compelled to do so. He said "sometimes, I don't feel required to do something—or if they ask to handle a claim or a case sometimes, it would be hard to want to help with a case because I was angry at how I was being treated. But I also recognize that in public service, you have to put those things to the side and try to push through. So, I guess, I would try to push through"

However, some participants admitted that sometimes RMAs could negatively impact the effectiveness of service, resulting in *poor customer service* towards the public. RP1 suggested that when employees feel like they are not part of the group, their mental capacity is affected. He added that "if they feel like an outcast, that could affect their performance", even when they are willing to help the public. RP3 confirmed this contention by explaining that sometimes he lacks the motivation and self-confidence needed to serve the public effectively. He stated:

> If the feedback you're getting from… your management is that you are, somehow, incompetent, or you lack the proper prerequisite to deal properly with the public because you're not feeling confident in the first place, obviously, often times it's going to reflect on your ability to do your job properly because you are—well, first of all, obviously you're not motivated. And second of all, you are not confident that you can provide adequate service because you lack the proper

knowledge. Not because that's the reality, but because that's the perception;

that's the feedback you gained.

RP5 stressed the negative impact on customer service. From his own experience

RMAs affected productivity, which in turn was reflected as poor customer service. This

is what he said:

When I was always in front of the public and dealing with them… You know, I'd

start at seven o'clock in the morning and take many, many people all the day

long. I never take any breaks, and I keep going. But when you suffer something

negative like that, you're not motivated anymore. So, you start to, you know,

slow down in how many people you take. Take your breaks; take your lunch.

And, why am I killing myself? I can't move ahead… And having that mentality.

So, it does hurt the public service, of course!

The last theme that emerged from data analysis did not directly answer any

research question. It resulted from the interview protocol. Participants were asked to

provide suggestions and recommendations to address the issue of racial microaggressions

at their agency. The majority of participants agreed that *RMAs can be curtailed by raising*

awareness on the issue and training employees on racial and cultural differences. This

theme will be addressed in details in the next chapter of this study.

<center>**Summary**</center>

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experience

of racial microaggressions in public agencies, from the perspective of naturalized

African-Americans. Data were collected using semi structured interviews with 10

naturalized African-Americans working for the Social Security Administration. Data

were analyzed thematically using the constant comparative method. The open coding

process resulted in 16 different categories, from which nine major themes emerged

including:

1- RMAs are a covert and unconscious phenomenon that is part of the American culture of diversity and racial prejudice.

2- Naturalized African-Americans are victims of nepotism, favoritism and unfair denial of opportunities for promotion and professional development

3- Naturalized African-Americans are not acknowledged and they are victims of false assumptions and prejudice about their intellectual abilities

4- RMAs result in negative emotional feelings for naturalized African-Americans

5- The promotion of naturalized African-Americans is not based on merit and performance

6- To cope with RMAs naturalized African-Americans ignore the issue; they focus on performing well at their job or find a mental break

7- RMAs result in demotivation, discouragement, low employee morale and low productivity

8- RMAs have no direct impact on public service

9- RMAs can be curtailed by raising awareness on the issue and training employees on racial and cultural differences

The aforementioned themes contributed to answering the overarching research question of the study: How do naturalized African-Americans experience racial microaggressions at the Social Security Administration? The themes also responded to the three sub-questions of the study. The last theme will be developed in the next chapter of the study. Chapter 5 will discuss the findings of this study and provide conclusions and recommendations for improvement and further research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological doctoral research study was to explore the lived experience of naturalized African-Americans regarding racial microaggressions in public agencies. In 1964, the Civil Rights Act was enacted with the goal of eliminating discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin (National Archives and Records Administration, 2014). Yet, research suggests that racial discrimination issues are still prevalent in a more covert way; they exist, according to researchers, in the form of microaggressions, which are subtle conscious or unconscious insults and derogatory attitudes directed towards minorities (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Previous researchers examining racial discrimination focused on racial microaggressions in the area of higher education (see Minikel-Lacocque, 2013). A few researchers focused on the workplace (see Basford, Offerman and Behrend, 2014) but did not address racial microaggressions as they pertain to naturalized African-Americans.

Through the use of purposeful sampling, I recruited 10 naturalized African-Americans from the SSA to participate in the study. They provided their perspective of racial microaggressions and answered the overarching research question, which was How do naturalized African-Americans experience racial microaggressions at the Social Security Administration? Findings from this study complement the work of Basford, Offermann, and Behrend (2014) who recommended a study that would provide a better understanding of the phenomenon of racial discrimination in the workplace and raise awareness of its negative outcome. Findings from this study also confirm and

complement the work of Shenoy-Packer (2015) in that they suggest that naturalized African-Americans experience prejudice and verbal and attitudinal microaggressions that affect their workplace productivity.

Interpretation of Findings

I conducted semi structured interviews with 10 naturalized African-Americans working for the Social Security Administration who provided their experience of racial microaggressions in the workplace. Chapter 4 includes the overall results and the themes that emerged from the thematic analysis of data. I analyzed and interpreted the study findings as they addressed each research question, and I made a connection to CRT and the literature on racial microaggressions.

Experience of Racial Microaggressions

The central research question was, how do naturalized African-Americans experience racial microaggressions at the Social Security Administration (SSA)? Findings from Chapter 4, based on the summary of interview responses, reveal that most participants have experienced racial microaggressions (RMAs) directly or indirectly. They have been victims or witnesses of RMAs. They believe RMAs are an endemic issue at SSA, but that, most of the time, microaggressions at SSA are perpetrated unconsciously or out of ignorance. This, according to participants, is mainly due to the U.S. history of racism and racial discrimination. This finding confirms CRT tenets that the concept of racism is not new in the United States, but originates from the history of slavery and discrimination, and is culturally enrooted (Mills, 2009), and that racism is

endemic to U.S. life (Matsuda et al., 1993). The finding also highlights the need for training in the area of RMAs at SSA.

I also found that naturalized African-Americans at SSA mainly experience RMAs from supervisors in the form of nepotism, favoritism, and unfair denial of opportunities for promotion and professional development. From a theoretical viewpoint, this finding contradicts any contentions of neutrality and colorblindness (Mills, 2009) in federal agencies as well as confirms Matsuda et al., (1993) skepticism toward dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, color blindness, and meritocracy. The findings confirm the work of Constantine and Wing Sue (2007), who argued that RMAs prevail between White supervisors and Black supervisees. Constantine and Wing Sue explained that because of deeply enrooted racism in U.S. culture, Black supervisees are typically victims of biases and prejudice from White supervisors, who are not specifically trained to handle diversity issues. Moreover, the finding confirms the need for systems and organizational changes that promote equal advancement and career development opportunities among employees (Rocco et al., 2014) at SSA and in federal agencies as a whole.

Participants noted that naturalized African-Americans also experience RMAs from their coworkers who are not in a position of leadership. These aggressions typically take the form of not being acknowledged outside of work situations (e.g., being ignored when they greet a coworker). Moreover, participants said they had been victims of false assumptions and prejudice about their intellectual abilities. This finding shows that participants experience RMAs from any category of SSA employee. Participants

emphasized that RMAs from supervisors are more consequential, as they have a direct impact on their career. The finding validates Sue et al.'s (2007) definition of microaggressions as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults" (p. 271). Offerman and Behrend (2014) revealed that gender-based workplace microaggressions are due to stereotypes and a biased perception of women. Based on this finding I concluded that a similar conclusion can be made about RMAs.

The analysis of data also revealed that RMAs resulted in negative emotional feelings for participants, which included disappointment, frustration, injustice, anger, unfairness, discouragement, humiliation, belittlement, tiredness, the need to prove oneself, confusion, demotivation, sadness, and exclusion. This finding is in alignment with research on the physical and emotional consequences of RMAs. Nadal (2011) found, for example, that RMAs were associated with high blood pressure, depression, and posttraumatic stress disorder. Nadal, Griffin, Wong, Hamit, and Rasmus (2014) also found that victims or racial microaggressions had a high propensity to be depressed and anxious, to have low self-esteem, and to be bitter. Therefore, this finding provides evidence that RMAs have the potential to negatively impact the physical and emotional wellbeing of naturalized African-Americans at SSA, because they experience disappointment, frustration, injustice, anger, unfairness, discouragement, humiliation, belittlement, tiredness, the need to prove oneself, confusion, demotivation, sadness, and exclusion in the workplace.

Furthermore, regarding naturalized African-Americans' experiences of RMAs, I found that the promotion of naturalized African-Americans was not based on merit and performance at SSA. Participants expressed their intention and their wish to leave the agency if they found the right opportunity. This finding uncovers a feeling of general dissatisfaction towards the agency because employees are typically interested in career development. This also demonstrates the potential for a high turnover of naturalized African-American employees if the issue of RMAs was not addressed properly. The finding is in agreement with Jones, Peddie, Gilrane, King, and Gray's (2013) contention that workplace discrimination is responsible for employee turnover and high litigation costs. Therefore, the focus of diversity and equal employment initiatives and regulations should be on overt discrimination in the workplace.

Overall, my findings showed that participants were victims of all three forms of racial microaggressions, which are microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations (Forrest Bank & Jenson, 2015). According to Forrest Bank and Jenson (2015), microassaults are "acts of racism or discrimination that are enacted knowingly toward others" (p.143); microinsults are "messages relayed interpersonally or environmentally that relay negative, degrading, or exclusionary messages" (p.143); and microinvalidations occur when people pretend that color does not matter and behave as if racism did not exist. While participants experienced all three forms of racial microaggressions, they developed coping strategies to overcome the effect of RMAs.

Coping Strategies

The first sub-question was: What strategies do naturalized African-Americans use to overcome racial microaggressions at the Social Security Administration (SSA)? Upon data analysis, the study found that to cope with RMAs naturalized African-Americans ignore the issue; they focus on performing well at their job or find a mental break. This finding validates the contention of Shenoy-Packer (2015) who performed research on immigrant professionals and found that in response to microaggressions in the workplace, they managed to rationalize and make sense by taking ownership and self-blaming. He explained that this strategy is more destructive psychologically and detrimental to the work environment. Even though naturalized African-Americans choose to focus on the job to ignore the issue, they cannot be fully productive if they are affected psychologically by RMAs. In academia, Constantine, Smith, Redington, and Owens (2008) observed that Latino/a students developed coping strategies such as seeking support from relatives and peers, prayer and spiritual engagement. These strategies are similar to the finding that naturalized African-Americans choose to find a mental break as highlighted in chapter 4, such as listening to music or writing a book.

Impact of RMAs on the Work Environment

The second sub-question was: How do racial microaggressions affect the work environment at the Social Security Administration? Answers to this question led to the finding that RMAs result in demotivation, discouragement, low employee morale and low productivity. This finding shows that RMAs have a direct negative impact on employee morale and productivity and should therefore be addressed. The agency cannot

afford to have a category of employees who are demotivated because of a phenomenon they experience on a daily basis. Demotivation might eventually impact their service to the public. This finding is also in line with Shenoy-Packer (2015) whose research on immigrant professionals revealed that as they manage to be accepted and assimilated, they could be demotivated and discouraged if they felt discriminated against, and this would affect productivity in the workplace.

Impact of RMAs on Public Service

The third sub-question was: How do racial microaggression affect the ability of naturalized African-Americans to provide effective public service at the Social Security Administration. Findings from data analysis revealed RMAs have no direct impact on public service. This finding shows that public service is a calling and a vocation for most respondents. Regardless of how RMAs might affect their personal feelings and emotions, it does not affect their work ethics; they manage to stay professional and to serve the American public properly. Most participants responded that they joined the federal government because they love the idea of serving the American people.

Important Additional Finding

From the analysis of data, I uncovered a finding that did not directly result from the interview protocol and did not specifically answer a research question. Some respondents contended that they were victims of RMAs from U.S. born African-Americans. They explained that U.S. born African-Americans considered naturalized African-Americans to be a threat to their professional advancement and therefore discriminated against them. This finding expands the idea of racial microaggression

above the typical divide between Blacks and Whites in the U.S. One major tenet of the

Critical Race theory stipulates that the necessity to perpetuate White privilege is socially

constructed and part of beliefs that span from the times of slavery (Tillery, 2009). This

finding reveals that racial microaggressions are not necessarily a consequence of a

socially constructed White privilege; they might occur within the same racial or ethnic

group, or between people belonging to minority groups.

Limitations of the Study

This phenomenological research study showed three major limitations. The first

limitation was the data collection tool. Data were collected using a single tool, semi

structured interviews performed over the phone. While phone interviews were more

practical and aimed at reducing the influence of the researcher on study participants, they

did not allow for observations. I was not able to observe any non-verbal expressions or

body language that might have conveyed a different meaning to the data. Face-to-face

interviews would have allowed to collect some additional data through observations and

thereby to get a more accurate account of the experience of racial microaggressions.

Future research might also examine any preexisting data from Equal Employment

Opportunity (EEO) complaints about racial microaggressions at the Social Security

Administration or any other similar agency, in order to ensure data triangulation.

The second limitation is the non-generalizability of the study. The study aimed to

explore the experience of racial microaggressions from the perspective of naturalized

African-Americans in federal agencies. However, data were collected only at the Social

Security Administration. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be generalized to

other federal agencies. Moreover, using purposeful and snowball sampling, only 10 participants were recruited. This means the data collected only reflects the views and the experience of those participants, and does not necessarily represent the experience of other naturalized African-Americans at the Social Security Administration or in any other federal agency. Future studies could expand data collection to other federal agencies where the phenomenon potentially exists, and other minority groups that might equally experience racial microaggressions in federal agencies.

The third limitation of the study is the potential for social desirability from respondents. The ontological assumption for this study was that research participants would honestly share their lived experiences of racial microaggressions in federal agencies by bringing their personal and unique perspective of the phenomenon. I contacted participants using their non-professional email address and interviews were performed over the phone. Participants were recruited from various divisions of the agency and there was no perceived coercion to participate because I am not in a management role at Social Security. However, all participants were aware that I worked for the agency and was performing dissertation research work. They may have responded based on what they believed I wanted to hear.

<div align="center">**Recommendations**</div>

Recommendations for this study are based on the participants' response to a question about what changes they would suggest the agency should implement to solve the issue of racial microaggressions. Most participants agreed there was no overarching solution to the issue. This is in line with the CRT, which stipulates that racial equality is

an ideal that cannot be achieved overnight, but through a permanent quest (Mills, 2009).

RP2, RP8, RP9 and RP10 explained that because RMAs are usually unconscious and

systemic, it would be challenging and illusory to find a definite solution to the issue. RP7

and RP9 contended that the issue was part of the organizational culture of the agency, and

management was typically ineffective and unreliable to provide solutions. However,

participants made the following recommendations, which could significantly curtail the

effects of racial microaggressions at the Social Security Administration.

Recommendation 1: Raise Awareness on the Issue of RMAs and Take Disciplinary

Actions Towards Perpetrators

Most study participants believe that the issue of RMAs is not discussed enough at

the agency and unknown to many employees. RP1 and RP2 suggested that the agency

should organize more diversity awareness events that promote multiculturalism as a joint

effort involving all agency units. RP5 and RP10 added that awareness could also be

raised through the promotion of academic research specifically aimed at exploring the

issue of RMAs. According to RP6, manager should talk about RMA issues so they can be

brought to consciousness, through designated group discussions and team-building

exercises. RP7 assented that cultural awareness should not be limited to the Black History

Month events, but organizing regular team building exercises, could bring diverse

employees closer to one another. He also suggested that the annual employee satisfaction

survey should be reviewed to include questions that specifically address the feelings of

employees toward RMAs issues.

Most participants agreed that victims of RMAs are reluctant to report the issue, mainly because reporting does not always lead to sanctions towards perpetrators. RP3 suggested that RMA issues should be addressed when they occur and perpetrators should be confronted. RP5 and RP7 added that employees should file a formal complaint with the Union or the EEO office, and management should take disciplinary actions towards perpetrators when their responsibility is proven.

Recommendation 2: Train Employees and Supervisors on Racial and Cultural Differences

RP2 stressed the importance of agency-wide communication on the personal responsibility of each employee to identify and report RMAs. He added that the agency should encourage the cultural sensitivity of supervisors and emphasize their responsibility to make sure everybody feels accepted. This could be done, he said, through interactive teamwork to break up ethical cliques, and training that emphasizes respect for differences among workers and education on cultural differences. During such trainings managers would be encouraged to identify their own biases and stereotypes, and open up about their own cultural background.

RP3 insisted that employees should be sensitized on the fact that racial microaggressions constitute a violation of workplace ethics. This could be achieved through genuine training on prejudice and cultural differences that moves beyond the traditional Black/White divide.

Recommendation 3: Acknowledge and Recognize the Unique Contribution of

Naturalized African-Americans

RP5 believes that it is necessary to redefine and specify the meaning of "African-American" as inclusive of all ethnic groups of African origin, but also to sensitize employees on the meaning of being a U.S. citizen, whether born in the U.S. or naturalized. He explained that events should be organized with the aim of acknowledging the unique contribution of naturalized African-Americans to the American culture as a whole.

RP9 proposed an inclusive and opened style of management. He suggested that upper management should promote management by walking around, so they can receive ideas from employees of all ethnicities and realize that people from all ethnic backgrounds are equally qualified.

The above recommendations are in line with the existing literature on possible solutions to racial microaggressions, as presented in chapter 2. In the area of education, Minikel-Lacocque (2013) suggested to raise awareness and train students on the issue, by designing specific programs that address racism and racial microaggressions for students of color in predominantly White universities. Ross-Sheriff (2012) advocated that victims should identify and acknowledge the microaggression, and attribute the responsibility to the perpetrator.

Implications

This study aimed to fill a gap in literature in the area of racial discrimination, and specifically, racial microaggressions in the workplace. Previous studies focused on the

areas of higher education and law, and highlighted the existence and manifestations of the phenomenon for African-Americans in general, Latino/a and Asian Americans. This study added to the existing literature by exploring the phenomenon as it pertains to the population of naturalized African-Americans. It provided a new understanding of the dynamics of racial relations, and their influence on the social and professional inclusion of naturalized African-Americans in federal agencies. The study presented naturalized African-Americans as a subgroup within the large group of African-Americans that has its own experience of racial microaggressions. It paved the way for future research in social sciences that could explore the phenomenon of microaggressions within the same ethnic group or between minority groups.

The study found that racial microaggressions exist at the Social Security Administration. They are perpetrated towards naturalized African-Americans in the form of false assumptions, prejudice, nepotism, favoritism and unfair denial of opportunities for promotion and professional development. This results in negative emotional feelings for naturalized African-Americans and affects their motivation and productivity. The study provides the management team at the Social Security Administration with new insights about their multicultural and diverse workforce. The findings mean that they should find policies to protect naturalized African-Americans and any similar employees from racial microaggressions as part of their responsibility to promote a fair and safe work environment for all employees. A theme that emerged from this study is that raising awareness on the issue and training employees on racial and cultural differences can help curtail racial microaggressions. Therefore, managers at the Social Security

Administration should revise their training policies on diversity issues to acknowledge the existence of subgroups inside the major ethnic groups and create an inclusive work environment that fosters public service. The study also revealed that regardless of racial microaggressions, naturalized African-Americans are still striving to provide the best possible service to the American public, which they view as a duty. Such positive feedback should prompt managers at the social Security Administration to make sure naturalized African-Americans and all similar ethnic subgroups feel accepted and assimilated, because their demotivation might be detrimental to productivity (Shenoy-Packer, 2015) and ultimately to the American public. Findings from this study can be used by any other federal agency as a basis to start the conversation, and develop policies aiming to improve racial relations and use diversity as an asset instead of a detriment to public service.

In the context of a general belief in a post-civil rights era and post racial society, this study presents racial microaggressions in the workplace as a potential civil rights issue. Civil rights organizations might use this study as a basis for devising new advocacy policies that would take into account the needs of the community of naturalized African-Americans and other similar communities. From a theoretical perspective, this study addressed the contention that racism is predominant and socially constructed in America, and confirmed the idea that colorblindness is not the adequate approach to solving the issue (Mills, 2009). Instead, racism in general and racial microaggressions in particular should be acknowledged and properly addressed in every area of the American society, and especially in federal agencies.

Conclusion of the Study

This phenomenological research study explored the experience of racial microaggressions from the perspective of naturalized African-Americans working for a federal agency. The study used the theoretical framework of the Critical Race Theory (CRT), whose tenets are aligned with the topic of the study and research questions. The CRT stipulates that the concept of racism is culturally enrooted in America and goes beyond the difference of skin color to involve unconscious feelings. The CRT also presents racial equality as an ideal that can only be achieved through a permanent quest (Mills, 2009).

Ten participants were purposefully selected from the Social Security Administration through snowball sampling. Data were collected using semi structured phone interviews and participants answered the overarching research question: How do naturalized African-Americans experience racial microaggressions at the Social Security Administration? Data were analyzed thematically using the constant comparative method, which identified similarities and differences within the dataset. The analysis resulted in 16 categories and nine themes.

Findings from the study revealed that racial microaggressions exists at the Social Security Administration in the form of bias, prejudice, false assumptions, nepotism, favoritism and unfair denial of opportunities for promotion and professional development for naturalized African-Americans. They result in negative emotional feelings, demotivation and discouragement that affect employee morale and productivity.

Participants suggested that racial microaggressions could be curtailed by raising awareness on the issue and training employees and supervisors on racial and cultural differences. Therefore, the study could be used as a basis for policy decisions in federal agencies that would improve racial relations and use diversity as an asset for effective public service. Moreover, the study could help the Office of Equal Employment Opportunity at any federal agency and civil rights organizations, to devise equal employment policies that would take into account the needs of the subgroup of naturalized African-Americans and other similar subgroups.

This study presented new insights about the multicultural and diverse workforce in federal agencies but only focused on naturalized African-Americans at the Social Security Administration. Future research may expand data collection to other federal agencies and consider other minority groups that might equally experience racial microaggressions. Future research may also explore the phenomenon of racial microaggressions as it occurs between subgroups within the same ethnic group in the workplace.

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Appendix A: Invitation to Participate

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Casimir Yem Bilong. I am a Social Security Administration (SSA) employee, and also a doctoral student at Walden University. I am currently performing a research study to understand how naturalized African-Americans experience covert and subtle forms of racial discrimination in federal agencies.

This study is not part of my official duties, and not endorsed by the Social Security Administration. I would greatly appreciate your **voluntary** participation in an interview, which would take about one (1) hour. The interview will be performed over the phone, at a time and date that is convenient for you. This will be done outside of your work time, which could be during your lunch hour or after your workday. Interview participants will later be emailed the date and time of their interview session at least 2 weeks in advance for confirmation.

The information from each interview will be kept strictly confidential and no one who participates will be identified in any of the study's reports.

Participation to the study is voluntary. **You may not contact me on SSA time or equipment**. Should you choose to participate, please feel free to email me at [e-mail address redacted] or give me a call at [telephone number phone number redacted]. I will answer any questions you may have about the study.

If you know any other SSA employees who might be interested in participating in the study, please provide their personal (**non-work)** contact information.

If you are interested in participating in the study, please complete the questions below in a reply email to me.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and assistance with my research study.

Sincerely,

Casimir Yem Bilong

[e-mail address redacted]

[telephone number redacted]

If you are interested in participating in the study, please complete the questions below in a reply email to me at [e-mail address redacted].

1. What is your name?

2. What is your gender?

2. What is your age range? (Under 18, 18-65, 65+)

4. What is your race (African American/Black, White, Hispanic/Latino or Spanish, Asian, or Specify Other)?

5. Are you a U.S. citizen?

6. How did you become a U.S. citizen (birth or naturalization)?

7. What is your personal (non-professional) contact information?

8. If applicable, please provide the personal (non-professional) contact

information for other SSA employees who might be interested in participating in

the study.

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Introduction

• Welcome the participant and introduce myself.

• Explain the general purpose of the interview and why the participant was chosen.

• Explain the concept of racial microaggressions.

• Discuss the purpose and process of the interview.

• Explain the purpose of recording the interview

• Outline general rules and interview guidelines such as being prepared for

the interviewer to interrupt to make sure all the topics can be covered within the allotted

time.

• Review break schedule

• Address the issue of confidentiality.

• Inform the participant that information discussed is going to be analyzed as a whole and

participant's name will not be used in any analysis of the interview.

Discussion Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experience of racial

microaggressions in public agencies, from the perspective of naturalized African-

Americans.

Discussion Guidelines

The interviewer will explain the following:

Please respond directly to the questions and if you don't understand the question,

please let me know. I am here to ask questions, listen, and answer any questions you

might have. If we seem to get stuck on a topic, I may interrupt you. I will keep your

identity, participation, and remarks private. Please speak openly and honestly. This

session will be tape recorded because I do not want to miss any comments.

General Instructions

When responding to questions that will be asked of you in the interview, please

exclude all identifying information, such as your name and other parties' names. Your

identity will be kept confidential and any information that enables identification will be

removed from the analysis.

Interview Questions

1. How long have you worked for your agency?

2. What is your current position?

3. Do you believe racial microaggressions exist in your agency?

4. Have you ever experienced racial microaggressions at work?

5. Describe your experience of racial microaggressions at work

6. How often do they occur, and how does that make you feel about the agency?

7. Are racial microaggressions mainly perpetrated by coworkers or supervisors?

8. How would you compare your experience of racial microaggressions with

coworkers as opposed to supervisors?

9. What strategies do you use to overcome the racial microaggressions?

10. How do racial microaggressions affect the overall work environment in your

agency?

11. How do racial microaggressions affect your work efficiency, especially toward the public?

12. Do you believe the issue of racial microaggressions at work can be resolved?

13. What solutions would you recommend to agency supervisors and managers?

Conclusion

Discuss the member check process with the participant, answer any questions, and thank the participant for his or her time.

Appendix C: Data Analysis Results

Table C2. Existence of RMAs

Existence of RMAs	Number	Percentage
Yes	8	80%
No*	2	20%
Total	10	100%

* RP1 and RP4 responded No

Table C2. Rationale for belief in the

existence of RMAs

Rationale for belief in the existence of RMA in the agency	Participants	Frequency	Percentage
Part of the American culture and longstanding prejudice	RP2, RP3, RP8, RP9	4	50%
The phenomenon is part of human nature	RP6	1	13%
I personally experienced the phenomenon	RP5, RP7	2	25%
I saw others experience the phenomenon	RP10	1	13%
Total		8	100%

Table C3. Experience of RMAs from Coworkers

RMAs perpetrated by coworkers	Participants	Frequency	Percentage
Covert denial of professional support	RP2	1	17%
False assumptions and prejudice about intellectual abilities	RP3, RP6	2	33%
Not acknowledged in public	RP4, RP7	2	33%
Rejection of cultural differences	RP8	1	17%
Total		6	100%

Table C4. Experience of RMAs from Supervisors

RMAs perpetrated by supervisors and managers	Participants	Frequency	Percentage
Nepotism and favoritism	RP1, RP5, RP7, RP8, RP9	5	29%
Unfair denial of opportunities for promotion and professional development	RP2, RP5, RP7, RP8, RP9, RP10	6	35%
Professional and academic abilities not recognized	RP5, RP10	2	12%
Held to different standards of professional conduct	RP8	1	6%
Racial Bias	RP5, RP7	2	12%
No personal relationship with employees	RP8	1	6%
Total		17	100%

Table C5. General Context of RMAs

Broad context of racial relations at Social Security	Participants	Frequency	Percentage
Diversity is considered an asset	RP1, RP5	2	25%
Employees congregate and get along by ethnicity/Club mindset	RP2, RP7	2	25%
Naturalized African Americans are not in leadership	RP5	1	13%
Great divide/Conflict between naturalized and US born African Americans	RP5	1	13%
Discriminations generalized to all African Americans	RP7, RP8	2	25%
Total		8	100%

Table C6. Feelings as a Victim

How RMAs make me feel	Participants	Frequency
Disappointment	RP2, RP3	2
Discouragement	RP2	1
Humiliation	RP2	1
Belittlement	RP2	1
Frustration	RP3, RP7	2
Tiredness	RP3	1
Need to prove oneself	RP3	1
Injustice	RP5, RP8, RP10	3
Anger	RP6, RP7, RP8	3
Uncomfortable	RP6	1
Confusion	RP7	1
Demotivation	RP7	1
Unfairness	RP8, RP9, RP10	3
Not given the same opportunities	RP8	1
Seclusion	RP8	1
Overlooked	RP8, RP9	2
Sadness	RP10	1
Not held to the same standards	RP8	1
Exclusion	RP9	1

Table C7. Feelings Towards the Agency

My feelings about the agency	Participants	Frequency
The agency is doing a great job	RP3	1
Promotion is not based on merit and performance	RP5, RP7, RP8, RP9	4
Institutional racial discrimination exists	RP7, RP8	2
I want to work for another agency	RP7, RP9	2
I am afraid to speak up	RP8	1
Disappointed	RP8	1
I work just for my paycheck	RP7, RP9	2

Table C8. Coping Strategies

Coping strategies	Participants	Frequency
Report the issue anonymously	RP1, RP2, RP8, RP10	4
Ignore the issue and focus on the job	RP2, RP3, RP4, RP5, RP7, RP8, RP9	7
Work harder to prove myself	RP2	1
Adjust my behavior to please the perpetrator	RP2, RP3, RP7, RP10	3
Confront the perpetrator	RP3, RP8	2
Avoid feeling like a victim	RP3	1
Develop a closer relationship with other naturalized African Americans	RP7, RP8	2
Refuse to socialize	RP7, RP8	2
Do not speak up to avoid getting in trouble	RP7, RP9	2

Table C9. Impact of RMAs on Public Service

Direct Impact of RMA on public service	Participants	Frequency
Poor customer service	RP1, RP3, RP5	3
No impact: public service is a duty	RP2, RP4, RP7, RP8, RP9	5

Table C10. Impact of RMAs on Work Environment

Impact of RMAs on work environment	Participants
Negative impact	RP1
Demotivation and discouragement, low employee morale	RP2, RP3, RP5, RP7, RP8, RP9
Frustration towards management	RP2, RP3, RP6
Unwillingness to learn	RP3
No impact	RP4
Poor interaction and conflicts between coworkers	RP5, RP7, RP8
Absenteeism	RP6
Lower productivity	RP2, RP7, RP10

Table C11. Rationale for not Believing in Overarching Solution

Rationale for belief/no belief in overarching solution to RMAs in government	Participants	Frequency
RMAs are unconscious behavior of perpetrators	RP2, RP8	2
People have different belief systems	RP4	1
The victims are reluctant to report	RP5	1
Management is ineffective and unreliable	RP7, RP9	2
RMAs are part of the organizational culture	RP9	1
RMAs are a systemic and societal issue	RP10	1
There is a tendency to blame the victims	RP8	1

Table C12. Recommendations

Recommendations	Participants	Frequency
Train employees on diversity issues	RP1, RP3, RP5, RP8, RP10	5
Train supervisors/managers on racial and cultural differences	RP2, RP4, RP8, RP9	4
Downplay the issue and focus communication on the organization's mission and vision	RP1	1
Promote multiculturalism	RP2	1
Openly discuss RMA issues	RP6, RP7, RP8	3
Academic research	RP5, RP10	2
Promote team building events/exercises	RP6, RP7	2
Raise awareness on the issue	RP1, RP2, RP3, RP4, RP6, RP7, RP10	7
Take disciplinary actions towards perpetrators	RP3, RP8	2
Acknowledge and recognize the contribution of naturalized AA	RP5, RP10	2
Redefine and communicate on the meaning of the expressions US citizen and African-American	RP5	1
Revise/perform employee satisfaction surveys	RP7, RP9	2
Lobbying before politicians	RP1	1