2018

Black Individuals' Lived Experiences with Racial Microaggressions and Implications in Counseling

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Abstract

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MA, University of Central Florida, 2007

BS, Bethune-Cookman College, 2003

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

The problem of racial microaggressions in the United States has important implications for counseling due to the mental and physical health concerns individuals who experience them may develop. Although the current literature addresses racial microaggressions among Black individuals and implications for counseling, no qualitative studies that included the voices of Black individuals using relational cultural theory were found. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of Black individuals who have encountered racial microaggressions and learn their perspectives on what counselors can do to help them in counseling. Adding this perspective will help fill this gap in counseling literature and aid counselors in promoting mental wellness among Black clients. Through semi structured interviews, 7 Black adults living in Florida shared their lived experiences with racial microaggressions and gave perspectives on how counselors can serve Black clients in counseling. Interpretive phenomenological analysis was the research design used in the study, in concordance the 6-step approach used to analyze the data, and relational cultural theory was the theoretical framework. The following 7 themes emerged from the study: lived experiences with racial microaggressions, emotional responses to racial microaggressions, intersectionality, coping with racial microaggressions, advocacy and social justice, neighborhood and community social support, and implications for counseling. These results provided implications for social change because they can add to counselors' knowledge on how to improve services to Black clients, which can improve their lives.

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Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation in loving memory of two special women, Sandra Bell-Browne, my beautiful mother, and Kama Melius, one of my best friends, who died too soon and before they could see me accomplish this life goal. I love and miss you both immensely and hope I have made you proud. Mom, thank you for giving me life and always being there for me until your premature death. Kama, thank you for being a dear friend who shared my passion for loving and caring for hurting children and for being one of the best educators I had the pleasure to know and emulate. I am sad that you did not get to complete the first semester of your Educational Leadership doctoral program, but cancer still did not win. Thank you both for being my guardian angels and allowing me to feel your presence when I need it most.

Acknowledgments

I feel so blessed and grateful by this doctoral experience that would not have been possible without the help and support of so many people. I would first like to thank God for His unmerited favor and blessings in my life. I meditated on three Bible verses that kept me grounded during this process. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-8). To my loving husband, Jonah James, Jr., words cannot express how much I love and appreciate you for your never-ending love, support, and patience during this process and beyond. To my loving father, Denfield Browne, thank you for your ongoing love and support and being one of my biggest supporters! You started telling me at an early age I would go to college and I knew that to be true even before I knew what college was or that I would eventually earn the highest degree possible. To my big sisters and brothers, Andrea, Michelle, Yvette, Duane, and Wayne, I love and appreciate you for being the best siblings a girl could have, cheering me on during this journey. To my extended family, I appreciate all your prayers, support, and encouragement too.

A very special thank you to my dissertation committee, which I affectionately call my "Dream Team": Dr. Corinne Bridges, Chair and Methodologist, Dr. Melinda Haley, Second Member and Content Expert, Dr. Jennifer Gess, University Research Reviewer, and Dr. Jason Patton, Honorary Committee Member. You will never know how much I appreciate your patience, guidance, corrections, and empathy during this process, which had many roadblocks caused by personal tragedies and stressors. You were a constant

source of support and inspiration to me, and I am honored to join your list of superb colleagues.

To all my professional mentors, teachers, professors, supervisors, role models, and colleagues, who are too many to name, but you know who you are, thank you for all the seeds you planted in my life and molding me into the professional I am today. To my NBCC Minority Fellowship Program Family including the staff, my 22 cohort members, Fellowship Mentor, Dr. Matthew Glowiak, and past fellows, thank you for being incredibly supportive and inspiring during this process! I feel blessed to be a part of the NBCC Minority Fellowship program family!

To my "bestie" of 30 plus years, Yonetta Francis, thank you for being there during the good and tough times throughout my life including this Ph.D. journey, I love and appreciate you very much. To my "Soul Sister" and Colleague, Elisa Niles, we started this doctoral journey together, which was unplanned and unknown to us but was destined to happen because we supported and helped each other from the beginning and I am not sure how I would have completed it without you! To all my friends and colleagues who have been cheering me on and supporting me during this process and beyond, thank you! I want to thank those who participated in this important study by giving your time and sharing your personal stories which were the cornerstone of my dissertation research. I would be remiss if I did not take time to share my immense gratitude to all who made this doctoral journey bearable and possible.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

In the United States, there are systemic problems with racism, also known as racial microaggressions, which affect the lives of people who experience them in various ways (Bowleg, Teti, Malebranche, & Tschann, 2013; Griffin, Cunningham, & George Mwangi, 2016; Owen, Tao, Imel, Wampold, & Rodolfa, 2014; Robinson-Wood et al., 2015). "Racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 273). These often covert yet frequent interactions can negatively alter the physical and mental health of individuals of color, including Black people (Nadal, Griffin, Wong, Hamit, & Rasmus, 2014; Robinson-Wood et al., 2015). Black people also experience overt forms of racial microaggressions that are equally harmful while interacting with other individuals—mostly White people—in various social settings (Peralta, 2015; Purifoye, 2015). Therefore, the prevalence of racial microaggressions experienced by Black people may create a health epidemic. However, due to the inherent personal, and sometimes intangible, nature of microaggressions Black people face, there is a lack of empirical evidence to support this classification.

In this chapter, I provide background information about the problem of racial microaggressions as well as literature supporting the need for this study. I also include the purpose of the study and the relevance of the problem to the counseling profession and implications for social change. Additionally, this chapter includes an operational

definition of racial microaggressions and its three types, the main research question, and conceptual framework supporting the study. Finally, I list the assumptions, scope, delimitations, and limitations of the study.

Background

Though some people may argue that individuals from all demographic groups have equal access, equity, and life experiences in society, researchers have found evidence to challenge these arguments (Bowleg et al., 2013; Nadal, Griffin, et al., 2014). For this study, I referenced many empirical studies where researchers discuss Black people's experiences with racial microaggressions. For example, Bowleg et al. (2013) conducted a qualitative study with heterosexual Black men from low income backgrounds who shared their experiences of discrimination and social inequalities in mental health, career, and while interacting with law enforcement officers. Forrest-Bank and Jenson (2015) found that among Black, Hispanic, Asian, and White young adults who experienced racial and ethnic microaggressions, Black participants reported having more experiences with racial microaggressions than those from the other four groups. Additionally, Gonzales, Davidoff, Nadal, and Yanos (2014) found that Black individuals who also had a mental illness experienced racial microaggressions surrounding their diagnosis and race.

Black individuals experience racial microaggressions in many public settings, which illustrates how pervasive they are in society. For example, White passengers who use public buses and trains engage in racial microaggressions such as pretending that Black passengers and bus drivers do not exist by avoiding conversation and eye contact

with them during commutes (Purifoye, 2015). White passengers may also interact more often with White bus drivers by greeting and expressing gratitude to them more than they do with Black drivers (Purifoye, 2015). Black professionals in other occupational settings have reported perceiving overt and covert forms of racial microaggressions in the workplace, and in some cases, the perpetrators were White supervisors (Offerman et al., 2014).

Another setting in which Black people experience racial microaggressions are institutions of higher learning. Black students who attend predominately White institutions where staff and administrators practice color blindness in their enrollment and other academic procedures, known as race-neutral institutions, have experienced more racial microaggressions than those who attend race-conscious schools where staff and administrators consider the unique needs and lived experiences of students of color (Peralta, 2015). Additionally, faculty members working at predominately White institutions also experience racial microaggressions. In one qualitative study, Black female faculty members working at predominately White institutions shared their lived experiences of racial microaggressions that their White peers and students committed against them (Robinson-Wood et al., 2015; Shillingford, Trice-Black, & Butler, 2013). Black faculty described these experiences as hurtful and said that they rely on their faith and support from mentors and colleagues to help them cope with racial microaggressions at work (Robinson-Wood et al., 2015; Shillingford et., 2013).

Children and adolescents are not exempt from experiencing racial microaggressions, and researchers have written about students' experiences in academic

settings. In one study, Black, Hispanic, and low income students who are academically gifted experienced microaggressions at higher rates than other gifted students because of their race (Stambaugh & Ford, 2015). Although gifted students have characteristics, which make them prone to microaggressions, the Black and Hispanic students experienced more problems because school administrators perceived their behaviors negatively. In another study, the teachers at predominantly White middle schools viewed Black male students as more deviant and likely to engage in criminal activities than their White peers (Henfield, 2011). These students expressed feeling pressure to adapt to White culture while not perceiving any openness and support from school administrators toward Black culture including preferences in music, hairstyles, and clothing (Henfield, 2011).

The research summarized in this section shows examples of the type of racial microaggressions Black individuals experience in different settings. Although these experiences are often subtle and unintentional, they are still harmful in many ways to the individuals experiencing them. Researchers have correlated racial microaggressions to physical problems such as heart disease and obesity as well as mental health issues including depression, anxiety, pessimism, and poor anger control (Hollingsworth et al., 2017; Hu & Taylor, 2016; Nadal, Griffin, et al., 2014). The adverse health and social implications that racial microaggressions have on Black people present important considerations for counselors to know when working with Black clients because they can understand how to help them in counseling. Additionally, it is important for counselors to understand that Black people have reported feeling opposition about going to

counseling because of the cultural negative messages and beliefs they have about it (Breland-Noble, Wong, Childers, Hankerson, & Sotomayor, 2015; Campbell & Long, 2014; Nadal, Griffin, et al., 2014).

Once in counseling, having a counselor who understands their lived experiences can be the main factor in whether Black clients have positive and successful counseling outcomes (Hook et al., 2016). However, some Black clients have reported that they experienced further microaggressions in sessions from their counselors (Hook et al., 2016; Nadal, Griffin, et al., 2014). Counselors of all racial and ethnic backgrounds have committed microaggressions in sessions, and the clients of counselors who had low cultural humility reported having poor counseling outcomes (Hook et al., 2016). Additionally, there is a link between social and mental health problems and racial microaggressions in therapy (Owen et al., 2014). Black people who experience racial microaggressions in everyday life and then in counseling could suffer more harm that further compromises their health, lives, and negative feelings about counseling (Hollingsworth et al., 2017; Hook et al., 2016; Mazzula & Nadal, 2015; Owen et al., 2014). Considering the social, physical, and emotional ramifications of Black individuals experiencing racial microaggressions, it is important for counselors to assess the role this may play in client presenting symptoms such as depression, anger, and anxiety when they go to counseling (Nadal, Griffin, et al., 2014). Counselors should also understand the historical and pervasive impact of racial microaggressions on Black clients (Nadal, Griffin, et al., 2014; Owen et al., 2014). The identified gap in the literature I explored in this study was Black people's perspectives on how professional counselors can help them

in counseling work through stressors and emotions surrounding their lived experiences with racial microaggressions. Gaining this insight and adding to the existing research literature can create social change by improving counseling interventions for Black clients.

Problem Statement

Black individuals describe having lived experiences of racial microaggressions on a regular basis in places such as work, school, stores, and healthcare including counseling (Griffin et al., 2016; Owen et al., 2014; Robinson-Wood et al., 2015). To complicate the problem, Black people from different ethnic groups interpret these experiences differently. For example, Black international college students attending predominately White institutions in the United States may perceive racial microaggressions differently than Black American students and may focus more on their privilege of being in the United States while minimizing the racial microaggressions they experience (Griffin et al., 2016). However, Black students have reported that they often face racial profiling and negative stereotypes on university campuses. Black faculty members and staff who work at predominately White institutions in various disciplines including counseling and psychology have also described lived experiences of racial microaggressions on campus (Robinson-Wood et al., 2015). Black students and employees in these settings have reported feeling isolated, dismissed, oppressed, and pressured to conform to White culture. As a result, they disclosed feeling hypervigilant and anxious and described these encounters as worse than blatant racism in cases where the perpetrators were their friends and colleagues on campus (Robinson-Wood et al., 2015). Black individuals' experiences

with racial microaggressions also contribute to them feeling depressed, angry, and developing physical symptoms such as cardiovascular diseases and obesity (Nadal, Griffin, et al., 2014; Robinson-Wood et al., 2015).

Some Black individuals in the United States have gone to counseling to address their concerns. However, they have reported not feeling like their counselors were empathetic to their lived experiences with racial microaggressions nor addressed their feelings about racial microaggressions (Constantine, 2007; Gonzales et al., 2014; Hook et al., 2016). Furthermore, some individuals have reported that their counselors committed racial microaggressions against them (Constantine, 2007; Gonzales et al., 2014; Hook et al., 2016; Owen et al., 2014). Research has indicated that there is no difference in the frequency of counselors from different racial backgrounds who commit racial microaggressions in counseling (Hook et al., 2016). Twelve categories of racial microaggressions may occur in counseling including colorblindness, minimization, stereotypical assumptions, and patronizing behaviors (Constantine, 2007). These actions from counselors may be unintentional or may be due to counselors not knowing how to respond to concerns about racial microaggressions in addition to lacking the cultural competence to understand the experiences and clinical needs of Black clients in counseling (Bowleg et al., 2013; Constantine, 2007; Forrest-Bank & Jenson, 2015; Gonzales et al., 2014; Hook et al., 2016; Nadal, Griffin, et al., 2014; Owen et al., 2014; Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2015). These counselors' actions may inhibit the therapeutic alliance and clients' healing processes, but counselors have ethical and legal obligations to help their clients achieve personal goals in counseling and

not cause further harm to them (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2014; National Board for Certified Counselors [NBCC], 2012).

After an exhaustive literature review, I found five current qualitative studies on racial microaggressions experienced by Black people but mainly in academic settings (Bowleg, 2013; Bowleg et al., 2013; Hotchkins, 2016; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015; Robinson-Wood et al., 2015). However, I could not find any research that explored participants' perspectives about how professional counselors could be supportive of their clients' lived experiences with this phenomenon when they go to counseling to address interpersonal or mental health issues. Thus, in this study, I illuminated the lived experiences of Black individuals who have experienced racial microaggressions in and outside of counseling to inform the work of counselors who will work with them to lessen this gap in the literature.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this interpretive hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore and report on the lived experiences of Black people who encountered racial microaggressions throughout their lives and gain their perspectives on how counselors can be effective while working with them in counseling (see Creswell, 2009; Nadal, Griffin, et al., 2014; Robinson-Wood et al., 2015). Using interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) as a conceptual framework in this study allowed me to explore and gain insights into the participants' lived experiences with racial microaggressions (Creswell, 2013; Dowling & Cooney, 2012; Patton, 2015). These findings can have positive implications by improving the professional practices of counselors, counselor educators,

and supervisors when working with Black individuals by allowing them to be more sensitive and accurate in their work.

Research Question

Main question: What are the lived experiences of Black persons who experience racial microaggressions?

Subquestion: What do Black people who have lived experiences with racial microaggressions want counselors to know about how to best help them in counseling?

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is a tentative theory that develops and evolves with the study and helps the researcher to justify their research (Maxwell, 2005). In the mid-1800s, Edmund Husserl conceptualized phenomenology as a philosophy to understand the subjective perspectives of individuals' lived experiences, which has become an important approach to research (Kafli, 2011; Laverty, 2003). Phenomenology involves conducting observations and in-depth interviews to understand individuals' lived experiences—how they recall, add meaning, judge, describe, and feel about their experiences, which influences their behaviors (Patton, 2015). The meanings individuals create come from various cultural contexts based on their and other people's lived experiences (Patton, 2015). A key part of phenomenological research is to find and report on commonalities in the participants' lived experiences on a deeper level than allowed in quantitative research and inform future studies to address a phenomenon (Dowling & Cooney, 2012; Patton, 2005).

There are various extensions of phenomenology, and in this study, I used IPA as the conceptual framework along with hermeneutic phenomenology (Dowling & Cooney, 2012; Patton, 2005; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009). Martin Heidegger, a protégé of Edmund Husserl, expanded phenomenology with hermeneutic phenomenology. Heidegger believed that going beyond the meaning individuals associated with their lived experiences and uncovering the hidden meaning and creating interpretations of their experiences added more depth to addressing a phenomenon (Dowling & Cooney, 2012). IPA builds on phenomenology by exploring how individuals make sense of their lived experiences and the meanings they associate with them (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith, Flower, & Larkin, 2009). IPA, often called double hermeneutics, allows researchers to analyze the data they collect as well as incorporate their interpretation of data (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009). By using IPA, a study develops based on what the participants reported about their lived experiences (Creswell, 2013; Dowling & Cooney, 2012; Patton, 2015).

Additionally, I incorporated relational-cultural theory (RCT) as the theoretical framework to analyze the data I collected on racial microaggressions. RCT is about helping individuals to build and create healthy interpersonal relationships and social connections (Frey, 2013; Haskins & Appling, 2017; Jordan, 2009). People suffer personally and culturally when they do not feel connected to others, and racial microaggressions adversely affect social relationships (Hook et al., 2016; Jordan, 2009; Owen et al., 2014). Therefore, using RCT as the theoretical framework in this study to address the phenomenon of racial microaggressions was appropriate (Frey, 2013; Jordan,

2009; Parsons & Zhang, 2014). Additionally, a crucial part of RCT is to validate individuals' lived experiences and empower them to move forward in their lives by maintaining and building healthy relationships (Frey, 2013; Parsons & Zhang, 2014). Keeping the focus on the participants' individual experiences with racial microaggressions is also consistent with RCT's focus on promoting social change by altering sociopolitical influences on social disconnection and promoting growth through healthy human connections (Frey, 2013; Haskins & Appling, 2017; Jordan, 2009). Therefore, RCT provided a lens for data analysis while IPA was the framework and supported the phenomenological design (Dowling & Cooney, 2012). I explain further the relevance of the theory to this study in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

The nature of the study was qualitative, and I used IPA, which draws upon the hermeneutic phenomenological tradition. I learned about the participants' lived experiences with racial microaggressions, the effect they have on their lives, and explored how counselors can support them if they go to counseling (see Creswell, 2013; Dowling & Cooney, 2012; Nadal, Griffin, et al., 2014; Patton, 2015). IPA allowed me to explore and interpret the meanings the participants give to the phenomenon (Dowling & Cooney, 2012; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009), and I analyzed and summarized the data I collected to conclude the study (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). Qualitative research is consistent with gaining an understanding of the lived experiences of the participants with racial microaggressions, which was the primary focus of this dissertation.

Operational Definitions

I used the following definitions in this study:

Racial microaggressions: Racial microaggressions are "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 273).

Microinsults: Microinsults are "characterized by communications that convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person's racial heritage or identity" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 274).

Microinvalidations: Microinvalidations "are characterized by communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color' (Sue et al., 2007, p. 274).

Microassaults: Microassaults are "explicit racial derogation characterized primarily by a verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 274).

Black: According to the United States Census Bureau, Black or African American is "a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa" (United States Census Bureau, 2017). For this study, Black refers to those of American or African descent.

Assumptions

The first assumption was that the participants in the study would honestly report their lived experiences with racial microaggressions and that they were negatively affected by these experiences because other researchers came to similar conclusion. Everyone has unique and personal lived experiences, so there was no guarantee that the participants who agreed to take part in this study had similar experiences and would honestly express those experiences during an interview. However, this was a necessary assumption to find participants who qualified for and consented to take part in the study.

The second assumption was that Black people will have better experiences in counseling if their counselor has knowledge of racial microaggressions and will process their experiences with them in counseling. Many factors contribute to a client having positive counseling experiences, so counselors knowing how to help a client process their experiences with racial microaggressions does not mean that Black people will have good counseling experiences. The assumption was necessary to help fulfill the purpose of the study, which was to get Black individuals' perspectives on what would be beneficial to them in counseling when they experienced racial microaggressions.

The third assumption was that using a qualitative design would generate richer data highlighting the participants' lived experiences with racial microaggressions and answer the research questions. However, the findings cannot be generalized to the entire Black population. Therefore, future studies may use a quantitative method with multiple elements, which may contribute to the population's experiences and a large sample to add to the literature and further inform the work of counselors. Additionally, a follow-up

study using a mixed method approach could add valuable data to further inform the work of counselors who work with Black clients. The qualitative assumption was necessary to add the voices of individuals from the population who have had lived experiences with racial microaggressions to provide further insight on what would be helpful to them in counseling.

A fourth assumption is that counselors, counselor educators, and supervisors need to gain more knowledge about how racial microaggressions affect Black individuals. Counselors, counselor educators, and supervisors have an ethical obligation to be multiculturally competent (ACA, 2014; Ratts et al., 2015). Hence, this assumption was important to facilitate counselors' cultural competencies when working with Black clients.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study was to learn from the perspectives of Black individuals how counselors can help them best in counseling when they have lived experiences with racial microaggressions. I chose this topic and population because I did not find a single study that thoroughly expressed the perspectives of Black individuals about their needs in counseling. By adding this perspective to counselors' expertise while working with Black clients, I will help fill the gap on racial microaggressions research literature. Additionally, there is limited research on working with Black people in the professional counseling literature, so adding information from this study lessens a gap in developing effective interventions, which work with this population (Nadal, Griffin, et al., 2014). Another intentional choice I made was to conduct individual interviews because of the

sensitive nature of this topic. Therefore, I chose to do a qualitative study to learn in-depth information about the lived experiences of Black people with this phenomenon which would not be as rich and detailed in a quantitative study. Although the literature shows that other racial minorities have lived experiences with racial microaggression, I chose to focus on the experience of Black individuals. I also selected RCT as the theoretical framework because I did not find any studies on racial microaggressions that used it as the theory. Although I cannot generalize the findings of this study to the entire Black population, using IPA as the conceptual framework to evaluate the lived experiences of the study's participants showed transferability.

Limitations

The exploratory nature of this study was a potential limitation because I could not predict the course of how it would evolve. A second limitation was the small sample size, which prevents generalizability to all lived experiences of Black individuals because it is not a quantitative study. Similarly, I only included persons who identified as Black, which restricted the voices of other racial minorities. Additionally, because of the qualitative nature of the study, I took more steps to show trustworthiness in the data to prove the study's integrity. For example, I used member checking by confirming with the participants that I captured their experiences accurately and used interrater reliability by working with my chair to ensure accuracy in my coding, which I discuss more in Chapter 3. Moreover, as a Black person who has experienced racial microaggressions, my personal biases could have affected the study. Therefore, I used reflexivity by saying my connection to the study that may have contributed to bias which included member

checking and feedback from my committee members (see Creswell, 2013; O'Connor, 2011; Patton, 2015). I was also mindful of my positionality to minimize bias, which includes the personality traits and experiences of a researcher that may influence their research (see Bourke, 2014). Researchers must be aware of and state their position including values and beliefs about the phenomenon studied to reduce personal biases from skewing their data (ACA, 2014; Bourke, 2014; Creswell, 2009). I am a Black woman, who has experienced racial microaggressions, and this could create potential bias in the study. However, I managed this bias by staying mindful of how my experiences may affect the data collected and engaged in member checking to mitigate risks (ACA, 2014). For example, I asked open-ended questions, avoided giving my individual opinions, or making leading comments during the interviews, and did not impose my values on participants (Bourke, 2014). Finally, I did not interview anyone with whom I had a personal relationship.

Significance

My study fills a gap in the literature by focusing on how the lived experiences of Black individuals who experienced racial microaggressions affect them. Having this knowledge creates more awareness for mental health professionals who work with Black individuals. The study is unique because it includes participants' perspectives about how professional counselors can be supportive of their clients' experiences with this phenomenon when they go to counseling to address interpersonal or mental health issues. When counselors know about racial microaggressions, they can ask open-ended questions to assess for and consider the role microaggressions have in clients' presenting problems.

Having this knowledge allows counselors to provide support to clients and reduce the chances of committing further racial microaggressions against them, which could ruin the therapeutic relationship and cause clients more harm.

Improving the clinical interventions that professional counselors use with Black clients as well as the supervision and academic practices of clinical supervisors and counselor educators are ways to increase positive social change. These professionals function in roles of mentors, teachers, and supervisors to counseling students and novice counselors who will work with Black clients and can instill the skills necessary to work effectively with them (ACA, 2014; Hess et al., 2014; NBCC, 2012; Ratts et al., 2015). The results from the study also provide implications for further studies on this topic with other racial minorities who seek counseling services. For example, future researchers can look at the effects of racial microaggressions on self-esteem, anxiety, and depression among multiracial individuals (Tran, Miyake, Martinez-Morales, & Csizmadia, 2015).

Summary

My purpose for this study was to understand the perspectives of how counselors can support Black people who have experienced racial microaggressions and go to counseling, because the participants' voice is one of the identified gaps in the counseling literature on racial microaggressions. Racial microaggressions pose significant mental and physical health risks to persons who experience them, and sometimes counselors not addressing them properly may worsen clients' experiences with them in counseling. Counselors, counselor educators, and supervisors have an ethical obligation to avoid causing harm to people and increasing their knowledge on racial microaggressions is one

way to minimize the risk of harm to clients. Therefore, increasing professional knowledge about racial microaggressions contributes to social change and provides insight for counselors who work with Black clients. In Chapter 2, I review the current literature on racial microaggressions and the impact on Black individuals, emphasizing the gap in the literature that supports the need for this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Despite the efforts of civil rights activists and laws against racial and other types of discrimination, both covert and overt types of racism manifest in the form of racial microaggressions in the United States. But there are no laws against racial microaggressions because of its often subtle features (Nadal, Wong, Griffin, Davidoff, & Sriken, 2014). Black individuals reported having regular experiences where people commit racial microaggressions against them in various settings including work, school, medical facilities, and stores (Cokley, McClain, Enciso, & Martinez, 2016; Griffin et al., 2016; Isom, 2016; Owen et al., 2014; Robinson-Wood et al., 2015). Researchers have found that racial microaggressions correlate to persons of Black descent having physical illnesses such as heart diseases and obesity (Nadal, Griffin, et al., 2014; Robinson-Wood et al., 2015). Black individuals who experience racial microaggressions have also reported feelings of anxiety, hypervigilance, depression, anger, embarrassment, and hurt from those experiences, especially when the perpetrators are people they like and respect (Robinson-Wood et al., 2015; Torres-Harding & Turner, 2015). These findings provide implications for counselors working with clients who present with mental health issues in counseling. However, some Black individuals who have gone to counseling have reported that their counselors also committed racial microaggressions against them in session or ignored their lived experiences with this phenomenon (Constantine, 2007; Gonzales et al., 2014; Hook et al., 2016; Owen et al., 2014). Twelve categories of racial

microaggressions that occur in counseling can include colorblindness, minimization, stereotypical assumptions, and patronizing behaviors (Constantine, 2007).

Several researchers have concluded that counselors who commit racial microaggressions in session are unaware of their actions, engage in avoidant behaviors because they do not know how to respond to their clients' lived experiences with racial microaggressions, or lack confidence in dealing with these issues in counseling (Bowleg et al., 2013; Constantine, 2007; Forrest-Bank & Jenson, 2015; Gonzales et al., 2014; Hook et al., 2016; Nadal, Griffin, et al., 2014; Owen et al., 2014; Ratts et al., 2015). Nevertheless, counselors who engage in racial microaggressions can cause further emotional harm to clients by impeding the counseling process, which also creates ethical concerns (see ACA, 2014; NBCC, 2012). However, I found minimal research articles on minimizing these issues in counseling and how counselors can become more aware of the adverse impact racial microaggressions have on clients (Bowleg, 2013; Bowleg et al., 2013; Hotchkins, 2016; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015; Robinson-Wood et al., 2015). Additionally, I did not find any research that included Black individuals sharing their experiences with racial microaggressions and their perspective on what type of support they would need from a counselor to cope with these experiences. Therefore, in this interpretive hermeneutic phenomenological study, I added the voices of Black individuals who have experienced racial microaggressions in their lives and were willing to share their experiences and give their perspectives on how counselors could help Black people like themselves overcome these lived experiences.

In this chapter, I explain my literature search strategy, including the research databases and search engines I used. Additionally, I include my search terms and processes. I review IPA, the conceptual framework used in the study, including what key theorists and researchers said about it and how it has been useful in this study. I then include an exhaustive literature review of current studies on racial microaggressions in society and recommendations some scholars offer counselors on how to best address them in counseling. Finally, I provide a summary of the chapter and give a rationale for the study.

Literature Search Strategy

To conduct a thorough literature review on racial microaggressions, I used two primary research engines: Walden Library system and Google Scholar. However, I used Walden's Library as the primary source for peer-reviewed research articles because I mostly found the same articles on Google Scholar and had free access to the full-text of articles in Walden's Library system. Within Walden's Library, I found the EBSCO Host search engine and searched in PsychINFO, PsychARTICLES, and Academic Search Complete. Academic Search Complete is a multidiscipline database. The single search terms I used in these databases and search engines were *racial microaggressions* and *microaggressions*. I combined *racial microaggressions* and *Black people*; *racial microaggressions* and *persons of Black descent*; *racial microaggressions* and *counseling*; *racial microaggressions*, *counseling*, and *Black people*; *racial microaggressions* and *mental health*; *racial microaggressions*, *Black people*, and *mental health*; and *racial microaggressions*, *persons of Black descent*, and *mental health*. Most of these search

terms gave the best results, and I focused on articles written within the past 5 years except for some articles that provided background information on the terms *microaggressions* and *racial microaggressions*. The search terms that did not produce any results included the words *Black descent*.

Conceptual Framework

Origin of IPA

Phenomenology is a type of qualitative research method that is informed by Husserl's philosophy on understanding the lived experiences of individuals with a phenomenon (Laverty, 2003). In 1962, Heidegger expanded phenomenology in a way that led to the development of IPA. Researchers using IPA try to find the meaning-making participants create from their lived experiences with a phenomenon (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith, Flower, & Larkin, 2009). IPA also allows researchers to incorporate their interpretations based on the data they collect, creating a double hermeneutic (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009).

Major Components of IPA

IPA draws from epistemology and is focused on the interpretations and meaning individuals associate with their lived experiences with a phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). Researchers refer to each research participant's story as a case. The research questions within IPA are rooted in epistemology, and researchers assume that the data they collect will answer their questions about a phenomenon through participants' meaning-making (Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, research questions in IPA remain open-ended and exploratory (Smith et al., 2009). Such research requires that researchers be

patient, dedicated, and willing to focus on each case to perform an in-depth assessment and analysis of them while uncovering meaning (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009). In other words, IPA builds on phenomenology and requires interviews and observations to understand the research participants' experiences. Researchers establish themselves in the data to describe and analyze it without passing judgment.

Rationale for Choosing IPA

I chose IPA as the conceptual framework for this study because of its roots in hermeneutic phenomenology that allowed me to learn about Black individuals' lived experiences with racial microaggressions, the meaning they associate with those experiences, and how counselors can be helpful to them in counseling. I gave a general account of the participants' lived experiences in my study using a small and homogeneous sample, which allowed me to analyze every case while comparing the experience each participant shared (see Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009). The framework also expands the literature, as I did not find any studies on racial microaggressions experienced by persons of Black descent where researchers used IPA as a framework. Literature Review

General Lived Experiences with Racial Microaggressions

Persons of color deal with racial microaggressions daily and these encounters significantly affect their health, making it important to highlight some of the general occurrences of this phenomenon in this study. Aversive racism occurs when people who do not realize that they are racist engage in unintentional racist behaviors. For example, White individuals who hold negative beliefs and feelings about racial minorities, which

affect the health of those individuals. Racism exists in Western society due to people viewing Whiteness as normal and marginalizing persons of color who do not conform to White standards (Knight, 2013). Being White allows individuals to have power and privilege, and even when some White individuals advocate against racism, they engage in subtle forms of racism (Knight, 2013; Torres-Harding & Turner, 2015). For example, some White individuals may be uncomfortable with Black individuals achieving occupational, financial, and social success causing them to make microaggressive comments about them (Carter & Davila, 2017). It is important for people of all demographic groups to experience racial healing, which involves understanding the experiences of others as well as sharing lived experiences in a safe and validating environment (Knight, 2013). Until Black and White individuals understand the lived experiences of each other, they will experience social disconnects and racial microaggressions, and other forms of discrimination will occur.

Although racial topics can be a political and sensitive issue, they affect people of color socially, emotionally, and physically and create a shared negative experience (Hu & Taylor, 2016; Isom, 2016; Knight, 2013; Lewis, Williams, Peepers, & Gadon, 2017; Linder, Harris, Allen, & Hubain, 2015). For example, occupational, educational, financial, political, and social class disparities show that White people have created racial divides as a social construct to keep societal dominance (Cokley et al., 2016; Isom, 2016; Knight, 2013; Smith et al., 2016). Individuals view the world through their lived experiences and often find comfort and validation learning that they share similar experiences with people like themselves. In the Black community, Black people

experience deep emotions such as validation and anger when they learn about the similarities and difference in race-based traumas between them and family members or other Black people in their social circles (Cokley et al., 2016; Forrest-Bank & Jenson, 2015; Hu & Taylor, 2016; Knight, 2013).

Racial and ethnic microaggressions can negatively affect the overall health of persons from racial minority groups including Black people, creating a need for public policy changes to minimize them in society (Forrest-Bank & Jenson, 2015). Though the usually subtle and unintentional forms of racial microaggressions individuals experience make them harder to address, they can still cause anger, doubt, depression, hurt, helplessness, shock, denial, and guilt from current and previous incidents (Alexander & Hermann, 2015; Forrest-Bank & Jenson, 2015; Torres-Harding & Turner, 2015). However, individuals who experience racial microaggressions have accepted that they will experience them again and have described the subtle forms of them perpetrated by people they interact with regularly as worse than overt racism (Forrest-Bank & Jenson, 2015; Isom, 2016; Lewis et al., 2017; Torres-Harding & Turner, 2015).

Racial microaggressions occur in many environments such as school, work, healthcare, and legal settings. For example, Purifoye (2015) observed that during every day public transportation routes, Black passengers and transit workers experienced *nice-nastiness* and racial hostility from White and Asian passengers and highlighted their social discomforts and racists behaviors. During the commutes, White passengers ignored Black passengers and bus drivers by avoiding eye contact and withholding speech from them, and White passengers greeted and expressed gratitude more often to

White bus drivers than they did with the Black drivers (Purifoye, 2015). However, she also noted that Black passengers interacted more with bus drivers while entering or departing the vehicle even if they were on their mobile devices; and White female passengers were more likely to sit next to well-dressed Black men who they may have perceived as less threatening than casually dressed Black men (Purifoye, 2015). White women also stood rather than sat next to a Black person if that was the only open seat; however, White female passengers were more likely to sit next to well-dressed Black men who they may have perceived as less threatening than casually dressed Black men (Purifoye, 2015). Additionally, White passengers on the bus made racist comments about Black individuals in predominately Black neighborhoods (Purifoye, 2015). On the other hand, some White individuals displayed *psuedoswagger*, which involved raising their voice, looking around at others while interacting with Black passengers to appear comfortable around them yet showing discomfort and ingenuine behaviors during those interactions (Purifoye, 2015). These observations support the notion that although it is not socially acceptable to be overtly racists and prejudice in the United States, White people still display these behaviors in subtle forms during face-to-face interactions (Torres-Harding & Turner, 2015; Williams et al., 2016).

Other forms of racial microaggressions occur online and create added stress for Black individuals who experience them often both online and offline (Kettrey & Laster, 2014; Linder al., 2015; Williams et al., 2016). For example, Internet memes have become a prevalent form of racial microaggression (Kettrey & Laster, 2014; Williams et al., 2016); they are "individual bits of cultural information, such as an image with a

caption, that are widely shared electronically" (Williams, Oliver, Aumer, & Meyers, 2016, p. 1). Despite the humorous intention of these memes, they can insinuate insulting, disrespectful, and hurtful racist messages (Williams et al., 2016). Additionally, people engage in these racist or microaggressive behaviors freely online, particularly when they can tell from someone's profile picture that they are a person of color (Kettrey & Laster, 2014; Williams et al., 2016). The anonymity of the Internet allows people to make racist comments to people of color, suggesting that they do not always act this way in person but on the Internet and through other media outlets (Kettrey & Laster, 2014; Williams et al., 2016).

Additionally, individuals who have a colorblind worldview are less likely to take racism seriously and use colorblindness as a defense while engaging in web-based racism (Goff, Jackson, Nichols, & Di Leone, 2013; Joshi, McCutcheon, & Sweet, 2015; Kettrey & Laster, 2014). Colorblind attitudes are just as damaging as the subtle forms of racial microaggressions because they can go unnoticed and are difficult to address; for example, racist messages in mainstream media published online (Joshi et al., 2015; Kettrey & Laster, 2014; Torres-Harding & Turner, 2015). The prevalence of racial issues on the Internet creates another means for White people to gain access, power, and influence over persons of color, known as "white space" (Kettrey & Laster, 2014, p. 257).

In addition to the offline and online settings of racial microaggressions, there is a systemic issue with racism and prejudice in the United States, which keep Black individuals on the lower end of the social hierarchy and limit their access to needed services (Edwards, 2017; Goff et al., 2013; Isom, 2016; Mcgee, 2016; Nnawulezi &

Sullivan, 2014). For example, the rate of African Americans receiving unfair treatment in the criminal justice system leads to a high amount of Black incarceration (Isom, 2016). African Americans also report the highest incidents of being racially profiled and assaulted by police officers in the United States (English et al., 2017; Isom, 2016). Moreover, African Americans make up 78% of those shot and killed by police (English et al., 2017; Isom, 2016). Police officers, a director of the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), and a former attorney general have admitted that implicit biases and deliberate efforts of law enforcement officials to arrest and prosecute Black males contribute to their overrepresentation in incarcerated populations (English et al., 2017). These violent incidents perpetuate African Americans' mistrust of the criminal justice system, which also adds to the violence in the Black communities (Isom, 2016; Williams et al., 2017). Additionally, Black individuals pass on negative messages from their experiences about what it means to be Black in a socially oppressive system to younger generations, which also fuels these problems in Black communities (Isom, 2016). From a criminal justice perspective, experiences with racial discrimination, microaggressions, and experiencing negative emotions such as anger and depression also increase violent offending in Black individuals (Isom, 2016; Torres-Harding & Turner, 2015).

Critiques of Critical Articles

A specific setting where Black individuals have reported racial microaggressions is with Black women in domestic violence shelters. Black women are victims of intimate partner violence (IPV) at staggering rates compared to women from other racial groups (Nnawulezi & Sullivan, 2014). These women are at an increased risk of experiencing

poor mental and physical health, come from backgrounds of lower social class, drug abuse, unemployment, guns in their homes, and are murdered by their abusers (Isom, 2016; Lewis et al., 2017; Nnawulezi & Sullivan, 2014; Williams et al., 2017). However, some Black female survivors of intimate partner violence also experience racial microaggressions while seeking safety in domestic violence shelters, creating another barrier to them living a safe and healthy life (Nnawulezi & Sullivan, 2014).

Nnawulezi and Sullivan (2014) interviewed 14 Black women from three different domestic violence shelters who had been there for at least 5 days, with the longest length of stay of a month. Using purposeful sampling, Nnawulezi and Sullivan (2014) recruited women between ages 18 to 49 for this study. Nine of the women had children, and five of them had their children at the shelter with them (Nnawulezi & Sullivan, 2014).

Twelve of 14 participants reported experiencing at least one racial microaggression at the shelter (Nnawulezi & Sullivan, 2014). The participants reported feeling isolated, uninformed about the shelter's existence before reaching out for services, and further oppressed in this setting that had a few to no workers who looked like them (Nnawulezi & Sullivan, 2014). They also described experiencing racism and sexism in shelters from staff and residents through microassaults, microinvalidations, and microinsults such as individuals calling them racial slurs, having their intimate partner violence experiences minimized, and feeling ignored by the lack of cultural foods and personal hygiene products available in the shelter (Nnawulezi & Sullivan, 2014). Some women reported that they responded to these microaggressions by either walking away or ignoring them, telling the offenders how rude or disrespectful their racial

microaggressions were, and still asking staff for the things they needed although they refused to give it to them despite meeting the needs of White residents (Nnawulezi & Sullivan, 2014). Some women admitted that they felt desensitized to racial microaggressions, while others expressed feeling a need to protect the offender by minimizing the insults (Nnawulezi & Sullivan, 2014). Although individuals' engagement in avoidant behaviors is sometimes necessary to help them avoid feeling overwhelmed from responding to racial microaggressions, the avoidance can also become emotionally and physically draining. This study was important to my dissertation because it showed how overt and covert forms of racial racism could deter Black individuals seeking help for domestic problems.

It is important to note that Nnawulezi and Sullivan (2014) referenced an old study with a sample of 42 executive directors of domestic violence shelters, in which all but one was White. The directors revealed that they did not attend to the cultural needs of Black women in their facilities because they viewed Black women are stronger, having closer families, and witnesses to more violence in their communities making them more able to withstand intimate partner violence (Nnawulezi & Sullivan, 2014). The directors admitted that they hired predominantly White staff and operated near White neighborhoods because they lacked funding to run shelters in or near Black communities and did not do much outreach in Black neighborhoods (Nnawulezi & Sullivan, 2014). One director admitted to closing a shelter in one community which became too Black and hindered White women from wanting to use the shelter, so she moved it a city where White women would feel comfortable going to it (Nnawulezi & Sullivan, 2014). These

findings revealed offensive microaggressions toward Black women and provided evidence of systemic barriers in the United States against persons of Black descent which is important to this study by highlighting the prevalence and need to address this issue in society to improve Black individuals access to social services. One strength of the study by Nnawulezi and Sullivan (2014) was the phenomenological design and interviews they used which is similar to what I used in this study. The limitation of the study was the small sample size which makes it impossible to generalize the findings to the entire population of Black women who survived intimate partner violence.

Black and White Women's Experience with Ethnic Awareness

Hu and Taylor (2016) used a quantitative research design to examine the differences between Black and White individuals' ethnic awareness during ethnic interactions. They examined ethnic awareness considering ethnic identity, race-related experiences, and mental health using a correlational design. They recruited 449 participants from many major United States cities by placing ads online that potential participants clicked on to access the informed consent and survey. Individuals who completed the survey had the choice to enter a gift card drawing at the end as a token for their time (Hu & Taylor, 2016). The researchers measured ethnic awareness with two questions and used the Racial Microaggressions Scale, Ethnic Identity Scale, Racism and Life Experience Scale-Brief Version, Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale, Perceived Stress Scale, and Suspicion, Irritability, and Resentment subscales of the Buss-Durkee Hostility Inventory (Hu & Taylor, 2016).

The results of the study were that African-Americans had the greatest amount of ethnic awareness ($M = 4.65$, $SD = 3.01$, $p = .011$) and were more aware of their ethnicity during social interactions (Hu & Taylor, 2016). African-Americans also reported having stronger ethnic identity ($r = .398$, $p < .001$), more experiences with racial microaggressions ($r = .603$, $p < .001$), and with racism and race-related encounters ($r = .493$, $p < .001$) with individuals who are not White (Hu & Taylor, 2016). It is likely that the historical negative White-Black interactions contribute to Black individuals' negative behaviors during interactions with White people and create a subjective form of racism or self-fulfilling prophecies that also worsens these social encounters. Those who reported negative experiences also had higher levels of depression ($r = .353$, $p < .001$), irritability ($r = .247$, $p < .001$), perceived stress ($r = .207$, $p < .001$), resentment ($r = .374$, $p < .001$), and suspicion ($r = .386$, $p < .001$) (Hu & Taylor, 2016). Also, White people's negative stereotypes that Blacks are aggressive and lazy criminals, as well as and the history of discrimination and prejudice against Blacks can contribute to White people feeling threatened or uncomfortable around Black individuals (Hu & Taylor, 2016).

These findings presented important implications for my dissertation because it shows the importance of White and Black individuals having positive and healthy relationships which contribute to mental wellness. Learning more about the lived experiences of persons of Black descent from Black individuals as well as how counselors could support them in counseling was an essential element of the current study and could promote social change by giving Black individuals a voice and improving cross-racial relationships in counseling. A limitation of the study included the

online survey data collection which does not fully represent the participants' experiences (Hu & Taylor, 2016). My study included semi-structured interview questions to garner details about the participants' lived experiences with racial microaggressions and allowed me to ask follow-up questions to clarify the interview questions as needed.

Intersectionality

There is a debate about racism and oppression in the United States. Those on one side of the debate view discussions about racism and oppression as unpatriotic and problematic while the other side views them as necessary by first acknowledging and discussing the existence of these problems (Edwards, 2017). Individuals and families affected by racism cannot forget their struggles and ignore the systemic barriers they face while White individuals, especially those from more affluent backgrounds, have unrestricted access and privilege in the United States (Edwards, 2017; Huber & Solorzano, 2015). Institutional racism goes back to slavery, is prevalent today, and manifests in forms microaggressions, oppression, racial profiling, and systemic biases that have negative consequences in the lives of Black people (Bowleg et al., 2013; Edwards, 2017; Huber & Solorzano, 2015; Isom, 2016; Smith et al., 2016). For example, systemic problems contribute to poverty, unemployment, voter suppression, unfair legal sanctions, unequal educational opportunities, and health disparities among Black individuals (Bowleg et al., 2013; Griffin et al., 2016; Isom, 2016; Smith et al., 2016). Currently, some political leaders encourage marginalizing all persons except White, affluent males highlights how engrained racist, sexist, xenophobic, and homophobic issues are in the United States (Edwards, 2017). For example, these political leaders tend

to victim blaming persons from sexual, racial, and religious minority groups for the systemic oppression they experience. Black individuals with disabilities and from religious communities have intersecting identities that worsen their lived experiences with microaggressions (Cerezo, Lyda, Enriquez, Beristianos, & Connor, 2015; Isom, 2016; Nnawulezi & Sullivan, 2014; Tran, Miyake, Martinez-Morales, & Csizmadia, 2015). Young Black adults reported higher incidents of racial microaggressions than other minorities and said that they did not see many positive images in the media of people who look like them (Forrest-Bank & Jenson, 2015).

Within the last few years, individuals from all demographic groups have come together to create modern-day social justice movements. For example, modern activists created the Black Lives Matter (BLM) organization to show that Black lives and lives of all minorities should receive equal treatment to White lives, and fight anti-civil rights efforts (Alexander, 2017). However, critics referred to the movement as a terrorist group (The White House, 2017). Those who support the BLM movement face criticism and invalidating slogans such as Blue Lives Matter and All Lives Matter have surfaced and led to further debates, violence, and murders in the United States (The White House, 2017). Therefore, society's expectation for people to forget these prevalent marginalizing issues and support a color-blind mentality are forms of microaggressions. However, there are systemic barriers in the United States that perpetuate the cycle of lack for boys and men of color. For example, Black males often end up in the criminal justice system; many are undereducated and impoverished which systemically work against them (Bowleg et al., 2013; Cerezo et al., 2015; Isom, 2016; Smith, Mustaffa, Jones,

Curry, & Allen, 2016). Black men in one study shared openly about their lived experiences of being Black males in the United States which involved being racially profiled and harassed by the police officers who committed microinsults and assaults against them (Bowleg et al., 2013; Isom, 2016; Smith et al., 2016).

Black men talked about colleagues in the workplace who committed microinsults related to their superb professional training and skills in the workplace (Bowleg et al., 2013). Black men also talked about people viewing them as violent, threatening to others, and criminals, which was emotionally draining to them and their families (Isom, 2016; Linder et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2016). For example, White people view Black men as a threat to White women (Isom, 2016). These Black men's lived experiences create important implications for counseling them related to the way they think, behave, and problems they may present within counseling (Forrest-Bank & Jenson, 2015; Gonzales et al., 2014; Nadal, Griffin, et al., 2014; Owen et al., 2014). Furthermore, Black male students experience racial microaggressions in school when White teachers and administrators perceive and target them as unrulier and more unmotivated than their White peers (Goings & Bianco, 2016; Hotchkins, 2016). Consequently, they end up with more infractions for issues such as tardiness and insubordination creating a racial climate stacked against them that leads to academic underperformance, poor social skills, or lower self-image (Goings & Bianco, 2016; Griffin et al., 2016; Hotchkins, 2016; Isom, 2016; Nadal, Wong, et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2016). Moreover, Black male students reported working harder to dispel these myths by suppressing their true selves and culture

in school to avoid White teachers targeting them because of their intersecting identities (Hotchkins, 2016; Isom, 2016; Mcgee, 2016; Peralta, 2015; Smith et al., 2016).

Black females also experience gendered and racial microaggressions. Although women of all races experience microaggressions, Black women's experiences are unique to their race, gender, and sexuality (Juan, Syed, & Azmitia, 2016; Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood, & Huntt, 2016; Lewis et al., 2017). Moreover, Black women experience racial and gender microaggressions more often than women and men of other races (Juan et al., 2016). Women of color including Latina, Asian, and Black women deal with the pressures of womanhood surrounding meeting family, work, and personal needs (Juan et al., 2016). Women from these three racial groups also reported feeling ignored and discredited in professional settings such as work, school, and in society where they face societal pressures to look and behave in ways considered normal for women of color (Lewis et al., 2016). These experiences cause some Black women to have low self-esteem and elevated stress levels (Juan et al., 2016). Some parents of Black females socialize them differently from Black males on issues such as racial equality, justice, and coping. For example, Black women learn more messages about racial equality overall causing them to feel more positive about their racial identity in society (Isom, 2016). Black females also tend to respond more positively to racial injustices due to their socialization and particularly because of their ties to the Black church and other social entities that create a safe space for healthy coping (Isom, 2016; Kim, 2016). For example, Black females tend to confront perpetrators of racial injustices and other ills against them healthy and proactively (Isom, 2016; Nnawulezi & Sullivan, 2014). These

reactions may contribute to the stereotype of Black women being strong and able to endure more hardship than White women (Domingue, 2015; Lewis et al., 2016; Nnawulezi & Sullivan, 2014). On the other hand, others have labeled Black women as angry, promiscuous, unintelligent, and poor (Alexander & Hermann, 2015; Domingue, 2015), which is known as projected stereotypes (Lewis et al., 2016).

Another group of individuals with intersecting identities that face racial microaggressions is multiracial individuals; although this population is multiplying in the United States, they face systemic and personal pressures to align with one part of their racial identity over the other (Tran et al., 2015). For example, while completing certain demographic information, some multiracial individuals reported feeling forced to select one race while denying their other racial identities (Tran et al., 2015). Another example included multiracial individuals feeling invalidated when others assume that they are foreigners, or when they experience microassaults because the people around them question their racial heritage (Tran et al., 2015). Some multiracial individuals described these experiences as rude, childish, aggressive, or offensive, while others view them as opportunities to teach others about their racial heritage (Tran et al., 2015).

Microaggressions in Academic Settings

All students in academic settings experience stressors throughout all levels of their academic training. However, students of color experience added stressors in these settings due to race (Cokley et al., 2016). For example, a Black male student shared his experiences of school personnel accusing him of partaking in negative incidents on campus just because of his race (Hotchkins, 2016). In another example, gifted students

of color, especially those from economically impoverished homes experience microaggressions about their giftedness which could include school personnel mislabeling them (Stambaugh & Ford, 2015). For example, Black gifted students and other students of color receive misdiagnoses such as oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and autism, which leads to counseling referrals while ignoring their giftedness in the classroom (Stambaugh & Ford, 2015). According to Stambaugh and Ford (2015), another stressor on gifted Black students comes from their Black peers accusing them of "acting White" (p. 197) because of their intellectual abilities which lead to them downplaying their academic skills in class.

A Black student described his experiences as the only Black student in the college-bound program in school as difficult academically and socially because his teachers saw him as a "super kid" which created added pressures to excel (Hotchkins, 2016, p. 17). He shared the following statement, "At first some teachers acted surprise when my grades came back; one even asked if I had a private tutor. I'm as smart as everyone else so I don't know what that was about" (Hotchkins, 2016, p.17). The researchers also saw these type of targeting, discriminatory, biased, and prejudice behaviors from teachers in the classroom during their research observations (Hotchkins, 2016). Teachers accused Black male students of cheating when they earned high grades and picked them last for lab projects (Smith et al., 2016). Moreover, some students reported experiencing racial microaggressions when teachers did not call on them in Math class to answer difficult problems, or expected them to underperform academically, so did not push them to succeed as much as they pushed the White students (Goings &

Bianco, 2016; Griffin et al., 2016; Isom, 2016; Nadal, Wong, et al., 2014). Therefore, Black students reported feeling pressured to prove their intelligence because they believed that their White teachers and peers saw them as less intelligent than they were (Joshi et al., 2015; Nadal, Wong, et al., 2014). These experiences are disheartening and tiring for Black students which make school an uncomfortable place for them and led to self-fulfilling prophecies of not being able to perform well academically (Griffin et al., 2016; Hotchkins, 2016). One interviewee made the following profound statement, "Black kids are given the option to fail and White kids are not by teachers. A teacher will let a Black kid be off task, but when the White kid does the same thing he is typically redirected" (Goings & Bianco, 2016, p. 635).

Other students reported more overt forms of racial microaggressions such as teachers shaming them in the classroom; one student said that his teacher called him the N-word after loudly scolding and kicking him out of the classroom for chewing gum (Goings & Bianco, 2016). Due to these negative race-based experiences with teachers, Black male students who were considering going into the teaching profession reported changing their career paths (Goings & Bianco, 2016). Additionally, not having many teachers of color in the classrooms may contribute to more incidents with racial microaggressions in academic settings because the population of minorities in the United States will soon surpass the population of White people, meaning that schools will have more racially diverse students, and having more representations of educators who look like them would be helpful (Goings & Bianco, 2016). Nevertheless, because only 17% of teachers in North American public schools are racial minorities, and Black males make

up only 2% of students, it is unlikely that Black students will have a Black teacher in their academic career (Goings & Bianco, 2016).

Black males complete high school and college at a lower rate than males from other ethnic and racial groups which limits their occupational and financial opportunities and adds to the struggles they face in other areas such as housing and healthcare (Cerezo et al., 2015; Cokley et al., 2016; Isom, 2016; Smith et al., 2016). Due to educational inequalities, systemic barriers, and microaggressions that permeate North American cities, Black males experience traumatic stress in academic settings that lead to mistrust of administrators, feeling disconnected, and academic underperformance (Cerezo et al., 2015; Cokley et al., 2016; Griffin et al., 2016; Hotchkins, 2016; Nadal, Wong, et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2016). Young Black men also admitted to feeling isolated, ignored, rejected, racially profiled, and hopeless in college settings which can also lead to underperformance and attrition (Cerezo et al., 2015; Isom, 2016; Mcgee, 2016; Nadal, Wong, et al., 2014; Peralta, 2015; Smith et al., 2016). These issues also cause Black students to experience stereotype threat, known as internalizing the view one perceives others to have of them, which, increased hopelessness, and reduced their self-concept and self-esteem leading to suicidal ideations (Griffin et al., 2016; Nadal, Wong, et al., 2014; Peralta, 2015).

Black college students in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) programs at predominantly White and historically Black and Latino institutions also reported experiences where people doubted their intellectual abilities and skills because of their race (Alexander & Hermann, 2015; Mcgee, 2016). These students

reported that their responses to these incidents depended on who the offender was, how many times they experienced similar things that week, if it was their offender's first-time, if it was a STEM colleague, location of the event, and if other students of color were around to support them (Mcgee, 2016). Thankfully, these students did not allow those experiences to dissuade them from pursuing STEM careers, but instead, their experiences motivated them to succeed (Mcgee, 2016). Nevertheless, they reported feeling like imposters, inadequate, angry, anxious, alone, and pressured to succeed especially because of the social stereotypes that they have not earned their spot in the STEM program (Alexander & Hermann, 2015; Cokley et al., 2016; Mcgee, 2016; Peralta, 2015).

These students described incidents of taking on "Whiteness" to fit in (Mcgee, 2016, p. 1628). They also reported feeling the need to be silent about the injustices they face in these environments because they did not want others to accuse them of complaining about speaking up which added more emotional stress on them (Alexander & Hermann, 2015; Mcgee, 2016). Moreover, a lack of STEM faculty of color made it difficult for these students to find mentors of the same race to support them in their programs (Alexander & Hermann, 2015; Mcgee, 2016). One Black female student shared her experience with a White male engineering faculty member, who blatantly refused to let her work in his lab and learn from him, under the guise that she did not have as much experiences as the other students working in his lab who happened to be White males (Alexander & Hermann, 2015).

Overall, the percentages of Black males on college campuses are much lower than their Black female and male peers from other racial groups (Smith, Mustaffa, Jones,

Curry, & Allen, 2016). Additionally, Black male students experience significant racial and gender microaggressions throughout their academic careers that negatively affect their academic pursuits (Cerezo et al., 2015; Hotchkins, 2016; Smith et al., 2016). Black male students experience these problems more at predominantly White institutions where students and faculty racially profile them, and these experiences led to racial battle fatigue (Griffin et al., 2016; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015; Mcgee, 2016; Nadal, Wong, et al., 2014; Peralta, 2015; Smith et al., 2016).

One Black male talked about his experiences not only as a student but as a president within a student-led organization where his leadership skills, intelligence, and financial ability to afford his tuition came into question, which often left him feeling angry and discouraged (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015). He further described feeling like the token person of color giving the illusion of organizational inclusivity (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015). He said that he did not view racism as something that would ever end in the United States and developed friendships with White allies who helped him through his academic journey (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015). Other students within academic settings, spoke about feeling tokenized to represent the Black community and culture (Griffin et al., 2016; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015; Joshi et al., 2015; Linder al., 2015; Mcgee, 2016; Peralta, 2015). For example, people make rude comments about Black students' hair and touch it, sometimes without permission (Joshi et al., 2015). Therefore, counselors who work in educational settings and are passionate about creating equal, fair, and respectful opportunities for students in academic settings advocate for, mentor, and support Black students to help them complete college (Cerezo et al., 2015).

Racial microaggressions in the classroom are not exclusive to Black American students because Black international students who migrate to the United States for schooling and other opportunities also experience them. However, Black international students have different experiences with race especially when they first arrive in the United States because they identify more with their subculture rather than race, so do not initially understand what their Blackness signifies in North America (Griffin et al., 2016). Additionally, Black international students tend to underreport the racial microaggressions they experience because they focus more on their improved quality of life in the United States than stressors (Griffin et al., 2016). However, as their experiences with racial microaggressions increases, their thoughts begin to align more with native Black students on this topic (Griffin et al., 2016). For example, Black international students start noticing the lack of racial diversity on their university campuses (Griffin et al., 2016). However, some international students considered their campus to be racially diverse because there were Black students from different countries enrolled there (Griffin et al., 2016).

Due to the difference in perspectives that Black students have about racial microaggressions, school administrators need to diversify their campuses as much as possible, not just racially, but also with sub-cultures (Griffin et al., 2016). For example, faculty across academic disciplines should try to consider various learning styles, worldviews, and beliefs systems of their diverse student populations (Linder et al., 2015). However, not all college and university institutions have culturally sensitive environments. For example, in race-neutral institutions, the academic culture is one of

color blindness. In race-neutral schools, White students receive acceptance and respect about earning their spot in school, while students of color hear messages that they only got in under affirmative action, instead of academic merit (Peralta, 2015). Racist encounters such as these lead to students of color thinking about race often as a protective measure and try to constantly prove themselves as equally intelligent (Peralta, 2015). However, White privilege allows White individuals to not think about race at all or only when they choose to think about it (Peralta, 2015). Race-conscious academic institutions, on the other hand, consider the unique needs and lived experiences of students of color where racial profiling and offenses are not prevalent, making these academic institutions the preference of students of color (Peralta, 2015).

Critique of Critical Article By using a grounded theory qualitative study, Smith et al. (2016) incorporated the voices of Black male students to discuss their beliefs about how they feel oppressed in the United States through gendered racism particularly in predominately White institutions (Smith et al., 2016). The authors referred to racial microaggressions as large-scaled systemic stressors that can become public and cause trauma to individuals who experience them (Smith et al., 2016). These direct and indirect racial microaggressions can lead to racial battle fatigue among Black individuals who directly or indirectly experienced them (Smith et al., 2016). Thirty-Six Black males between the ages of 18-25 participated in the study and answered the following research questions:

> Have you experienced racial discrimination at ‘this university’? If so, please give specific examples. If applicable, describe your reactions to the specific examples

> of racial discrimination you have experienced. How would you describe the racial campus climate at 'this university' in relation to Black male students such as yourself? Please note specific incidents that led you describe the campus climate as you did (Smith et al., 2016, p. 1194).

The researchers recruited the participants from six universities' campus-based African-American male groups as well via mail and student newspapers (Smith et al., 2016). The men participated in focus groups and individual interviews, and two of them completed the interview questions via e-mail because they could not attend the in-person interviews (Smith et al., 2016). The results showed that the participants experienced various forms racial microaggressions in school, social, and public spaces with two major themes of Black misandric stereotyping and marginality and hyper-surveillance and control (Smith et al., 2016). Although they all had these experiences that triggered negative emotions such as anger, fear, shock, and defensiveness, they described them at various levels of intensity (Smith et al., 2016). The participants described feeling out of place and judged by fellow students, professors, administrators/staff, and police who perceived them to be athletes, criminals with gang knowledge, access to drugs, and familiar with rap music (Smith et al., 2016). As for individuals who had some form of power over Black students, marginalized them in many ways. For example, professors gave the White students more merit and a voice over the Black students the classroom (Smith et al., 2016).

The study was important to my dissertation because it explored the lived experiences of Black men in higher education through their lens. Similarly, in my study,

I captured the voices of persons of Black descent who have lived experiences with racial microaggressions in various settings and provided insight into what would be helpful for them in counseling. One strength of the study included multiple forms of data collection (Smith et al., 2016). One limitation was that two participants completed their interviews via e-mail. I conducted all my interviews in person.

In the Workplace

When racial microaggressions or racism occur in the workplace, it can have devastating effects on employees' performance (Bowleg et al., 2013; Isom, 2016; Malott, Paone, Schaefle, & Gao, 2015). For example, professors of color reported that while they were working at predominantly White universities, their White colleagues questioned their research, teaching, and other professional qualifications which caused them a lot of stress (Joshi et al., 2015; Sue, 2013). Some faculty of color described incidents where White colleagues told them that because they used proper English, were intelligent, did not have gang knowledge, or were not from the ghettos, they were not Black enough (Joshi et al., 2015). The professors of color talked about how White students questioned their education, professional skills, refused to take their class, asked them "Where did you get your degree?" accused them of talking too much about race, or made comments such as "she knows a lot for a negro" on course evaluations (Joshi et al., 2015, p. 309). Professors of color also described experiences of having to defend their pedagogical techniques which lessened opportunities for all students to learn more about racial diversity through classroom discussions (Joshi et al., 2015; Linder al., 2015).

Professors of color explained that these experiences with students got worse when they received reprimands and directives from their deans and department chairs to make accommodations to pacify those students regardless of how outrageous the students' claims were which felt disempowering to the professors (Joshi et al., 2015). Furthermore, some Black professors reported feeling silenced and did not seek administrative help, when they encountered problematic students because they had not received support from their leadership in the past on similar issues (Domingue, 2015; Joshi et al., 2015). Black faculty who work at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) denied having similar experiences at their institutions (Joshi et al., 2015).

Other professional issues that Black faculty of color face surrounded their physical appearance (Joshi et al., 2015; Lewis et al., 2016). For example, they described incidents where White individuals stared at them, questioned their dress, or made comments about their hairstyle not being neat, asked to touch or touched their hair without permission (Joshi et al., 2015; Lewis et al., 2016). Professors of color also described feeling alone and isolated at events such as professional conferences and social gatherings because they were usually the only or one of a few persons of color present, and their White colleagues interacted with each other (Joshi et al., 2015). However, faculty of color described experiences where they interacted with other colleagues of color at a work event, and White colleagues approached them and made comments such as "What are you guys plotting? Are you plotting to take over the ship?" (Joshi et al., 2015, p. 314). Others described dealing with microaggressions about race-related

scholarly research when they received severe, insulting, and condescending criticism or outright rejections from journal editors who were often White males (Joshi et al., 2015). These Black scholars described the blind editorial journal review process as akin to White students hiding behind class satisfaction surveys to say hurtful and insulting things about them.

These experiences are tiring, isolating, uncomfortable, and threaten to the self-concept and self-esteem of Black faculty (Domingue, 2015; Joshi et al., 2015). Fortunately, Black women reported that they create a network amongst themselves to support and mentor one another to overcome these microaggressions in academia (Domingue, 2015; Shillingford et al., 2013). Supportive alliances among Black individuals with Black women at the forefront of these relationships date back to slavery when Black individuals relied on Black women as a source of strength, knowledge, guide, and educator to help them cope with life stressors (Domingue, 2015). These patterns led to Black women taking on leadership roles in homes, churches, and professional settings (Domingue, 2015).

Mental and Physical Health Effects of Racial Microaggressions

Racial microaggressions are subtle forms of racial discrimination, which includes perceived and internalized racism have adverse effects on individuals' mental and physical health (Forrest-Bank & Jenson, 2015; Hu & Taylor, 2016; Isom, 2016; Nadal et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2016; Williams et al., 2017). Additionally, in some ways, subtle forms racial microaggressions may more adversely affect individuals' health than the overt forms (Nadal et al., 2017). Black people have historically and generationally

experienced racial and other traumas that remain unresolved because it is culturally ingrained in them not to talk about their problems or acknowledge the pain of traumatic experiences, which continues to affect their overall well-being (Cokley et al., 2016; Forrest-Bank & Jenson, 2015; Hu & Taylor, 2016; Knight, 2013). These experiences often lead to familial messages about trust and mistrust of non-Blacks and especially White individuals (Hu & Taylor, 2016; Knight, 2013). These issues can create added social and emotional barriers as Black individuals develop further prejudices and views based on their lived experiences (Forrest-Bank & Jenson, 2015; Hu & Taylor, 2016; Knight, 2013). For example, there is generational mistrust of the police and criminal justice system, particularly in lower-income Black communities, based on past and current incidents of police brutality (Bowleg et al., 2013; Isom, 2016). In another example, a woman described feeling scared and humiliated after a police officer called her a "Black bitch" and physically assaulted her during a traffic stop (Knight, 2013).

The unresolved trauma of such experiences have devastating effects on Black individuals and sends internal and external messages that they are less than human, and inferior to White people, which contributes to higher stress levels among Black individuals (Joshi et al., 2015; Knight, 2013; Williams et al., 2017). Additionally, White individuals are less likely to want to talk about race issues in the United States due to guilt or discomfort discussing this emotionally charged topic (Goff et al., 2013; Sue, 2013). On the other hand, Black individuals are more open to having these difficult dialogues because of their racial socialization and daily lived experiences with racism making them welcome opportunities to share their stories and bring about change (Goff

et al., 2013; Sue, 2013). Black individuals also have a fear that when they share their stories, people will judge them as angry or aggressive (Lewis et al., 2016; Sue, 2013). Nevertheless, racial microaggressions contribute to negative mental or emotional health and substance abuse (Forrest-Bank & Jenson, 2015; Mazzula & Nadal, 2015; O'Keefe, Wingate, Cole, Hollingsworth, & Tucker, 2015; Williams et al., 2017). Other mental illnesses linked to racial microaggressions are obsessive-compulsive disorder (ODD), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and social anxiety among persons of Black descent (Williams et al., 2017). Hypervigilance, hypersensitivity, irritability, defensiveness, helplessness, hopelessness, anxiety, and apathy are also prevalent problems that Black individuals who experience racial microaggressions go through (Liao, Weng, & West, 2015; Smith et al., 2016).

Researchers have also found a significant relationship between racial microaggressions, depression, and suicide ideations among African Americans more than other racial minorities (O'Keefe et al., 2015). Black individuals usually connect socially to their ethnic community, which consists of other Black people they interact with and rely on for coping skills, support, and validation from stressors including racial microaggressions (Joshi et al., 2015; Liao et al., 2015). But some Black individuals need to feel socially connected and adjusted to mainstream society too, which involves social interactions with persons of other racial groups (Liao et al., 2015). But, when they feel connected to mainstream society and experience racial microaggressions in those settings, they may experience higher levels of psychological symptoms such as increased anxiety (Liao et al., 2015). Despite the negative mental health impact racial

microaggressions have on Black individuals, having positive racial identity contributes to better ways of coping with these issues (Isom, 2016).

Critique of Critical Articles

In a recent quantitative study conducted by Hollingsworth et al. (2017), they used a correlational design to determine if racial microaggressions positively correlated to suicidal ideations in African Americans. The authors hypothesized "that all six dimensions of racial microaggressions would have an indirect effect on suicide ideation through both perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness." They also hypothesized that "all six dimensions of racial microaggressions would have a direct effect on suicide ideation" (Hollingsworth et al., 2017, p. 106). They recruited the participants from a research database at a Predominantly White Institution in the Midwest United States and received 135 completed surveys from African-Americans participants,76 woman, and 27 men. The participants completed a demographic questionnaire, the Interpersonal Needs Questionnaire-15 (INQ-15), Racial Microaggressions Scale (RMAS), and the Hopelessness Depression Symptom Questionnaire-Suicidality Subscale (HDSQ-SS) online and received course credit for participating (Hollingsworth et al., 2017).

The results showed that the following types of racial microaggressions, invisibility, low-achievement/undesirable culture, and environmental invalidations, indirectly affected suicidal ideations in African Americans due to feelings of perceived burdensomeness, but not thwarted belongingness which increased the participants' risk for having suicide ideations (Hollingsworth et al., 2017). However, none of the racial

microaggressions directly correlated with suicide ideations which showed partial hypotheses support (Hollingsworth et al., 2017). Additionally, the researchers concluded that African Americans who experienced racial microaggressions verbally, behaviorally, and environmentally in their daily lives felt they were a burden on others more often than those who did not experience them (Hollingsworth et al., 2017). These racial microaggressions led to them feeling incompetent, dismissed, less intelligent, or like unequal members of society which contributed to increased suicidal thoughts showing a positive correlation between perceived burdensomeness, thwarted belongingness, and suicide ideation (Hollingsworth et al., 2017).

A positive correlation also emerged between perceived burdensomeness and low-achievement/undesirable culture, and between invisibility, perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness (Hollingsworth et al., 2017). "The racial microaggressions total score had an indirect effect on suicide ideation through perceived burdensomeness (point estimate = .0049, *SE* = .0047, 95% *BC* = .0010 to .0124); however, the indirect effect through thwarted belongingness was nonsignificant (point estimate = .0008, *SE* = .0007, 95% *BC*= -.0003 to .0038)" (p. 108). The researchers used the 95% confidence interval to measure the low-achieving/undesirable cultural dimensions of the Racial Microaggressions Scale because they did not trust the accuracy of the BC 95% endpoints to measure it (Hollingsworth et al., 2017). One strength of the study is its implication to address how racial microaggressions affect the mental health of persons of Black descent. The limitations of the study included a cross-sectional design which shows relationship rather than causation as well as the use of a convenience sample rather than a community

or clinical sample (Hollingsworth et al., 2017). The study was important to my dissertation because I used a community sample which added the Black community's voice to how counselors can address the mental health impact of racial microaggressions in counseling.

In another quantitative study, Nadal, Griffin, et al. (2014), said that racial microaggressions could lead to physical and mental health distress among persons of color. Nadal, Griffin, et al. (2014) explored the relationship between racial microaggressions and mental health. Nadal, Griffin, et al. (2014) hypothesized "Higher frequencies of experiences of racial microaggressions would negatively predict individuals' mental health" (p. 59) and gave implications for counselors to be culturally sensitive towards clients of color. The researchers had a sample of 506 participants including 375 women and 131 men ranging in age from 18-66 years old. The racial breakdown of the sample included 157 Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders, 131 Latinas/Latinos, 80 Blacks/African Americans, 63 Whites/European Americans, 48 multiracial, 25 other and two participants who did not list their race/ethnicity (Nadal, Griffin, et al., 2014). Most participants identified as heterosexual (85.2%), gay/lesbian (5.5%), bisexual (2.8%), and other (0.8%). Much of the sample (57.1%) lived in northeastern states, (19.6%) lived on the West Coast, (13.6%) in the Midwest, (3.4%) in the southwest, (2.4%) were from southeastern states, (2.0%) lived in Hawaii, and only (1.2%) lived outside of the U. S. Many participants (48.2%) had a high school diploma, (22.7%) had a bachelor's degree, (17.6%) had a graduate degree, and (10.7%) had an

associate degree. Most participants were U. S. citizens (76.5%), and (22.1%) were born in other countries (Nadal, Griffin, et al., 2014).

The researchers used a demographic questionnaire, the Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale (REMS), and the Mental Health Inventory (MHI). The procedures included giving a link to the informed consent, demographic questionnaire, and surveys on Survey Monkey which took between 30-45 minutes to complete followed by a debriefing statement (Nadal, Griffin, et al., 2014). A team of three coded the race and ethnicity open-ended choices of the research participants. The analysis included a correlational analysis to examine the relationship between microaggressions and mental health. "A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and comparative t-tests were used to observe if race was a predictor of different types of microaggressions and if certain groups reported more experiences with certain types of microaggressions than other groups" (Nadal, Griffin, et al., 2014, p. 60). The results showed that there is a negative correlation between racial aggression and mental health symptoms ($r = –.11$, $p = .047$) such as depression, anxiety, and lack of behavioral control (Nadal et al., 2014). All racial and ethnic participants that participated in this study reported experiencing racial microaggressions, but the Black participants reported the highest numbers (Nadal, Griffin, et al., 2014).

The result of this study where:

> Exoticization and Assumptions of Similarity was the only REMS subscale with a significant, negative correlation with the MHI-18 average ($r = –.15$, $p = .005$). Two of the four MHI-18 subscales were significantly and negatively correlated

with overall REMS average scores: Depression ($r = –.12$, $p = .026$) and Positive Affect ($r = –.11$, $p = .043$). The MHI-18 Depression subscale had significant, negative correlations with REMS Subscale 4: Exoticization and Assumptions of Similarity ($r = –.16$, $p = .003$). The MHI-18 Positive Affect subscale had a significant, negative correlation with REMS Subscale 3: Microinvalidations ($r = –.13$, $p = .012$) and REMS Subscale 4: Exoticization and Assumptions of Similarity ($r = –.16$, $p = .002$). The MHI-18 Behavioral Control subscale also had a significant, negative correlation with REMS Subscale 4: Exoticization and Assumptions of Similarity ($r = –.12$, $p = .024$) (Nadal, Griffin, et al., 2014, p. 60).

A simple linear regression model was tested (using the enter method), and REMS average scores were found to be a significant predictor of MHI-18 total scores, F (1, 354) = 6.19, $p = .013$; however, the effect size was small (adjusted $R^2 = .01$), accounting for only 1.4% of the variance. REMS average scores were significantly predicted on the MHI18 Depression subscale scores, F (1, 354) = 7.43, $p = .007$, and MHI-18 Positive Affect subscale scores, F (1, 354) = 8.43, $p = .004$. However, again, effect sizes were small, with adjusted $R^2 = .02$ for MHI-18 Depression and adjusted $R^2 = .02$ for MHI-18 Positive Affect (pp. 60-61).

The authors used "multiple regression analyses to determine if an overall model of REMS subscales predicted MHI-18 average scores or MHI-18 subscales" (p. 61). They only found a significance for "MHI-18 Positive Affect subscale scores, F (1, 344) = 2.55, $p = .020$, accounting for 2.6% of the variance" (p. 61). "The subscale Microinvalidations was the only significant predictor ($t = –2.28$, $p = .02$)" (Nadal,

Griffin, et al., 2014, p. 61). "There were significant differences between racial groups in REMS average scores, F (5, 456) = 6.12, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .06$" (p. 61).

The authors found significant differences between White participants ($M = 0.25$) and every other racial group, Black participants ($M = 0.40$, $p = .001$), Asian participants ($M = 0.35$, $p = .001$), Latina/o participants ($M = 0.39$, $p = .001$), and multiracial participants ($M = 0.36$, $p = .001$). There were no significant differences in average scores among any of the other racial groups, suggesting that Black, Asian, Latina/o, and multiracial people experience similar amounts of cumulative microaggressions (Nadal, Griffin, et al., 2014, p. 61).

There were significant differences between racial groups in Subscale 1: Assumptions of Inferiority average scores, F (5, 452) = 6.22, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .06$. Comparative t tests found significant differences between Asian ($M = 0.23$) and Black ($M = 0.41$) participants ($p = .000$), Asian ($M = 0.23$) and Latina/o ($M = 0.40$) participants ($p = .000$), Black ($M = 0.41$) and White ($M = 0.17$) participants ($p = .015$), Latina/o ($M = 0.40$) and White ($M = 0.17$) participants ($p = .001$), and White ($M = 0.17$) and multiracial ($M = 0.33$) participants ($p = .009$) (Nadal, Griffin, et al., 2014, p. 61).

There were significant differences between racial groups in Subscale 2: Second-Class Citizen and Assumptions of Criminality average scores, F (5, 454) = 4.77, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .05$. Comparative t tests revealed differences between Asian ($M = 0.21$) and Black ($M = 0.36$) participants ($p = .000$), Asian ($M = 0.21$) and White ($M = 0.13$) participants ($p = .044$), Black ($M = 0.36$) and White ($M = 0.13$) participants ($p = .000$), Black ($M = 0.36$) and Latina/o ($M = 0.26$) participants ($p = .033$), multiracial ($M = 0.26$) and White

(*M* =0.13) participants (*p* = .012), and Latina/o (*M* = 0.26) and White (*M* = 0.13) participants (*p* = .007) (Nadal, Griffin, et al., 2014, p. 61).

There were significant differences between racial groups in Subscale 3: Microinvalidations average scores, *F* (5, 453) = 3.70, *p* = .003, η2 = .04. Using comparative *t* tests, we found significant differences between Black (*M* = 0.48) and Asian (*M* = 0.32) participants (*p* = .001), Asian (*M* = 0.32) and Latina/o (*M* = 0.41) participants (*p* = .016), Black (*M* = 0.48) and White (*M* = 0.32) participants (*p* = .003), and Latina/o (*M* = 0.41) and White (*M* = 0.32) participants (*p* = .045) (Nadal, Griffin, et al., 2014, p. 61).

For Subscale 4: Exoticization and Assumptions of Similarity average scores, there were significant differences between racial groups as well, *F* (5, 454) = 3.57, *p* = .004, η2 = .04. Significant differences were found between Black (*M* = 0.35) and Asian (*M* = 0.52) participants (*p* = .000), White (*M* = 0.14) and Asian (*M* = 0.52) participants (*p* = .000), Black (*M* = 0.35) and Latina/o (*M* = 0.55) participants (*p* = .000), Asian (*M* = 0.52) and White (*M* = 0.14) participants (*p* = .000), Latina/o (*M* = 0.55) and White (*M* = 0.14) participants (*p* = .000), and multiracial (*M*= 0.43) and Latina/o (*M* = 0.55) participants (*p* = .029) (Nadal, Griffin, et al., 2014, p. 62).

There were significant differences between racial groups in Subscale 5: Environmental Microaggressions average scores, *F* (5, 430) = 5.38, *p* < .001, η2 = .06. The *t* tests indicated significant differences between Black (*M* = 0.37) and Asian (*M* = 0.54) participants (*p* = .02), Asian (*M* = 0.54) and Latina/o (*M* = 0.46) participants (*p* =

.05), White (M = 0.43) and Asian (M = 0.54) participants (p = .05), and Black (M = 0.37) and multiracial (M = 0.53) participants (p = .05) (Nadal, Griffin, et al., 2014, p. 62).

There were significant differences between racial groups in Subscale 6: Workplace and School Microaggressions average scores, F (5, 454) = 2.93, p = .013, η2 = .03. Significant differences were found between Asian (M = 0.24) and Black (M = 0.34) participants (p = .04), White (M = 0.14) and Black (M = 0.34) participants (p = .009), White (M = 0.14) and Asian (M = 0.24) participants (p = .017), White (M = 0.14) and Latina/o (M = 0.24) participants (p = .03), and multiracial (M = 0.34) and White (M = 0.14) participants" (p = .000) (Nadal, Griffin, et al., 2014, p. 62).

This study was critical to my dissertation because it examined the mental health effects of microaggressions on minorities including Black individuals. The implications of these findings suggested that counselors should include the impact of racial microaggressions on culturally diverse clients into their work to serve them effectively in counseling (Nadal, Griffin, et al., 2014). A limitation of the study included the surveys being self-reported instruments administered in the same order, which may not have accurately reflect the real experiences of participants, and people of color tend to underreport mental health symptoms (Nadal, Griffin, et al., 2014). My study addressed this limitation through semi-structured interviews with Black individuals about their lived experiences with racial microaggressions that they shared candidly.

In a recent correlational study, Nadal et al. (2017) sought to find if there was a significant relationship between racial microaggressions and poor physical health. The research questions were: Is there a significant correlation between experiences of racial

microaggressions and physical health problems? Does the cumulative nature of racial microaggressions predict physical health and quality-of-life problems? Do specific types of racial microaggressions predict physical health and quality-of-life problems? The study included 277 participants consisting of 207 females and67 males who ranged in age from 17- 63. The researchers did not report data on the gender of the other three participants (Nadal et al., 2017). Eighty-nine participants were Hispanic, 69 were Asian-American or Pacific Islander, 54 were Black/African American (19.6%); 32 were multiracial (11.6%), and three were other (Nadal et al., 2017). Twenty-eight participants were White/European-American, which the researchers included in the sample because they may also experience microaggressions in nonwhite majority settings (Nadal et al., 2017).

The researchers recruited the participants from multiple sources including a psychology undergraduate student research participant pool, college and local organizations' e-mail lists, online public ads posted on websites, and snowball sampling (Nadal et al., 2017). Undergraduate students made up about half of the sample and received course credit for their participation, but the participants from the community sample did not receive any compensation for their time (Nadal et al., 2017). The results data showed that 72.7% of the participants were U.S. natives while the other 27.3 were from other countries (Nadal et al., 2017). The sample consisted of 85.6% heterosexual participants and 14.4% gay, lesbian, bisexual, or other (Nadal et al., 2017). The results showed that 47.7% of the participants reported that they earned a high school diploma, 25.6% earned a bachelor's degree, 17% completed graduate school, and 9.7% had an

associate degree (Nadal et al., 2017). The surveys used in the study were the Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale (REMS) and the RAND 36-Item Short Form Health Survey-Version 1.0 (SF-36), which is a health survey (Nadal et al., 2017).

The results showed that racial microaggressions negatively correlated with physical health ($r = –.253$, N = 256, $p = .01$, two-tailed), and emotional health ($r = –.286$, $N = 256$, $p = .01$, two-tailed) leading to declines in role limitations due to having health and emotional issues (Nadal et al., 2017). According to Nadal et al. (2017), the results of the study on the subscales of the RAND were: Energy/Fatigue ($r = –.216$, $N = 255$, $p = .01$, two-tailed), Emotional Well-being ($r = –.190$, $N = 255$, $p = .01$, two-tailed), Social Functioning ($r = –.314$, $N = 255$, $p = .01$, two-tailed), Pain ($r = –.212$, $N = 256$, $p = .01$, two-tailed), and General Health ($r = –.178$, $N = 258$, $p = .01$, two-tailed) (Nadal et al., 2017). The researchers examined whether the participants' collective experiences of racial microaggressions as independent variable predicted certain types of physical health issues using the RAND subscales as the dependent variable. The researchers reported the following statistics "Role Limitations Due to Physical Health, $F(1, 254) = 17.39$, $p < .001$, Role Limitations Due to Emotional Problems, $F(1, 254) = 22.63$, $p < .001$, Energy/Fatigue, $F(1, 253) = 12.38$, $p = .001$, Emotional Wellbeing, $F(1, 253) = 943$, $p = .002$, Scale 6: Social Functioning, $F(1,253) = 27.65$, $p = .001$, Pain, $F(1, 254) = 12.01$, $p = .001$, and General Health, $F(1, 256) = 8.36$, $p = .004$" (Nadal et al., 2017). "Significant findings accounted for 2.8% to 9.5% of the variance" (Nadal et al., 2017, p. 11).

The authors also examined if specific types of microaggressions predicted certain physical health and quality-of-life problems using all six of the subscales in the REMS as

the predictor variables and subscales on the RAND *SF*-36 scale as an outcome variable. The researchers found that "Role Limitations Due to Physical Health, a significant model emerged for Workplace and School Microaggressions, $F(6, 249) = 3.71$, $p = .002$, accounting for 6.0% of the variance" (Nadal et al., 2017, p. 11). For the "Role Limitations Due to Emotional Problems, a significant model emerged for Environmental Microaggressions and Workplace and School Microaggressions, $F(6, 249) = 5.01$, $p < .001$, accounting for 8.7% of the variance" (Nadal et al., 2017, pp. 11-12). "Energy/Fatigue, a significant model emerged for Environmental Microaggressions, $F(6, 248) = 3.15$, $p = .005$, accounting for 4.8% of the variance; Emotional Wellbeing, a significant model emerged for Workplace and School Microaggressions, $F(6, 248) = 2.98$, $p = .008$, accounting for 4.5% of the variance" (Nadal et al., 2017, p. 12). For "Social Functioning, a significant model emerged for Assumptions of Inferiority and Workplace and School Microaggressions, $F(6,248) = 6.32$, $p < .001$, accounting for 11.2% of the variance" (Nadal et al., 2017, p. 12). On the Pain scale, "a significant model emerged for Assumptions of Inferiority Microaggressions, $F(1, 254) = 11.41$, $p = .001$, which accounted for 3.9% of the variance. None of the REMS subscales were significant predictors of RAND SF-36 Scale 1: Physical Functioning and Scale 8: General Health ($p > .008$)" (Nadal et al., 2017, p. 12).

This study was important to my dissertation because it showed that there is a correlation between racial microaggressions and poor physical health which is important to the counseling profession because it focuses on the holistic wellness of individuals. One major strength of the article is its implications for counseling including advocacy,

clinical practice, and communal psychoeducation as a means to promote racial healing. However, one limitation of the study that I addressed in my dissertation was to learn more about the holistic effects of racial microaggressions on persons of Black descent from the meaning they associate with those experiences, how they currently cope, and their perspectives on how counselors can promote healing.

Experiences of Persons with Mental Illnesses

People in society also commit microaggressions against individuals living with mental illnesses. In one study, Gonzales et al. (2014) found that individuals with mental illnesses often experienced microaggressions surrounding their mental health that could lead to internalize stigma and worsen their condition. Hence, it is important for counselors to work to increase public awareness to reduce microaggressions in society and specifically highlighting how they affect mental health. The researchers created hypothesis categories applying to persons living with mental illnesses who experience microaggressions including: (a) individuals with mental illnesses experience microaggressions in which they felt that others invalidated their mental health challenges, (b) people perceive individuals with mental illnesses as less intelligent than those without such illnesses, (c) microaggressions directed toward persons with mental illnesses involve treating them like children or helpless, (d) individuals with mental illness are dangerous (Gonzales et al., 2014). The researchers collected data in four focus groups with a total of 21 participants they recruited from a local community organization and a college in New York City by posting fliers in the centers and making verbal

announcements in the waiting room and shared areas of the facilities (Gonzales et al., 2014).

The inclusion criteria were that the potential participants be adults with self-reported mental health diagnoses, speak English, and sign an informed consent (Gonzales et al., 2014). The researchers screened interested persons and made sure they met the criteria and then put them in one of two focus group sessions either at the college or resource center where they answered semi-structured interview and demographic questions (Gonzales et al., 2014). Most of the participants identified as male, either Black or Hispanic, and ranged in age from 30-58 (Gonzales et al., 2014). They reported either having bipolar disorder, ADHD, depression, or schizophrenia spectrum disorders (Gonzales et al., 2014). The participants received a $20 incentive for participating in the 90-minute focus groups. Four of the participants came from the college and 17 from the community organization (Gonzales et al., 2014).

Gonzales et al. (2014) found support for their hypotheses about persons with mental illnesses through five themes of microaggressions which "are invalidation, assumption of inferiority, fear of mental illness, shaming of mental illness, and feeling like a second-class citizen" (p. 3). Within the first theme, *invalidation*, many participants reported feeling invalidated about their lived experiences with mental illness (Gonzales et al., 2014). The participants also reported feeling like various individuals whom they had formal and informal relationships with minimized the importance and severity of their mental illness (Gonzales et al., 2014). The symptomizing theme stood for individuals attributing every emotion or behavior to the person's mental illness (Gonzales et al.,

2014). Within the second theme, *assumption of inferiority*, 13 participants discussed people making them feel incompetent and less intelligent than those without mental illness (Gonzales et al., 2014). Twelve participants discussed their experiences with the third theme, *fear of mental illness* that led them to feel isolated and withdrawn from others who assume they are dangerous, unpredictable, and contagious (Gonzales et al., 2014).

For the fourth theme *shaming of mental illness*, seven individuals discussed their experiences with others telling them to keep their diagnoses quiet because it is something bad (Gonzales et al., 2014). Seven participants shared their experiences with the fifth them *second-class citizen* which occurred when individuals minimized or dismissed the person with mental illness ideas, opinions, and input about their treatment which made them feel devalued (Gonzales et al., 2014). Fifteen participants shared experiences of the sixth theme, *experiences of overt discrimination*, which included job loss due to having a mental illness (Gonzales et al., 2014). Other participants shared their experiences with the seventh and final theme, *negative outcomes*, which included feeling isolated, frustrated, and decreased self-esteem because of the microaggressions they experienced surrounding their mental illness (Gonzales et al., 2014).

The study was important to my dissertation because it showed how individuals with intersecting identities such as race and mental illness are at an increased risk for experiencing microaggressions which may worsen their mental illness and strain their interpersonal relationships (Gonzales et al., 2014). The study's limitation that I addressed in my dissertation is the role of intersecting demographic factors of individuals

who experience racial and other microaggressions. One major strength of this study is its in-depth analysis of the participants' lived experiences of microaggressions related to mental health.

Racial Microaggressions in Counseling

Racial microaggression is a modern term for racism and racist behaviors of individuals in society. There is a need to address racial microaggressions in counseling from the clients' perspective because their experiences with this phenomenon inside and outside of counseling can adversely affect their mental health and the counseling process (Knight, 2013; Malott et al., 2015). For example, in cross-racial counseling relationships when a counselor invalidates a client's lived experiences with racial microaggressions or do not appropriately address them in counseling, it can create problems in the counseling relationship (Knight, 2013; Malott et al., 2015). Additionally, some White counselors struggle with facing and understanding how their personal racial histories may contribute to the stereotypes and biases they hold against persons of color (Knight, 2013; Malott et., 2015; Mcgee, 2016). Facing these histories can sometimes be unpleasant and difficult for counselors to deal with personally as well as professionally while processing a client of color's negative racial experiences (Knight, 2013; Sue, 2013). Some counselors also struggle with feeling confident in knowing the proper way to respond and intervene while engaging in cross-racial counseling relationships which could manifest in racial microaggressions (Knight, 2013; Sue, 2013). Additionally, Hook et al. (2016) found that counselors of all racial backgrounds equally commit racial microaggressions in counseling. For example, some counselors perpetuate racial microaggressions by

invalidating clients' lived experiences with race relations and work from a color-blind or monocultural worldview, which causes clients to feel misunderstood and distrust the counselor (Hook et al., 2016; Mazzula & Nadal, 2015).

Additionally, intersectionality among racial minority clients who are also members of other minority groups such as sexual, gender, or religious communities further compounds the problem of developing a trusting client-counselor relationship (Bowleg et al., 2013; Mazzula & Nadal, 2015). In general, Black individuals are resistant to counseling due to myths they heard about it or based on past negative counseling experiences (Bowleg et al., 2013). A counselor's attempt to convey that they are not racist by responding to a client's race-related experiences with comments about not seeing color or saying a client is too sensitive by the meaning they associate with their experiences can cause harm to the therapeutic relationship and the client's emotional well-being (Mazzula & Nadal, 2015). Moreover, if a client of color tells a White counselor that they feel uncomfortable talking with them about race, based on their worldview and negative past experiences with White people, it is not helpful for the counselor to respond with comments about race not being a factor and discounting the client's feelings and experiences (Mazzula & Nadal, 2015). Responding to racial problems clients share by referring to another marginalized identity such as sexuality or gender is also invalidating and shows that they do not acknowledge the role power and privilege play in White people's lived experiences (Mazzula & Nadal, 2015).

According to Mazzula and Nadal (2015), counselors that did not consider the role of racial and cultural factors in their clients' problems had clients who showed poor

clinical engagement, missed appointments, had cultural mistrust, and prematurely stopped counseling. A challenge that counselors face in providing culturally sensitive treatment is simultaneously recognizing themselves as cultural beings who may hold worldviews, values, and beliefs that are harmful to their client (Mazzula & Nadal, 2015). The purpose of the case study by Mazzula and Nadal (2015), based on a vignette of a 40-year-old African-American female receiving treatment for depression from a White female counselor was to learn more about how racial microaggressions come out in therapy. Counselors have personal values and beliefs unique to their cultural experiences that may create challenges for them to provide proper counseling interventions to clients who have diverse cultural lived experiences (Mazzula & Nadal, 2015). The authors used feminist theory to support their research which made it significant for my qualitative dissertation because I am using RCT, an extension of feminist theory as my theoretical framework (Mazzula & Nadal, 2015). The article was also important to my dissertation because of its emphasis on how counselors who work with clients from diverse cultures can be effective with them (Mazzula & Nadal, 2015). The major limitation of this study was the samples size of one, but my study addressed this limitation by having seven participants (Mazzula & Nadal, 2015). However, this limitation was also a strength because it allowed the researchers to provide an in-depth analysis of the single case.

Owen, Tao, Imel, Wampold, and Rodolfa, (2014) conducted a quantitative study to find out how counselors could address racial and ethnic microaggressions in counseling because clients were experiencing them from counselors in session. Therefore, they set out to find ways to reduce these occurrences in counseling by making

counselors aware of microaggressions and teaching them how to address them in session. Owen et al. (2014) hypothesized the following:

Hypothesis 1 "REM clients' perceptions of microaggressions would be negatively associated with their ratings of the alliance" (p. 284). Hypothesis 2 "Client–therapist dyads that addressed the microaggression (and were able to come to resolution) would demonstrate similar levels of working alliance to clients who never perceived a microaggression," (p. 284). When they addressed these microaggressions effectively, Hypothesis 3 the said the client–therapist dyad would "have higher levels of alliance than clients whose therapist never discussed the microaggression or were unable to resolve the issue" (p. 284).

The total sample was 120 participants including 88 females and 32 males ranging in age from 18 to 51, with a median age of 22 years old (Owen et al., 2014). Thirty-two percent of the sample were graduate students, 28.3% were seniors, 20.8% were juniors, 11.7% were sophomores, 13.3% were freshman, and 1.7% of the sample included non-student populations (Owen et al., 2014). Racially and ethnically, 1.7% of the sample identified as African- American, 42.5% as Asian-American, 24.2% as Hispanic, 30.8% as multiethnic, and less than 1% did not identify their race or ethnicity (Owen et al., 2014). The measures used in the study were the Racial Microaggressions in Counseling Scale (RMCS), Working Alliance Inventory-Short Form (WAI-S), Schwartz Outcome Scale-10 (SOS-10), and SOS-10 is a 10-item scale (Owen et al., 2014). The researchers recruited the participants from a university counseling center and received the informed consent and surveys via e-mail; the participants had an opportunity to enter a drawing for $100

(Owen et al., 2014). The researchers only used data from participants who identified as a racial or ethnic minority, had individual counseling, and listed their counselor's name during data collection. The study examined to what extent therapists varied in their clients' perceptions of therapeutic alliance and microaggressions (Owen et al., 2014).

> The analyses showed statistical significance for all three hypotheses: Therapists accounted for approximately 9.8% of the variance in their clients' ratings of alliance (client level variance = 1.19, $p < .001$, 95% CI = 0.94, 1.61; therapist level variance = 0.13, $p < .001$, 95% CI = 0.004, 0.61) and they accounted for approximately 6% of the variance in their clients' perceptions of microaggressions (client level variance = 0.15, $p < .001$, 95% CI = 0.12, 0.20; therapist level variance = 0.01, $p < .001$, 95% CI = 0.001, 0.03) (p. 286).

The results for client reported differences of microaggressions based on therapists' racial/ethnic status did not yield statistical significance, $b2$= -0.04, SD = .08, p = .64, 95% CI = -0.18, 0.12" (Owen et al., 2014, p. 286). There was also no statistical significance in the test about if clients' perception of microaggressions perpetrated by their therapist changed based on the therapists' racial/ethnic identity, b =0.57, SD = .30, p =.086, 95% CI = -0.11, 1.12. A total of "53.3% (n = 64) of REM clients reported experiencing a microaggression (68.4% of REM clients who were treated by REM therapists and 46.3% of REM clients who were treated by White therapists) (p. 286)".

> Of the 64 clients who reported experiencing a microaggression, 76% (n =42) reported that the microaggression experience was not discussed, 24% (n =13) reported the microaggression was discussed. Of these 13 clients, only one client

reported that the discussion was not successful. REM therapists were less likely to discuss the microaggression experience as compared with White therapists (90.5% vs. 67.6%); however, after controlling for therapist effects, these differences were not statistically significant (*b* _ 0.78, *SD* _ 0.37, *p* _ .06, 95% CI _0.04, 1.54). The lack of statistical significance is likely a result of the small sample size as there were only 10 REM therapists and 23 White therapists coupled with the fact that discussion of the microaggression experience was a low base rate event (Owen et al., 2014).

The significance of this study to my dissertation was that there was evidence that racial microaggressions occur in counseling and highlights the need to hear from the participants' perspectives of how counselors can be helpful and avoid causing further pain with microaggressions. One strength of this study was it showed the relationships between the racial microaggressions and counseling. In my study, I found the importance of counselors addressing and assessing for the role microaggressions have in the clients' lives.

Hook et al. (2016) conducted a quantitative study using a survey design to examine if a correlation existed between racial/ethnic minority (REM) clients' perceptions of their counselor's cultural humility and the racial microaggressions they experienced in counseling. The study was important because people commit aversive racism, a type of racism where the perpetrators hide or deny their negative beliefs and feelings about racial minorities, nevertheless, these racial microaggressions cause harm to racial minorities. Sometimes the individuals performing these negative and hurtful acts

are counselors from all racial backgrounds (Hook et al., 2016). The first research question was to decide how often racial microaggressions took place in counseling and how they affect the targeted clients. The second and third questions were to "to explore differences in the frequency and impact of racial microaggressions based on the race of the clients" (Hook et al., 2016, p. 273). The fourth question was what the differences in racial microaggressions in counseling are when the client and counselor are of the same race. "The fifth research question focused on the role of perceived cultural humility in predicting racial microaggression frequency and impact" (Hook et al., 2016, p. 276).

The researchers hypothesized "that perceptions of cultural humility would be associated with (a) lower racial microaggression frequency in counseling and (b) lower impact of racial microaggressions when they did occur" (Hook et al., 2016, p. 276). The sample size was 2,212 REM adults from the United States, and 35.1% male, 62.9% female, and 2.0% Other. Their mean age was 29.6 (*SD* = 9.0) (Hook et al., 2016). Racially the sample consisted of "29.7% Black, 30.9% Hispanic, 12.4% Asian, 6.1% American Indian/Alaska Native, 1.2% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 17.5% Multiracial, and 2.2% other" (Hook et al., 2016, p. 272). Regarding sexual orientation, "80.2% heterosexual, 2.4% gay, 2.8% lesbian, 10.9% bisexual, and 3.6% other" (Hook et al., 2016, p. 272). The researchers recruited the participants on Amazon's Mechanical Turk website, and they received compensation for their time with a U.S. $1.00. The study's inclusion criteria were that participants had a U.S. bank account and identified as a racial or ethnic minority who had gone to counseling in the past (Hook et al., 2016). The participants had to read and agree to the informed consent document and answer

qualifying questions to access the surveys. Upon completing the surveys, the participants took part in a debriefing session and received contact information for the researchers for future reference (Hook et al., 2016). The surveys the participants completed were the Racial Microaggressions in Counseling Scale (RMCS, Cultural Humility Scale (CHS), Cross-Cultural Counseling Inventory-Revised (CCCI–R7), and Counselor Rating Form—Short (CRF–S). The results showed that 81.7% of the sample had experienced at least one racial microaggression in therapy. The most common type was microinvalidations in the form of counselors denying or lacking awareness that racial microaggressions exist. The second most common racial microaggression in counseling was counselor avoiding discussing cultural issues with their clients (Hook et al., 2016).

There were significant differences in the frequency of the 10 racial microaggressions, $F(9, 19{,}899) = 144.42$, $p < .001$, $\eta p2 = .06$" (Hook et al., 2016, p. 272). "There were no differences in racial microaggression frequency, $F(2, 1{,}613) = 0.12$, $p = .887$, $\eta 2 = .00$, based on client race" (Hook et al., 2016, p. 273). There was, however, a significant difference in racial microaggression impact, $F(2, 1{,}320) = 3.07$, $p = .047$, $\eta 2 = .00$, based on client race, although the size of this effect was small. Post-hoc tests with a Bonferroni correction revealed that Black clients reported a trend toward experiencing racial microaggressions to be more impactful ($M = 1.95$, $SD = 0.92$) than did Asian clients ($M = 1.79$, $SD = 0.71$, $p = .060$, $d = 0.19$). (Hook et al., 2016, p. 273). "There was not a difference in overall racial microaggression frequency, $F(3, 1{,}980) = 1.35$, $p = .258$, $\eta 2 = .00$, based on counselor race, nor was there a difference in overall racial microaggression impact, $F(3, 1{,}616) = 0.925$, $p = .428$, $\eta 2 = .00$, based on counselor race" (Hook et al.,

2016, p. 273). For racial microaggression frequency, there was not a significant main effect for client race, $F(2, 1{,}610) = 0.50$, $p = .610$, ηp2 = .00, or racial match, $F(1, 1{,}610) = 0.00$, $p = .995$, ηp2= .00, nor an interaction between client race and racial match, $F(2, 1{,}610) = 1.44$, $p = .236$, ηp2 =.00. For racial microaggression impact, there was not a significant main effect for client race, $F(2, 1{,}317) = 0.06$, $p = .946$, ηp2= .00, but there was a significant main effect for racial match, $F(1,1{,}317) = 5.79$, $p = .016$, ηp2= .00, as well as a significant Race X Racial Match interaction, $F(2, 1{,}317) = 3.95$, $p = .019$, ηp2 .01. Overall, clients who were racially matched were more likely to experience racial microaggressions and view them as more impactful ($M = 1.97$, $SD = 0.88$) than clients who were not racially matched ($M = 1.86$, $SD = 0.87$, $p = .016$, $d = 0.13$). However, this finding was true for only Asian clients ($p = .004$, $d = 0.48$) and Hispanic clients ($p = .040$, $d = 0.22$); it was not significant for Black clients ($p = .420$) (Hook et al., 2016, pp. 272-274). The study was important for my dissertation because it showed that counselors of all racial backgrounds commit racial microaggressions in therapy and there needs to be more research focused on reducing them. Additionally, my study included Black voices in how counselors can address to in counseling (Hook et al., 2016). The limitation to this study was the scarce literature on this topic, and my study added to the research about helpful ways counselors can work with clients from racial minority groups.

Established Approaches to Address Racial Microaggressions

Culturally, every client has unique needs based on their norms and practices making it imperative that counselors use clinically relevant interventions with them. For example, in South Africa, most counselors use psychoanalytic therapy which is

ineffective with Black Africans (Knight, 2013). On the other hand, psychodynamic therapy can be useful in helping counselors to understand how Black clients' unconscious thoughts and beliefs about race could hurt their mental health. One of the first steps to becoming a culturally competent counselor and addressing multicultural issues such as racial microaggressions in counseling is for counselors to own personal biases, racism, and preconceived notions about persons from diverse populations (Mazzula & Nadal, 2015; Stambaugh & Ford, 2015). Counselors should avoid making assumptions about clients based on their race or other demographics because it takes away those individuals' uniqueness (Mazzula & Nadal, 2015). However, counselors should also recognize that race and race relations are important concerns and factors in the lives of Black clients, so acknowledging them in therapy can strengthen and deepen the therapeutic relationship, especially if addressed early which helps to build trust (Hook et al., 2016; Mazzula & Nadal, 2015).

Counselors should follow their clients' lead on whether they are ready to address race relations in session (Knight, 2013). In other words, counselors could initiate and pursue the topic of race if a client has an issue and is ready to address it, but not pursue it if a client does not see it as a problem or is not ready to address it in counseling. Within a cross-cultural counseling relationship, it is imperative that the counselor understands the lived experiences of their clients to make sense of subjective views they may hold while keeping in mind that a client's perception of racism and racial microaggressions is real to them and can adversely impact their mental health (Knight, 2013; Nadal, Griffin, Wong, Davidoff, & Davis, 2017). Therefore, it is important for a counselor to validate the Black

clients' feelings about race and acknowledge how their experiences affect them (Mazzula & Nadal, 2015).

From a feminist perspective, counselors understand how social inequalities contribute to a decline in the interpersonal relationships as well as the mental and emotional health of Black clients and work with them through this lens to create a collaborative and empowering partnership (Mazzula & Nadal, 2015). Counselors also acknowledge how power and privilege shape clients' worldviews and may affect their work with clients of color (Giesekus, 2014; Mazzula & Nadal, 2015). Similarly, using a feminist or systems theoretical approach allows counselors to show cultural humility with clients from racial minority groups (Giesekus, 2014). They do this by considering how cultural and systemic factors affect the way clients communicate and allow counselors to provide culturally competent care to them (Giesekus, 2014; Jordan, 2009). Doing so can also reduce incidents of counselors engaging in racial and ethnic microaggressions (Forrest-Bank & Jenson, 2015).

Counselors should prepare to deal with subtle and overt forms of transference and countertransference particularly when issues of race surface in therapy. For example, if a client has negative views and experiences of White people, they may remain guarded or bluntly state things in counseling that may be uncomfortable for counselors (Knight, 2013). One White counselor shared an incident where she mentioned the racial difference between her and a Black client in session to address any racial issues early on that might hinder the counseling relationship due to the cross-cultural counseling relationship (Knight, 2013). However, the client did not say anything about it until the

next session when she asked the counselor if she liked Black people or saw her as inferior. The counselor admitted that she felt paralyzed at that moment about how to respond nondefensively but worked through it successfully with the client (Knight, 2013). Counselors who have high cultural humility do not commit as many racial microaggressions as those who have low cultural humility (Hook et al., 2016). These same counselors also do a better job of resolving any harm they may cause when they engage in racial microaggressions and establish more trusting relationships with clients (Hook et al., 2016).

The use of therapeutic silence can also be powerful during intense therapeutic dialogues about clients' lived experiences with race and racial microaggressions (Knight, 2013). Also, encouraging clients who are religious to find added support from their religious community may be helpful. According to Kim (2016), religious support helps racial minorities cope with experiences of racial microaggressions. These counseling experiences about race can also create intense personal and professional growth experiences for counselors to recognize their unresolved biases, beliefs, and emotions about race relations, power, oppression, and privilege (Knight, 2013). Appropriate self-disclosure could be a powerful mechanism in therapy to help clients feel safe sharing their experiences about racial microaggressions and other racial traumas (Knight, 2013). Nevertheless, the emotional intensity of conversations about racial microaggressions may contribute to counselors avoiding having these conversations altogether in counseling with clients. Such avoidance is similar to how people avoid going to counseling or dealing with their trauma in another healthy way because of how painful and difficult

their pain is to face. Therefore, seeking clinical supervision and support is crucial to help counselors navigate these issues which can eventually lead to significant healing and growth for them and their clients.

The Role of Counselor Educators and Supervisors

Considering the widespread issues of racial microaggressions in counseling and within society, counselor educators and supervisors also have an ethical obligation to address this issue from social justice, ethical, and public health perspectives through education, leadership, research, teaching, and advocacy (see ACA, 2014; ACES, 2011; Ratts et al., 2015). In recent studies, authors acknowledged that having race-based conversations in counselor education programs can be difficult and evoke strong emotions within students that may cause them to feel bad about their role in engaging in racist behaviors and shut down in the classroom (Malott et al., 2015; Sue, 2013). Consequently, some counselor educators and supervisors may not discuss racial issues including racial microaggressions to avoid experiencing adverse reactions from students and supervisees as well as not having to deal with their discomfort and anxiety surrounding these topics (Malott et al., 2015; Sue, 2013). However, there are ways to facilitate this learning in a non-threatening way which may include non-traditional forms of instructions such experiential activities focused on creating awareness about racial microaggressions, and the need to unlearn behaviors and messages from society about Whiteness being the standard (Malott et al., 2015; Sue, 2013).

Another helpful approach that counselor educators and supervisors can use is appropriate self-disclosure which may help students and supervisees learn about their

struggles and biases about racism and racial microaggressions (ACA, 2014; Malott et al., 2015; Sue, 2013). Having frank discussions in the classroom may also help students to be honest about where they need the most help in practicing cultural competence (ACA, 2014; Malott et al., 2015; Sue, 2013). Counselor educators that give students a safe place to ask questions and process what they are learning and feeling will help them to gain meaningful lessons from these interactions (Malott et al., 2015). For example, students learning about their peers' lived experiences, that may be different from theirs, can help students to understand more about different individuals' lived experiences (Linder al., 2015; Malott et al., 2015). Doing so can help counseling students to realize that although they engaged in microaggressions, they can change these actions. Counselor educators and supervisors should also avoid tokenizing any student who is a person of color to speak on behalf of their race, as this can be harmful to them (ACA, 2014; Malott et al., 2015). Similarly, counselor educators should not pressure or shame students who have differing views or do not wish to share or participate in activities surrounding these topics and allow them to be where they are once they respect everyone else in the class (ACA, 2014; Malott et al., 2015). Debriefing sessions can also help students to process what the experience was like for them.

Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the search strategy I used to find articles on my topic which included the databases I accessed and the search terms I used to find research articles. I summarized the literature on racial microaggressions, divided it into subtopics, and provided a thorough critique of articles showing germane scholarship in my literature

review which was crucial to building my rationale for my study. One major theme that emerged from the current literature was that racial microaggressions led mental and physical consequences for persons of Black descent who experience them (Nadal et al., 2017; Nadal, Griffin, et al., 2014; Robinson-Wood et al., 2015; Williams et al., 2016). The second theme was that racial, ethnic, and other microaggressions occur in various places in society such as schools, workplaces, counseling, on buses and trains, and within criminal justice (Bowleg et al., 2013; Griffin et al., 2016; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015; Joshi et al., 2015; Linder al., 2015; Mcgee, 2016; Peralta, 2015; Purifoye, 2015; Isom, 2016). The third theme was that counselors need to understand that Black individuals have intersecting identities that can increase the number of racial microaggressions they experience (Nadal et al., 2017). The fourth theme was that counselors need to learn how to avoid committing racial microaggressions in counseling and educate the general population about the health risks they pose in hopes of minimizing them in society (Mazzula & Nadal, 2015; Nadal et al., 2017; Nadal, Griffin, et al., 2014).

A few studies addressed counseling implications through the lens of mental health professionals giving insights on how counselors can address racial microaggressions in counseling (Forrest-Bank & Jenson, 2015; Giesekus, 2014; Hook et al., 2016; Knight, 2013; Mazzula & Nadal, 2015). Moreover, there are many quantitative and a few qualitative studies that addressed Black individuals' experiences with racial microaggressions and highlighted the mental and physical impact it has on them (Bowleg et al., 2013; Hook et al., 2016; Knight, 2013; Mazzula & Nadal, 2015; Nadal et al., 2017; Owen et al., 2014; Sue, 2013). But, the voices of Black individuals who experienced

racial microaggressions sharing their perspectives on how counselors could best support them in counseling is still missing from the literature. Therefore, I conducted a hermeneutic phenomenological study using IPA as the conceptual framework to learn about the lived experiences of persons of Black descent with racial microaggressions to generate counseling implications from the population's perspective using a community sample.

The participants in my study shared information to support existing literature such as the importance of validating, rather than invalidating clients' lived experiences with racial microaggressions (Mazzula & Nadal, 2015). Hearing directly from the population lessened the gap in the literature and contributed to positive social change. I used RCT as the theoretical framework in the study to analyze the data from the participant interviews because relationships are important in everyone's life and RCT focuses on building and maintaining healthy relationships (Frey, 2013; Haskins & Appling, 2017; Jordan, 2009; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). In Chapter 3, I will on the research method for the study including the procedures for recruiting a community sample, data collection, and analyses.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of Black people with racial microaggressions and implications for counseling (Nadal, Griffin, et al., 2014; Robinson-Wood et al., 2015). An operational definition for "Racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 273). Using a hermeneutic phenomenological design and IPA as the framework allowed me to explore Black individuals' experiences with racial microaggressions (Creswell, 2013; Dowling & Cooney, 2012; Patton, 2015). The findings can add to counseling competencies for counselors working with Black individuals by providing information to improve the training counselors receive in graduate school, which can enhance the services Black clients receive from counselors. In this chapter, I expound on the research method, research design, and my rationale for selecting it for the study. I also explain the population, recruitment, and sample size. Further, I discuss the interview questions and protocol and my role as the researcher. Finally, I include my data analysis plan, trustworthiness, and ethical practices throughout the study.

Research Design and Rationale

Qualitative researchers strive to capture the voices of individuals who have had lived experiences with a phenomenon (Patton, 2005; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009). In this study, I explored the lived experiences of Black people who

encountered racial microaggressions using a hermeneutic phenomenological design. The main research question for the study was: What are the lived experiences of Black persons who experience racial microaggressions? The subquestion was: What do Black people who have lived experiences with racial microaggressions want counselors to know about how to best help them in counseling? The central phenomenon I explored in this study was racial microaggressions. "*Racial microaggressions* are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 273). *Microinsults*: "characterized by communications that convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person's racial heritage or identity" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 274). *Microinvalidations*: "are characterized by communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color' (Sue et al., 2007, p. 274). *Microassaults*: "explicit racial derogation characterized primarily by a verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions' (Sue et al., 2007, p. 274). I explored the lived experiences of Black people who encountered racial microaggressions in this study. According to the United States Census Bureau, Back or African American is "a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017).

I used IPA as the conceptual framework and drew from hermeneutic phenomenology (Dowling & Cooney, 2012; Patton, 2005; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009) to explore the lived experiences of Black individuals who have

experienced racial microaggressions and provided implication for counseling. Hermeneutic phenomenology along with IPA allowed me to add to the historical aspect of the participants' experiences (see Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009; Laverty, 2003). In IPA, researchers uncover the significance and sense participants make of their experiences (Laverty, 2003; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009). Because IPA builds on phenomenology, I explored how individuals made sense of their lived experiences with racial microaggressions and learned about the meanings they associated with them through semi structured interviews. Experiencing racial microaggressions can be an emotionally sensitive and individualized experience; therefore, using a qualitative, rather than quantitative approach allowed me to capture participants' lived experiences on a deeper level. Although a transcendental phenomenological study would have allowed me to learn about the participants' lived experiences, it would not have allowed me to include my interpretations of the participants meaning making, known as double hermeneutics (see Creswell, 2013; Smith et al., 2009).

A researcher using IPA can decide to highlight details of a sole case or give a general analysis of the population group of the study (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). I give a general account of the lived experiences of the participant group in my study. Regardless of which approach a researcher takes, using IPA to inform a study requires giving each participant's unique experience undivided attention to interpret and analyze the data by pointing out different and similar experiences in each as well as analyzing how these experiences create meaning for the participants (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012;

Smith et al., 2009). Consequently, the sample sizes in IPA studies are smaller and homogeneous so that the researcher may attend to each case thoroughly (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009).

Role of the Researcher

My role in this study was a participant-researcher (Patton, 2015). I conducted semistructured interviews that lasted 40 minutes and up to a 1 hour and 04 minutes to generate an open and natural discussion with participants about their lived experiences. I gave each participant a $20 gift card at the beginning of the interview to express my gratitude for their time and then started the audio recorded interview. However, one participant refused the gift card and said he was interviewing to contribute to a great cause and the gift card was unnecessary. I strived to minimize risks and harm to participants and controlled for bias throughout the research process (see Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009). I was mindful that I am a Black woman who has lived experiences with racial microaggressions, so I took precautions to avoid skewing the participants' answers by bracketing my experiences and beliefs about the topic. During the interviews, I did not give opinions, shared individual experiences, or interpreted what participants said (see Bourke, 2014; Smith et al., 2009). I asked the participants open-ended questions, used minimal encouragers, and probed to get more information on important points (see Smith et al., 2009). When needed, I asked participants for clarification, rephrased interview questions to ensure understanding, and made statements to facilitate the discussion and build rapport (see ACA, 2014). I also engaged in member checking with participants to ensure data accuracy, took memo notes, and worked with

my dissertation committee members who served as data quality reviewers during the data analysis phase. My relationship with the participants was for this study only.

Methodology

Based on achieving data saturation, I strived to interview six to eight Black adults, which included anyone who identifies racially as Black, African American, Black Caribbean-American, or African. Six to eight participants were within the normal range in qualitative studies to gain a thorough analysis of a specific population while achieving saturation (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Robinson, 2014; Smith et al., 2009). After achieving saturation at seven interviews after hearing the same themes across interviews, I stopped recruiting participants. My study was open to participants of any religion, socioeconomic, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, or another group. The participants had to have lived experiences with racial microaggressions, live in Florida due to the face-to-face interview requirement, and be willing to share their experiences and give their perspectives on how counselors could support Black people in counseling. I used snowball and convenience sampling to obtain a purposeful homogenous sample, which are common sampling strategies in IPA studies, especially when researching sensitive topics (Robinson, 2014). Racial microaggression is a sensitive and emotional topic, making these sampling choices right for the study. Small sample sizes also allow IPA researchers to look for similarities and differences among cases while conducting an in-depth case by case analysis of participants' lived experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Robinson, 2014; Smith et al., 2009).

To increase validity, I adhered to the inclusion criterion for the study (Patton, 2015; Robinson, 2014). The exclusion criteria were individuals who were under the age of 18, those with disabilities that prohibited them from giving legal consent, non-Black individuals, and those who could not participate in the face-to-face interview. Before obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for the study (approval no. 04-06-18-0547328), I sought permission from the presidents of two National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) chapters in Florida to recruit participants. I contacted the presidents by e-mail and phone, introduced myself, explained the study, and asked if they would send my call for participants letter to their organization's members after I got IRB approval. After they said yes, I included their names and the names of their chapters in the IRB application I completed for the study. Getting permission from organizational gatekeepers was the best way to access potential study participants (Smith et al., 2009).

Instrumentation

I used six semi structured interview questions in the interview protocol (see Appendix A) to help the participants describe their lived experiences with racial microaggressions. The open-ended interview questions aligned with IPA as the conceptual framework and evolved with the study as participants shared their lived experiences and the meaning they associated with them (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009). My dissertation committee members and IRB personnel reviewed and approved the interview protocol and ensured content validity (see ACA, 2014; Patton, 2015).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Once I obtained IRB approval to start collecting data, I began my procedures for recruitment. I notified the presidents of the Orange and Osceola County Branches of the NAACP by phone and e-mail that I was ready to start recruiting participants from their organizations via e-mail and chapter Facebook pages. I provided them with my recruitment letter, which described the study, criteria, purpose, and included the IRB approval number as well as my contact information so that interested persons could reach me via phone or e-mail to learn more about the study. During the conversations with the potential participants, I gave them an overview of the study, asked screening questions (see Appendix B) to confirm that they fit the inclusion criteria, and answered the questions they had about the study. For those who fit the criteria and agreed to an interview, I provided them with a copy of the informed consent document by e-mail to review. Those individuals then had a choice to give electronic consent by replying to my e-mail with the words "I consent," or signing a hard copy in person. Only one person chose to sign in person while everyone else replied with the words "I consent" via e-mail. Once I obtained consent, I began data collection by scheduling the one-time one-hour audio-recorded interview with each participant. Four of the interviews occurred in a private room at a local library, and three took place in a private conference room of those interviewees' workplace. Six to eight participants should be enough to achieve saturation in a phenomenological study (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). I stopped interviewing after seven participants at which point themes became redundant, and I achieved saturation.

On the day of the interview, I verbally reviewed the informed consent and got verbal confirmation that the participants understood everything and consented to participate in the study (see ACA, 2014; Janesick, 2011). I answered final questions they had and started the recording device on my laptop computer where I audio recorded the interviews. During the interviews, I remained patient, used interviewing skills such as trust and rapport building, nonverbal attending, and asked warm-up questions to help each interviewee feel comfortable about sharing their lived experiences about racial microaggressions (see Haahr et al., 2014; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Janesick, 2011; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Price & Nicholl, 2013). I also asked follow-up questions to clarify and gather more information about their experiences. The semi-structured protocol gave me some flexibility during the interview to have a natural conversation with each participant while sticking to the hour timeframe (see Janesick, 2011; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009). I asked the research questions verbatim but rephrased them when necessary to aid participants' understanding of each question (see Janesick, 2011; Patton, 2015) and changed the question order when appropriate to keep the conversation flowing. These adjustments are common in IPA studies (see Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

Due to the nature of this study, I was prepared to provide crisis counseling if a participant became emotional while discussing their experiences and had local counseling referrals to give them if they needed further counseling support. However, no one became emotional or needed counseling support during or after the interviews. At the end of the interview, I thanked each participant for their time and reminded them that I

would contact them after summarizing their transcribed interviews to make sure I accurately captured their experiences. I also asked the first three participants to share my contact information with anyone who met the criteria and may be interested in participating in the study.

Research participants can act as informal gatekeepers by talking about their interview experience and encouraging other qualified individuals within their social circles to participate in a study (Seidman, 2013). Two participants in my study referred other potential research candidates and some of them made up the rest of the sample. After transcribing and summarizing each interview, I asked every participant to review the summary of their interview to see if I captured their lived experience accurately by providing feedback within two weeks of receiving it. Some participants needed an e-mail reminder to review their interview summary and two of them did not respond to member checking. However, asking research participants to do this is an important member checking step in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009). The last potential contact with the participants will be to disseminate the findings of the study if they are interested in receiving them.

Data Analysis

After completing the interviews and transcribing them verbatim using a website called Voice Base, I followed IPA's steps for data analysis: (a) Step 1 required listening to a single recording while reading the transcript multiple times to recall the interview setting and milieu (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009). In this step, I also bracketed my thoughts for later analysis by making notes of them on the transcript; (b)

Step 2 involved making notes in the margins of the transcript of interesting points from the interviews which allowed me to become familiar with each participant's lived experiences and the meaning they made of them (see Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009). The notes can be descriptive using words or phrases to describe the participants' accounts of their experiences or linguistic by using the words, jargon, and behavioral cues of participants (Smith et al., 2009). My notes in the margins included both descriptive words and phrases about the interviews. I then moved to interpretive or conceptual notes based on my initial interpretations of the participants' accounts of their experiences (see Smith et al., 2009).

I incorporated my bracketed thoughts from step one with new thoughts I developed as I went through each transcript (see Smith et al., 2009); (c) Step 3 entailed looking for emergent themes in the data by focusing more on my notes and how they connected with parts of the transcript based on the participant's lived experiences creating a hermeneutic circle (see Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009). The emergent themes captured the essence of the data I collected and analyzed up to this point (see Smith et al., 2009); (d) in Step 4, I looked for connections among the themes and mapped and merged some and discarded those that no longer fit (see Smith et al., 2009); (e) I repeated the first four steps for each subsequent transcript (see Smith et al., 2009); (f) in Step 6, I looked for patterns and comparisons across cases to generate a list of super-ordinate or final themes (see Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009).

I analyzed the data and connected it to the research literature by identifying connections and contradictions in it and added what I learned from conducting the study

(see Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009). As a scholar-practitioner in the counseling profession, I connected participants' experiences to counseling theories and gained insights into my research problem (see Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). The theoretical framework in the study was relational-cultural therapy (RCT), which focuses on healthy social relationships and social justice (see Frey, 2013; Haskins & Appling, 2017; Jordan, 2009; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). I used RCT to explore how the final themes in the study influenced the participants' interpersonal relationships and advocacy efforts. I learned from the participants their perspectives on what counselors can do to strengthen counseling relationships with clients of Black descent who have lived experiences with racial microaggressions as well as how counselors can help them develop skills to form and maintain healthy interpersonal relationships in society.

Issues of Trustworthiness

To address issues of trustworthiness in the study, I performed a thorough literature review of research that supported as well as contradicted my findings to show research credibility (see Patton, 2015). I created inclusion and exclusion criteria to make my sample purposeful and homogeneous to show credibility and dependability (see Patton, 2015; Robinson, 2014). Unlike quantitative research, the goal of qualitative research is not generalizability, but transferability. To improve transferability, I employed IPA, a widely used theory in qualitative research (see Smith et al., 2009). I gave an in-depth analysis of each case and used member checks after summarizing the research transcripts to ensure I accurately captured the participants' experiences before analyzing the data which showed dependability in data analysis. Member checking also

showed confirmability. I used reflexivity by stating my connection to the study that may contribute to bias; I also relied on my committee members' review of my coding procedures to capture inter-rater reliability (see Creswell, 2013; O'Connor, 2011; Patton, 2015). I avoided imposing my values and beliefs about racial microaggressions on the participants by limiting my comments during the interviews (see Patton, 2015). The IRB and dissertation committee checked my interview protocol for content validity (see ACA, 2014; Patton, 2015).

Ethical Procedures

The overall goal of every ethical researcher is to conduct a quality and thorough studies without causing harm to research participants. My dissertation committee and IRB reviewed the study, recommended changes, and ensured that I maintained the highest quality and research ethics throughout the study. After obtaining IRB approval for the study, I sent my call for participants to the presidents of two local NAACP chapters for dissemination to their membership through their chapters' e-mail and Facebook pages. I screened each potential participant during our initial contact and right before starting the interview to make sure they were cognitively and emotionally able to give informed consent to participate in the study (see ACA, 2014). After they passed that screening, I provided them with a copy of the informed consent document which explained the purpose, benefits, risks, and limitations of participating in the study, time commitment, confidentiality procedures, voluntary nature of participating which included the option to withdraw from the study at any time. No one withdrew from the study. However, if anyone did, I would have thanked them for their participation, stopped all

communication with them, and discarded whatever data I collected from them up to that point.

I informed potential participants that I will store their data in a locked file on my computer for five years before destroying it, per Walden University's procedures and shared how I will disseminate the study's findings (see ACA, 2014; NBCC, 2012). After they agreed to participate in the study and I obtained their verbal and written consent, I assigned them a pseudonym to protect their identities which I used to identify them from that point on. Due to the sensitive nature of the research topic, I was prepared to provide crisis counseling during or right after the interview and was prepared to make referrals available if any participant needed further counseling. Each participant except one who refused it, received a $20 gift card to Amazon or Walmart at the beginning of the interview for their time rather than at the end to avoid coercion.

Summary

In this chapter, I restated the study's purpose, rationale, design, and research questions. I described my role as a participant-researcher and explained how I would use IPA as the research method. I described the population, recruitment strategies, interview protocol, participation, and RCT as the lens for data analysis and IPA as the framework. I also discussed ways I ensured data trustworthy and upheld ethical practices throughout the study. In Chapter 4, I will further discuss my data collection strategies, describe the participants' demographics, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and the study's results.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

My purpose for this study was to learn about the lived experiences of Black individuals who experienced racial microaggressions as well as gain their perspectives on what interventions and approaches counselors can use with Black clients in counseling to increase the chances of them having positive counseling outcomes. The main research question in the study was: What are the lived experiences of Black persons who experience racial microaggressions? The research subquestion was: What do Black people who have lived experiences with racial microaggressions want counselors to know about how to best help them in counseling? In this chapter, I describe the settings where I collected data, summarize the participants' demographic information, the locations, and details of data collection. I also explain the data analysis, including the emergent themes and categories, results, and measures I used to ensure trustworthiness in the study.

Setting

The participants had the option to choose a public library or a community meeting space convenient for them to meet me for the interview. Four participants selected a convenient public library location on a day and time, they were available, and I paid the $10 fee to reserve a private room for the interview on the library's website. Three participants chose a free private room in office buildings on a day and time they were available. Each participant and I were the sole persons in the meeting spaces during the interviews. The interviews occurred with little to no interruptions, although one interviewee and I heard a child yelling outside one of the library meeting rooms for a

short period during an interview. There were also minor traffic sounds from the road during a few interviews that took place at the same library location.

Demographics

As outlined in the interview protocol, I asked the seven participants their gender, current educational status, relationship or marital status, age, and spiritual orientation. During the interview, some participants also shared where they were from and the work they do, which I included in their demographic description. To protect the participants' identities, I assigned them a pseudonym; I will use that name when referring to them in the study.

Diane

Diane was a 43-year-old heterosexual female who identifies as an African American. Diane is a mother of two adult children and is divorced. Diane has a bachelor's degree and is an executive assistant in a small city office in Florida. Diane is also a Christian minister and business owner who is passionate about helping individuals and families live their best lives. She does this by offering community health and empowerment seminars.

Chad

Chad was an African-American heterosexual 32-year-old male college student and full-time professional in the technology industry in Florida. He was single and did not have any children. Chad did not identify with any religion but grew up Christian and has a spiritual relationship with God at the time of his interview.

Sam

Sam was a 25-year-old African-American heterosexual single female and did not have any children. Sam was in her last semester of pharmacy school in Florida. She did not identify with any religion at the time of her interview.

Teresa

Teresa was a 65-year-old married African-American heterosexual female who has two adult children. Teresa reported having a master's degree in special education, a bachelor's degree in specific learning disabilities and varying exceptionalities, and an associate degree in general studies. Teresa was a retired special education teacher and identified spiritually and religiously as a nondenominational Christian at the time of her interview.

Nikki

Nikki was a 30-year-old Black female of Caribbean descent from the island of Jamaica. Nikki was single and did not have any children. Nikki had a master's degree in business administration and worked in a bank vault in Florida. Nikki identified spiritually and religiously as a Christian at the time of her interview.

Owen

Owen was a 35-year-old heterosexual Black male of Caribbean descent from the island of Jamaica. Owen was single and did not have any children. During his childhood, Owen moved to Florida from Jamaica and worked in the technology industry. Owen has a bachelor's degree in film. Owen identified spiritually and religiously as a Christian at the time of his interview.

Jabari

Jabari was a 46-year-old heterosexual Africa-American male who has lived in Florida all his life. Jabari has a wife and one child. Jabari has a high school diploma and worked in human resources as a trainer in the mental health field. Jabari identified religiously and spiritually as a nondenominational Christian at the time of his interview.

Data Collection

There were seven participants in this study. I conducted four of the interviews at one of two local libraries and three in private rooms of office buildings. I interviewed each participant one time face to face with a planned time of 1 hour; the actual interviews ranged from 40 minutes to 1 hour and 04 minutes. I audio recorded the interviews using a Microsoft Windows standard recorder on my laptop. The initial plan I outlined in Chapter 3 was for me to transcribe all the interviews manually. However, after transcribing one interview, I decided that it was too time consuming to do them myself. Therefore, after getting IRB approval to change my research procedures, I used Voicebase's human transcription service to transcribe the other six interviews. I did not encounter any unusual circumstances during data collection.

Data Analysis

Because I used IPA as the conceptual framework for this study, I used the six data analyses steps provided by Smith et al. (2009) to analyze my research data. In Step 1 after the first interview with a female participant, I wrote a research memo about my initial thoughts about the interview, completed and read the transcript multiple times while I listened to the interview recording, and made notes in the margin about the salient

points and my thoughts about what interviewee's lived experiences (see Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009). In Step 2, I highlighted and made conceptual, linguistic, and exploratory notes of the meaning the interviewee made of her experiences as well as added my additional thoughts and analyses in the transcript each time I read it (see Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009). This process allowed me to analyze the first case on a deeper level while capturing the interviewees' meaning-making of her lived experiences. During this step, I also created an interview summary from the transcript which included the interviewees' responses to each interview question and e-mailed it to them for member checking (see Creswell, 2013; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009). In Step 3, I created a separate Word document where I added my notes including phrases and words from the transcript of preliminary and emerging themes as I prepared to start coding the data and identifying the final themes.

After the previous three steps, I began working more with the emerging themes, starting the hermeneutic circle process. The hermeneutic circle involves looking at how each part of a study links such as connecting the data in each transcript to the entire phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2013; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009). In Step 4, I used abstraction which involved clustering and categorizing patterns from the preliminary themes in the order they emerged from the data to create the study's major themes (see Smith et al., 2009). I then moved on to Step 5, which involved leaving the first case, and completing steps one through four for that case and the next five cases (see Smith et al., 2009). I also bracketed as much as possible by analyzing each case

separately from the analysis performed in the previous cases (see Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

Finally, in Step 6, I looked for patterns and themes that occurred across all cases and created themes that emerged in at least one-third of the interviews using an excel spreadsheet to compare and contrast them (see Smith et al., 2009). This step involved reevaluating, renaming, clustering, and categorizing the themes using RCT, which led to a total of seven major or superordinate themes and 23 categories I clustered within the themes based on likeness. Themes included: (a) lived experiences with racial microaggressions, in which all participants described having multiple experiences either directly or indirectly with microaggressions; (b) emotional responses to racial microaggressions, which included categories of disliking these experiences, hypervigilance, and feeling judged; (c) intersectionality, included categories of feeling targeted because of one' s gender and race such as being a Black man; (d) coping with racial microaggressions entailed categories of participants using their self-confidence, focusing on Black power and excellence, personal choice, and spirituality and religion to cope with racial microaggressions; (e) advocacy and social justice, which involved Black people exemplifying leadership skills by helping others who may feel disempowered by their experiences to use their voices to stand up for themselves; (f) neighborhood and community social support, where participants shared the benefits and needs of them having social support to overcome their lived experiences with racial microaggressions including categories of making social connections, parental roles/responsibilities, and White allies; and (g) implications for counseling involved participants giving their

perspectives on what counselors can do to increase positive counseling outcomes of Black clients including using individuals and innovative counseling interventions and understanding a Black client's history. I will discuss the themes further in this chapter.

Discrepancies

All cases were consistent regarding participants' lived experiences and implications for counseling. The only difference or discrepancy I uncovered was that some participants reported having more lived experiences with racial microaggressions than others. For example, Nikki did not report having as many personal lived experiences with racial microaggressions as the other interviewees. However, that may relate to her tendency not to let her lived experiences with racial microaggressions affect her as much as she thinks African Americans do by focusing too on those experiences. Nikki attributed her perspectives on this issue to her Caribbean upbringing including working hard and not letting anyone deter her from achieving her goals, especially when she has the privilege of studying, working, and living in the United States. Nikki's tendency of overlooking her experiences of racial microaggressions is consistent with the findings of Griffin et al. (2016), who found that international students underreport their experiences with racism by focusing more on the privileges they have of living and studying in the United States. However, Owen, who is also from Jamaica, described his lived experiences with racial microaggressions similarly to the other interviewees who are U.S. natives, showing different perspectives of participants with similar nationalities. A final discrepancy was that Teresa viewed her experiences mostly as indirect racial

microaggressions in work and academic settings while the other participants reported experiencing more direct experiences in multiple settings.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Qualitative researchers must provide evidence of trustworthiness in their studies. Trustworthiness includes research credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Although these measures may look different in each qualitative inquiry, all qualitative researchers must show the ethical procedures they used in studies, which may involve some overlapping tasks. During this study, I ensured trustworthiness by completing the process of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility involves researchers showing the steps they take during a study to expand on the current research literature, including the theory they use to support their work (Patton, 2015; Robinson, 2014). Credibility also includes researchers' training in employing qualitative methods, fieldwork, member checking, and triangulation (Patton, 2015; Robinson, 2014). During this study, I conducted a thorough literature review and included current research that supported and contradicted my findings. I engaged in fieldwork by collecting data and performing member checks with the research participants to ensure I accurately captured their lived experiences. I also used triangulation in which my dissertation committee members served as added data reviewers to strengthen the data.

Transferability

Transferability involves linking the current literature on the topic of study to a qualitative method of inquiry and the researchers' personal and professional experiences to that phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). Transferability in qualitative research is the equivalent of generalizability in quantitative research. However, unlike generalizability, which includes applying the findings to a larger population in quantitative research, qualitative researchers use transferability to show similarities in outcomes and to provide as many details as possible about their research processes. In this study, I implemented transferability by using IPA as my conceptual framework for data analysis, which allowed me to give a detailed description of the six steps I used for analysis. I also confirmed the accuracy of the data via member checking. However, two of the seven participants did not respond to member checking, so I relied on the data they provided during their interviews for data analysis.

Dependability

Dependability allows researchers to show the steps they took during a qualitative study, which others can verify and follow based on the research method used (Patton, 2015; Robinson, 2014). For example, if another researcher wanted to replicate the study, they should be able to do it by following the steps the researchers used to carry out the study. In this study, I ensured dependability by outlining the steps I took to execute the study. For example, I created and described the inclusion and exclusion criteria I used to make my sample purposeful and homogeneous. I also described the steps I took during data analysis which were the six steps of conducting IPA research. The process included

doing a case-by-case analysis and comparison of the interview data. I also explained that I summarized the research transcripts and sent them to each participant for member checking.

Confirmability

Like dependability, confirmability requires that researchers keep records of the data collected and analyzed and show support for their findings and interpretations in the existing research literature. Member checking is also an example of confirmability (Patton, 2015). I used confirmability during this study by completing member checks, and I completed an extensive literature review on racial microaggressions to show integrity in the data I collected and analyzed. I also have a secured electronic record of the data including the transcripts, recordings, research notes memos, and all other forms of data I collected during the study. Therefore, the data is available on request of auditors at any time during this process and for the next 5 years if needed.

Other evidence of trustworthiness I used in this study included obtaining informed consent, practicing confidentiality, and minimizing my comments during the interviews to only when necessary. Examples of when I needed to make comments during the interviews were to clarify questions, summarize statements and positions of the participants, or help move the conversation forward. Doing so also prevented me from imposing my personal values and beliefs about the topic on to the participants. I also reminded participants that they could share whatever they wanted in response to each interview question and that there was no right, wrong, or desired answers other than them sharing their lived experiences. Finally, I sought content validity through the IRB's study

review process and my dissertation committee members' oversight of my research procedures. By using these methods of trustworthiness, I showed research ethics and quality throughout the study (see ACA, 2014; Patton, 2015).

Results

The main research question answered in this study was: What are the lived experiences of Black persons who experience racial microaggressions? I answered the research question with exerts from the transcripts about what the participants shared about their lived experiences with racial microaggressions, how they affect them, and how they cope and overcome them. The subquestion was: What do Black people who have lived experiences with racial microaggressions want counselors to know about how to best help them in counseling? I answered the subquestion through the participants' perspectives on implications for counseling Black individuals. The answers to these questions resulted in seven themes and 23 categories: (a) lived experiences with racial microaggressions, (b) emotional responses to racial microaggressions, (c) intersectionality, (d) coping with racial microaggressions, (e) advocacy and social justice, (f) neighborhood and community social support, and (g) implications for counseling. I addressed each theme and category below and included a small chart for each theme and category in Figures 1-7.

Theme 1: Lived Experiences of Racial Microaggressions

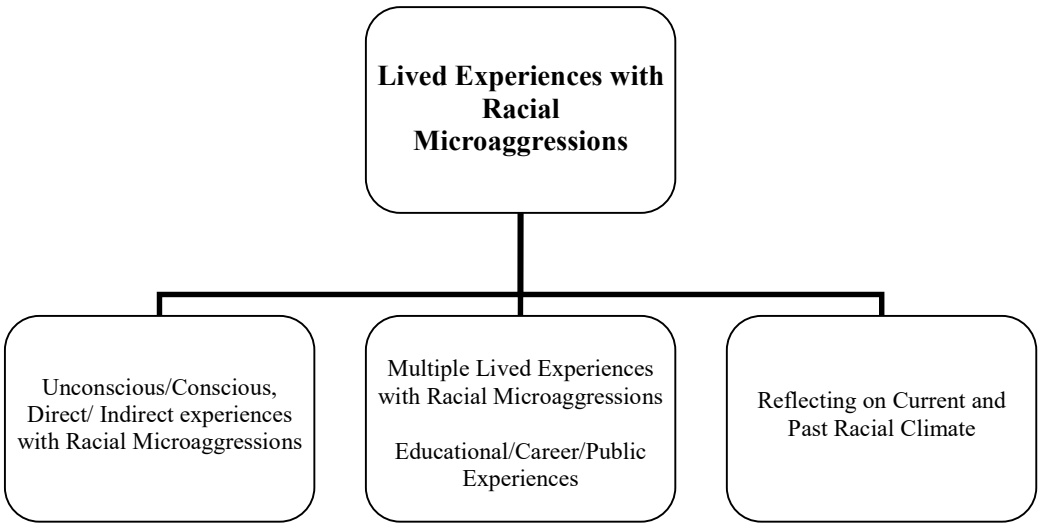

Figure 1. Lived experiences of racial microaggressions.

All participants shared experiences within the first theme, lived experiences of racial microaggressions which had the following categories unconscious, conscious, direct, indirect experiences with racial microaggressions, multiple lived experiences with racial microaggressions, educational/career, and public experiences, and current and past racial climate. These results support prior research findings where individuals reported experiencing racial microaggressions in multiple settings (Griffin et al., 2016; Owen et al., 2014; Robinson-Wood et al., 2015). All participants reported an overwhelming combined number of lived experiences with racial microaggressions. These encounters happen in various settings such as school, work, their neighborhood, or while seeking professional services.

Category 1: Unconscious, conscious, direct, indirect experiences with racial microaggressions. All participants reported having multiple lived experiences with racial

microaggressions in forms of direct and indirect experiences. An example of a direct microinsult came from Diane who said the following:

> And some are unconscious at times, but I do remember going to my family physician's office for a scheduled appointment, and after checking in and taking my seat in the lobby, I sat directly next to an African American, not African American but a Caucasian male and after sitting down, he got completely up and walked to another side of the room.

Chad gave an example of an indirect microinsult he experienced while he was among a group of White friends and their White acquaintances in the following statement:

> And I remember him talking about something completely separate and he made a reference to somebody. And he goes, yeah when people don't really bother us we don't really bother them, right. And when he said he looked at me. And mind you, I'm always the only Black person in those scenarios. This is a trailer park; this is conservative White folks except a few of my friends, who are White but wouldn't necessarily be considered conservatives.

Chad also gave another example of a direct microassault he experienced during a negative encounter with a police officer while running to his friend's house for a social gathering:

> I was about halfway there, a cop pulled up around me and stopped me and says where are you running? He says, could you hold it right there, please? Some kind of stop don't move kind of thing just to threaten you first and get the upper hand real quick. Saw a Black guy running on the street, and he went so far as to

handcuff me with the plastic handcuffs, the strip or whatever. He sat me on the ground. He says, can I search you? Do you have any drugs on you? I said, no, I don't have any drugs on me. I was just running to my friend's house. And he was like where are you headed? And I told him where I was going again. I was heading to my friend's house. Then he took my phone out of my pocket, and he was like, if I call the person that you're going to meet. Are they gonna say that you're running there?

Sam explained that she has had multiple encounters throughout her lifetime and shared both indirect and direct experiences:

In my lifetime. It has happened a lot. Like I said, not necessarily directly towards me, indirectly while I was in a group . . . this has happened since I was a child. Was, people commenting on me talking White, speaking White. I didn't really understand what that meant when I was younger, of course. I thought everybody spoke the same. We had different dialects, but I never heard of a dialect of White. And that was something that was told to both me and my sister growing up for many, many years by all different groups, particularly the Black group. And that later on, I did realize that that was kind of looked at as the best way to speak. White is the best way to speak. And they were trying to compliment me. [LAUGH] I don't think there's anything negative going on when they said that, but just the fact that they were associating my speaking well with being White absolutely is racial. And that one was pretty much the main one that I heard growing up constantly. So that one's a big one. Really the only one that I can

> really remember growing up is, why do you talk so White? Really, it happened a lot, so that one for sure. And it happened with me and my sister.

Teresa mostly shared experiences related to her academic and professional careers. In one example, she shared an experience where a White teacher at the Historically Black college she attended committed verbal microaggressions against her and her classmates in the following statement:

> We had a History teacher, who came from Alabama, and he would initially call us niggras. And then the guys in the class said if you do that one more time, it's not gonna be pleasant in here, so he stopped calling us that.

Teresa also shared a personal experience she had with her mother where her mother became upset with a White person for honking their horn at her while driving:

> I will talk about this one time I was with my mom. We were at the mall, at the post office, it was one of the kiosk kind of post offices that you drive up to… my mom was driving… she was too slow for the person behind her in the car, and the person was just blowing at her. And my mom began to use profanity in a way I've never heard. I said, what's wrong? … and my mom said to me, when we were young, we thought White people were Gods. We had to treat them like they were Gods. Now that I'm older and know better, the person better get off my back. So, I never agreed with the profanity part, but I never knew until she expressed that. What she went through. So, we experienced that one thing together.

Nikki shared that people complimented her on her professional and formal speech and demeanor which comes out as a microinsult in the following statement:

> I startle people because, the way I'm talking to you now, that's how I speak to everyone. I'm very formal in the way I talk. So, they're like! And see how I'm sitting? My posture is on point, so I startle people with that, too. They're like, well, you speak so nice. Well, yes, I do! What do you expect me to sound like?

Owen discussed him and other Black people's experiences of police racially profiling them, yet they receive invalidating messages from society with slogans such as All Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter in response to the Black Lives Matter movement. He said the following: "They talk about Blue Lives Matter. My gosh. You guys can quit being cops. I can't quit being Black." Jabari shared an offense verbal microinsult that he experienced while he played football:

> Being on a football team in (county name omitted for anonymity) County and having one of the coaches comment on myself and a few other African American players. That it's in our blood to be workhorses. And the way that he said it, it kind of rubbed us the wrong way, to the point where we thought that there was like a demeaning statement.

Jabari also shared an experience he had in public while he was in line at a fast food restaurant and a White couple skipped him and placed their order without acknowledging him:

> And I'm standing in the aisle, the walkway, to go make my order. They came around me, went to the front counter was like, hey, how's it going? Yeah, this

> blah blah blah. I'm just standing there like [SOUND]. And then, all of the sudden, yeah, can I get this, and this, and this, and that, whatever? Yeah, sure. It's just something as simple as, and I mean, it was a quick order. But I still felt the intrusion.

In this category, all participants shared their lived experiences with direct and indirect racial microaggressions. They described that these incidents happened in different settings in forms of microinsults and microassaults. The current research literature supports that it is common for individuals to have these experiences in various settings (Griffin et al., 2016; Owen et al., 2014; Robinson-Wood et al., 2015).

Category 2.1: Multiple experiences with racial microaggressions. Five participants shared that they had multiple experiences with racial microaggressions across their lifespan. Diane said that she has had multiple experiences with racial microaggressions especially when she feels judged unfairly because of her race and what she describes as her ethnic presentation. She also admitted that sometimes, it is difficult for her to not respond negatively during these situations:

> And its oftentimes, when given the opportunity to sit and interact with me they realize that… Oh no, she's not, what I thought she was. You know, so that, that's another experience. And, and that right there is very edgy for me. It really is! I am not going to sit up hear and act like I can process that well. I mean, I choose to process it well! But the emotional process that I go through! You know, it's definitely real! It's definitely real. And sometimes I do want to say something. You know, in a way that could be condescending, disregarding, or disrespectful,

> and I would feel like I have a right too. Because I was disregarded, I was disrespected! You know, but of course going back to my spiritual foundation and my faith, you know, and I just choose to respond differently.

Sam shared multiple examples from her work as a pharmacy resident in a healthcare setting:

> I can't be the pharmacist, it can't be anybody else. It's automatically the nurse. So, encounters like that happen all the time with me in the healthcare setting. So that's where I have to come in and say I'm actually a pharmacist for the day.

Teresa talked about multiple experiences in the workplace in the late sixties before she became a teacher:

> And one of my supervisors said to me, they wanted to promote another African American . . . And she said to me that the only other Black person that we can choose is . . . and we really don't want that kind of person. Now, she was a very well-dressed person, but she was very flashy in her character maybe not as subtle, let me say it that way. But I don't think it would have damaged the position for her to be in there. But the fact that she thought she could say that to me, what are you to do? You just say, my, here we go again. But it was just the times. I mean, you just dealt with it all the time, proving yourself that you could do this and I'm in this position to stay, and you really had to be on top of things.

Owen described the multiple experiences he had with racial microaggressions as exhausting in the following statement:

> I figured like if I could have a conversation with anybody about anything, then they would see that there's more to it than just the color of my skin. Perhaps, help the next person. It is exhausting to be Black but, if you can quantify your thoughts in a way that will make somebody who might have some aversion to you maybe just cast a little bit of doubt like maybe I'm wrong about this, but that is our responsibility for those who may not be able to do so.

Jabari described his experiences as occurring so often that even if the behaviors are subtle microaggressions, he recognizes them. Here is how he described them:

> And you know, I think that when you look at those micro-responses, they don't call them micro for nothing. You see what I'm saying? I mean, it's right underneath the surface. And the only way that you'll be able to identify it is if you've felt it before. It's kinda like that tactile stimulation that if you never felt it, it's so subtle, but if you never felt it, you could overlook it. But if you've felt it, then now it's in your neurological pathways that it comes up and it automatically triggers. And you automatically know what it is.

In this category, the participants described what it is like for them dealing with microaggressions on a regular basis. The overall messages from their experiences are that they must work hard to prove themselves and feel exhausted from these experiences.

Category 2.2: Educational/career/public experiences. Six participants reported having multiple lived experiences with racial microaggressions throughout their academic and professional careers. Diane gave a few examples from her experiences as a public speaker in the following statement:

> And because I'm an African-American woman who has an ethnic presentation with my African American locks, my African locks when I walk in a room, there're all, many times, I won't say all the time but many times there's this presumption that I'm uneducated. That I'm not the professional; that I might be the hire or there to serve. In instances like that, I have been asked can you go get this for me? As opposed to them acknowledging me as the facilitator, the organizer. And I think that is just a preconceived notion that they have about African-Americans, people who have an ethnic presentation. You know, that we don't speak well. You know, we're not leaders. And I think just through facial expressions. When the program starts, and I'm the one that opens up as the facilitator, it's the physical expressions of I think I just put my foot in my mouth. Then you get those who are just really nonchalant. Oh well! You know, it really doesn't matter if she's a facilitator, this what she means to me. You know, she'll always be beneath me. So, you have different responses.

Chad discussed his experiences at work where he is one of a few persons of color in an office space with employees of various companies. He shared the following experiences:

> They're not trying to have a conversation. They're just fine with the way things are. It's funny to be in a space kind of like this too where there's different companies. And whenever something pops up in the news like it's huge. You can see who's talking about it right now and those who don't give a crap about it. And so, if something happens in terms of the story about a Back person getting

> shot by the police. Then a couple of girls will be like my God; I can't believe this happened again. Other guys over here are like why is it we have to talk about this anymore kinda thing, right? Without thinking about it at all, just like whatever. They're so numb to it happening, it doesn't even really matter. In terms of how these things affect me, how do I express myself, genuine enough? Be my authentic self, but also how do I navigate those spaces?

Sam described an incident where she overheard White colleagues she had just met with for a group project in the school's library talking about her after they thought she had left the library. Instead, she said she had moved to another area to complete her work.

> So, I'm doing my work and then later on, I start hearing the conversation about Sam always having an opinion, never agreeing with what the rest of the group has to say. Maybe that's just how they are. That was kinda the first or the main event that I really remember of. Maybe this has something to do with my race, and it's not just about me. Now I'm a representation to everybody who looks like me.

Teresa shared her early experiences in the workplace as one of the only African-American women in a leadership role at that company:

> Okay, well, I am a product of the sixties and seventies, so I, affirmative action was just introduced when I began my working career. And so, there were always little subtle things, and I'm remembering when I retired from what is now (Omitted to protect participant's identity) … I received my first promotion from being a directory assistance operator to being a service representative in business office... It was very difficult, I remember being trained by who might have been

> considered an outsider, which she was also White... And she was doing her job as a trainer, which I thought was a very thorough job. Well once the training was over and it was time for me to implement the training in the work environment, it became very difficult. And the things that I learned, I was told they were not the correct way to do things often. But they were the correct way to do things it was just a way to try to break me down I think. So, I had several experiences in that arena, but I needed a job so and I had a family, so I stayed in that job, and I went from being in that position to being promoted two other times.

Nikki denied having any individual experiences in work or school settings. However, she described overhearing others say negative things about Black students' academic abilities when she was in college. She said, "I know that, I've heard of other people saying, well they couldn't have possibly written that because you're Black. But I never had that reaction with my professors."

The last example in this category came from Jabari who shared a microinsult he experienced at work:

> Even to the point of having the vice president of outpatient stopping you in the hallway. Says, you're doing such a great job. There's a question I've always wanted to ask you. Yes, ma'am. What's the significance of your dreadlocks? I mean, are you Jamaican? I mean, are you Rastafarian or something like that? Is the start. And she said, is it a style or a trend? I said, no. I said, it's spiritual to me. She said: Oh, what religion? I didn't say whether religion, I said spiritual.

In this category, the participants shared direct and indirect experiences they had

with racial microaggressions in work, school, and other public settings. In addition, five of the participants experienced multiple lived experiences with microaggressions.

Category 3: Reflecting on current and past racial climate. Four participants discussed their experiences in the past and current racial climate which includes politics, bigotry, oppression, and racism in the United States. For example, Chad discussed his struggles interacting with his friends and colleagues at times because of current sociopolitical affairs by saying:

> But when it comes to personal stories, it's difficult to talk about them sometimes because in certain circles who although they may not be you know, on the other side as far as like politically. They haven't really accepted the facts that those things are real…maybe the people on the far right aren't our worst enemy. I mean, they're pretty awful. I interact with folks who consider themselves on the left, so they assume that they're on the right side of history. And that, there's this sense of entitlement and privilege that what they're doing is correct. And there's a lot of those stories where I'm happy to talk about injustice. But I feel like if I sometimes talk about certain specific stories, they'll see me differently and then I won't be able to share some things. So, I have to like navigate that very carefully in terms of like people that work in tech or work in business who traditionally are very conservative. There may be more of them that are on the left now because of the younger generation of a wider demographic and race. But a lot of them still are very oppressive and as far as their emotions go.

Teresa shared two historical examples. One she experienced as a child and the other she said her grandmother shared with her. Here is what she shared about her childhood experience when she and her brother went to spend a summer with their aunt and uncle in Georgia and picked pears from White lady's tree:

> The pear tree hung over the highway side, so when we passed by there we got some of her pears and she called the police on us. So, I had to hide my cousins. Not only were my brother in there with my aunt, but my uncle's three nieces were there too. So, we were all there spending the summer with my aunt and uncle. And so, I had to hide them, because I didn't know what to expect. Georgia's segregation and laws were different from Florida. Especially South Florida. So, they were hiding under the bed, in the closets, and the police came and knocked on the door. And he asked me, did we take the pears, and I lied and said no, we didn't but I did see some children running.

Teresa also shared that her grandmother told her about what she experienced during the 1960s while working as housekeeper in a hotel. Teresa said that hearing what her grandmother experienced affected her emotionally. Here is what Teresa said:

> She would tell us that, when she worked in this hotel in Atlanta when she was very, very young, not married yet. How she was a maid and, how they used to have to run to hide from White men. Because if you, they had their way. Was nobody gonna help you. So, they had these, I'm gonna call them little strategies of how they would avoid that.

Owen talked about his interaction with a White female friend's mother while they were at his home:

> She was like, when she was younger, she was like I never wanted her to date a Black man. She only watches FOX News, and the daughter is like excuse me? She's like mom, what's wrong with you? . . . And the daughter fucking lost it! This is a woman who, never saw her daughter angry before. Like, she's like, you come in this place and you're racist towards friend! Like, my God! She was like, why didn't you get as angry as me? Girl, it's just Tuesday to me. Like, I deal with this stuff every day.

Jabari said the following about racial microaggressions in the form of bigotry and politics:

> Because when you think of a young myelinated, a young African American individual, you always tend to put sports or rap as what they can do professionally. You know, but, when you start talking about the Carson route. That's only anomaly. That's not a generalization. You know what I'm saying? .. . You know, and it made me understand that not only with the president's bigotry is that, this is not the person, this is the condition. Their prior condition, because no one is born with those concepts… That was one of those statements where, you know, how can I say what I mean but stay politically correct so that I don't have to face repercussions behind what I'm saying?

In this last category of theme one, I shared what four participants said about how the past and current political climate in the United States contributed to the oppression as well as racial and other microaggressions persons from marginalized groups experienced.

Theme 2: Emotional Responses to Racial Microaggressions

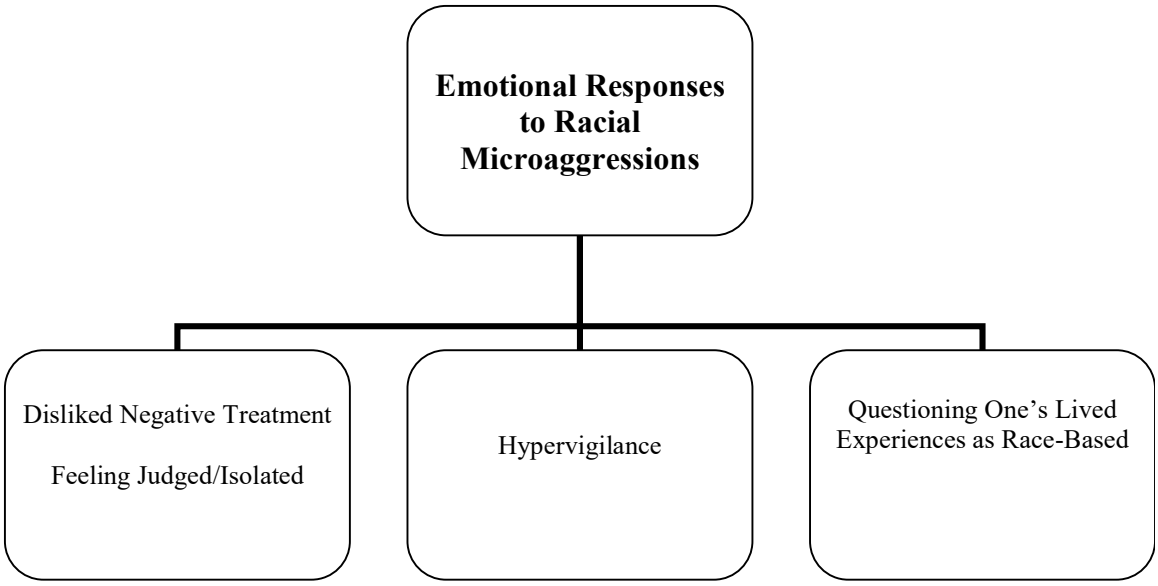

Figure 2. Emotional responses to racial microaggressions.

The second theme had four categories: disliked negative treatment, feeling judged/isolated, hypervigilance, and questioning one's lived experiences as race-based. Feeling judged leads to individuals having strained relationships and mistrusting others (Jordan, 2009).

Category 1.1: Disliked negative treatment. All participants made distinct comments about not liking being targets of racial microaggressions.

Diane shared an experience in the following statement where she felt judged as nasty or filthy because of her race while walking her dog soon after moving to a new upper class and predominantly White neighborhood:

> Being new to the subdivision at this, at the time that I experienced this, I was fairly new to the subdivision. And, so I was out walking my dog, and the gentleman that lived maybe two units down from where I live came out, and he was just very… Not welcoming… It was like oh I've got to move out of here now; this is just, it's just filthy over here . . . But he wasn't a new resident . . . Been there for years! You know but . . . Seeing me come out with my dog. And not even knowing how I clean my house and how I live my life, and that, you know, there's, nothing filthy or grotesque about who I am. Even in my presentation . . . I don't look dirty, I don't dress dirty. You know, and my home is not dirty! And how you associate me with filth! Dirt or nastiness . . . Not even knowing who I am! Just from the physical. And to get that type of response from him.

Chad described a what he considered a terrifying experience where someone fired gun shots at him and some friends while they were playing in the shooter's yard with his son:

> To being in . . . County, which is a very red area in terms of their politics. A lot of conservatives, and a lot of people that are still very happy to wave the rebel flag. So, I lived in an apartment complex, right on the other side of the fence of a trailer park that I mentioned before. And in one instance I was with my friends. I was 13 at the time, and it was me, . . . and like two other friends. I forgot their names, but a kid I knew at the time. And we were playing in front of our friend's house. And we're just playing, hanging out, shooting the shit or whatever. I

> forget exactly what we we're doing, and out of nowhere, the kid's dad comes out screaming like, get the hell out of my front yard. Pulled out a shotgun, and the second I see it, I'm gone. Again, with the running. I could hear the [GUN SOUND] as I was running away. So, to this day, I don't know who he was shooting at, which one of us he of us he was aiming for. Cause it was about five of us. He wasn't shooting at his own son. Maybe he was. You shouldn't be hanging it with them! Who knows what conservatives do in . . . County. I'm still figuring it out for myself. But he shot, the point is he shot at us. The shotgun and if you understand how shotguns work. It doesn't have to be a direct hit for it to wound you.

Sam gave an example of when she felt others treated her negatively and overlooked her because of her race which led to her missing an opportunity:

> It was never confirmed, but I had high speculations that certain opportunities that I either applied for or went for were not given to me because of my race. One, in particular, was a position for an ambassador of a certain organization. And they went through a process of interviewing and later on selecting a group of individuals to represent the organization. It was very apparent that they were looking for a certain demographic that did not look like me. I just didn't think they were looking for me as a Black woman to represent the organization. They did choose one Black woman, but that was it. I noticed that they may have had an agenda, or a certain quota. And they're like, well we've got our diversity check. With that, just one person and I definitely felt that I was qualified for the position.

I did really feel that it may have been my race that played a role. They didn't want too many Black people in our group, we can have one, mix it up a little bit, but the rest of the group was pretty much White except that one Black woman. So, I kinda felt that they were already discriminating even before I stepped in.

They didn't give me any opportunity to show that I was qualified, they kinda just took my name and said we already have one, so I think that's enough. So that one really kinda, that one hurt. It was definitely tough, I, of course, took it personally at first because I was thinking of all the things it could be other than my race before I got to that point. And I was like maybe I'm not good enough, maybe I'm not smart enough; maybe I didn't have the best application. And I'm looking at all those points, and I was like no, I really do have the qualification, it might just be my race. So, I automatically went to everything but my race, cause, I don't really, it's not something I would focus on a day-to-day basis. I'm walking in as a Black woman; I'm walking in as a woman just as equal as everybody else, and no real difference. It's those certain things that happen, or situations that happen that make me think you also have to consider that race may play a role.

Teresa shared in the following statement, a hurtful indirect experience she had:

And I said, well, what I heard in her voice was enough for me to be really, really upset about it because it, the class was majority African-American students. She's teaching, and they all heard the statement. It wasn't just him. And I heard the statement which hurt me to the core

Nikki shared an incident of her experiencing a racial microaggression from a White female sales associate in a Coach store while shopping:

> There was a White lady at the front. She's like, hello. Like, I'm begging her to say hello to me, and then didn't say anything else. Then a Black guy came from the back. He said, hey, how are you? Can I help you find something? I said, yes. And it's like, I'm looking for a weekend bag that I can do this that that that, he's like, here you go. And it was at that time the White lady came up from her little corner and said, would you like to add this to it? I just took the purse, and I gave back to her and said, no thank you. And I let the Black guy help me out. Cause I realized she didn't think that I was gonna spend any money.

Owen said he had a lot of negative interactions with others especially in certain public places and parts of various cities in Florida where he felt judged: "I mean it's tons. Let's see. Certain restaurants. I get it a lot. I know it sounds… I get it a lot, like I get it a lot from older White people, like especially down South Florida. Older White people." Owen also shared experiences where he felt isolated although people were around him:

> I think it was just my experiences at elementary school and middle school, cause like in middle school. I wasn't Black enough for the Black kids, and I wasn't White enough for the White kids. And there was no like, first-generation immigrants around me, whatever it was just me, see, feeling kinda all alone

Jabari shared experiences he had as a trainer where he felt judged because of his race and physical appearance:

> See with me, I may be doing a training or a group, or something like that. And I have somebody that has a master's degree or multiple master's degrees… And they hear me and my training, and they say, what level of education is this guy? You know what I'm saying? Cause he doesn't look the part. Or like I go, the first CIT training that I did, I was one of the presenters for reflective listening. As soon as I walked in, police officers, you know what I'm saying? Watching me walk up front, and they're already looking at me, in the habitual response to a person that looks like me. Squared off shoulders, tense, contracted face. Kind of drawn back. They were just looking. Then all of a sudden, I get introduced as a verbal and physical de-escalation expert. They're like, I've seen some do this [physical gesture] which is a sign of protection and resistance.

These negative and frequent experiences continue to occur in various settings for these participants, which led to hypervigilance.

Category 1.2: Feeling judged/isolated. All seven participants shared experiences where they felt prejudged, judged, or isolated. Diane said the following about feeling judged:

> And I think that is just a preconceived notion that they have about African Americans, you know? People who have an ethnic presentation. You know, that we don't speak well. You know, we're not leaders. And it's oftentimes, when given the opportunity to sit and interact with me they realize that oh no, she's not, what I thought she was.

Chad described a situation where felt judged by undercover police officers in his upscale neighborhood while running to the store. Here is what he shared about the experience:

> I'll run to Publix. I literally ran to Publix. Got some food or was going to get some food. Before I could get there, a big, big black SUV pulled up beside me. And two officers come out. And then, this was 2014 I think, something like that. And they were like, excuse me, where are you headed? And I was like, I'm just running to the store. They're like, why are you running so fast? I'm like, well, I'm kind of in a hurry. And they're like, can I see some ID? And they're giving me those kinda like bullshit questions to catch you in a lie kind of thing, which was very common for law enforcement. And most often they're trained to do that.

Sam discussed instances at work where she felt both isolated and judged by supervisors as incompetent because of her race.

> That's been a little bit different, not as overt with superiors. They may have underestimated my ability in some ways. Like in a work setting, if I was the only person in the area, one of my superiors would need help with something, they kind of look at me and go around, see if there's anybody else. And then ask, hey Sam, is there someone else that can help me with this? And I'm like, I can help you with this, what can I do for you? And they're like, I just needed help, I didn't know if you could do it. I just want to see if there's someone. I was like, well, I can, or if there's something that I can't do, I can definitely find someone that can get you the answer. So that's happened a few times where I've been

> underestimated, or for my abilities. Not sure particularly why, but it always is a possibility that it has something to do with my race.

Teresa expressed feeling judged unfairly or harshly during work evaluations because of her race:

> I would say, maybe not harsh, maybe harsh, I would go for patting them more. Patting in terms of maybe the person who was doing the observation may not have been as objective. You know what I'm saying? They may have inserted some of their beliefs or some of their how they felt about Black people or me in that interview. Or she didn't do quite this. Well, maybe I did it, but this person might have done it to this degree, but I had to do it at this degree, the higher degree.

Nikki shared two experiences of feeling judged or isolated. The first one occurred when she was growing up, and in the second example, she said that she was aware that others judged her because of who she is:

> I remember when I was young, I was maybe ten and I was being raised with my mom and my stepdad. My stepdad is much darker than I am. And of course, for a very long time, I knew that my stepdad was not my real dad. But I always called him dad. And then I remember one person, I could never forget it, came up to me and said why is he so Black and you're so light if he's your daddy? And that shocked me back into saying well he's not my dad, he's my stepdad, but I call him daddy cause my dad was absent at the time. My biological dad was absent at the time. And to me, I took that personally. I remember I cried… Yes, I'm going

> to be held back just because of my name. Yes, I'm going to be, people are going to judge me instantly because of the way I look.

Owen also added his perspective on feeling judged and the mental health implications of it in the following statement:

> Well, if you don't feel like someone really gets you, and understand your struggles of constantly being on guard because people automatically judge you in society because of your race, that can impact a person's mental health.

Jabari shared the following: "I mean as soon as you come in, your presentation is already prejudged. That's the word prejudice in there. There is a pre-judgement."

The participants who shared about feeling judged, highlighted various situations and ways in which they felt others judged them. Feeling judged can cause people to shut down and experiences relational disconnections with others (Haskins & Appling, 2017; Jordan, 2009). It can also cause them to question themselves and their experiences.

Category 2: Hypervigilance. Six participants shared lived experiences in which they felt they had to be hypervigilant to protect themselves. The first example came from Chad who made a statement about hypervigilance and mistrust: "But maybe it's the people that don't acknowledge our identity. Maybe it's the people that are in the middle."

Sam discussed experiences she and her Black friends had in college that made her feel like they had to always be on guard on campus.

> Not really just me alone. Mainly if I were with groups of friends. Definitely us as a group, we were targeted. I went to a predominately White institution from

> my undergraduate career. And that was something that kinda happened a lot. There was just a handful of Black students there, and whenever me and my friends would be in any real setting, it would be mainly looks first, especially if it was in a primarily White crowd. And we would all walk in, they were kind of looking to see what we were gonna do, how we were gonna act. If we were laughing at anything, if we were talking to one another, we automatically became the loud group that everyone was staring at. If we were joking around, I had a lot of male friends. If they were kinda playing around, pushing each other, whatever, it would automatically be, my gosh, a fight's about to break out. Things like that, that I can remember clearly just particularly at school. Not me in particular once again, but just the fact that my immediate group of friends, we were all Black and we just automatically became that target or the spectacle.

Teresa shared her experiences of always feeling on guard at work as one of a few Black persons in that setting:

> And then always being on guard with how you… it was a customer contact job. So, it was always, that was a part of just providing good customer service anyway, but you could not, I didn't feel like I could ever let my guard down, because we were observed, we knew we were observed. But I'm not so certain that it was always on the same level.

Nikki disclosed in the following statement saying she feels hypervigilant for her male family members and potential future sons:

> But I will say that I do know that there are injustices... And I do know that it is definitely race related… if I decide to have a kid, I don't want them to grow up to that…I don't want my Black son out there, I want to make sure that he's going to be okay. The cop is not gonna look at the fact that well, he's light skinned, he's dark skinned, he's a little browner, whatever, just going to look at him as Black. That's the end of it and I don't want that. You know, like my brothers, it's a scary thought. They come visit here just for whatever. They live in Jamaica now. But I have one brother here… And I don't want them to just stop him just because he has a dark tinted vehicle.

Owen discussed the emotional process he goes through when he feels hypervigilant for being who he is:

> And who I am has kept me alive so far. But who I am also knows that I walk into a room, I can't walk out. That kinda thing. Probably got no business in this room. It's just how it is. And yeah, it sucks. But… you have to always to be on guard. Who is looking at you? Why are they looking at you? What did you just do for them to look at you?

Jabari also shared his perspective on this issue from his lived experiences of feeling on guard:

> I went somewhere, and then when I was walking out, going to my truck, then all of a sudden, I heard, [SIREN NOISES] so I look around, being the person who I am. And when I looked around, all eight police cars that was parked at that point, over at the outpatient parking lot. All of them were lined up, and all of them has

> their lights going. And they start chirping [SIREN NOISES]. You did a great job, did a great job! So, I don't know whether to throw my hands up.

In this section, I highlighted statements that some participants shared about feeling hypervigilant for themselves and their loved ones because of racial microaggressions. Hypervigilance is a common emotion felt by persons who experience racial microaggressions (Liao et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2016).

Category 3: Questioning one's own lived experiences as race-based. Three participants said they have personally questioned their lived experiences with racial microaggressions. For example, Chad shared an experience he had in a bar, which he believed was based on race, but he was not 100% sure. Here is what he shared about the incident:

> This is kind of a weird one, because I was at a bar with a friend of mine. And I have these gloves that I wear and they looked, I guess they looked like biker gloves. They're not really biker gloves and the knuckles are kinda hard like a hard rubber on the knuckle. And this guy walked over to me that worked in the bar. A pretty towering figure. I wanna say he was like five or six inches taller than me. And he was like, I think first he asked me to take the gloves off. And I said, why? And he says, well, those are very violent looking gloves. Like you will have the upper hand in a fight or something like that. And I said, who said we're gonna get into a fight? I was just standing by myself. My friends were there but they had stepped aside. It was kind of like dead in the bar. I was by myself, watching the game on the TV and this was about a month and a half ago.

> And then about three or four of my friends were maybe like ten feet away from me. And I was like, cool. One second man. And I motioned one of the girls to come over. And I just wanted a witness for this conversation. So, I'm like, okay. So, tell me again. You want me to take the gloves off because I might get into a fight when there's like... I looked around and there's like nobody there. And the only people that were there were people that I came with. And I refused to take them off. I was like, well, I guess I'm just gonna leave then. Not even the fact that I couldn't take them off, I didn't want to … I can't really identify that as a racial scenario, but it just seemed like an odd request. And I've had a lot of those kind of like odd requests.

Sam shared an experience where she was unsure if she was judged because of her race. "Maybe, this has something to do with my race and it's not just about me. Now I'm a representation to everybody that looks like me." Jabari shared three experiences during his interview where he questioned his lived experiences and how to respond to them in a safe way:

> That poor self-esteem or that lack of- emotional self-preservation, goes away. And then now you have to ask yourself the question, do you feel comfortable inside your own skin? And I think that that goes to, certainly... And I know I felt it to a point where I actually had to mentally assess it, process it, and eliminate it. Yeah, it's so micro because like you said, did that just happen? Just to question that means that there's a self-preservation or piece of that. But it's so micro to; and if you ask yourself which one do you feed? Cause that's the one that has the

biggest impact. You know what I'm saying? So, I sat there, and I said why did I have that response to that?

Although race was the major construct I was exploring to see how it affected the participants lived experiences, other parts of their identities leading to them being targets of racial microaggressions came up in the interviews.

Theme 3: Intersectionality

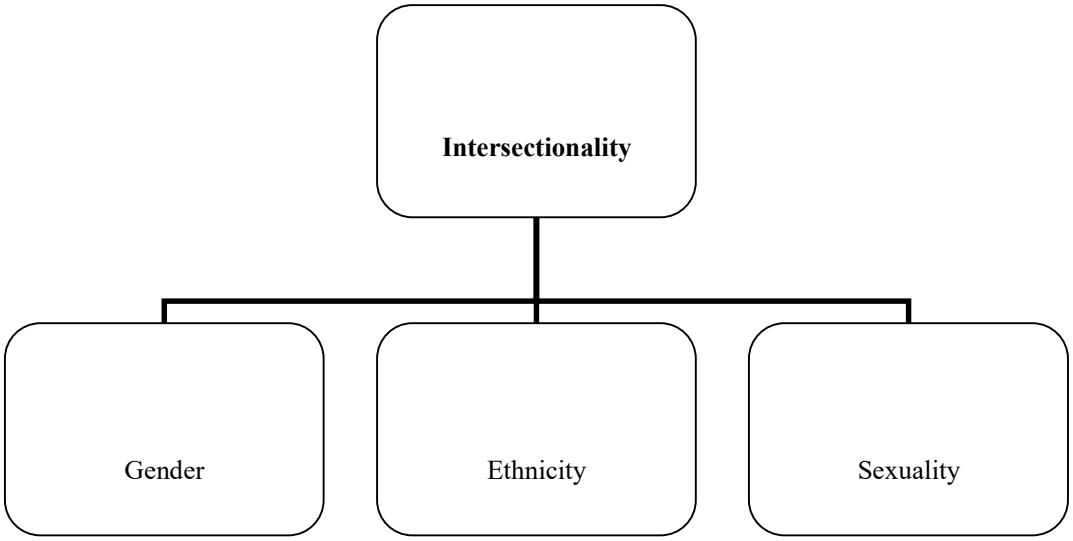

Figure 3. Intersectionality.

Six participants expressed having lived experiences with intersectionality. They shared that these other parts of their identities such as gender led to them experiencing other types of microaggressions and worsened their lived experiences. Intersectionality is another phenomenon in which people experienced microaggressions (Edwards, 2017; Smith et al., 2016). The participants in the study discussed how gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity factored into their experiences.

Diane talked about being a Black woman and how that ties into her lived experiences with racial microaggressions:

> Because I remember when I, acknowledged my calling into the ministry, and I went to my pastor, I was in a Missionary Baptist Church which was traditionally not a denomination that accepts women a ministry… So, having the opportunity to come before a group of leaders and teach and train, being a young African-American woman too. The reservation was there. Which became an experience for me. It's something I had to process through. I had to, and even to this day, being in ministry, being active in ministry, those things I still ponder on. I still think on those things.

Chad gave an example of intersectionality being a Black Male with bi-racial roots:

> The relationship aspect of the two are like, more like my daughter's dating a Black guy or something like. Or they have children that are considered biracial, which one would argue that bi-race doesn't really exist. It never really did in my view. It's a buzzword for Whites to not claim that person, and then Blacks have to. And of course, Black folks are happy to welcome someone of mixed race, but White folks aren't. So, it's almost kind of like if the White people aren't accepting you and the Black people are, then are you really of mixed race or are you really just Black? So that's something I think about a lot. I come from a family where there is what you would consider people that are biracial, my ancestors. But, you know, no one ever talks about the White ancestry because

> they didn't really claim those people from what I understand of our history. I wasn't there, obviously.

Sam talked about working hard to avoid the Angry Black Woman stereotype in the following statement:

> It's really important, because the Black woman sometimes just automatically have a negative connotation to a lot of different groups of people, even within our race, even to Black men. So, it's really important for me to at least be that one that could be the exception. If they've only ever met the angry Black woman, I want to be the one that was not angry. So that's been my goal, recently and going forward.

Nikki shared her passion for educating and empowering other woman who have challenges and burdens that men do not usually have:

> But for me, I'm really passionate about women or girls being properly educated, because I feel like women are . . . Women bear the brunt. At the end of the day, a guy can come, knock her up, and he can leave, but she has to make the decisions. And I think that if we properly educate and empower our girls, then we can make appropriate change. And it'll, women are the ones who teach our boys, our girls about life at the end of the day, right? . . . I'm really passionate about it. Especially in different countries where girls don't have what I have.

Owen shared an experience where some of his extend family members reminded him of the importance of keeping up a certain appearance as a Black male with a larger body type. He said the following:

> It's interesting cause my family is up here, we have a tragedy, my grandmother passed away. So, we're going to her funeral this Saturday. But when she was ill last month, some family members who hadn't seen me in a few years. They saw me, and they see the beard on me. It was like, are you Muslim now? And I'm like, no. He was like, are you sure you wanna walk around America looking like that? Because you're not exactly. You know, the warm and fuzzy teddy bear that you may think you are, I mean they, and it's not like, it wasn't, it's like they're all highly educated. They're all doctors and stuff.

Jabari shared his intersecting identities, which contributes to him experiencing microaggressions in this statement:

> African-American male, strong build, average height. Well, slightly over average height, dreadlocks, naturally red-tinted eyes, right? Which is a family trait, but to the average person, you must be smoking weed. Got them dreadlocks, so you probably got a little Rasta going on, that makes you Jamaican. … Even to the point of having the vice president of outpatient stopping you in the hallway. Says, you're doing such a great job… There's a question I've always wanted to ask you. Yes, ma'am. What's the significance of your dreadlocks? I mean, are you Jamaican? I mean, are you Rastafarian or something like that? Is the start. And then, I set up. And she said, is it a style or a trend? I said, no. I said, it's spiritual to me. She said. Oh, what religion? I didn't say whether religion, I said spiritual. And she said, what you mean?

The first three themes covered the participants lived experiences with racial microaggressions and the impact it had on them. It is important to consider the role coping skills and other strength-based actions provide a way to deal with these incidents.

Theme 4: Coping with Racial Microaggressions

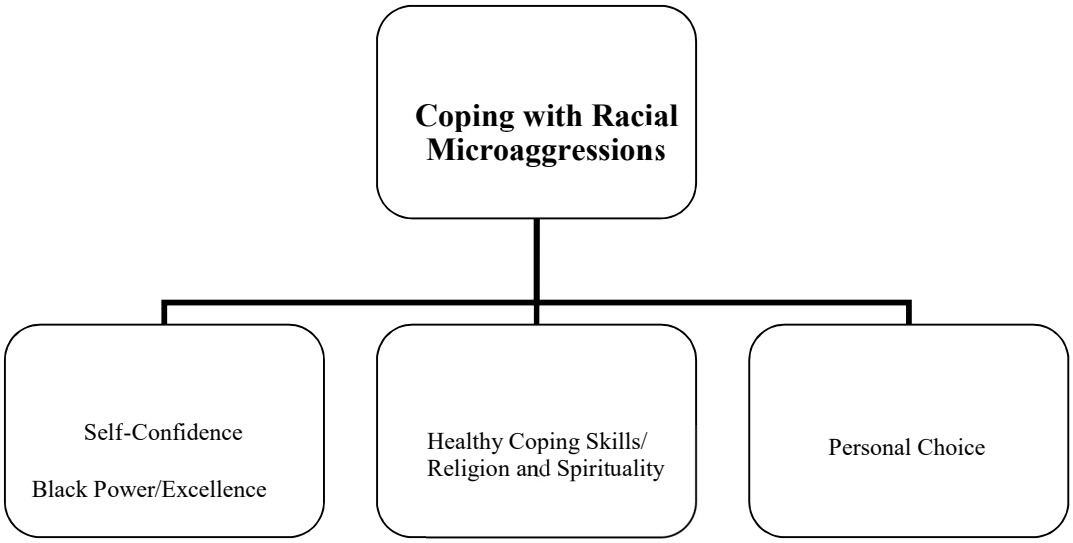

Figure 4. Coping with racial microaggressions.

All participants in this study shared the healthy coping skills they use to combat racial microaggressions which lead to categories of self-confidence, Black power/excellence, personal choice, and healthy coping skills/religion and spirituality.

Category 1.1: Self-confidence. All participants talked about using their self-confidence as a coping skill to combat racial microaggressions. For example, Diane made the following powerful statement:

> I think it's so important that you resume yourself! So other people don't define who you are. So, a lot of times when I facilitate, I lead in with who I am! So, if there's any questionable doubt about which I am, they have understanding of who

> I am before they leave the room! Knowing who you are and confidently stating that is important to combating microaggressions.

Chad shared that he learned from his elders that being Black is a positive thing in the following quote "it's good to be Black. Be proud of it. And I think that kind of influenced the conversation a little bit between us." Then Sam talked about remaining confident to overcome her lived experiences in this statement:

> But once again, just being confident, as positive as I can be, trying to help. And in most cases, trying to prove them wrong, which, in some cases, needs to happen in order to kind of move past that, it's to prove them wrong.

Teresa also shared that her confidence and self-esteem helped her cope with her lived experiences:

> that didn't change how I felt about myself. It just helped me define who he was. So, I didn't feel. It didn't lower my self-esteem or anything like that. Because by that time James Brown had come out. So, it didn't matter. Well, it did matter, but it didn't affect me, let me say it that way, okay?

Nikki said in this statement that her self-confidence and upbringing helped her to overcome and ignore racial microaggressions:

> Just keep going, keep pushing. It happened, yes, but we still fought through, we still tried to get where we're going. We don't focus on, okay well this happened. We focused on just getting ahead, and I guess it's a mentality thing on how, how do I put it? Yes, definitely how you're raised too.

Owen shared that his self-confidence and drive to maintain excellence in all he did helped him cope with his experiences.

> Like all I can do is try to be who I am. I like who I am. …excellent in sports, excellent in academics, this is me just tooting my own horn; it can be verified. And I was even Homecoming King at my high school when I wasn't, I wasn't even an athlete at the school that year. I stopped playing sports in senior year, so I could focus on my education, and was Homecoming King just to show that you know…

Jabari shared two experiences he had while in a crowded room. In one situation he was in the role of a trainer at work and in the other he was a guest speaker at a state college.

> Then all of a sudden, we were talking, get um' laughing a little bit. And now we're here [physical gesture]. And now they're doing this [head nods]. Acknowledgment. And I remember the first one that I had over at … And you know when I got finished, I got a little standing ovation, and then they come over, and they were shaking my hand . . . Nursing Students Graduation. They asked me to go speak, because some of them, may go into the psych field and stuff like that. So, I go out there, and I start speaking. And I walk in, it's 80-plus students. One little girl, it was her first time wasn't that big. And everybody's, all of them were looking at me like, who is this dude? And all of a sudden, I go to talking, and I get them laughing. That's one thing about it though, when kinda like that Richard Pryor syndrome in prison. Keep them laughing to keep um' off you.

In this category, participants shared that their confidence kept them positive while they coped with racial microaggressions. They also expressed that importance of celebrating their culture.

Category 1.2: Black power/excellence. Three participants talked about the importance of acknowledging and having pride in their racial heritage as a coping skill to combat racial microaggressions. One participant said that the renewed pride Black people felt after the box office record-breaking movie *Black Panther* came out this year with an all-Black cast showed the world that Black is beautiful, powerful, talented, and excellent. Black people have been using artistic expression to celebrate Black culture for decades (Washington, 2018). I took an example of this from Chad who referenced Black power and excellence a few times during his interview. He made the following statements:

> Black Panther had dominated the conversation the last couple of months even before it came out, it was dominating the conversation, the excitement over it. All Black cast, mostly Black crew. You know a story about what it means to be Black in Africa and then as an African American. But anyway, in the early 90s there was this very interesting and this is kind of separate conversation but resurgence of in my view of like Black power. You had a lot of… and I think it stemmed from a lot of, a lot of stuff from the nation of Islam and a lot of pop culture. There was a lot of great content coming from Black artists. You have Spike Lee, who was just on top of the world in the early 90s. Do the Right Thing just crushed it. Denzel was becoming a huge star, you have all these Black artists.

> Michael Jordan is the biggest star in the world. All these, Oprah, all these Black people that were just crushing it in whatever they were doing, whatever their field was. And I think that gave us a resurgence of like pride. And music, I mean like we had Arrested Development. All music that was like saying it's good to be Black. Be proud of it.

Sam also mentioned that pride in herself and her confidence as a Black woman helped her cope and work through situations where she felt targeted or discriminated against because of who she is: "I definitely think one needs to work harder. It comes with a certain strength, courage, and an opportunity to educate also comes with it as well, and just overall being strong, not letting little things break you down." Teresa also shared how she coped by keeping a standard of excellence for herself in all that she did. She shared an example of her experience that happened during her college and graduate school years:

> But like at Valencia, I set my goal at making all A's. I had a B at Cookman, even though it was an HBCU, I liked making all A's, so my goal was still that even though it wasn't for the same reason. And at UCF, that remained my goal.

Three participants shared how celebrating Black power and excellence has been a form of coping for them. It helped increase their self-worth and pride, which seemed to also increase their knowledge about recognizing what is within their control and focusing on that.

Category 2: Healthy coping skills/spirituality and religion. Six participants shared that they cope with microaggressions through their spirituality and religion. For

example, Teresa shared how going to church and practicing ones' spirituality was ingrained in her from a young age: "But anyway, she was there with me and she shared her story too cause my grandmother was like on Sunday you just go to church, and you don't have any work to do."

Diane also shared that practicing her religion and spirituality is an important coping skill for her in the following statement:

> When I go through experiences where I am having to deal with racism, and I need help, where does that resource come from? You know. The different outlets that that resource come from? For me, it comes from my pastor. It comes from close friends. It comes from, my devotion, and my inward meditation. Those are the vices that I use for help.

Chad did not identify with any religion but had a religious upbringing and believes in God. Here is what he shared about his spirituality:

> I actually went to Catholic school, and then I went to Episcopalian school. It was a private school, but the denomination was Episcopalian, I believe. I think that's what it is . . . So, I mean, I went to church or attended services as an adult, but I honestly don't think I have a title, I guess . . . And, if I wasn't as fast, I'd be dead. So, I thank you [looking up] for my speed.

Sam said she not religious. She practices spirituality as a coping mechanism in the form of yoga. She said: "I like yoga." Teresa talked about her religious upbringing in the church which she still practices today. She said: "cause my grandmother was like on Sunday you just go to church, and you don't have any work to do… I grew up in the

church like most Black people did back in that time."

Owen talked about how his mother teaching him about God and the Bible helped him cope with his experiences during childhood and as an adult in the following statement:

> At least like my anger, my mom, we would pray together. She was a woman of academics and theology. So, it was like a lot of common sense into it as well. She never like forced God on me in a way. If I was having an issue, she'd opened up passages in the Bible and was like look, they dealt with this, this . . . When you think of an Esau, and things are important like when it comes to family and money, and things like that, and working hard. The Bible is just a guidebook to let you know that you're not the only person who's done whatever you're going through. There's some similar story you just find it here. Whether you choose to believe in God or that's up to you; He gave you the free will to do that. But she's just like at the end of the day all, God is asking you to just be good. She's like, that's hard, it's hard to be good.

Jabari identified as a Christian, but he also talked about the spiritual influences of Eastern philosophy in his life this quote: "I was exposed to Eastern philosophy at a young age with my martial arts and stuff like that, the Taoism and the Buddhism or whatever."

In this final category within this theme, the participants shared the impact that spirituality and religion played in their lives and how they use it to cope with their lived experiences with racial microaggressions. From an RCT perspective, when people experience injustices, they may experience feeling isolated, unseen, unheard, misjudged,

or treated unfairly which contributes to social disconnections leading them into self-preservation modes (Jordan, 2009; Kress, Haiyasoso, Zoldan, Headley, & Trepal, 2018). After experiencing racial microaggressions throughout an individual's life as frequently as the participants in this study described, and viewing their experiences through an RCT lens, it is likely that they experienced social disconnections. According to Jordan (2009), people develop relational images (RI) from their life experiences that permeate their social relationships in which they predict certain outcomes in those relationships. These images can change as individuals seek counseling to process their experiences, develop healthier interpersonal skills, and learn about advocacy and social justice (Jordan, 2009; Kress et al., 2018).

Category 3: Personal choice. All participants shared that their coping skills to overcome racial microaggressions included reframing those experiences and educating the offender on racial microaggressions because those things are within their control.

Diane talked about focusing on the choices she makes to help her cope with microaggressions which is a skill she developed over time. Here is what she said:

> I think I'm more proactive instead of reactive at times and, I think that I don't respond in an irrational way as I would have in days when I was younger immature, didn't really have a spiritual foundation. Just kind react to the stimuli that come towards you. And I just choose now because I operate from a whole different understanding of who I am as an individual, and what I bring to the table when it comes to humanity, and I just choose to respond differently. I think

> everything goes back to choice. You know, unfortunately, in making choices a lot of times, that's dictated on our experiences.
>
> One of the things that we have learned throughout the course of the years, and when people don't know how to inventory those feelings, process those feelings, you know they make a decision to react accordingly. You know, but it still all goes back to choice. I chose for it not to destroy me as a person or cause me to react in a manner that is outside of who I am as a person. I could have gotten angry, I could have said something. I could have exhibited some type of inappropriate behavior to let him know that I'm very aware of the decision that made or the behavior he just displayed but I just chose not to, you know give the power over to him.

Chad explained that his self-control occurs in social situations when he is talking to a White person regarding racial injustices in the following statements:

> I spent a lot of time thinking about these things and talking about them. But I had to be very careful how I talked about them . . . At the same time, I don't wanna, if I were to alienate somebody in the conversation, then nothing will be served.

Sam talked about maintaining self-control by thinking through her experiences and responses which may include educating the offender who may be behaving offensively due to ignorance:

> And so far, I've changed, like I said, how I approach things. I'm trying not to take offense to it. I try to take a step back and think, this, they're not saying this out of ill will. Maybe they are, but in my mind, I try to think that they are not.

> And maybe this is my time to teach them something about me, about the race, that they may not have known before. Cause maybe it is just purely ignorance, they really just don't know, so why don't I show them? Why don't I share and see how they feel about it? So, I think that's the main thing that's changed with me approaching any situation where I think my race has introduced some type of stereotype or made them act or say things differently than they would have if I was of a different race. And I now take it as an opportunity to educate. That's my main goal.

Teresa shared an example of overhearing one of her White teacher colleagues saying an offensive thing to a student they shared during a class lesson. She practiced self-control by talking to colleagues about it before confronting the colleague and used the opportunity to educate her about how her comment was verbal racial microaggression. Here is what she shared about the incident:

> Okay, it was another educator, and the study was Black History month, and they were studying one of the persons. I don't remember who it was. The student was a student that we shared. The student has emotional disabilities. And my class was next to her. So, it was a day that he was having difficulty and evidently not paying attention because I was not there to visualize what's going on but, I could hear everything going on. And, she asked him to pay attention because it was his history that they were talking, and he should be interested in this history. So, I stewed about that, and I went to two other colleagues because I was going to report it to human relations. And the colleagues said to me, both of them, one of

> which was our guidance counselor, and the other one was a friend of mine. They both suggested that I go talk to her, because her motive may have not been that. . . . the class was majority African-American students. She's teaching and they all heard the statement. It wasn't just him. And I heard the statement which hurt me to the core. So, I did as they said, and I decided to go and talk to her about it….
>
> I approached and told her that you know, I did hear her teaching and, the teaching seemed to be okay, but her heart wasn't in it. Especially I know that, when she said, it was your history, I said no it's not his history. It's your history, too, because . . . and then she stopped me and said, yes, you're right. Because it was the White people who caused the problem with slavery, and it is our history. I said, well, you should be cognizant of that. I heard what you said. I said, but it wasn't just to him. The other children heard it. You don't know what that has done to their self-esteem, telling him that this is their history. So, she agreed to talk to them. I don't know if she did or not, but she accepted what I said.

Nikki shared her perspective based on how she grew up and that her Caribbean subculture helped her focus on what was within her control instead of on what racist encounters she had. Here is what she had to say:

> Let's say I'm in a grocery store or whatever, snarky commentary, and with me, how I am, I laugh at things like that, I don't take it seriously. If you have a problem, that's you, and I guess maybe that's how I protect myself, and I don't dwell on it . . . I remember thinking that, why is the Black Americans, why do

> they feel hung up so to speak on what happened why are they letting it hold them back? Whatever happened in the past, why are they letting it hold them back?
>
> . . . Instead of saying you know what, this is what happened. Okay, it happened, let me keep it moving. Let me fight through it . . . But don't let that hold you. Just keep going, keep pushing . . . I can't speak on the Caribbean as a whole, but I can speak on Jamaica. Yes, we did have the racial divide, but we didn't hold on to that. Say, okay, well, the White man is better, or the White skin is better. It happened, yes, but we still fought through, we still tried to get to where we're going. We don't focus on, okay well this happened. We focused on just getting ahead, and I guess it's a mentality thing… definitely how you're raised too.

Owen explained that his mother's teachings shaped his current level of self-control:

> Racial issues I had to deal with or seeing the main person in my corner that has prevented me from ever succumbing to hate is my mother. She refused, refused to let me get off myself. Or refuse to let my I guess my basic instincts take over. She's like, you're a Black man in America. There was an advertisement she showed me on television that was single parents, or children of single mothers are more likely to grow up incarcerated. Because they don't have that father figure. It was during the 80s. And like this will never be you, ever. And I didn't even get it like. I didn't get what she was doing. Like at the end of the day she was giving me the toolset to be able to deal with or handle anything that came across

> my way. When doing so like, I kind of isolated myself, because it was just like well I can't figure this out on my own, I'm not getting it, I've got to retool it.

Jabari said his early training in Eastern practices helps him focus on what is within his control when dealing with racial microaggressions:

> I think for me, it's different, because I was exposed to meditation at a young age. I was exposed to Eastern philosophy at a young age with my martial arts and stuff like that, the Taoism and the Buddhism or whatever. So then now that is not faith, but those things are more like science of the mind. So, I was able to get through it, cause . . . I guess I'm not like the average person who may not have those systems of process.

Each participant described ways in which personal control helped them to overcome racial microaggressions to cope with their experiences. Most of the participants also discussed the role spirituality and religion had in their coping.

Theme 5: Advocacy/Social Justice

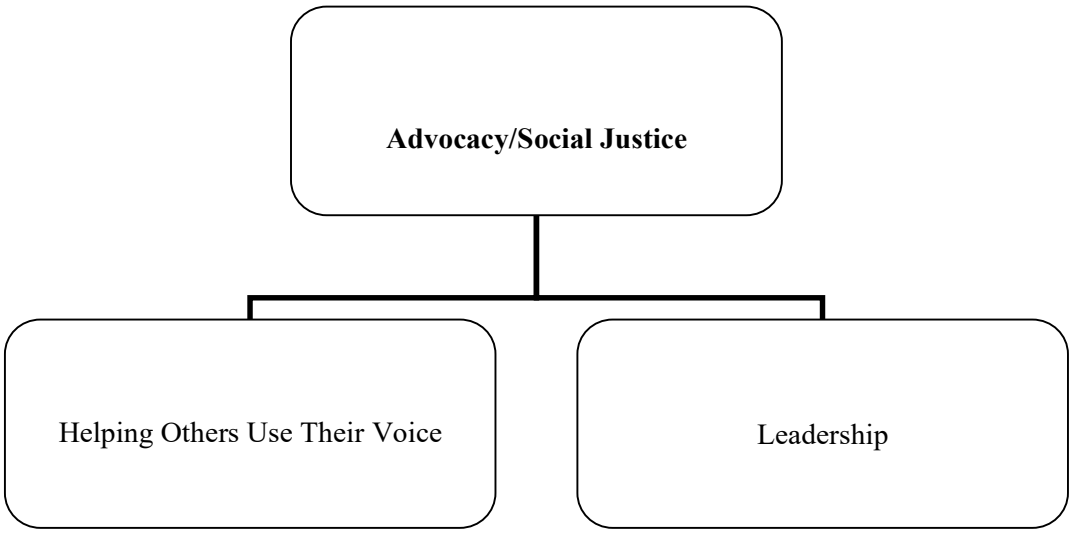

Figure 5. Advocacy/social justice

The participants talked about the importance of advocacy and social justice. This theme is crucial to this study because advocacy is an ethical mandate for counselors to do on behalf of clients, members of their communities, and the counseling profession (see ACA, 2014; NBCC, 2012). Additionally, advocacy and social justice are major tenants of RCT which encourages counselors to engage in social change that challenges and disrupts oppressive social systems to help those most affected by them (Haskins & Appling, 2017; Jordan, 2009; Kress et al., 2018). There are two categories within this theme, which are helping others use their voice and leadership.

Category 1: Helping others use their voice. Four participants shared about the importance of helping others use their voice as a form of advocacy and social justice. Diane talked about helping other people use and exercise their voice in the following quote: "So, we have to become our own advocates, so I teach families."

Chad also talked about the importance of engaging in advocacy and social justice causes by helping others use their voice:

> I do have friends who part of like the dad in "Get Out" who say things like that, but they are genuinely wanting to get better. And as a very good friend of mine, we literally had to conversation with me like that about a year ago about spring of 2017 . . . What do we have to do? What do I have to do as a White person to just be better, what the fuck man? And having the tough conversations, supporting local candidates that are progressive, inclusive, and learn their language. And those are the baseline things. . . . He wants to get better. He's acknowledging his privilege. He's acknowledging that maybe he hasn't been always correct in his

language has been. And he wants to get better, and he's approaching someone like me to lead that conversation for him and to help him get to that point. And I really respect him a lot for that.

And those kinds of scenarios, they can happen in terms of people growing . . . . The movie Selma is really great because it showed how MLK was really concerned about using media as a tool. So, the affirmation of this right, so the cameras see it. If the cameras don't see it, it's not gonna affect America. That's how social media is now. It has to be covered, or people won't see it. They will be in their office and typing on their computer and see that post on Facebook or Twitter or whatever, in an e-mail and my God, see a video of a Terrance Crutcher or Philando Castillo or whoever. If they don't see that, then it's not as impactful to them. So, going back to the Selma film, there are folks who would see things in the media and just be like my God, this is what's happening down there? There's some kid in New Hampshire, and he thinks, well me, and my Black friends are all great up here! Oh, but down there this is happening. And when I see these kind of reactions, it makes me think of that. Because there are folks who were just kind of like, I can't believe this is happening, and then there's folks who were just kind of like, whatever.

Nikki said she would like to promote change by advocating for others in Washington if that was practical for her at this time in her life. She shared her perspective in the following statement:

> I can't tell you I'd be a lobbyist because I'm not that great at convincing, but I can talk you to death about what I feel. And I can try my hardest to convince, so I don't know what that position will be like, I could make the change directly with the people who I, not necessarily made the change, but at least influenced or plant a seed in their mind. So, I don't know what that position is though. But I would be in Washington somewhere; if time was on my side, then I would be out there doing something.

Owen said the following about his role as an advocate to help others use their voice:

> I figured like if I could have a conversation with anybody about anything, then they would see that there's more to it than just the color of my skin. Perhaps, help the next person. It is exhausting to be Black but, if you can quantify your thoughts in a way that will make somebody who might have some aversion to you maybe just cast a little bit of doubt like maybe I'm wrong about this but that is our responsibility for those who may not be able to do so.

Category 2: Leadership. Five participants discussed the importance of leadership as a part of advocacy. Diane talked about the importance of advocacy for herself and others:

> So, we have to become our own advocates, so I teach families. I tell families you have to be advocates for your own families. Don't just rely on the doctor. Don't just rely on the counselor. Now they become a tool to help you. Gain information so you can learn and navigate…be the pilot of your own family.

Chad discussed situations where he was in a position to educate and lead a conversation with an associate about the importance social justice in the following quote: "And he wants to get better, and he's approaching someone like me to lead that conversation for him and to help him get to that point." Next, Teresa talked about participating in leadership efforts during her adolescent years to advocate for social justice issues such as Black employees receiving equal treatment at work:

> And then, the one thing that I experienced with my paternal grandmother when we were doing the boycotting and demonstrating when I was in high school, she would go with me because my mom worked at night. So, I would go and pick her up, and she would go to these demonstrations with me, and she would take a part. Well in a subtle way, she would, her main role as I see it was to make sure I was okay. This one time, we were boycotting with our teachers. If you have seen the news where teachers are on strike lately, well back in 1968, I believe it was, our teachers that went on strike. And we were so close to our teachers, we were like, no we're going on strike with them. Okay, so our first thing was we had to plan, and how we were gonna do it, and so we met, and that was a great experience.
>
> Our school leaders were like in charge, like the senior president or the student council president. They were kinda in charge, but adults were telling them, this is what you do to make this correct. So, we decided that we were going to demonstrate with them and we were meeting and this park. Before that meeting though, we were at a church, Antioch and my grandmother went with me to this planning meeting. And so, one of the men who were in charge, he was an

> educator at another school but, he was a classmate of my uncle at FAMU. And he was also a member of my grandmother's church. So, Mr. Wilson, you got to…he was a young man right out of college, he got up to talk and…, Mr. Wilson started cussing and carrying on. Oh, my goodness called him and said to him that all you did a mighty fine job, when you were conducting the meeting, I was so proud of you, but you need to let those profane words go. So, I thought that was too funny cause this is a grown man but, yet she called him and told him that.

Owen discussed leadership in the form of joining forces and using his knowledge to help others. He said:

> I can do whatever I want to do. But I'm ready for it. Whenever anybody has any questions about it, or I see somebody messing up or some inequality or somebody who can't like to say what they need to say in the right way. I'll say it for them. Or I'll just listen. Sometimes I mean, you need to listen.

Nikki said she joined the NAACP as a young person of color who can help bring about change by engaging in leadership and advocacy efforts:

> But I will say that I do know that there are injustices. I do know that. And I do know that it is definitely race related. So, for me, I do want to make an impact. I do want to make that change. I know that something needs to change, and it needs to change, and it needs to start from the ground up. So that's my involvement in the NAACP I want to see change, I want it.

The two categories in this theme were helping others use their voice and leadership which is consistent with advocacy efforts counselor can engage in on behalf of clients (see ACA, 2014).

Theme 6: Neighborhood/Community Social Support

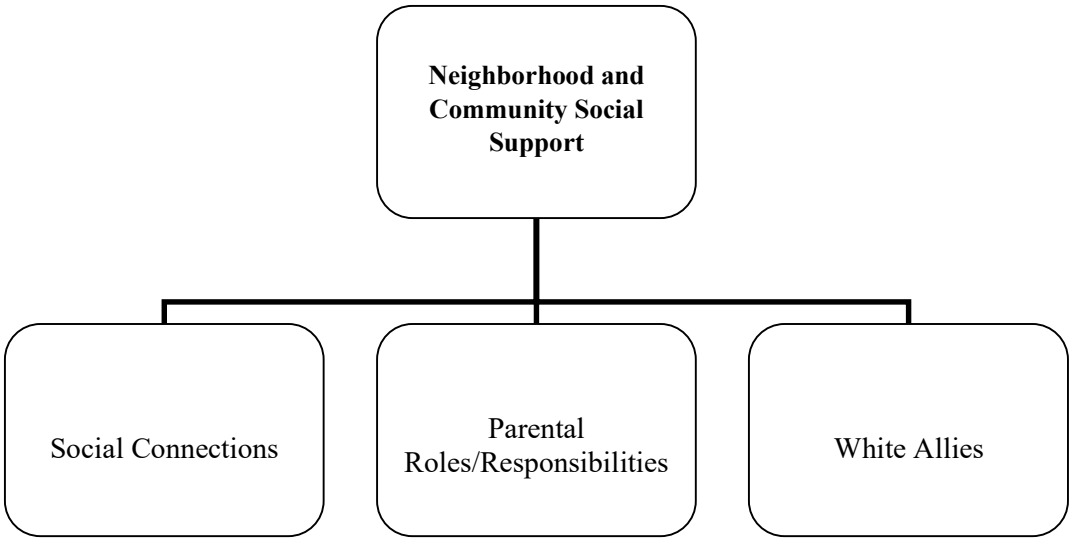

Figure 6. Neighborhood and community social support.

The sixth theme in this study was neighborhood and community support which relates to another RCT component of having healthy social connections with others including counselors who join forces to promote mutual empathy and positive social change (see Jordan, 2009; Haskins & Appling, 2017; Parsons & Zhang, 2014). All participants talked about the importance of being a part of social support networks and communities to help them stay grounded in their lives. The categories, which emerged from the data for this theme are social connections, parental support, and allies.

Category 1: Social connections. All participants talked about the importance of social connections to sustain mental health and help others. Social connections and

maintaining healthy relationships are crucial to individuals' well-being (Haskins & Appling, 2017; Jordan, 2009; Kress et al., 2018; Parsons & Zhang, 2014). Diane shared a story from her work as a church leader, which led to her potentially saving someone from dying by suicide:

> I remember, being at a church and I was facilitating, and a young lady walked in off the street, and I could tell that she was disturbed. She was having some challenges, and so, I chose as a facilitator to put a pin in my agenda to deal, to her. And after speaking with her, she was getting ready to take her life. She was suicidal. She went through an experience, and she was not able to navigate through. And it brought her to a place of oppression and depression to the point where she was getting ready to take her life that day! When she came into the seminar, and I took time to talk with her, and she shared with me what she had gone through, it was the same exact experience that I had gone through. Yet this same woman that went through the same experience that I went through, was to the point to where she was getting ready to take her life. But yet I'm one enjoying life!
>
> So that's two experiences, that's two different individuals having the same experience but processing them different… What did I have that she didn't have to make me choose a different way? …Was it that I had a support group? Or was it that I had more of a spiritual foundation? You know, was it that I had somebody that I could go to and talk to? Kinda help walk me through that experience? You know, I didn't know if she had all those things. But all I know

> is where she was at that place; she was at a place where she was, almost thought life was hopeless. And it wasn't worth living. And I just thank God that, in that particular experience, I was available! Because something I said changed her mind! Didn't change her experience! Gave her a different perspective and gave her a way out! Gave her a way out of hopelessness! You know, but how many of us have that type of... How many us go through that? You know . . . we need somebody to talk to, or somebody to show us a different way. You know, to get us out of the slump of depression and oppression? In a positive light.

Chad expressed that being connected to others socially is important to individual wellness:

> There's nothing to be lost from having a conversation with somebody who's listening to you and who's open to potentially helping you through whatever you're going through. Something as small as talking to your friends can satisfy that need that you may have.

Sam discussed in the following statement, the strength she draws from the support of her friends and family. She also mentioned that strength comes from seeing other Black women in her community succeed:

> . . . and just overall being strong, not letting little things break you down. Definitely comes from the community. Seeing other Black women doing great things. Not letting people bring them down. It could be community, meaning anybody, friends, family, significant others. Mine personally comes from family, and friends. Just seeing people around, me doing great things. It really motivates

me. So, I know that strength comes from all over, but for me, it comes particularly from family and friends.

Teresa talked about her social connections growing up in an era where she had the option to continue attending a segregated school or go to a desegregated school. She said she chose to remain in the segregated school because of the healthy connections she had with her teachers in her school. She also shared that she still has some of those relationships today:

> Well, when I came up, I was really in segregation. Integration was right there on the cusp. So, when I was in high school, that's when integration of the predominantly White schools was open to us. I grew up in West Palm Beach, Florida. And so, we had a choice. You could stay with your school, which was a segregated African American school, or you could go to the formerly, predominately White school. It was still predominately White at the time. And I chose to stay. I did not want that experience. And when we have reunions now, we have a combined reunion, they come back to our, I don't wanna call it a segregated reunion, but in essence, it is. And some of those stories, I didn't remember, they brought them back up, again, that they were fighting every day.
>
> Just because the N word or we don't want you here, and they refused to be nonviolent. So, they were fighting every day and being, receiving punishment for it, but I wasn't a part of that because I chose not to go to the school. Now, when it came to our junior and senior years, we knew that they were gonna close our school, so we began to protest. We had organized protests, where some of the

> adults in the community would help us organize and guide us, even some teachers would. So that we would do it the right way… But our teachers, so many of them, were so committed and knew what we would have to encounter in life, that, in my opinion, they made up for it. So, I don't feel like anybody else got a better education than I did, contrary to what you hear some people say. They were glad to leave. I did not want to leave my school. I didn't want to leave my neighborhood. I did not want to leave our teachers. So, every chance I get, I tell those that are still living how much they meant to me, they still mean to me.

Nikki talked about her intentionality in maintaining social connections in professional and personal settings:

> My classes were very diverse, and if anything, I can see that my professors were very open-minded, very liberal in their thought… We've always open full communication, and they're like wow, so you can improve or whatever… But yeah, I went to the FIU in Miami, so it was very diverse. And I went to the North campus which was predominantly African American… You know, African Americans are my people, Caribbean Americans are my people.

Owen shared his lived experiences growing up in Jamaica and the United States where people came together to support his mother and himself. Black people refer to this type of communal and familial support as "The Village," where people come together to provide support for one another (Joshi et al., 2015; Liao et al., 2016). He shared the following example:

> I was handcuffed in front of my own home when I was 15 years old, by the police, because they believed I broke into it. So even with all the neighbors. The cops like you don't have any ID. And the neighbors are like he's a 15-year-old kid, what kind of 15-year-old kid has ID on them? The officer that arrested me, he was like I have to handcuff you for my own safety. I was always told do what the cops tell you to do. He's got a gun. You gotta treat him like anybody else who has a gun. So, I let him handcuff me. And all of my friends, the landlord, everyone who was out there was like, just tell him, he lives here. After school, his mother is at work, and when my mom comes home, everybody tells her.

Owen also talked about his volunteerism by giving back to his community by speaking to Black youth:

> My friends who are teachers locally. I'll go speak at their schools and try to give alternative career paths to some of these kids. Sometimes just listening, Black kids are just like, telling me things. Like no one is listening to them. Not a lot of Black dudes are out there doing this, especially my age. Everyone is just kinda, I know when I was younger there were a lot of, being Jamaican, being West Indian, we know it's never about the individual, it's about "The Village." And even though it was just my mother and I when we first came here, a lot of people stepped up. A lot of family members stepped up. Other men, who were there when my father wasn't. Like I learned a lot from a lot of good men.

Jabari discussed two situations in which his social connections were important. In

one situation, he explained that positive male role models during his childhood helped him excel. In the other, he shared another situation where a friend facing a mental health crisis reached out to him for help.

> . . . for a lot of us our coaches were father and uncle figures because most of us didn't have father figures growing up. So that became family... Now, this is when the person starts to become the mask, instead of genuine. And I do feel that, once a person loses their genuineness, then that's when they lose connection . . . Whatever validation they seek, right? Once it's gone the fall has a bigger impact. Just like when I'm dealing with a situation where someone was suicidal last week, and then you text me and say I just want to die now . . . I started talking to them.

In this category, participants shared how the supportive relationships, they had with others helped them, and other people achieve goals, success, and wellness. Having healthy social connections with people promote growth fostering relationships, which are crucial to human survival (Frey, 2013; Haskins & Appling, 2017; Jordan, 2009).

Category 2: Parental support. Five participants talked about the importance of giving and receiving parental support. Diane spoke about it from the perspective of being a parent and the importance of reminding her children who they are and instilling positive messages in them. She said the following about keeping her children positive in the face of racial microaggressions:

> I feel that I have a responsibility as a parent even with adult children being that voice of reasoning. Yeah because, you know, everything else around. All the

> information that they're receiving, you know, says so much different. From who they are as a person. So, I have to make sure that I'm there as that voice of reasoning. That voice of accountability you know that says no, this is who you are. This is who God says you are. Don't worry about what they say. I understand, they may, that might be the only information they have. But that doesn't validate you. That doesn't define you. You know there's a saying, and it's a cliché that if people keep telling you the same thing over and over again about who you are, if you're not careful you'll begin to believe it.

Chad shared the positive impact of his parents using their parental responsibility and roles to show him love and support:

> I actually had a very nice home. It was poor and small, but no one was beating each other or fighting constantly, or there was no one pulling back on each other. There was no crime in the household. It was a small two-bedroom apartment with a bunch of people. And there was a bunch of people in two bedrooms, but my mom is an incredibly supportive person. I mean she's tough, she's in the military, and she grew up in a very harsh environment in Harlem as a kid, but she is very loving and supportive. She's the kind of person that's like she'll buy someone else's kids Christmas presents if their parents don't have any money. Even though we don't have any money, kind of thing. And my dad's the same way. He's very tough, but . . . They're not together but, he is very tough, but he's an incredible supportive, loving person. He's the kind of guy that like, will like text

> you randomly and say, hey I'm just thinking about you. I love you, hope you have a good day.

Teresa talked about her and her husband's goals and responsibilities as parents to encourage their children to achieve more success in life since they did not face similar barriers that she and her husband did growing up:

> I didn't have hardly any men in my family growing up. My dad died when I was five. So, it was women and even though I'm not trying to use this term loosely strong women. I feel we just, our parents and grandmothers . . . just had to do what they had to do. So, I just tried to transfer that to my own daughters that, okay, you have just got to try to be the best, now. But that was my goal with them. And their father, too, teaching them, cause my husband, he came from a different kind of background in the sense that both his parents. I don't think either one of them went past third grade, but they were hard workers. So, we both tried to just pass that on, both of those things, to our daughters, and hopefully, that turned out to be positive, well, that was the goal anyway. Was to just take our experiences, share those experiences. But not share them in a way where you felt like you were down. No that means you got to go up. You got to go higher than us, that was the goal. Try to aim higher, because you can. Sometimes we had barriers, you have no barriers. That kinda thing.

Nikki talked about the values her father placed in her to be successful and independent:

> For most of my life, I grew up with my dad . . . he taught us how to be independent woman. Cause he was like, I'm letting you know, I'm not paying for no wedding, no babies, none of that. So, he said, pretty much what I got from that is, handle yourself.

Owen talked a lot about the guidance and support he received from his mother throughout his life. Referring back to the example I shared from his interview under the social support category within this theme, Owen talked about his neighbors helping him after police racially profiled in his neighborhood, Owen shared the following:

> After school, his mother's at work, and when my mom comes home, everybody tells her. And she calls that police station. And they sent a cop over. And the cop that came over, he could have been a pro wrestler. And he just took her abuse, she yelled at him. He just apologized, he was like, ma'am, we're so sorry. I looked at it; it was pretty interesting because he just took it, for like twenty minutes, and then he apologized to me. But I was like this tiny woman was standing up to this giant man with no fear, and he was just like ma'am it was clearly a mistake, we're so sorry.

In this category, I shared what some participants said about the value of being supportive parents and what other participants said about having supportive parents themselves. These relationships are important because parental relationships are usually some of the most impactful relationships in people's lives (see Haskins & Appling, 2017). According to RCT, having healthy relationships also promote brain health (Jordan, 2009).

Category 3: Allies. Four participants talked about the importance of having allies and being allies for others. Considering an RCT lens, allies are important to advocacy and helping people gain access they may have difficulty obtaining by themselves (Haskins & Appling, 2017). Chad shared a few examples, from his personal life. In one story, he discussed a recent event, which gained media attention after coffee shop employees racially profiled a Black man who was in the shop. Chad said the scenario sounded like experiences he had in the past:

> I don't know if you heard this, it just happened the other day, of a guy who was at Starbucks. And the manager or whoever that worked there, called the police on the Black guy because he hadn't ordered anything yet. And the police came and arrested him, and the White people in the establishment were confused like why is he being arrested? He didn't do anything wrong. We're just sitting here, too, maybe some of us didn't order anything, and I forgot the outcome of that conversation, but lo and behold, he was arrested. He wasn't charged with anything obviously, because he didn't do anything wrong, but the idea to . . . maybe there's a law that you can't sit in that Starbucks in that county or whatever. But they are not treating the White people the same as the treatment to Black people.
>
> That exact scenario has happened to me. I didn't end up getting arrested. But I certainly had the cops called on me for being somewhere. Well, why did that person get the cops called on them for being somewhere? I've definitely been in coffee shops, have had grocery store owners threaten to call the police on

me, they didn't actually do it. In instances, where the cops were called, I was okay, I didn't go to jail, and luckily it wasn't worse. But the fact that the person that was in charge of that establishment took it upon themselves to isolate me, and then not isolate the other person or anybody else that came through.

One of the first instances that happened to me, I was 11 or 12 . . . I was in sixth grade and my friends and I, . . . and my two cousins, who both are Black. And . . . a fifth friend who is White were in like a quickie mart kinda place . . . And this is a neighborhood that we live in, that Marco and I had lived in for a long time. He'd never had any problems. But the first time we had went with him, the guy threatened to call the police on us, because he said, we couldn't be in the back of the store. He had money, we had money, he had been there many times. But us as a group of kids, and I remember him saying, . . . like what's the big deal, man? I come here all the time... And even in my young mind, I'm thinking like this has gotta be, because we're here. I'm 11 years old, and I understood that, . . . we're kind of just trained to be aware of that kind of stuff all the time. It's also interesting too, to see just that difference in White folks. Like people who are genuinely concerned.

Teresa talked about experiences she had in graduate school where one of her White classmates became her only friend:

. . . when I got to UCF, that's where I did graduate studies . . . I was the only African American in the cohort. We were all teachers trying to get our master's . . . . And as far as instructors go, . . . I have never felt like I was, it was unequal

> except the group cohort itself was a very unfriendly cohort at first… except for a couple of people, I think there are always gonna be some people who really try to do what's right . . . we partnered up from day one, Jessica and I. But with the cohort that's where the, no one wanted to sit by me at first except for Jessica.

In her interview, Nikki stated the following about having White allies who she felt were supportive of her:

> Maybe that is how I do it, because I did grow up, and of course, for a few years, I was in Jamaica, but my entire high school career, and middle school, it was predominantly White. That's who I hung around, those were my friends, and if anything, they helped to protect me. If anyone said anything, then I don't know if they said anything negatively, because they wouldn't tell me. They would protect me if they did.

Owen talked about a conversation he had with one of his White friends who is a police officer. Here is some of what he shared about their conversation on police racial profiling:

> . . . a friend became an Orlando Police Officer. And we went to elementary school together; this guy served multiple tours in the military. He's a good dude. It's a White guy, and I was talking to him like hey man what's up man? What's up? This whole driving while Black, and he's like I've known you for a long time so let me just holler at you real quick. When I'm driving with anybody, or I'm on like patrol or doing my stuff I only use the statistics that are in front of me. So, it's like he put me on for a ride along and he was like look. I know that

obviously, cops are not in your best interest. But I'm gonna tell you what I do, just so you can just see what's up . . . On to the next guy, now this guy is looking at me repeatedly in his rearview mirror. I'm just a cop behind the car… Not a big deal, but, you know.

All of a sudden, the guy who's in the left lane, in that Civic, immediately cuts across three lanes to get off on the exit. And he's like, that's a ridiculous maneuver that he pulled. I have to make sure that he could be having sort of health issue, I don't know. Pulls the guy over and of course, it's not his car. He has an expired license. But that guy, you have to give me a reason, but not every cop is like that . . . . I've grown up around everybody, you've got a diverse family, and this is what he's telling me. I understand that people are people. But talk to some of these other cops, they may not have your best interest out there, man. So, you gotta do what you gotta do and be careful. You gotta like, they tell you to do something, man, just do it.

In this final category of this theme, I shared what the participants said about the importance of having White allies helping them navigate difficult and uncomfortable settings. It is also important to hear from the participants what they feel would be valuable in counseling by including their voices in counseling literature which can promote mutual empathy between Black clients and counselors working with them (see Frey, 2013; Haskins & Appling, 2017; Jordan, 2009; Kress et al., 2018).

Theme 7: Implications for Counseling

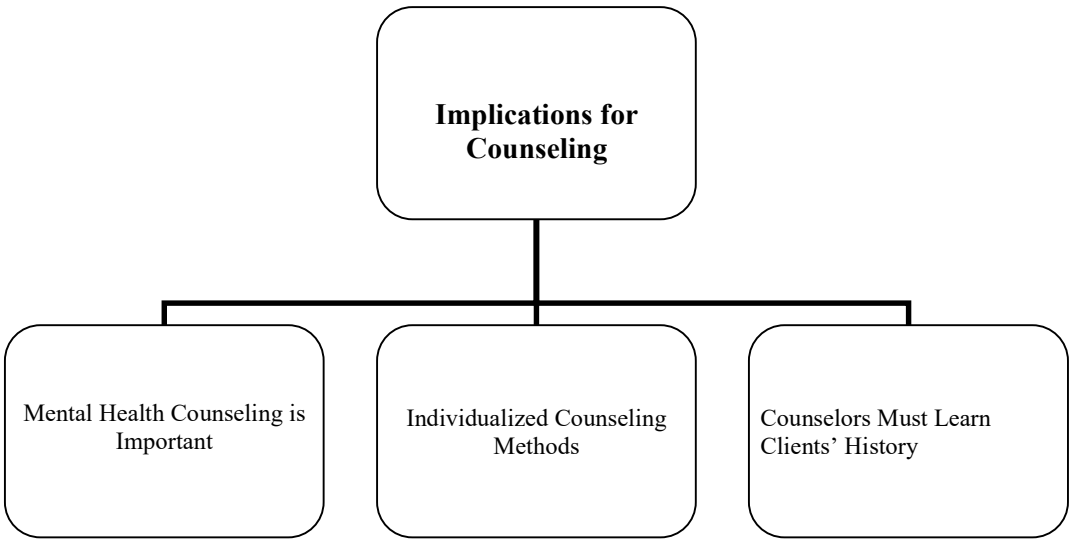

Figure 7. Implications for counseling.

The participants provided their perspective and feedback about the importance of mental health counseling, and culturally appropriate interventions counselors can use with Black clients. However, according to RCT, the interventions a counselor uses are not as significant as the rapport, therapeutic alliance, and mutual empathy they build with clients to increase successful counseling outcomes (Frey, 2013; Haskins & Appling, 2017; Jordan, 2009; Parsons & Zhang, 2014). The three categories that emerged from the data in this theme were mental health counseling is important, individualized counseling interventions, and counselors must learn clients' histories.

Category 1: Mental health counseling is important. All participants expressed that they value mental health counseling and think it is important, particularly within Black communities to help people get and stay mentally healthy. Also, they felt counseling is important to help quell the negative stereotypes that many Black people

have about going to counseling. Diane shared her insights on the benefits of mental health counseling, particularly in the Black community:

> I think it's very important. I think it's needed. I'm an advocate for it even though I'm not a professional. In my organization, I have a nonprofit organization that the goal is to reclaim the family and to strengthen the family, and so a lot of community events, that I do, I'm bringing those professionals to the table. And talking about what is some vices or some coping strategies you know or some outlets that one can use to navigate through these types of experiences. Whether it's with bullying, whether it's with drug addiction, whether it's with trafficking whether it's with racism. You know, whether it's with police brutality. You know all those need intervention, and if it comes in the form of mental health counseling, you know, or mentoring in some formal way, I think it's very important. I mean, the Bible says that there's safety in the multitude of counsel. So, I believe that.
>
> You know. My family has gone the counseling before, you know. And, and for what we needed at that time, it was wonderful for us. Now wasn't, wasn't the total resolve? No, but it definitely contributed to the overall. It was a tool in my toolbox. That in addition to my spiritual ground, awareness. You know, just the need to even go out and research. What works for somebody else might not work for you.

Chad discussed the importance of mental health counseling due to the traumatic experiences Black people have endured over the years. He said:

> Well, I think, Black folks, I think anyone would benefit from mental health counseling. There's nothing to be lost from having a conversation with somebody who's listening to you and who's open to potentially helping you through whatever you're going through. Something as small as talking to your friends can satisfy that need that you may have. Obviously, it's not the same scenario, but I think it's beneficial to people. But in terms of Black folks, and the traumas that they had to go through, I think it's important to acknowledge that the trauma of someone who lives through the trauma. Not just the big event, like the Black person that has to watch videos of other Black people getting shot, and then imagining them living in fear constantly of police or growing up hating police, because of what police are doing.

Sam shared the following about the importance of mental health counseling:

> I actually think that mental health counseling is really necessary, it's really important, especially in our community, the Black community because there's a lot of stigma associated with seeking out mental health services. I think it really can help a lot of people, and then it doesn't have to be extensive. It could be just a few sessions, and it can help someone, so I really do think it's important for the community.

Teresa added her perspectives on the importance of mental health counseling for Black students:

> I think it is so necessary and I'm coming straight strictly from a professional point of view in coming as a former educator because so many of our children need it.

> So many of them need it. So, we as a people can't be afraid of it. There have been too many times where we have been in meetings with parents, we say okay, based on these behaviors, based on these outcomes. Maybe we need to get someone to even just talk to Johnny or Suzy or so, to see where they're coming from and to try to help them get to so and so. And many times, there are roadblocks, because they don't want the person in their home. Okay, well, can we try in the school setting first? Because it's evident. You see it; we see it that they need help. Okay, so my thought is that it's very necessary. I have never had mental health counseling, but just looking . . . So, I'm not opposed as an adult, but my experience is just with children, so that's why.

Similarly, Nikki said the following about the importance of mental health counseling:

> I think it's necessary. If you have a problem, I believe you need to speak with someone. I believe that talking it out, for me, personally, sometimes I don't need someone to solve my problem. I know exactly what I need to do to solve my own problem, but just getting it out. So, I'm a big supporter of therapy, getting it out there, speaking to someone. Maybe you don't trust, maybe, a personal friend to handle your situation, but talk to someone who's random, so to speak, to get it out there. And maybe they can make a suggestion, and it could be the same suggestion that a friend is saying, but get it out there, get someone to talk to.

Owen gave his perspective too on the importance of mental health counseling and dispelling myths that mental illness is only a White person's disease. Here is his perspective on the importance of mental health counseling in the Black community:

> I personally experienced it people/friends with mental health. I almost lost somebody because of it had I not like reacted the way I was supposed to. It was 12 hours of watching someone like lose themselves to the point where I would call the police. I had to call the police twice, and the police were like look, this gonna get worse, but we can't do anything right now because it'll be harmful for themselves. But it got worse, and they called the cops, and they came, and they took care of it. But it was just 12 hours of watching one of my best friends become someone else. And a pretty strong guy.
>
> I never felt powerless before, never, never felt powerless before. I felt powerless. And I was like, green, yellow or anything, this is like some real stuff. This isn't White people disease; this is real! Like I watched somebody unlearn themselves and become someone else! So, when I studied it myself, I had a couple of friends who were getting their doctorate in psychology and explained some things to me. And being proactive about it but it's very important. The brain is an organ. It's like your heart, your lungs, your stomach. Like when those go wrong, you go to a doctor like, or the doctor for your brain like this isn't nonsense.

Jabari also made a statement about the importance of mental health and approached it from a systemic perspective:

> I think that mental health counseling is a sleeping giant. You know what I'm saying, that is slowly being awakened by necessity. I think that mental health counseling is society's savior. Because everything is mental health, you know what I'm saying? Everything is mental space, whether that space is cluttered or it's spacious. And I just think that it's kind of like that mental health continuum no one is 100% healthy or 100% mentally ill. That is controlled by coping mechanisms. So, my thing is, if it's right here, if you have someone who has reached the level of stasis or at least a level of balance, why not emulate that out into society? That's full of imbalance.

All participants expressed that they believe mental health counseling is important for all persons. However, a client-centered approach is crucial to successful counseling outcomes especially considering the role culture plays in people's lives (Frey, 2013; Haskins & Appling, 2017; Jordan, 2009; Kress et al., 2018; Parsons & Zhang, 2014).

Category 2: Individualized Counseling Interventions. All participants talked about the importance of counselors making counseling interventions individualized to Black clients' experiences. They said when counselors personalize counseling interventions, it will increase the chances of Black individuals going to counseling, not terminating prematurely, and having successful counseling outcomes. I included each of their perspectives in this section.

Diane added insights about nontraditional interventions counselors could use to help Black clients feel comfortable in counseling in the following statements:

So, I know in order for an impact, in just our community, that there has to be a certain type of messaging and packaging. You can't come. You can't approach it traditionally. I'll give you an example. One of the things that I do in my organization deals with anger management and crisis prevention, conflict resolution which all ties into mental health. But we present it in the way to our youth to where it has something to do with video games. So, we take strategies from video games, and compare it to strategies for living the life. Strategies that you have used to go into the world and navigate, is strategies you have to use and implement into your personal life in order to navigate. So that you can win. The goal of playing video games is to win. So, the same time, effort, sacrifice that you make to play video games for four hours because you try to rack up points or you can win. Take that same energy and passion and apply those strategies to winning at life.

I think taking them out of the office. Creating an environment that feels home. Like home, and not one that feels like an institution. Because we always been institutionalized. So, we're trying to get away from the institution, but yet when we go get counseling, it looks like we're in one. I think that the change of environment and plus, I'm a designer. I went to school for design too. So, I think colors. The atmosphere, that you set played a role in the type of outcome that you get in wellness. In wholeness. So, I think to answer your question, the change of environment would be good. I'm just going be honest. Words play a huge role in how people interpret and process. You know, just using certain terms differently.

> Maybe not call it counseling. The goal is to counsel. It don't necessarily have to be called counseling. The goal is to counsel, to bring that type of intervention. And establishing a relationship.

Chad added the following implications for counseling, which includes having a Black counselor, or a counselor who understand the lived experiences of Black people:

> I think it would be important for Black folks to have Black therapists, initially. They might not be the end all, be all on that scenario, because every Black person's experience is very different. Well, maybe not very different, but just different. But I think that would be a benefit because it would begin a conversation of empathy, which I think is important if somebody's gonna listen to you and potentially help you through whatever you're going through. They have to at least believe that what you're saying is real and have some empathy for you.

Sam said that counselors must believe and empathize with Black clients' lived experiences with racial microaggressions:

> I think number one, helping us to figure out how to respond to them. I am more of shy, quiet. I don't really like confrontation type of person. So, for me, my first thing would be to kind of brush it off and not say anything. And other situations someone may be more verbal, more opinionated. They may kind of lash out and become angry at someone that does say something that they feel is being racial toward them. So, I think, as a counselor best thing would be to look at your particular client and figure out what's the best way for them to respond to that in a healthy way. Cause everyone is gonna respond to it differently. Really just

listening and, also trying to, I guess, advise on how to change that situation for the future if it's just that one person.

So, in my case, I usually take that time to educate, but if you, if the counselor has advice on how to educate someone that may have stereotypes in their mind against certain races. How can we as, I don't wanna call us victims, we as individuals? Yeah, as targets, how can we change that. One person at a time, how can we change it, so that the next time they approach a Black person, they may think differently and may not act in the same way. Yeah, I think it's really just providing ways to either cope with the feelings associated with certain actions, and ways of changing it in the future. So, ways of educating the population so that it doesn't happen again. The population that may be discriminating against Black people. So how can I as a, like if that happens again, how can I educate that person? And ways for me to cope as a person that has gone through it. So those would be the things that I would look for.

Teresa said the following about her work as an educator in Title I schools with mostly Black students as well as her experiences working with both White and Black counselors:

And then, from the counselor's point of view, I have only worked with, I think one White counselor. And I felt she was a pretty neat counselor in the sense that she would really try to get to the bottom of things and not use her culture or her experiences to come to a conclusion. All of the other counselors I've worked with have been African American, cause I work just in all Title I schools. So, to

> say yes, they are necessary, let's hear what they have to say, let's talk together, and respect their positions. Well, if they are not of the culture of the child, I think they should find some information about the culture first. I think that they should partner with someone who knows the child and not just, I respect everybody as professionals in whatever it is they study. But sometimes it might be that you need to partner with someone or just to do something to learn more about the child before you reach a conclusion about that child.

Nikki's perspective on implications for counseling included the counselors understanding White versus Black clients' needs in therapy:

> Exactly, and that comes back down to even, I don't wanna say stark differences, but between the African American versus the White therapy. Certain things that are normal in the Black culture is not necessarily normal in the White culture, if that makes sense. So even just the subtlety of going to someone who's familiar with the African American background, versus someone who's in a completely different, race. And you know, grew up as such. Not necessarily saying that a White person couldn't have lived in a Black household and understand it. But just if they understand the differences between the cultures, I mean probably adequately, what do you call it, advise on that.

According to Owen, we need a systemic overhaul which has implications for mental health counseling for Black clients:

> All the systems need to be redone. I mean, all the social sciences need to be redone because now the cell phone is a permanent of our bodies. And social

media is a permanent part of our bodies all of it needs to be redone. I think, I mean not only the history but their body language too. If the counselor doesn't look comfortable, or doesn't react appropriately to certain things, it's like we're pretty visual people in our . . . And like okay, what do you mean by that? Like, if you're not saying certain things or not reacting in the right way, it can definitely come off as disingenuous. Like why am I here? Do you care? I just told you some real serious stuff, man! So, if you not dynamic in how your approach is to that, and you can see it's like a total show. Like come on, the show we love a good show, so I mean like, have the same, meet us with the same energy level if you need too. You have to adapt to your client.

I would like to see the history of that counselor. Like, obviously, your accolades and stuff like that but maybe you've traveled. Maybe you've seen people of different cultures, countries, and things like that. This is when I've been here. I studied with this person in China or I went to Nigeria. I went here. You know. I went to places. Like to truly understand the people you have to see the people. You have to see the people. Like you have to be out there. It's a disservice to yourself. You are working on the mind, the most complex organ. I guess, on the real hard work's how it recovers. What it does, even the dream state, it's a phenomenal thing how it can be enhanced, how it can be.

And you think that this 4 to12 years of schooling is enough? It will never be enough. It's always changing. So, it's up to you to do a good job. To not only make your mind better, your experiences better, but understanding. Just that

> psychological validation to put that foot one . . . Just get up the next morning and put one foot in front of the other. That's all we need is the . . . Like sometimes is just extending yourself as a human. So, checking with me. I guess all encompassing. Or you deal with array of clients.

Jabari added his perspective on what counselors can do to improve counseling for Black clients including incorporating the implications of race in clients' presenting concerns:

> I think in counseling, that's one of the things you want to find out is the person's personal history. But asking those questions, you know what I'm saying? I mean, if you had a, LGBT or whatever? And if you have that population, right? And if you were sitting there and your assessing this person and having a conversation, you're gonna ask those questions. So why ask about sexual preference, when you can't ask about what is your thoughts about racism? That is, we are the sum total of our life experiences? You know what I'm saying? The only way that you're going to be able to target, find the moment is to look at where it came from. Not only in sexual orientation. And that's why when you look at it, the ADA, the American Disability Act, and it talks about regardless of sex, race. All of those subjects should be part of an assessment. You see what I'm saying? If you do not, if you do not exempt this, with a person's identity. Then you can't exempt them from trying to find out their identity. That's what assessment is doing. Every single one of those marks should be very, very important, because what impact does it have to the psyche? Much. Because if it

> didn't have it, then why are we identifying it? You see? So that's how it would look in the mental health counseling, you know what I'm saying? How can you implement race? Because that is part of the guide.

In this category, each participant shared examples or ideas that counselors can incorporate into their work with Black clients. Every person, including counselors, have individual worldviews and perspectives which influences their relationships with others. Therefore, counselors should engage in self-awareness and reflections to challenge their personal biases that may create social disconnections while working with clients (Jordan, 2009; Kress et al., 2018).

Category 3: Counselors must learn client's history. For this category, six clients mentioned the importance of counselors learning and knowing a Black client's historical experiences to help them most effectively. According to Diane, Black people have been socialized to view mental health negatively:

> In the African American race, I don't think as whole. I think we're getting there. But we're not there yet. We have a hard time embracing mental health. Because there's a taboo to it. There's a negative connotation to it. I see it in the church. I see it in the professional world where we have a hard time embracing that. Because we were told that, that's for crazy people.

Chad gave his perspective in the following statement about the effects of slavery on Black oppression:

> First off, they should know that the effects of slavery are very alive and awake. I think if there's a, I forgot what the headline said, but it was an article that said

40% of Whites just think that it might have been The Atlantic. It was either the Atlantic or The Intercept, great publications one of my publications. I think Atlantic has a physical magazine or whatever, but the article said 40% Whites think that Blacks and immigrants should just work harder. They're not working hard enough to be equal. And that couldn't be farther from the truth. And obviously, the truth is stacked way against them long before. I just feel like the seeds of slavery are just still there in a lot of ways. And there's this really great clip of MLK, and I keep going back to him because, why not? Where he talks about at the end of slavery, there was this; it should be there was, when the country was founded there was this excitement to give land to White folks.

So, they could start a life for themselves here. But when slavery ended, as you, I'm sure know, that people were left with nothing. And the irony is that during slavery, you had a place to live. You had something to do. You didn't have to, obviously, your life was horrible, but outside of slavery, you had people who had very little skills. They only had the skills of the job that they had, not job but the tasks they had as a slave. But now, they have no wealth. They don't own any property, and they don't have the means to better their situation, and that exact scenario is still happening. And more specifically, in terms of like someone working a low wage job, like at Disney, or something.

So, you have a place like Disney that's a compound. It's like pretty much its own zip code or town where like Lake Buena Vista belongs to Walt Disney World. But you don't . . . most folks who work at Disney live a significant

> amount of distance from it in terms of like miles and time that it would take to get to the job? So, if you have to use public transportation, which takes maybe an hour maybe more to get to your job, and then you work all day five or six days a week for low wage. At what point do you have time to get training, or school, or technical knowledge to better your situation? So, you're effectively stuck like that forever, and that in my view is a descendant of the slaves, free quote/unquote. It's the exact same scenario.
>
> You have no opportunity to really better your situation. And the ironic part about it is there have been hubs, little bits of time periods in history where Blacks have somehow pulled themselves up by this miraculous bootstrap and created an environment where they thrive. It was whole Black towns that were doing great and the only time those towns were in decay was when there was interference by White Supremacists. Legitimate attacks or that one story where the town that was burned down from . . . losing the name of it at this moment.

Sam's perspective included the importance of mental health counseling within the Black community. Her views also included her thoughts on how negative and untrue cultural stigmas may hinder Black people from seeking counseling:

> I actually think that mental health counseling is really necessary, it's really important, especially in our community, the Black community because there's a lot of stigma associated with seeking out mental health services. Feeling that you're weak, that you're seeking help. You may be looked at a different way; you may be looked at as crazy if you're going to talk to the counselor. Or that

> what good is talking to someone going to do about my problems. Or feeling that certain things that you've experienced need to be kept in the family, kept in the house. I can't share this with outside people; it's not their business. So, I think those stigmas really play a role in why a lot of the Black community doesn't seek out mental health services, but it is really important.

Nikki shared her perspective on why it is important for counselors to understand clients' racial and cultural histories:

> For me, I would say learning about my culture, alright, being a Jamaican. Hold on, let me backtrack. Alright, so I think if I'm going to see a therapist, I would not necessarily prefer, but ideally, I would like someone who's familiar with my background, to know where I'm coming from, to see maybe if I have a problem back then. Alright, well, I'm just gonna make something up. Let's say that, I don't know, I was traumatized in Jamaica. Okay, not necessarily making something up, but in Jamaica, older men prefer younger women, younger girls. They prefer these 16-year old's who are about to graduate high school in Jamaica, and me, being up here, I've been living here for a while, I know that that's not right. But to those girls, they think that's normal to be with an older man. So maybe I didn't take it as okay. I was probably traumatized, but if my therapist knew that type of, that was pretty normal back then. Then maybe he or she can recommend and say, okay, well, this is their history. I know that's really not normal, but this is why you feel a certain way about this. So just having a history

or a background about me, or about my culture. Yes, I think that would greatly help in my therapy, personally.

Owen said: "History is so important. I mean just so important. And we do the repeated . . . the fact that one-third of the next generation doesn't believe that World War II or the Holocaust happened is unreal to me." Jabari stated the following about counselors understanding and using a client's history to help them in the present:

> I like the way that Dr. Joy D. Avery with post-traumatic slave disorder. Because that's mental health counseling, with a focus on racial relations and the way that she does it through that paradigm, through that concept of post traumatic slave disorder. That looks like, the first thing that came to my mind was Sankofa. But the concept of Sankofa which means going back and fetching. What's in the past. To be able to take it into the future for better growth and development. That's why it's the bird with his head turned back with an egg in its mouth. You know what I'm saying? With Sankofa that whole meaning which is why it is a… it's kind of like that all present now because you have in that bird or in that concept, right? You have past, present, and future occupying the same space in that bird. You know what I'm saying in that? And I think that that's what it does is that, there is the history of it which, you gotta have the history. . . .
>
> But then we have the present circumstances that's all around you. This has shed so much light on it, that now that light reaches to the point where you see the direction of the light. Even when you look at a diagnostics and statistical manual of mental health. That's nothing but the sum total of history. But when

> you're revising it, what are you adding to it? You're adding more experiences from the past. Because anytime you talk about evidence-based, you're talking about historians. Because evidence in and of itself means historic, you know what I'm saying? That the past is useful, okay? And I think, how does that look?

In this last category within this final theme, six of the participants discussed the importance of counselors understanding a client's history to include generational effects of slavery, systemic oppression, subcultural influences on clients' experiences, and myths about the benefits of counseling. The recommendations and insights that the participants shared exist within RCT and multicultural literature. For example, RCT experts discuss the importance of counselors considering sociopolitical influences such as sexism, racism, classism, and other social structures that contributed to disconnections and connections within individual lives (Frey, 2013; Haskins & Appling, 2017; Jordan, 2009; Kress et al., 2018; Parsons & Zhang, 2014). Many of these points came out in the interviews I conducted for this study.

Summary

In this chapter, I summarized the steps taken to execute this study as outlined in my research plan in Chapter 3. I presented the study's findings from the data collection phase which included 23 categories, which I consolidated into seven emergent and super-ordinate themes: (a) lived experiences with racial microaggressions, (b) emotional responses to racial microaggressions, (c) intersectionality, (d) coping with racial microaggressions, (e) advocacy and social justice, (f) neighborhood and community support, and (g) implications for counseling. The main takeaway from this study was that

racial microaggressions exist among persons of Black decent and those lived experiences hurt them emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually. During the interviews, the participants candidly shared their experiences with racial microaggressions, how these incidents affected them, how they coped with them, and what they believe counselors can do to help Black clients have successful counseling outcomes. Additionally, the participants believed that mental health counseling is important to overall wellness and counselors should consider Black culture when working with Black clients. The participants also discussed their resiliency, coping skills, and pride to overcome these lived experiences. In Chapter 5, I present my analysis and interpretations of the participants' lived experiences and the overall findings of the study. I also list the study's limitations, implications, and social change impact as well as give suggestions for future research on this topic as it relates to the counseling profession.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

My purpose for this dissertation was to learn from Black adults their lived experiences with racial microaggressions and their thoughts on what Black clients need from professional counselors to have successful counseling outcomes. I used a qualitative interpretive hermeneutic phenomenological approach to analyze the participants meaning-making about their lived experiences with racial microaggressions as well as added my perspectives and interpretations about their experiences. In this chapter, I summarize the key findings of the study, which included using RCT as the theoretical framework for data analysis (see Creswell, 2013; Frey, 2013; Jordan, 2009; Kress et al., 2018; Parsons & Zhang, 2014; Patton, 2015). The main findings were that Black individuals had multiple experiences with racial microaggressions directly, indirectly, personally, and through witnessing others' experience them. The participants also provided implications for counselors working with Black clients such as the importance of understanding a client's racial history and providing culturally sensitive interventions.

Interpretations

The findings of this study support current literature on Black individuals of various ages and backgrounds experiencing racial microaggressions at various times and settings throughout their lives (Griffin et al., 2016; Owen et al., 2014; Robinson-Wood et al., 2015). However, many factors such as whether the person was born and raised in the United States or another country and the values and norms they grew up embracing

determine how they process and internalize their experiences. The participants in this study shared similar experiences to those in other studies presented in the literature review in Chapter 2 such as experiencing frequent and pervasive racial microaggressions in public settings. For example, they experienced racial microaggressions while seeking professional goods and services, in school, at work, and in their residential neighborhoods (Griffin et al. 2016; Owen et al., 2014; Purifoye, 2015; Robinson-Wood et al., 2015). Data from prior research also showed that Black people encountered racial microaggressions while taking public transportation, connecting with others online, during interactions with police officers, and in counseling (Cokley et al., 2016; English et al., 2017; Isom, 2016; Kettrey & Laster, 2014; Purifoye, 2015).

Additionally, the participants in the current study reported feeling unsure whether their experiences with racial microaggressions occurred because of their race or other demographic factors such as gender or a combination of them, which also coincides with previous research. For example, in an earlier study, individuals reported that their intersecting identities contributed to their marginalization and noted the importance of counselors considering how sociopolitical impact individuals' mental health (Edwards, 2017). The participants in this study also shared accounts of their intersecting identities worsening their experiences with racial microaggressions. For example, police officers harassing and targeting Black men based on their race and gender (Bowleg et al., 2013; Isom, 2016; Smith et al., 2016).

Due to the participants sharing their lived experiences with racial microaggressions during the interviews, the study's results also answered the main

research question and subquestion. Additionally, the participants' recommendations that counselors need to be nonjudgmental, compassionate, and use culturally competent interventions with Black clients are consistent with counseling literature. For example, prior researchers showed that counselors working with clients who have had experiences with racial microaggressions should use basic counseling skills such empathy, nonjudgement, and unconditional positive regard to help their clients work through them effectively (Mazzula & Nadal, 2015; Stambaugh & Ford, 2015). Counselors using an RCT lens to work with clients from minority populations should explore if they have experienced microaggressions, societal traumas, or discrimination, which may contribute to their social disconnections (Jordan, 2009; Kress et al., 2018).

Although the data in this study confirmed some of the literature, it did not support other elements in the existing research. For example, although the participants in this study discussed feeling angry and hypervigilant about their experiences with racial microaggressions, they did not report having serious mental health, substance abuse, self-esteem, or self-concept issues. They reported feeling confident, supported, and empowered to overcome their experiences. In contrast, participants in other studies reported having mental health and substance abuse problems related to experiencing racial microaggressions (Liao et al., 2015; O'Keefe et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2016; Williams et al., 2017). Furthermore, none of this study's participants reported having any mental illnesses, which made them targets of microaggressions, while participants in an earlier microaggressions study reported that they were targets of microaggressions because of their mental illnesses (Gonzales et al., 2014).

The participants in this study also did not report having any physical health concerns because of their experiences with racial microaggressions as those in a study where the researchers found a negative correlation between physical health conditions and racial microaggressions, which led to people having role limitations (Nadal et al., 2017). Another element of past research literature that this study did not confirm was participants experiencing racial microaggressions in counseling because only one participant, Diane, reported that she and her family participated in counseling in the past and reporting having a positive experience.

The results also showed that multiple theoretical approaches to counseling could be effective with proper cultural awareness when addressing Black clients' mental health concerns and racial microaggressions. For example, RCT came from feminist theory and is a combination of client-centered and multiculturally theories with a social justice emphasis. The core tenants of RCT and the counseling profession, in general, are that therapists must use mutual empathy and empowerment, remain genuine, validate clients, show compassion, be nonjudgmental, and have a willingness to learn and grow to promote healthy and successful therapeutic alliances with clients (Haskins & Appling, 2017; Hook et al., 2016; Jordan, 2009; Kress et al, 2018; Mazzula & Nadal, 2015). Therefore, counselors who are aware of how their worldviews may affect their work with clients can strive to create a warm, nonjudgmental, mutually empathetic, and inclusive milieu for all clients (ACA, 2014; Haskins & Appling, 2017; Mazzula & Nadal, 2015; Stambaugh & Ford, 2015).

Acknowledging a Black clients' race and what being Black means to them can also strengthen the counseling relationship and help clients to relax and open up in counseling. Therefore, if counselors address race relations early in the counseling relationship, they may help foster a positive therapeutic alliance based on trust and safety from the onset of therapy (Hook et al., 2016; Kress et al., 2018; Mazzula & Nadal, 2015). It is crucial for counselors to learn about, support, and validate Black clients' lived experiences with racial microaggressions to understand how those experiences affect them (Jordan, 2009; Knight, 2013; Kress et al., 2018; Mazzula & Nadal, 2015; Nadal et al., 2017). On the other hand, counselors must also avoid probing clients for racial issues beyond what the clients want to discuss (Jordan, 2009; Knight, 2013). Using this technique takes practice, supervision, trial and error, and counselors' willingness to push beyond their comfort zone by starting conversations about these often sensitive and uncomfortable issues (Knight, 2013; Mazzula & Nadal, 2015). However, counselors applying RCT to counseling focus more on creating a safe, healthy, social, and mutually empathetic milieu for clients than using specific interventions (Jordan, 2009; Kress et al., 2018).

Based on the results of this study, I interpreted that Black people continue to persevere despite the generational adversities they have faced. The coping skills that the participants in this study use such as having social support, faith, and internal strength are how they overcome these experiences. An example in the study came from Diane, who is from a middle- to upper-class background and shared that she had direct and indirect experience with racial microaggressions. She also shared that she must help her children

navigate similar experiences by making sure they know who they are and do not let racial issues discourage them. Diane further explained that although her children are adults, she still encourages them to always remember who they are as individuals and as Black people regardless of the trials they face in society.

Similarly, Owen, Chad, and Teresa talked about the values their parents and other family members instilled in them from childhood about how to navigate a world filled with systemic oppression and racism. They said their families shared stories with them about the racial struggles of their ancestors and told them to use precautions to remain safe. Their parents explained that safety is important especially as they navigate environments where people judge others because of race, gender, and other intersecting identities. These strong family structures are at the forefront of creating healthy social relationships and connections among Black families, which are major tenants of RCT (Frey, 2013; Haskins & Appling, 2017; Jordan, 2009; Kress et al., 2018; Parsons & Zhang, 2014).

Research Themes

The research themes, which emerged from this study were: a) lived experiences with racial microaggressions, (b) emotional responses to racial microaggressions, (c) intersectionality, (d) coping with racial microaggressions, (e) advocacy and social justice, and (f) neighborhood and community social support. The RCT thematic analyses I discovered based on the themes and basic tenants of RCT included participants reliance on healthy social connections, reliance on religion and spiritual beliefs, and Black culture to express healthy coping. Another theme that emerged from the data was the

participants' perspectives on the importance of advocacy for themselves and others. Understanding that social injustices will continue to occur, participants have shared the meanings they associate with their lived experiences.

Lived experiences of racial microaggressions. Each participant shared their lived experiences with racial microaggressions, which included multiple direct and indirect encounters. Chad and Jabari shared that they did not realize how emotionally suppressed some of their lived experiences were until their interview for this study. They also associated their lived experiences with racial microaggressions as well as the experiences of other Black people who experience them as a form of modern slavery because some White people still consider them as inferior to them. Sam also shared that her experiences with racial microaggressions caused an internal conflict about when she should speak up or remain quiet during these encounters because they could potentially affect her professional relationships.

Emotional responses to racial microaggressions. According to the participants in this study, dealing with racial microaggressions at various points in a person's life can be exhausting and frustrating, as Black individuals must work harder to prove themselves in certain settings due to feeling judged, isolated, and mistreated. Owen found it exhausting to be Black considering there is no "off button" for racism. He explored Western hypocrisy as well as interracial conflicts. On reflection and increased understanding of systemic, overt and covert issues including microaggressions, Owen now experiences increased empathy for Black women who are offended by cross-racial dating. He said he did not understand why Black women get upset when a Black man

dates White women. However, he realized that they feel that way because the pool of Black men available to them remains limited due to systemic and emotional issues including overt forms of racial microaggressions such as mass incarceration and death. These emotional responses are consistent with the research literature, which suggests that depression, anger, anxiety, and hypervigilance are common reactions to racial microaggressions (Forrest-Bank & Jenson, 2015; Isom, 2016; Lewis et al., 2017; Torres-Harding & Turner, 2015). From an RCT perspective, these emotional issues could adversely affect an individual's interpersonal and social relationships and emphasize needs for social justice advocacy efforts to combat systemic oppression (Frey, 2013; Haskins & Appling, 2017; Jordan, 2009; Kress et al., 2018; Parsons & Zhang, 2014).

Intersectionality. Participants reported feeling scared and angry in situations where people called the police on them unnecessarily, or police racially profiled them due to racial and sometimes gender biases. These experiences have created a sense of hypervigilance in the participants of this study as frequently expressed by Owen, Chad, and Jabari, who are Black men, supporting the notion of race and gender increasing a person's chances of experiencing racial microaggressions. Additionally, intersectionality is a factor for persons experiencing racial microaggressions, which have counseling implications surrounding their intersecting identities leading and being targets of institutional racism (Bowleg et al., 2013; Edwards, 2017; Huber & Solorzano, 2015; Isom, 2016; Smith et al., 2016).

Coping with racial microaggressions. The participants in this study shared that they use healthy coping skills such as spirituality, personal choice to decide how and

when to respond to racial microaggressions and participate in activities surrounding Black power and excellence which increase their self-esteem and give them hope. Celebrating Black power and excellence comes in many forms and for several reasons. For example, honoring President Barack Obama becoming the first Black U.S. President. Also, expressing happiness and excitement when Black professionals become successful in their careers such as Gabby Douglas, the U.S. gymnast who became a classic example of the "Black Girl Magic" mantra which occurs when a Black girl or woman does something great. Other examples include the creation and growth of the Black Lives Matter Movement, embracing Black music or Black people dressing in African clothing and costumes when they went to see the Black Panther hit movie featuring Black actors in the leading roles. These celebrations and movements are not meant to make Black culture seem superior. Instead, they express that Black culture is just as powerful and beautiful as the dominant culture (Washington, 2018). These celebrations are also motivating and express healthy ways of coping with Black oppression and racism.

Advocacy/social justice. The participants in the study shared that they advocate for themselves and others when necessary. A major part of RCT is engaging in advocacy and social justice efforts to help those oppressed and marginalized. Engaging in advocacy helps to validate and empower individuals to deal with their oppressive situations and can lead to developing healthy and fruitful relationships (Frey, 2013; Haskins & Appling, 2017; Jordan, 2009; Parsons & Zhang, 2014). The research participants from this study discussed the importance of engaging in advocacy and

wanting to be a part of systemic changes through it. Advocacy requires individuals to exhibit leadership qualities, which can help bring about needed changes in society.

Neighborhood/community social support. Having the support of others is a basic human need for each person to have a successful, healthy, and productive life (Domingue, 2015; Frey, 2013; Parsons & Zhang, 2014). All the research participants in this study shared how important having social connections and healthy relationships are to them. These types of relationships come from their families, friends, allies, and colleagues. The study's results show consistency with the research literature on the benefits of having social support which is also a crucial part of RCT and feminism (see Frey, 2013; Haskins & Appling, 2017; Parsons & Zhang, 2014). Having healthy social connections date back centuries and is at the core of Black culture because most Black people come from collectivist cultures where multigenerational and within group support are common practices (Holder, Jackson, & Ponterotto, 2015; Liao et al., 2015).

Implications for counseling. The implications for counseling, which came from this study are consistent with prior research findings on how counselors can work effectively with Black clients. For example, the participants in this study said that it is important for counselors to be nonjudgmental, show unconditional positive regard, and use individualized and unconventional counseling interventions with Black clients. These recommendations are consistent with the findings of several studies that found these recommendations to be effective strategies in counseling (Haskins & Appling, 2017; Knight, 2013; Kress et al., 2018; Nadal et al., 2017). The participants also expressed the importance of counselors understanding their personal biases and

channeling them to avoid impeding the counseling relationship. Additionally, Owen, Jabari, and Chad said that counselors need to know Black clients' histories to help them effectively. The current literature emphasizes the importance of counselors understanding a client's racial history as a counseling implication (Hook et al., 2016; Jordan, 2009; Kress et al., 2018; Mazzula & Nadal, 2015).

When counselors understand and embrace clients' lived experiences in counseling, it can foster healthy therapeutic alliances (Haskins & Appling, 2017; Knight, 2013; Nadal et al., 2017). Chad also said that when possible, Black clients should have a Black counselor to aid in the process of understanding their lived experiences. Moreover, Diane shared that counselors need to consider using nontraditional counseling settings such as having sessions outside of their office spaces. She also said that counselor should consider using other words to describe counseling to help with Black clients' buy-in and reduce resistance to the counseling process because the word counseling has a negative connotation in the Black community.

All participants discussed suppressing the emotional turmoil related to racial microaggressions. This disclosure is congruent with my clinical practice in which client suppression manifested in poor anger control, depression, and anxiety. Therefore, it is imperative that counselors understand this concept to provide proper assessment and intervention with Black clients. For example, Chad said, counselors must consider the effects of even small racial traumas on Black clients' mental health. In a recent article, Kress et al. (2018), recommended that counselors use RCT to address clients' trauma which may include interpersonal traumas related to social injustices. For example,

counselors could use interventions such as role plays and psychoeducation to help clients learn effective ways to cope with traumatic experiences (Kress et al., 2018). As Sam shared, she would like counselors to help individuals with shy personalities learn how to respond to racial situations effectively. For example, responding to them by educating perpetrators about microaggressions in a way that they will be receptive rather than defensive or dismissive. Counselors must also be at the forefront of promoting systemic changes, which help all individuals. According to Owen, all systems need revising to match the current issues today people face such as the negative impact of social media on individuals' mental health.

Counselors could also do a better job of encouraging clients to share positive counseling experiences with their support networks to help reduce the stigma of mental health counseling in Black communities. A part of this negative counseling stigma came from slavery when White individuals were the ones with access and money to afford counseling and other health services, while Black people relied solely on each other and their faith to cope with stressors (Holder et al., 2015). However, post-civil rights era, many Black people gained access to counseling, but the stigma surrounding it remained prevalent within the culture (Fripp & Carlson, 2017). Although current research supports some of these recommendations (Bowleg et al., 2013; Kress et al., 2018; Mazzula & Nadal, 2015), it is helpful to hear from Black individuals that these are what they have or would find beneficial in counseling.

Limitations of the Study

The first limitation of this study relates to the qualitative nature and small sample size of seven participants, preventing the findings from applying to the entire population of Black individuals. However, generalizability was not the purpose of this study. Additionally, five of the participants were of American descent, and two were of Caribbean descent which is a subset of Black people represented in the United States. A second limitation was that the study only included Black individuals while persons from other racial and minority groups also experience racial and other types of microaggressions. A third limitation came from two of the seven participants not responding to member checking to confirm that I documented their lived experiences correctly. Therefore, I relied on the information they shared during their interview. Another limitation of the study was the personal bias I brought to the study as a Black woman who has direct and indirect lived experiences with racial microaggressions. However, I worked to reduce this limitation by using reflexivity by remaining mindful of how my lived experiences could affect my perspective and input and relied on my dissertation committee members to review the data objectively (see Creswell, 2013; O'Connor, 2011; Patton, 2015). I also asked the participants open-ended questions, avoided giving my individual opinions, or making leading comments during the interviews, and did not impose my values on them (Bourke, 2014).

A final limitation was relying on the participants' subjective recollections of their lived experiences which may not accurately reflect the events they reported. However, the purpose of the research is to understand participant perspectives and this study

achieved that goal. The noteworthy point is that although the participants gave their perspective of what counselors could do when working with Black clients in counseling, only one participant reported ever going to counseling, and her recollection of that experience was positive. However, all participants shared that they would be open to receiving counseling in the future.

I added trustworthiness to the study which included its four elements of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Trustworthiness in this study included credibility via member checking and conducting a comprehensive review of the current literature, which confirmed and disconfirmed my findings. For example, confirmation of my findings came from Smith et al. (2016) who found that racial microaggressions created anxiety and anger among six Black males who attended various universities and experienced racial microaggressions. Similarly, participants in other studies reported feeling hurt, hypervigilant, anger, hurt by their lived experiences with racial microaggressions (Robinson-Wood et al., 2015; Torres-Harding & Turner, 2015). The participants in this study reported experiencing similar emotions due to direct and indirect experiences with racial microaggressions which have an impact on mental health. However, although the participants in this study reported having negative emotions from racial microaggressions, they did not report experiencing major depression or suicidal ideations which contradicted the findings of another study showing that racial microaggressions might indirectly contribute to suicidal ideations in Black adults (Hollingsworth et al., 2017). Comparing my findings to supportive research literature also showed transferability. Following and outlining the steps I took in the research

showed dependability and maintaining a record of all the research data demonstrated confirmability.

Recommendations

Recommendations for future research include replicating this study with other racial populations as well as more Black clients who have had counseling experiences to determine if the recommendations for counseling would be similar or different. A similar study using a mixed method could provide richer data too. Studies based on other demographic factors such as gender, age, social class, generation, and sexuality would be important to explore as well. All the participants in this study discussed experiencing racial microaggressions during childhood. Also, each participant had parents and other adults in their village who taught them how to navigate the world despite their race. Therefore, a study with adolescent participants to learn about the messages the adults in their lives teach them about race as well as learning about their lived experiences about racial microaggressions may provide new insight for counselors working with them. Similarly, another study to learn from Black parents and guardians why they teach their children about race during childhood would help shed more light on this important issue. Other studies should address how racial microaggressions contribute to mental health issues such as depression, self-efficacy, and self-esteem of those who experience them to inform the work of counselors (Tran et al., 2015).

In this study, Owen and Jabari talked about how current politics in the U.S. contributes to microaggressions and negatively impact their relationships with others. Moreover, due to the intensity and emotional nature of current American politics, a study

that addresses the impact of politics and racial microaggressions would be helpful to generate more knowledge for counselors working with persons from underserved and marginalized groups. Microaggressions in academic and work settings came up often in the literature as well as in this study. So, a study addressing educators' knowledge and perspectives on this issue would be helpful in finding ways to minimize racial microaggressions in these settings. Some clients reported experiencing microaggressions in counseling (Hook et al., 2016; Mazzula & Nadal, 2015); therefore, more studies addressing this issue would be helpful to potentially reduce the occurrence of counselors being the perpetrators of racial microaggressions. Studies addressing racial microaggressions from the clients,' counselor educators,' and supervisors' perspectives would also help fill gaps in the research literature on this topic.

Implications for Positive Social Change

My dissertation study presented implications for social change by lessening the research gap on how counselors could work more effectively with Black clients by understanding their histories and daily stressors surrounding their lived experiences with racial microaggressions. The findings in this study presented useful information for working with Black individuals as well as Black families. These implications for counseling could lead to more Black families having positive counseling experiences and increase the numbers of Black people seeking mental health services. If so, this could create individual, familial, organization, and systemic changes toward reducing the mental health and physical health disparities among the Black population (see Hollingsworth et al., 2017; Hu & Taylor, 2016; Nadal, Griffin et al., 2014). Additionally,

professional counseling is about promoting holistic wellness of individuals, so the results of this study are contributing to individuals' overall wellness.

RCT has a strong cultural and social justice focus, which made it an ideal choice for the study's theoretical framework. The theory highlights the counseling implications and research that counselors must do to provide culturally sensitive services to ethnically diverse clients. Additionally, counselors could create further social change by implementing the interventions the participants recommended in this study in their professional practices. Therefore, the major social change implication I uncovered in this study was that counselors should consider doing more research with community samples. Although these types of studies may be harder to execute, clients are the consumers of counseling, and it is crucial to lend their voices to our work. For example, a participant in this study suggested that counselors take Black clients out of traditional counseling settings and into settings that they would find more comfortable such being outdoors during counseling sessions. This is something I found counselors are reluctant to do because it is out of their comfort zone and they are concerned about confidentiality. But it is possible to do it without violating confidentiality if executed carefully.

Jabari recommended that counselors ask open-ended questions about clients' historical and lived experiences with race. He said counselors could ask this just like they ask about other demographic questions about religion or sexual orientation. I support this recommendation as race-related demographic variables are just as important as other demographic ones such as gender, age, religion, disability, or sexuality. Additionally, when counselors understand what racial microaggressions are, they are less

likely to commit them in counseling and can learn how to address them if they come up for clients. The current study also presented implications for counselor educators and supervisors charged with teaching counselors-in-training and novice counselors about working with clients from various backgrounds. Therefore, a final recommendation would be for counselor educators and supervisors to stay current on empirical findings on this topic to inform their students and supervisees about them.

Conclusion

It is impossible for all members of the counseling profession to have knowledge or competence in all areas of counseling. However, the more active role counseling professionals take in increasing their knowledge and skills, the better professionals they will be to the people they serve. Research scholars in the counseling profession often collect data from counselors to inform their work which may or may not be helpful for improving counseling disparities. Therefore, in this dissertation study, I recruited and interviewed seven Black individuals living in Florida who experienced racial microaggressions and were willing to share their experiences and provide implications for counselors working with Black clients. Hearing directly from Black consumers or potential consumers of counseling about what will be helpful to them in counseling gives counselors a non-clinical perspective on how to improve their interventions to meet the needs of their Black clients.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Date: _____

Interview Number and pseudonym: _____

Location: _____

Demographic Questions:

1. What is your gender?

2. What is your current educational status?

3. What is your relationship/marital status?

4. How old are you?

5. What is your spiritual or religious orientation?

Interview Questions:

1. Tell me about a time when you felt that your race led to a person or people saying offensive, hurtful, or insulting comments to you or about you?
2. Please share any other experiences you had where you felt mistreated because of your race?
3. Please share more about how that experience or those experiences affected you?
4. What are your thoughts about mental health counseling?
5. In what ways do you think counselors can best address race-related issues in counseling with someone like you who has endured these experiences?
6. Are there any final thoughts you would like to add?

Appendix B: Inclusion/Screening Questions

1. Do you identify as a Black person who has experienced negative verbal or physical encounters with other people because of your race?
2. Would you be willing to participate in one audio recorded interview in a private room at a local library or community center where you would share your experiences with me?
3. Are you a professional Counselor?