



Hidden Bias, Overt Impact: A Systematic Review of the Empirical Literature on Racial Microaggressions at Work

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Abstract

This article presents a systematic review of literature on workplace racial microaggressions. Increasingly, workplaces around the world have made concerted efforts to foster diversity, equity, and inclusion in their workforces. However, racial discrimination is a social issue that continues to be endemic to the workplace—including, yet not limited to, the prevalence of racial microaggressions. These microaggressions can, at times, be covert, and undertaken sometimes without the explicit awareness or intention of the perpetrator. Yet, the consequences of these can be very real for the person impacted (the target), which include diminished wellbeing, job satisfaction, and career progression. To capture the overall trends and themes that empirical research has examined related to workplace racial microaggressions, a systematic review of 48 scholarly peer-reviewed articles on the topic was conducted. The review highlights how racial microaggressions have been conceptualized and measured in previous work, and critically examines empirical findings to date. The systematic review reveals that more work needs to be done to advance our understanding of this field of inquiry. To address this, a future research agenda based on identified gaps in the literature is articulated which highlights opportunities for advancement of the literature. Addressing these gaps will provide actionable insights for organizations in addressing the insidious social issue of racial microaggressions in the workplace, and support scholars in the development of future work.

Keywords Discrimination · Racial microaggressions · Systematic review

Introduction

Despite business organizations placing a greater focus on equity, diversity, and inclusion in the workplace, racial discrimination still persists in organizational contexts, and remains a pressing issue (Roberson, 2023). In modern workplaces, racial discrimination is typically less overt and more insidious than in the past, and is often witnessed in the form of more subtle microaggressions rather than outright bigotry. Racial microaggressions have been defined as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and

insults toward people of color” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 271). Although racial microaggressions are often delivered carelessly without the intentionality of harming others, they are considered offensive and derogatory by racial and ethnic minorities. As such racial microaggressions can be considered as behavior that does not adhere to accepted standards of conduct in a society, i.e., conduct that breaks ethical norms (Davis et al., 2024).

Over the last decade, there has been growing empirical work on racial microaggressions in the workplace. However, given this work has been published across a wide range of academic disciplines and has adopted a variety of methods, our knowledge around the topic is fragmented. Although there have been recent reviews of the general microaggressions literature in leading psychology journals (e.g., Osman et al., 2024; Spanierman et al., 2021; Wong et al., 2014), researchers have not yet conducted a systematic review of empirical work on racial microaggressions in the workplace.

In order to take stock of what we know, this article undertakes a systematic and comprehensive review of prior scholarship on racial microaggressions in the workplace. Based

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on the insights from the review, a future research agenda is developed that highlights opportunities for theoretical, empirical, and methodological advancement of the field. In doing so, the article makes several contributions. First, it makes an important contribution by synthesizing the findings from an emerging, yet fragmented body of literature on racial microaggressions at work. In particular, it highlights findings from research on target's experiences and bystanders' perceptions of racial microaggressions in the workplace, the outcomes associated with racial microaggressions, and the strategies people adopt to make sense of and deal with microaggressions. In doing so it allows us to consolidate existing knowledge from different disciplines about what we know, highlight inconsistent findings, and identify gaps in our understanding. Moreover, it exposes emerging theoretical perspectives that scholars have used to explain the prevalence of racial microaggressions in the workplace, the negative impact of these microaggressions, and how people respond to these microaggressions. Second, the article contributes to this growing field by highlighting gaps in our knowledge and identifying inconsistent findings, especially in relation to how race intersects with other salient group characteristics in predicting the nature of microaggressions experienced. This will allow us to better understand the unique experiences of racial microaggressions for people with different intersectional identities, and develop a comprehensive agenda for future research that targets opportunities for development of the field. In particular, the agenda will assist scholars in the design of future studies that examine how different groups deal with and respond to racial microaggressions, identify the policies, training, and practices organizations may introduce to reduce the prevalence of racial microaggressions and address microaggressions in the workplace when they occur. Such work will provide insights for organizations on how to reduce the prevalence of racial microaggressions at work, and for organizations, targets and bystanders to deal with racial microaggressions.

Before presenting the methodology for the systematic review, the following section highlights the definitions of racial microaggressions adopted in prior empirical work. After presenting the methodology for identifying empirical studies for inclusion in our review, prior empirical work on the topic of racial microaggressions in the workplace is reviewed. Following this, the key insights from the review are highlighted, before an agenda for future research is articulated.

Definitions of Racial Microaggressions

Prior empirical studies have typically drawn on Sue et al.'s (2007) definition of racial microaggressions as "indignities" that are perpetrated through everyday interactions i.e., verbal, behavioral, and environmental, on racial minorities and

other marginalized groups. This definition built on earlier work by Chester Pierce (1970) who originally coined the term microaggressions to describe the subtle ways in which Black people experienced discrimination from their White counterparts. These microaggressions may be intentional or unintentional, and yet create hostility and manifest as "routine and chronic experiences of unfair treatment" (King et al., 2023: 184). Microaggressions can be as subtle as acts such as ignoring, interrupting, or questioning the contributions of people from minority racial groups (Rollock, 2012). The definition of racial microaggressions shares overlap with other constructs that measure subtle racism such as selective incivility and everyday racism in that they capture subtle slights that harm the target through a violation of expected treatment or social norms by the perpetrator (Smith & Griffith, 2022). However, what distinguishes racial microaggressions from similar constructs is its focus on specific behaviors that have a damaging impact on the target i.e., the target's lived experience of various behaviors, and not the intent or motivation of the perpetrator. For example, as well as looking at subtle behaviors that harm the target, the construct of selective incivility also focuses on its intentionality toward the target, that the behaviors are undertaken deliberately with the intent of harming the target (Cortina, 2008).

Sue et al. (2007) identified four overarching categories of microaggressions. First, microassaults are explicit racial derogations characterized by verbal or nonverbal attacks meant to hurt the target through name-calling, discriminatory actions or avoidant behavior. Second, microinsults are verbal remarks or comments or that are rude, insensitive, or demeaning of a target's racial heritage or identity (Sue et al., 2007). Third, microinvalidations are subtle communications that exclude, invalidate, and rescind the thoughts, feelings, or lived experience of someone from a minority racial group (Sue et al., 2007). Finally, environmental microaggressions are microaggressions that are manifested on a systematic level across an organization. In recent years, researchers have added a fifth type of microaggression, overvalidations. This is a subtle racial microaggression wherein the perpetrator acts in a seemingly favorable way toward people from a certain racial group based on positive stereotypes, for example, assuming Asian people are good at math (Kim et al., 2019).

Within the microinsults and microinvalidations categories, Sue et al. (2007) highlighted different sub-categories of racial microaggression. Types of microaggression in the microinsults category include being assigned a degree of intelligence based on one's race (ascription of intelligence), being treated as a lesser person or group (second class citizen), treating people's communication styles as being abnormal because of their race (pathologizing cultural values/communication styles), and assuming someone as a criminal because of their race

(assumption of criminal status). Types of microaggressions in the microinvalidation category include being treated as a foreign citizen in one's own land (alien in own land), denial from a majority group member that they do not see race (color blindness), being subject to statements which assert that race plays a minor role in life success (myth of meritocracy) and denying of personal racism or one's role in its perpetuation (denial of individual racism). These sub-categories of racial microaggressions have been extended in recent work by Williams et al. (2021) to include 16 specific types of microaggression based on findings from empirical work. Their categorization was largely consistent with that of Sue et al. (2007) but introduced new categories such as tokenism (being treated in a tokenistic manner), connecting via stereotypes (connecting with someone from a racial minority through the use of stereotypes), exoticization and eroticization (being exoticized or eroticised due to one's racial group membership), reverse-racism hostility (expressing jealousy or hostility surrounding the notion that racial minorities get unfair advantages or benefits because of their race), avoidance and distancing (being ignored or be treated as invisible), and environmental attacks (including decorations, literature or depictions of people that insult a person's cultural group or identity).

Methodology

The Web of Science database was utilized to search for articles on racial microaggressions that had been published or were in press by the end of May 2024. This database was chosen as it is the most comprehensive database, includes all articles in the social science citation index, and all articles from key scholarly publishers. We searched for the term 'racial microaggression*' in the titles, keywords, abstracts, and body of text (but not reference sections) from all scholarly work in the database. We did not include dissertations, book chapters, or conference proceedings in this search as we were not certain they had been subject to peer review. We also excluded articles published in languages other than English. This yielded 1807 articles. We did not include other forms of subtle discrimination such as selective incivility, everyday racism, and everyday discrimination in our search as the focus of this article was to examine the literature on racial microaggressions. However, in the review sections, we have highlighted similarities in findings between empirical work on racial microaggressions and other constructs that capture subtle discrimination against racial/ethnic minorities in the workplace such as everyday racism and selective incivility.

In order to make sure that the articles focused on the workplace context we then revised the search by combining the words 'racial microaggression*' in combination with

the search terms 'work*' or 'employee*' in their titles, keywords, abstracts, and body of text (but not reference section). This led us to identify 557 articles. We read the abstracts and methods sections of each article to determine whether they met our inclusion criteria. More specifically, quantitative work had to measure racial microaggressions and qualitative work had to examine racial microaggressions as a major phenomenon in the study. We excluded conceptual work and discussion papers as the focus of this article is to systematically review empirical work on racial microaggressions. As our focus was on the workplace, we excluded studies that focused on students' experience of microaggressions and individuals' experiences of microaggressions outside the workplace, or articles that focus on microaggressions more generally. As a result of this screening, we identified 48 articles for inclusion in the review.

Review of the Literature

Research Designs Adopted in Previous Work

Of the 48 studies we reviewed, 26 adopted a qualitative approach to studying microaggressions, with 20 studies using interviews. Only 19 studies adopted a quantitative approach, with 14 adopting a survey design and 5 adopting an experimental design. There were three studies that used a mixed methods approach.

Lived Experiences of Microaggressions in Qualitative Research

The majority of the qualitative studies adopted semi-structured interviews (e.g., Kalemba, 2023; Kim & Shang, 2024; Oh & Min, 2022; Settles et al., 2021) and focus groups (Amoakoh & Smith, 2020; Hernandez et al., 2010; Nguyen et al., 2024) to explore the lived experiences of microaggressions faced by individuals. The questions were designed to either explore broader narratives around experiences of those from racial/ethnic minorities e.g., DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2020, or directly explore the experiences of microaggressions in the workplace e.g., Branco & Bayne, 2020; Miller, 2021, and in some cases, the interview questions were even informed by intersectionality e.g., Best et al., 2023. In addition, a few studies used personal narratives (Louis et al., 2016, 2017) and auto-ethnographic approaches (Simatele, 2018).

The analysis of data found in the qualitative papers typically adopted grounded theory constructive processes or used thematic analysis. A grounded theory approach facilitated the continuous refinement of interview questions, allowing for an iterative engagement with the theory. This

process enabled an authentic exploration of participants' experiences with racial microaggressions (Miller, 2021; Pitcan et al., 2018). For instance, Settles et al. (2021) suggest that by using grounded theory, and because it aligned with their phenomenological focus, it prioritized the participants' subjective meanings of their experiences of microaggression while also acknowledging the researchers' interpretive subjectivity.

Relatedly, these qualitative studies were transparent and explicit about the steps taken to ensure trustworthiness of the data and analysis, particularly researching with vulnerable participants, in this case racial/ethnic minorities, and those with intersecting identities like gender. This has been done through an acknowledgment of the researcher positionality (Weiner et al., 2021), maintaining reflexivity using memos and discussing meaning and interpretations with others on the research team (Best et al., 2023), and even member-checking (Branco & Bayne, 2020).

Measurement of Racial Microaggressions in Quantitative Research

In the 14 studies adopting a survey design, four main scales were used to capture an individual's experience of racial microaggressions at work. The Workplace and School Microaggressions, a subscale of the Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale (REMS; Nadal, 2011), was used by three studies to examine an individual's experience of microaggressions at work (Bergh & Hoobler, 2023; Miller et al., 2023; Thomas-Hawkins et al., 2022). Three additional articles (Nadal et al., 2014, 2017; Williams et al., 2023) used the full REMS scale to measure the experience of microaggressions in one's daily life inside and outside the workplace. The Workplace and School Microaggressions subscale, across five items, uses a five-point Likert scale ranging from "I did not experience this event 10 or more times in the past six months" (1) to "I experienced this event 10 or more times in the past six months" (5). These five items capture an individual's perceptions of their general experiences of racial microaggressions at work such as being treated differently or being treated in an unfriendly or hostile manner. It also captures whether they feel ignored, consider their opinions overlooked, or have their work being assumed to be inferior because of their race. However, the items in this scale do not fully capture the various types of microaggressions that were delineated by Sue et al. (2007).

The 32-item Racial Microaggressions Scale (RMAS; Torres-Harding et al., 2012), in contrast, was used in four studies (Cabell & Kozachuk, 2022; King et al., 2023; Marks et al., 2022; Sudol et al., 2021). This is a holistic scale which captures the different types of microaggressions experienced by individuals detailed by Sue et al. (2007). There are six sub-dimensions in this scale that include foreigner or not

belonging (being made to feel as if one is an outsider in one's own land because of one's racial group); criminality (being treated as if one is aggressive, dangerous or a criminal); sexualization (being treated in an overly sexual manner and being sexually stereotyped); low-achieving/undesirable culture (being treated as if people from one's racial group are incapable, incompetent, or dysfunctional, and as if successes are due to unfair special treatment); invisibility (being treated as if one is of lower status and is not visible or being dismissed or devalued); and environmental invalidations (observing that people from one's racial group are largely absent from work settings or from positions of power at work). However, compared to the Workplace and School Microaggressions subscale of the REMS, the RMAS looks at an individuals' general experiences of racial microaggressions across their life experiences, and is not specific to the workplace. However, in recent work, King et al. (2023) adapted the RMAS to ensure it focuses on individuals' experiences of racial microaggressions in the workplace. They did this by adding an "at work" or "in my workplace" descriptor to each item. Despite this limitation, researchers have used the RMAS to examine how individuals' experience of microaggressions in their daily lives (and not just in their working lives) influences their experiences at work and their career mindsets (Cabell & Kozachuk, 2022; Marks et al., 2022; Sudol et al., 2021).

The third scale developed to quantify the experiences of microaggressions is Graebner et al.'s (2009) 13-item scale. It has been used in two studies (Offermann et al., 2013, 2014). This scale is specific to an employee's perception of microaggressions perpetrated by their supervisors (Offermann et al., 2013). This scale much like the Workplace and School Microaggressions subscale of the REMS captures an individual's general perception of the supervisor's racial microaggressions, rather than capturing the differences in the microaggressions being perpetrated.

The fourth scale adopted to capture racial microaggressions was the 14-item Daily Life Experience scale (DLE), a subscale of the Racism and Life Experiences Scale (RaLes; Harrell, 1997). It was used in a single study (McCallaghan, 2022).

Although the use of different scales to measure racial microaggressions is problematic in that it does not allow researchers to accurately compare the results of previous studies, researchers should continue to adopt the scale that best suits their research needs and their conceptualization of racial microaggressions. As the King et al. (2023) scale which adapted the RMAS for the workplace context probably most accurately captures a wider range of racial microaggressions than other scales, particularly within the context of the workplace, they may consider using this when looking to measure the various forms of racial microaggressions and conceptualizing it as a multi-dimensional construct.

However, this scale does not capture the updated categories of racial microaggressions recently highlighted by Osman et al. (2024), so may be revised to include additional items that capture new categories of racial microaggressions identified in previous work. In contrast, if they want to measure microaggressions as an overall global construct and not look at its different forms, they may consider using the Workplace and School Microaggressions subscale. Similarly, if they want to measure the perpetration of racial microaggressions by a supervisor they may consider using Graebner et al.'s (2009) 13-item scale.

Key Findings from Empirical Work on Racial Microaggressions

In the following sections, the key findings from empirical work on racial microaggressions in the workplace are reviewed. We start by examining prior literature on targets' experiences of racial microaggressions and bystanders' perceptions of racial microaggressions in the workplace. After that we explore the outcomes of racial microaggressions that have been identified in the literature and the strategies used by individuals to deal with racial microaggressions. In doing so, we note that most research examining racial microaggressions has predominantly focused on examining issues from the target's perspective, rather than from the perspective of the perpetrator or bystander.

Targets' Experiences of Racial Microaggressions at Work

In this section, we look at the body of empirical literature on how targets experience racial microaggressions in the workplace. In particular, we look at whether racial/ethnic minority group status, gender, immigrant status, and manager/workplace characteristics influence the target's experience of microaggressions and the types of microaggressions they experience.

Racial/Ethnic Minority Group Status Growing research has established that individuals from minority racial/ethnic groups are more likely to experience microaggressions than those from majority racial/ethnic groups. For example, a growing body of quantitative work across different industries including the healthcare and higher education sectors has confirmed that those from minority racial/ethnic groups are more likely to experience microaggressions at work than those not from minority racial/ethnic groups (Alabi, 2015a; b; Miller et al., 2023; Sudol et al., 2021; Thomas-Hawkins et al., 2022). These findings are consistent with those from quantitative research on other forms of subtle discrimination such as selective incivility, which reveal that people from racial/ethnic minorities are more likely to experience discrimination (e.g., Cortina et al., 2013; Labelle-Deraspe & Mathieu, 2024; Ozturk & Berber, 2022).

Qualitative research has also explored the microaggressions faced by professionals from racial/ethnic minorities in a variety of organizational contexts. For example, in the higher education sector, research suggests that faculty from racial/ethnic minorities often experience subtle microaggressions in the form of their scholarship, skillsets or contributions being devalued, questioned or dismissed (microinvalidations) and aggression and inappropriate comments from students and other faculty members (micro insults) (Constantine et al., 2008; Ford, 2022; Louis et al., 2016; Settles et al., 2021; Williams, 2022; Zambrana et al., 2017), while simultaneously having to bear the burden of representing minority groups in different aspects of their work (Zambrana et al., 2017). Davis et al. (2024) also highlighted specific examples of microassaults faced by Black accounting faculty during their doctoral education and hiring and promotion processes. For instance, a participant shared that while being picked up from the airport for an interview by a [White] faculty member, they drove through cotton and peanut fields. When the student asked if agriculture was a major industry there, the faculty member went on to say that "Maybe you can stop and pick some on the way back" (Davis et al., 2024: 15). Branco and Bayne (2020) highlighted the racial microaggressions faced by counselors from racial minorities when interacting with clients from the racial majority group. They found that microaggressions committed by White clients manifested in the way clients talked to counselors of colour (e.g., the use of slang or use of racially charged language), or changes in the body language of clients (microinsults). Shang et al. (2021) found that Asian Canadian and Asian American doctors experienced various microaggressions during the COVID-19 pandemic including being questioned about Asian stereotypes, being glared at and having their health questioned (microinsults).

Qualitative work has also explored the unique microaggressions experienced by individuals as a result of their ethnic/racial minority group membership. This work has typically drawn on Critical Race Theory to explain how historically embedded social, political, and legal structures can influence institutional systems and norms—which may subsequently marginalize and 'Other' people of color (e.g., Bilwani, 2023; Davis et al., 2024; DeCuir & Gunby, 2016, 2020; Ford, 2022; Louis et al., 2016). Although prior work has predominantly focused on the experience of Black employees in the USA, researchers have also begun to look at the experiences of employees from other racial/ethnic backgrounds including Latin Americans (Nadal et al., 2014) or Asian Americans (Kim & Shang, 2024; Nguyen et al., 2024; Oh & Min, 2022; Shang et al., 2021). A recent study by Nguyen et al. (2024) looked at the experiences of Asians and Asian Americans in the US workplace. They found that these groups experience similar forms of racial microaggressions to other racial/ethnic minorities

including invalidation of individual differences, having their contributions being unrecognized or undervalued (microinvalidations), being singled out, and having their cultural values and communication styles demeaned (microinsults). They also highlighted unique racial microaggressions (stereotype-based microaggressions) that are only experienced by people from an Asian background in the USA due to stereotypes held about Asians. These were the ascription of subservience, the ascription of diligence, and the ascription of math competency, the last two being examples of overvalidation. Drawing on Critical Race Theory, Kim and Shang (2024) also explored the experience of Asian American professionals in the US workplace, albeit during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. They found that professionals experienced various types of racial microaggressions including their identity being questioned through being asked, “where are you really from?” or “do you really speak English?” or being misidentified i.e., being presumed to be Chinese as they were of Asian ethnicity (microinsults). They also experienced microinvalidations, in that others in the workplace denied or trivialized their experiences of being treated on account of their race.

Overall, prior empirical research suggests that those from minority racial/ethnic groups are more likely to experience racial microaggressions than those from majority groups, and that microaggressions come in various forms including microinvalidation, microinsults, and overvalidation. Recent research also highlights that individuals from certain racial/ethnic groups might experience general microaggressions and microaggressions specific to that racial/ethnic group.

Intersectional Experiences of Microaggressions Our review of the literature also shows that an individual’s experience of microaggressions is also dependent on other intersecting demographics. The two intersecting demographics which have been examined alongside race in the microaggressions literature are gender and immigrant status. Despite this, microaggressions research looking at intersectional identities has trailed behind research solely focusing on a single identity.

Gender. Researchers have begun to adopt an intersectional lens to explore how gender influences racial/ethnic minorities experiences of racial microaggressions at work (e.g., Miles Weiner et al., 2021; Nadal et al., 2014; Oh & Min, 2022). For instance, quantitative research by Nadal et al. (2014) found that Latina women reported more incidents of microaggressions due to either racism, sexism, or a combination of both, particularly in the workplace or in school settings.

These findings are supported by intersectional lived experiences captured in qualitative research. Miller (2021) explored the unique racial microaggressions faced by Black female managers working in the Children and Young

People’s Services within the educational sector in the UK. These microaggressions included degrading remarks about accents or clothes (microinsults), stereotyping remarks e.g., Black women as aggressive (microinvalidations), but also about the “subtle ways” they are held from career progression, in other words, they face a double glass ceiling one that is racial, and one that is gendered (environmental microaggressions) (Miller, 2021). Hussain et al. (2023) drew on qualitative research to explore racial minority women junior doctors’ experiences of racial microaggressions. For instance, one Asian female doctor, despite being the senior registrar on call and having the expertise, was ignored and undermined by a group of male doctors (White and racial minority backgrounds), who took over care of a patient who was getting sicker (Hussain et al., 2023).

Finally, qualitative research by Oh and Min (2022) during the COVID-19 pandemic examined how reporters from Asian American backgrounds, both men and women, dealt with racism when their identity as Asian Americans was stigmatized as a result of the racialization of the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors suggest that because of the double-oppression as racial minorities and as women, the microaggressions experienced may be extensive, but also normalized by these women as a coping strategy. Such active coping enabled them to recognize the internal harms caused by microaggressions perpetrated against them which produced reflexivity, making them more likely to become “change agents” through “affirmative, individual-level change in news work” within predominantly White male newsrooms (Oh & Min, 2022).

Overall, there is a dearth of research on how an individual’s gender influences their experience of racial microaggressions. Of the research that has been conducted there is some evidence to suggest that women from ethnic/racial minorities may face unique microaggressions as a result of their gender, and that they tend to deal with racism by internalizing it much more than men who externalize harm by labeling it as racial microaggressions.

Immigrant Status Exploratory qualitative work has examined how an individual’s status as an immigrant and being a racial/ethnic minority may increase the likelihood that they experience racial microaggressions in the workplace. This work has also typically drawn on Critical Race Theory to highlight how those from majority groups in the workplace marginalize immigrants from racial/ethnic minority backgrounds (Gatwiri, 2021; Kalemba, 2023; Zaami & Madibbo, 2021). Several studies have looked at the experience of African immigrant professionals navigating workplace cultures in predominantly Anglo societies (Amoakoh & Smith, 2020; Gatwiri, 2021). For example, Amoakoh and Smith (2020) found that African immigrants pursuing STEM careers in the US often faced microinvalidations, in that their education and training were often questioned by individuals in the host

country due to not being educated locally and their obvious immigrant status. Similarly, Gatwiri (2021) explored African professionals' experiences of racial microaggressions in the Australian workplace. They found that individuals were often confronted with microinvalidations of their expertise or their "African skills," or microinsults, in the form of eye contact avoidance, and others being suspicious of their work.

Other work has examined the experiences of youth immigrants in the labor market (Kalemba, 2023; Zaami & Madibbo, 2021). For example, Kalemba (2023) looked at the racial microaggressions experienced by immigrant Black African youth in predominantly White workplaces in Australia. Kalemba (2023) found that on many occasions, immigrant youth were assumed to be refugees, arriving on boats, or not referred to by their names, because they were seemingly difficult to pronounce. In addition, participants highlighted instances of infantilization i.e., the assumptions that those who are racialized are less competent or lack skills (microinvalidations). Zaami and Madibbo (2021) found that African immigrant youth experienced racial microaggressions in the Canadian workplace as a result of their immigrant status. As a result of having 'immigrant names' they were often treated differently from those with more common names. Participants also highlighted that potential employers often assumed they were unqualified and lacked experience due to their immigrant status (microinvalidations).

Furthermore, literature has suggested that immigrant professionals face microaggressions due to their minority ethnic group status more generally. For example, Best et al. (2023) study on the microaggressions targeted at Caribbean and Central American immigrants found that participants felt "pigeon-holded into roles" based on stereotypes that made them feel invisible in the workplace.

Overall, while no quantitative work covered by this review has examined differences between racial/ethnic minorities from immigrant backgrounds and those who are not immigrants, exploratory qualitative research suggests that being an immigrant may lead individuals to experience additional forms of microaggressions not experienced by individuals from racial/ethnic minorities who are not immigrants.

Manager/Workplace Characteristics Researchers have only just started to look at the manager and workplace characteristics that may influence the extent to which individuals experience racial microaggressions. Quantitative work by Bergh and Hoobler (2023) has looked at whether characteristics of managers predict the extent that employees experience racial microaggressions at work. They found that the implicit racial bias of the manager predicted the extent to which employees experienced racial microaggressions at work. They also found that individualized consideration reduced the negative influence of implicit racial bias on employees' experience of racial microaggressions.

Qualitative research has highlighted how organizational policies, procedures, and practices enacted by organizations normalize and perpetuate the use of microaggressions in line with Critical Race Theory. For example, Miles Weiner et al. (2021) argued that by not providing space for leaders from racial/ethnic minority backgrounds on administrative preparation programs to explore their identities or experiences of discrimination, or to develop strategies to deal with discrimination, such programs perpetrated various racial microaggressions excluding, negating, or nullifying participants' experiences as minority group members. Bilwani (2023) highlighted how the organizational culture in the Portuguese social service sector normalized and perpetuated racial microaggressions against Black professionals. They highlighted how senior leaders fostered a culture where individuals from ethnic minorities were pressured to assimilate to the majority culture and were ignored in work meetings, training opportunities, and field work.

Although there is dearth of research on the managerial and workplace factors that influence individuals' experiences of racial microaggressions at work, there is some evidence to indicate that racial biases of managers influence the prevalence of racial microaggressions and that the organizational culture may normalize and perpetuate the use of racial microaggressions by majority group members.

Bystanders' Perceptions of Racial Microaggressions at Work

Researchers have undertaken quantitative work to pinpoint the factors which influence bystanders' perceptions of racial microaggressions, i.e., the extent to which bystanders are likely to pick up on racial microaggressions in the workplace. Offermann et al. (2014) found that those with higher levels of colorblind worldviews (i.e., those that see all people as fundamentally similar and equal) were less likely to perceive racial microaggressions in the workplace. They also found that White people were less likely to perceive racial microaggressions than those from minority ethnic groups due to having higher levels of colorblind worldviews. Kim et al. (2019) examined differences in Whites and Asians' perceptions of racial microaggressions. They found that Whites were less likely to pick up on subtle racial microaggressions than Asians, especially those who endorsed colorblind attitudes. Similarly, Kim et al. (2024) found that Asian Americans who witnessed racial microaggressions were more likely to identify the behavior as a microaggression and report negative perceptions of the aggressor than Whites. Drawing on an experimental approach, Kim et al. (2021) found that individuals in the US who had positive attitudes toward Asian Americans rated blatant racial microaggressions as more harmful than those with less positive attitudes. However, they also found that positive attitudes

toward Asian Americans did not influence perceptions toward subtler microaggressions.

Finally, researchers have also looked at whether characteristics of the perpetrators of racial microaggressions may lead bystanders to treat their behavior as being less severe. Adopting an experimental approach, Offermann et al. (2013) found that for all levels of microaggression severity, racial microaggressions perpetrated by a White supervisor against a Black employee were perceived as less serious when the supervisor had a reputation for equity and fairness. They also found that expected work outcomes were also better when the supervisor had a reputation for equity and fairness at all levels of microaggression severity.

Overall, researchers have begun to look how the characteristics of bystanders and perpetrators influence bystanders' evaluations of others' behavior as microaggressions. However, this research has been limited to examining the influence of bystanders' worldviews and racial/ethnic minority status, and the reputation of the perpetrator, and has rarely drawn on established theory when developing hypotheses.

Outcomes of Experiencing Racial Microaggressions at Work

Researchers have also begun to explore the influence of racial microaggressions on a whole host of outcomes at work. We categorized these outcomes into wellbeing outcomes, career outcomes, and work outcomes. The literature has only looked at the influence of racial microaggressions on the target, and not looked at the influence of racial microaggressions on perpetrators and bystanders.

Wellbeing Outcomes Growing quantitative research has explored the link between individuals' experiences of racial microaggressions and measures of physical and emotional wellbeing including burnout, emotional distress, stress, anxiety, and depression. A large proportion of this research has focused on employees in the healthcare sector. Researchers have found a strong link between racial microaggressions and burnout (Sudol et al., 2021), especially for female healthcare workers from racial/ethnic minorities. Other research has found a strong link between racial microaggressions and other outcomes including emotional distress (Cruz et al., 2019; Thomas-Hawkins et al., 2022), anxiety (Cruz et al., 2019), and depression (Cruz et al., 2019). This research did not draw on relevant theories to explain the link between racial microaggressions and wellbeing outcomes.

Researchers have also looked at the link between racial microaggressions and wellbeing outcomes for employees from different racial/ethnic minorities across a range of industries. Drawing on the Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989), King et al. (2023) found that while Black employees who experienced environmental microaggressions and microaggressions where they were treated like a criminal or being dangerous/deviant were

more likely to experience burnout, those who experienced microaggressions where they were treated as a foreigner or being incapable, incompetent, or dysfunctional due to their membership of a racial group (low achievement), were less likely to experience burnout. These findings were difficult to explain and suggest that employees may respond differently according to the type of microaggression being perpetrated. They also found that trait resiliency and organizational support did not buffer the negative effects of racial microaggressions on burnout as predicted. Other research has established that individuals who experience more racial microaggressions at work had lower levels of physical wellbeing, social functioning, and emotional wellbeing, and more emotional problems (Nadal et al., 2017). Finally, researchers have also found that individuals who experience racial microaggressions also report higher levels of bullying at work (Bergh & Hoobler, 2023). Overall, there is strong quantitative evidence to suggest that racial microaggressions typically have a negative impact on the target's health and wellbeing, albeit it may depend on the type of microaggression being perpetrated. These findings are consistent with those from research on other forms of subtle discrimination such as everyday discrimination (De Castro et al., 2008; Rosemberg et al., 2019).

Qualitative research has also explored the impact of racial microaggressions on the physical and emotional wellbeing of individuals from minority racial/ethnic groups in the workplace. The findings from this body of work support findings from quantitative work by highlighting how ongoing exposure to racial microaggressions at work leads to higher levels of stress, burnout, and fatigue and a resultant impact on the mental health of targets (Brooks-Ucheaga, 2023; Gatwiri, 2021; Louis et al., 2016; Pitcan et al., 2018). Racial microaggressions have also been highlighted to increase the target's feelings of isolation and loneliness in the workplace and a lack of belongingness (Settles et al., 2021).

Overall, there is general consensus in the literature that racial microaggressions have detrimental effects on the physical and emotional wellbeing of targets. However, the evidence is not conclusive, as some research suggests that certain types of microaggressions may not always have a detrimental impact (King et al., 2023). In addition, it is important to recognize that most studies establishing a link between racial microaggressions and wellbeing outcomes were conducted on employees from the healthcare sector, where demands on employees are significant and there is significant interaction with patients. As such these findings suggest that the effects of racial microaggressions might be conditional on a variety of different factors, including the personality of the target and the industry in which they work. With the exception of King et al. (2023) who drew on the Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989), prior

research has not typically drawn on theory to explain the link between racial microaggressions and measures of physical and emotional wellbeing.

Work Outcomes Researchers have begun to explore the influence of racial microaggressions on employee work outcomes. These include work attitudes such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and work behaviors such as organizational citizenship behaviors. Quantitative research has examined the link between several types of racial microaggression and the job satisfaction of targets. King et al. (2023) found that while Black employees who experienced microaggressions where they were treated like a criminal or being invisible reported lower levels of job satisfaction, those who experienced microaggressions where they were treated as a foreigner or being incapable, incompetent, or dysfunctional due their membership of a racial group (low achievement) reported higher levels of job satisfaction. They also found that co-rumination with co-workers and racism-related vigilance mediated the link between racial microaggressions and job satisfaction. DeCuir-Gunby and Gunby (2016), on the other hand, found that African American educators who experienced racial microaggressions where they were treated as being inferior because of their membership of a minority racial group reported lower levels of job satisfaction. McCallaghan (2022) also found a negative link between individuals' experiences of racial microaggressions and both job satisfaction and organizational citizenship behaviors. The author also found a strong positive link between racial microaggressions and turnover intentions, and established that diversity climate partially explained the negative links between racial microaggressions and organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and organizational citizenship behaviors, and the positive link between racial microaggressions and turnover intentions.

Qualitative work has also indicated the negative impact of racial microaggressions on employee productivity. Settles et al. (2021) highlighted the performance-related outcomes of being excluded in the workplace. They explain how experiences of racial microaggressions resulted in faculty members feeling that their contribution was not valued, which in turn led them to limit the scope of their scholarship and reduced their productivity. However, we have yet to see quantitative research confirm such a link.

In summary, there has been limited work exploring the work outcomes associated with racial microaggressions. Prior work has begun to look at the link between racial microaggressions and work attitudes such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment. However, we have yet to see research on work behaviors other than organizational citizenship behaviors. In addition, research has only looked at how targets respond to microaggressions and not looked at the impact of racial microaggressions on the work attitudes

and behaviors of other bystanders in the organization, and rarely drawn on theory to explain the negative effects of racial microaggressions.

Career Outcomes Researchers have also begun to explore the career-related outcomes of racial microaggressions in the workplace. Career outcomes include career-related cognitions such as work volition, the extent to which an individual feels they are able to overcome career barriers, and career adaptability, the extent to which an individual feels they have the psychosocial resources to cope with the changing nature of work, as well as career attitudes such as commitment to one's occupation (profession) or occupational turnover intentions. They also include career behaviors such as social networking behaviors and engagement in professional development.

Quantitative research has also a negative link between numerous forms of racial microaggression and individuals' work volition, defined as the capacity of an individual to make occupational decisions despite having constraints (Marks et al., 2022). Such microaggressions include being treated as a foreigner in one's own country, being treated like a criminal or considered dangerous/deviant, and assumed to be from a low-achieving/undesirable culture. In line with the Psychology of Working Theory (Duffy et al., 2016), Marks et al. (2022) also found a negative link between environmental microaggressions and work volition. In addition, looking at which individuals responded less negatively to racial microaggressions, they found that bicultural self-efficacy attenuated the effects of four racial microaggressions (criminality, invisibility, low-achieving/undesirable culture, and sexualization) on work volition. Similarly, in line with the Psychology of Working Theory (Duffy et al., 2016), Williams et al. (2023) found a strong negative link between Black employees' experiences of racial microaggressions and work volition. They also found that racial microaggressions led Black employees to perceive that they had less access to decent work through reducing their work volition. Cabell and Kozachuk (2022) found that counselors from racial/ethnic minorities who experienced racial microaggressions reported higher levels of career adaptability and professional leadership development. Qualitative research has also documented the career-related costs of racial microaggressions. These include the detrimental influence of microaggressions on the ability of the target to build the social networks that are essential for career progression (Pitcan et al., 2018). Other research suggests that ongoing exposure to microaggressions leads targets to hold negative views of their profession and consider leaving their profession (Davis et al., 2024).

Overall, these findings suggest that racial microaggressions might have mixed effects on individuals' career mindsets. While most studies suggest that racial microaggressions may have negative effects of career-related

attitudes like work volition in line with the Psychology of Working Theory (Duffy et al., 2016), this may be dependent on the individual and the strategies they use to deal with microaggressions. Some individuals may proactively seek to address microaggressions by exploring new career opportunities and investing in their career development (Cabell & Kozachuk, 2022).

Strategies Adopted by Targets to Make Sense of and Deal with Racial Microaggressions at Work

Researchers have begun to look at the strategies adopted by targets to make sense of and deal with racial microaggressions in the workplace. Most of this work is qualitative, with the exception of King et al. (2023) who explored the strategies Black employees used to deal with racial microaggressions. They found that certain racial microaggressions led employees to engage in strategies aimed at resource replenishment (i.e., co-rumination with co-workers) and protection (i.e., racism-related vigilance). More specifically, they found that those who experienced microaggressions where they were sexualized or treated as being incapable, incompetent or dysfunctional due their membership of a racial group (low achievement) engaged in greater co-rumination with co-workers, and those who experienced environmental microaggressions or were treated as being incapable, incompetent, or dysfunctional due their membership of a racial group (low achievement), were more vigilant toward racism. They also found that those who experienced sexualization due to their membership of a racial group were less likely to engage in racism-related vigilance.

Some qualitative studies have looked at how targets of microaggressions make sense of and interpret (or reinterpret) racial microaggressions. For example, Li (2019) explored how Chinese migrant workers in Australia made sense of racial microaggressions. They found that they tended not to react too negatively as they accepted their foreignness and migrant status. They tended to reinterpret microaggressions in a positive manner and sympathize with the perpetrator, justifying it as cultural ignorance.

Qualitative work has also begun to explore the adaptive and maladaptive strategies adopted by targets from racial/ethnic minorities to deal with microaggressions. For example, prior work has highlighted that adaptive strategies adopted by the target might include engaging in self-care (Best et al., 2023; DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2020; Hernandez et al., 2010), being assertive and confronting the perpetrator (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2020; Hernandez et al., 2010; Kalembe, 2023; Kim & Shang, 2024; Settles et al., 2021; Simatele, 2018), seeking support from personal and professional networks including allies/mentors from the majority group and others from ethnic/racial minorities (Constantine et al., 2008; DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2020;

Hernandez et al., 2010; Kim & Shang, 2024; Settles et al., 2021; Williams, 2022), setting boundaries (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2020), and documenting their experiences (Hernandez et al., 2010). In particular, several studies have highlighted the importance of social support from both inside and outside the organization to obtain emotional, informational, and instrumental support to deal with the perpetrator and manage the stress resulting from racial microaggressions (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2020; Hernandez et al., 2010; Pitcan et al., 2018; Settles et al., 2021; Williams, 2022).

Other qualitative studies have highlighted maladaptive strategies that targets use to deal with racial microaggressions. These include avoiding the perpetrator (Amoakoh & Smith, 2020; DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2020), restricting one's identity and self-expression (Pitcan et al., 2018), and working harder (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2020; Pitcan et al., 2018). For example, Amoakoh and Smith (2020) found that Black immigrant professionals in STEM tend to adopt more avoidance-oriented coping strategies that are punitive, self-preserving, and self-enhancing, preferring not to address the discrimination head on.

Overall, research on strategies used by targets to make sense of and deal with racial microaggressions has tended to be qualitative in nature and identified the adaptive and maladaptive strategies adopted to respond to microaggressions. However, there is a dearth of quantitative research looking at the effectiveness of different approaches and the effects of different strategies on mitigating the link between racial microaggressions and different outcomes. Research has also failed to examine the strategies adopted by bystanders (e.g., co-workers) and organizations to address microaggressions when they arise.

Summary of Key Insights from the Review

In the first half of this article, we reviewed a growing body of research on racial microaggressions in the workplace. In this section, we summarize key insights from the review, before highlighting an agenda for future research. First, our review highlighted that a large proportion of previous research on racial microaggressions at work had been conducted in the US, and had typically focused on Black employees. Although researchers had begun to focus on other racial/ethnic minority groups such as Latinos and Asian Americans, we have limited knowledge about the experiences of different minority groups, especially outside the US. We have also witnessed a disproportionate amount of empirical work focusing on the experiences of faculty in higher education institutions.

Second, our review revealed that prior research on the factors which influence targets' experiences of racial microaggressions at work has predominantly focused on the racial/

ethnic minority status of the individual. Several studies have used an intersectional approach to explore how various characteristics, such as gender and immigration status, interact with an individual's racial or ethnic minority status to influence their experiences with racial microaggressions and their responses to such microaggressions in the workplace. However, much of this prior research has predominantly relied on exploratory qualitative designs. To date, limited quantitative work has been conducted to confirm whether those from racial/ethnic minorities who belong to other minority/marginalized groups (e.g., identify as being LGBTQI+ or from a minority religious group) are more likely to experience racial microaggressions or consider behavior to be a microaggression. In addition, there is a dearth of work at the manager or team level that examines whether manager or workplace characteristics predict the prevalence of racial microaggressions in the workplace, or the extent to which an individual may consider behavior to be a microaggression. Finally, although some work has examined how characteristics of bystanders and perpetrators influence bystanders' evaluations of others' behavior as microaggressions, this research has only looked at the influence of bystanders' worldviews and racial/ethnic minority status, and the reputation of the perpetrator.

Third, our review revealed that prior empirical studies looking at the outcomes of microaggressions have typically examined the topic from the perspective of the target rather than the perspective of the perpetrator and bystander. Research examining the outcomes of racial microaggressions has not yet examined how they may influence the work attitudes or behaviors of bystanders in the workplace, nor have they examined how engaging in racial microaggressions influences the perpetrator. In addition, research has yet to explore in any depth the reasons why different types of racial microaggressions may exert differential effects on the target's physical and emotional wellbeing, work, and career outcomes.

Fourth, research examining the strategies targets used to make sense of and deal with racial microaggressions has predominantly been qualitative in nature, with the exception of King et al. (2023) who examined the strategies adopted in response to different types of microaggression. Prior work has yet to examine the effectiveness of different strategies adopted to deal with microaggressions, and whether such strategies reduce the negative impact of such microaggressions on outcomes in the workplace. In addition, researchers have yet to explore the strategies adopted by bystanders (e.g., co-workers) and organizations to address microaggressions when they arise, and their effectiveness. For example, we have witnessed limited work on the extent to which human resource management practices or policies reduce the incidence of racial microaggressions or encourage targets or bystanders to proactively address racial microaggressions.

Finally, our review highlighted the sparse use of theory to examine the phenomenon of racial microaggressions at work. Out of the 48 studies in our review, less than half ($n = 23$) relied on theory to develop research questions and hypotheses, with many conducting inductive exploratory research. Although researchers have started to draw on a variety of theories to explain how individuals respond to and deal with racial microaggressions (i.e., Psychology of Working Theory (Duffy et al., 2016), Social Identity Theory and Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989)), there has tended to be a reliance on Critical Race Theory in exploratory work to highlight how employees experience racial microaggressions at work and why such microaggressions occur ($n = 12$). While this theory is useful in explaining how organizational structures, systems, and policies perpetuate the existence of racial microaggressions in the workplace, it does not provide a theoretical explanation as to how targets, bystanders, and organizations respond to, deal with, and address racial microaggressions in the workplace. In the future research agenda, we therefore highlight various theoretical perspectives that may be utilized to investigate new directions in scholarship on racial microaggressions.

Future Research Agenda

Based on our review of the literature and the research gaps highlighted above, we develop an agenda for future research that targets advancement of the field. In doing so, we highlight areas of research that may provide fruitful for future investigation, the methods that may be adopted by researchers to examine such phenomenon, and the theoretical perspectives that may be considered to explain such phenomenon. In Table 1, we highlight questions for future research that are discussed in the following sections.

Broadening the Scope of Empirical Research

As highlighted in the review, prior scholarship on racial microaggressions has often focused on the experiences of Black employees in the US, especially those of faculty in higher education institutions. This research has typically drawn on Critical Race Theory to highlight how structures and systems in society more generally, and the organizational context more specifically, perpetuate discrimination against racial/ethnic minorities. Although in recent years we have witnessed growing scholarship on other racial/ethnic minorities such as Latinos and Asians, most of this work has also been conducted in the USA. Research outside the USA has typically focused on the experience of immigrants rather than non-immigrant racial/ethnic minorities (e.g., Kalemba, 2023; Li, 2019). In line with recent work on other forms of subtle discrimination such as everyday racism and

Table 1 Future Research Agenda*Broadening the scope of empirical research*

Diversity in racial/ethnic minority groups	How do experiences of people from different racial/ethnic minority groups across various national cultural settings differ? Whether people from different racial/ethnic minorities experience unique racial microaggressions because of their group membership, the effects of such microaggressions on outcomes at work, and whether the strategies they adopt depend on their racial/ethnic background or social context?
Inequality	How racial microaggressions are perpetrated through the allocation and acquisition of financial and non-financial resources?
<i>Adopting an intersectional approach</i>	
Gender, Sexual Orientation, Ability	What is the impact of racial microaggressions on people of different genders, sexual orientations and ability? Is the negative impact of microaggressions more or less severe when the target is a member of another minority group in the workplace? How does intersectionality affect the experience of microaggressions?
<i>Role of manager and workplace characteristics</i>	
Role of manager	What are the factors inherent in the workplace e.g., inclusive leadership of immediate supervisor or senior management, in predicting the likelihood that individuals will experience racial microaggressions?
Organizational Structures	How organizational systems and structures perpetuate racial microaggressions in the workplace?
Theory e.g., Bourdieu and Critical Race Theory	How experiences within fields of social practice shape individual dispositions? How these dispositions shape the systems and structures underpinning the field/s of analysis? How does the interplay between agency and systems/structure explain the a) impact of workplace racial microaggressions b) challenge the status quo of particular social practices that catalyze such microaggressions?
<i>Examining the efficacy of organizational interventions to reduce and address racial microaggressions</i>	
Policy, Procedures & Training	How do diversity-focused HRM policies and practices impact the prevalence of racial microaggressions at work? How does diversity or microaggression training and introduction of procedures to report affect the incidence of microaggressions and support those who experience microaggressions?
<i>Bystanders' perceptions racial microaggressions</i>	
Personality traits, Demographics	What factors may lead bystanders to perceived behavior as racial microaggressions? What personality traits e.g., neuroticism, negative affectivity, race-based sensitivity, shape bystanders' judgments of behaviors as racial microaggressions? What demographics e.g., gender may affect a bystanders' judgments of behaviors as racial microaggressions?
<i>Exploring the differential effects of racial microaggressions on outcomes and the boundary conditions of such effects</i>	
	Why do certain forms of microaggressions positively associate with different health, work, and career outcomes (e.g., job satisfaction and burnout) and the mechanisms which may underlie such effects? Does perceived victimization and race-based rejection sensitivity heighten the target's negative reactions to racial microaggressions?
<i>Exploring the effects of racial microaggressions over time</i>	
Methods	How do mixed methods provide insights into the influence of racial microaggressions over time? What other methods e.g., diary, experimental sampling could provide insights into everyday experiences of racial microaggressions and its influence on emotions, employee engagement, burnout, and wellbeing?
Work-life outcomes	How do work experiences of microaggressions spillover into non-work domains e.g., family and life satisfaction?
<i>Exploring the effects of racial microaggressions on bystanders and perpetrators</i>	

Table 1 (continued)*Broadening the scope of empirical research*

Perpetrators	How do perpetrators deal with their own transgressions? How do perpetrators react e.g., affective and cognitive reactions, when confronted about their discriminatory behavior?
Bystanders	How do bystanders react to or deal with racial microaggressions? How do racial microaggressions influence how bystanders interact with the target and perpetrator? How do microaggressions affect group dynamics e.g., group cohesion, communication and performance? Which organizational factors lead bystanders to step up and call out microaggressions in the workplace?
<i>Exploring strategies adopted by targets and bystanders to deal with racial microaggressions</i>	
Adoption of Strategies by Target	What are the strategies adopted by target in reducing the negative impact of racial microaggressions and prevent the perpetrator from engaging in such behavior in the future? How do individuals from ethnic and racial minorities engage in identity management strategies to reduce the prevalence of racial microaggressions by managing the impressions others have of them?
Adoption of Strategies by Bystanders	Whether and how does assistance from bystanders in the workplace support targets to deal with and address microaggressions?

selective incivility (Bonhomme & Muldoon, 2024), we call on researchers to broaden the scope of research on racial microaggressions by examining the experiences of people from different racial/ethnic minority groups across various national cultural settings. In particular, following recent research that looked at the unique microaggressions experienced by Asians in the USA (Nguyen et al., 2024), and research which suggests that national cultural settings and membership of highly competitive immigrant groups may influence individuals' experience of everyday racism (Bonhomme & Muldoon, 2024; Krings et al., 2014), we call for mixed methods research that explores the lived experiences of different racial/ethnic minorities in different national cultural settings. This research might examine whether people from different racial/ethnic minorities experience unique racial microaggressions because of their group membership, the effects of such microaggressions on various outcomes at work, and whether the strategies they use depend on their racial/ethnic background and the societal context in which they are located. In examining these issues, we call on researchers to consider broadening theoretical approaches beyond Critical Race Theory to examine the influence of the societal context on racial microaggressions in the workplace. Critical Race Theory came into fruition in the West, particularly in the USA, keeping at its center the role of institutionalized racism and racial discrimination which structure society (Kalemba, 2023). Critical Race Theory has continued to evolve and develop across multiple global contexts, such as in the Global South to address issues such as ongoing colonial legacies and structural inequality across various social practices. Expanding theoretical approaches to workplace racial microaggressions research can further

enhance robust and nuanced understandings across these diverse global contexts. For example, in addition to Critical Race Theory, researchers could draw on an inequality lens to explain how racial microaggressions are perpetrated through the allocation and acquisition of financial and non-financial resources. Such an approach has the potential to shed light on both visible inequalities, which are "inequalities experienced by individuals whose demographic category is generally apparent and noticeable," and invisible inequality which is the "uneven possession of and access to resources and opportunities to engage in value creation, appropriation and distribution based on attributes and characteristics that are not readily apparent or noticeable" (Bapuji et al., 2024b:2).

As highlighted in our review, there has been a predominant focus on the higher education and healthcare sectors in previous empirical research. We therefore call on researchers to focus on the unique and varied experiences of racial/ethnic minorities in different sectors of the economy. It might be expected that employees from racial/ethnic minorities in customer focusing sectors such as retail, hospitality, and healthcare will more frequently experience microaggressions at work due to constant interactions with customers, and in the case of healthcare, the close, intimate nature of supporting patients (Greenberg et al., 2020). Researchers should also examine whether the effects of microaggressions on the target, and the strategies they adopt to deal with microaggressions, depend on whether the perpetrator is a customer, co-worker, or manager.

Adopting an Intersectional Approach

As we highlighted above, prior research has underscored the importance of understanding how intersectional identities influence how targets experience racial microaggressions. Despite this we have witnessed limited quantitative work that shed light on the experiences and specifics of the racial microaggressions faced by those that have intersecting identities i.e., racial/ethnic minorities who also belong to other minority/marginalized groups (e.g., identify as being LGBTQI+, are an immigrant or from a minority religious group). In future work, researchers might also consider adopting an intersectional lens (Hebl et al., 2020; Thatcher et al., 2023) to explore the relative impact of racial microaggressions on people of different genders, sexual orientations, and ability e.g., women, non-binary people, and neurodiverse people who come from minority racial backgrounds. For example, building on recent work from outside the workplace (Fattorachi et al., 2021) and work that has focused on other forms of subtle discrimination such as selective incivility (Cortina et al., 2013), future research might explore whether the negative impact and repercussions of microaggressions are different when the target is a member of another minority group in the workplace (e.g., non-binary group membership). In addition, researchers may adopt an intersectional lens to examine whether people from different intersectional groups (e.g., Black male, Latino female) experience microaggressions in different ways. Furthermore, extending scholarship on inequality and racial microaggressions, researchers can explore the experiences of racial microaggressions of individuals across hierarchies of social class (Gray & Kish-Gephart), caste (Bapuji et al., 2024a), and disability (Kulkarni & Lengnick-Hall, 2014).

Role of Manager and Workplace Characteristics

As highlighted in the review, there has been limited work examining the link between manager and workplace characteristics and individuals' experiences of racial microaggressions in the workplace. Of the work that has been done, quantitative research has only looked at the implicit racial bias of the manager in predicting the likelihood that individuals will experience racial microaggressions. Future work may consider looking at factors inherent in the workplace such as the inclusive leadership of the immediate supervisor or senior management or the level of diversity or inclusion climate in the team or organization, in predicting the likelihood that individuals will experience racial microaggressions at work.

In addition, we also call for greater theoretical understanding around how organizational systems and structures perpetuate racial microaggressions in the workplace. Building on work that has drawn on Critical

Race Theory to scrutinize the influence of organizational systems and structures on racial microaggressions, a post-structural lens may be adopted to advance an understanding of the interplay between these systems and structures and individual agency. For example, a Bourdieusian analysis (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) could frame an understanding of how experiences within fields of social practice (i.e., experiences of workplace microaggressions) shape individual dispositions as well as how these dispositions (and those of others) shape the systems and structures underpinning the field/s of analysis. Furthermore, this theoretical perspective can also shed light on the resources (i.e., capital) that individuals possess to navigate and challenge detrimental experiences of workplace racial microaggressions. In concert with previous work using Critical Race Theory, a better understanding of the interplay between agency and systems/structures can both (a) advance our scholarly knowledge of the impact of workplace racial microaggressions, and (b) challenge the status quo of certain social practices that catalyze such microaggressions. For example, future research might draw on recent findings from research on other forms of subtle discrimination such as selective incivility (Ozturk & Berber, 2022) which found that at the organizational level, organizational whitewashing, management denial, and upstream exclusion are the key factors which lead to selective incivility.

Examining the Efficacy of Organizational Interventions to Reduce and Address Racial Microaggressions

Building on the suggestions highlighted above to examine the link between manager and workplace characteristics, and the prevalence of racial microaggressions, researchers may also consider exploring whether the introduction of diversity-focused human resource management policies and practices (Devine & Ash, 2022; Roberson et al., 2020) reduces the prevalence of racial microaggressions at work. In examining these issues, researchers might undertake experimental work to examine whether the introduction of workplace interventions such as diversity or microaggression training, and the introduction of procedures for reporting racial microaggressions reduce the incidence of microaggressions and support people to deal with microaggressions (e.g., increase the likelihood that targets or bystanders report microaggressions or confront the perpetrator). Although recent research from the general microaggressions literature suggests that diversity training might foster inclusive behavior and microaggression allyship awareness (Kossek et al., 2024), and that bystander training fosters bystanders' willingness and efficacy to intervene when they witness microaggressions in the workplace (Haynes-Baratz et al.,

2021), we are yet to investigate the effects of workplace interventions on reducing the prevalence of racial microaggressions in the workplace. Effective training and workplace policies should assist employees from majority privileged groups in the workplace to ensure they do not unintentionally engage in the perpetration of microaggressions and develop appropriate responses to targets who confront them (Fattoracci & King, 2023). In particular, such training might highlight the different categories of racial microaggressions, and how such microaggressions make targets feel devalued and perpetuate stereotypes (Skinner-Dorkenoo et al., 2021). To examine the impact of these policies, procedures, and training on reduce and address racial microaggressions, researchers could use action research e.g., developing policy or training programs in consolidation with the organization being researched, or case study analysis e.g., examine effectiveness of policies, procedures, and training across organizations etc.

As Social Norms Theory suggests, people may engage in discrimination because it is viewed as socially acceptable to engage in such behavior (Crandall et al., 2002). Using a Social Norms Theory lens, Yazdanmehr and Wang (2016) have described behavior based on social norms as being guided and restrained “through social sanctions” (p. 37). Therefore, to combat subtle forms of discrimination such as racial microaggressions, it is important for organizations and leaders to communicate an intolerance for behaviors that may be considered as racial microaggressions in both workplace policies and training (Hebl et al., 2020). Recent research on gender microaggressions in the workplace suggests that the introduction of training on microaggressions will reduce the prevalence of microaggressions in the workplace through mobilizing bystanders to alter local social norms (Bond & Haynes-Baratz, 2022).

Further, Bond and Haynes-Baratz (2022) have argued that it is important to understand the intersections of contextual factors that can lead to social norms which result in behaviors of racial microaggressions. For example, a systems-based approach such as one that aims to understand the socio-ecological formulations of social practices within the workplace could be useful in this endeavor. In their recent work on the mobilization of bystanders to address microaggressions in the workplace, Bond and Haynes-Baratz (2022) offer examples of how broader social and political discussions of race and gender can influence the individual, their perceptions of social norms, and how this can subsequently influence systems within a workplace. In other words, social, familial, cultural, and political systems have the capacity to intersect and catalyze norms within workplaces that can challenge or reinforce systems of practices and acceptable behaviors. Similarly, in their social-ecological analysis of the actions, as well as inactions, taken by faculty bystanders

in response to gender microaggressions in academic context, Haynes-Baratz et al. (2022) argue that “facilitators and barriers to bystander action exist at the individual, interpersonal, and organizational levels” (p. 521). Therefore, research and intervention practices addressing racial microaggressions in the workplace could benefit from considering the nuances of the socio-cultural and political underpinnings of norm and behavior (i.e., socio-ecological formulations of workplace racial microaggressions).

Bystanders’ Perceptions of Racial Microaggressions

As highlighted in the review, we have witnessed limited investigation of the factors that may influence bystanders’ perceptions of racial microaggressions, with extant research only examining the effects of bystanders’ worldviews and racial/ethnic minority status, and the reputation of the perpetrator. Research could explore additional factors that may lead bystanders to perceive behavior as racial microaggressions. In particular, as articulated by Lilienfeld (2017) in his discussion of research on microaggressions, researchers may explore the role of personality traits such as neuroticism, negative affectivity, and race-based rejection sensitivity in shaping bystanders’ perceptions of behaviors as racial microaggressions. In addition, researchers may draw on recent findings from the gender microaggressions literature which suggest that women might be more likely to identify behavior as microaggressions, to explore whether women from racial/ethnic minorities are more likely to identify behavior as microaggressions than men (Basford et al., 2014).

Exploring the Differential Effects of Racial Microaggressions on Outcomes and the Boundary Conditions of Such Effects

As highlighted in the review, few studies have relied on theory to highlight the mechanisms which explain the effects of racial microaggressions on different outcomes and the boundary conditions of such effects. Building on King et al.’s (2023) work, researchers might undertake quantitative research to explore the differential effects of various types of microaggressions on work outcomes, and the reasons why differential effects may occur. For example, researchers may explore why certain forms of microaggressions are positively associated with different wellbeing, work, and career outcomes (e.g., job satisfaction and burnout, King et al., 2023) and the mechanisms which may underlie such effects. In doing so, they may test the salience of different theoretical perspectives as to why racial microaggressions are negatively linked to wellbeing, work, and career outcomes. Such perspectives may include the Psychology of Working Theory (Duffy et al., 2016), which proposes that racial microaggressions negatively influence

the target's experiences of meaningful work and wellbeing through reducing their work volition and career adaptability, and the Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989) which suggests that racial microaggressions may negatively influence the target's wellbeing through depleting their resources.

In line with prior work on discrimination more generally (Ngo et al., 2002), researchers might also examine the boundary conditions of such relationships. For example, they may follow Lilienfeld's (2017) advice to examine whether perceived victimization (the tendency to view oneself as a victim, to be sensitive to rejection, or to blame others for one's misfortune) and race-based rejection sensitivity (the tendency to expect, readily perceive, and intensely react to status-based rejection) may heighten the target's negative reactions to racial microaggressions. Future research might also consider drawing on the Exit, Voice, Loyalty, Neglect (EVLN) model (Withey & Cooper, 1989) to explore what leads individuals to exit their organization to avoid experiencing racial microaggressions in the future (exit), voice their dissatisfaction to other members of the organization (voice), do nothing and maintain their loyalty to their organization (loyalty) or respond by disengaging from their job (neglect). These outcomes may depend on the personality of the target, the support they receive from others in the organization (e.g., allyship), the identity of the perpetrator (i.e., whether they are in a position of power), and the perceived utility of adopting different responses.

Exploring the Effects of Racial Microaggressions Over Time

Our review also identified limited longitudinal research on the effects of racial microaggressions. Future research should consider adopting mixed methods to explore the influence of racial microaggressions on outcomes over time. As well as undertaking quantitative survey research that examines the influence of racial microaggressions on career and work outcomes over several weeks or months, researchers might also consider undertaking diary studies or the use of an experiential sampling methodology (see Gabriel et al., 2019) to examine how people's daily experience of racial microaggressions influences their emotions, engagement, burnout, and wellbeing over shorter periods of time (e.g., hours and days). Qualitative interview research might also be conducted over multiple time points to explore how targets deal with racial microaggressions over time and the effectiveness of different strategies adopted. Finally, researchers might draw on the work-family and work-life literature to examine whether the target's experience of microaggressions may spillover over time into the non-work domain and influence their family and life satisfaction (Eby et al., 2005). Recent exploratory work indicates that experience of

racial discrimination has a significant negative spillover onto employees' work-life outcomes (Zhang, 2023).

Exploring the Effects of Racial Microaggressions on Bystanders and Perpetrators

Prior research on the outcomes of racial microaggressions at work has typically focused on the targets of racial microaggressions. In contrast, the studies covered in this review did not focus on how bystanders react to or deal with racial microaggressions, and how perpetrators deal with their own transgressions. Building on work in the diversity, equity, and inclusion literature which has begun to look at how perpetrators react when confronted about their discriminatory behavior (Madera, 2018), future research could explore the affective and cognitive reactions of perpetrators when they become aware of the racial microaggressions they have perpetrated. In particular, mixed methods research might be undertaken to examine the emotions they experience such as anger or guilt, and their subsequent behavior toward the target. For example, prior work suggests that perpetrators may react more negatively when confronted if they have colorblind views (Zou & Dickter, 2013).

Researchers might also explore how bystanders react to or deal with racial microaggressions in the workplace. For example, future research might look at how bystanders interact with the target and perpetrator of racial microaggressions, and the subsequent impact on group functioning. In particular, researchers might examine how racial microaggressions affect group dynamics such as group cohesion, communication, and performance. In doing so, researchers could draw on Social Identity Theory (Hogg, 2016), to examine whether witnessing racial microaggressions by a perpetrator toward a target in the same group leads other group members to identify less with their group and reduce interactions between members of the group. In addition, future research might explore whether experiencing racial microaggressions has a detrimental influence on the work attitudes and behaviors of bystanders, such as their organizational commitment, job satisfaction, retention, and their engagement in organizational citizenship behaviors. Researchers might also explore, in line with social norms theory and social ecological analyses, the organizational factors (e.g., organizational justice or diversity climates and anti-discrimination and whistleblowing policies) that make it more likely that bystanders will step up and call out microaggressions in the workplace.

Exploring Strategies Adopted by Targets and Bystanders to Deal with Racial Microaggressions

As highlighted earlier, prior research has highlighted the adaptive and maladaptive strategies that targets use to deal with racial microaggressions. A recent review of the general racial microaggressions literature suggests that the adaptive strategies which may be adopted by the target fall into four distinct categories; make the invisible visible, disarm the microaggression, educate the perpetrator, and seek external reinforcement or support (Sue et al., 2019). Future work may explore in greater depth the effectiveness of such strategies in reducing the negative impact of such microaggressions and stopping the perpetrator from engaging in such behavior in the future.

Researchers might also consider drawing on identity-based perspectives to examine how individuals from ethnic and racial minorities engage in identity management strategies to reduce the prevalence of racial microaggressions by managing the impressions others have of them (Hebl et al., 2020). In particular, research suggests that acknowledging or disclosing a stigmatized identity may allow them to regain some control over the construal of their identities and support others to form a more complex understanding of the individual beyond stereotypes and assumptions (Hebl et al., 2020; Ragins, 2008). This in turn might reduce the incidence of microaggressions as people are more aware of their identity at work.

Future research might also examine whether and how assistance from bystanders in the workplace supports targets to deal with and address microaggressions. In the wider microaggressions literature researchers have highlighted microstrategies including microinterventions, microvalidations, and microaffirmations that others in the workplace (managers and colleagues) may engage in to address microaggressions (Huber et al., 2021; Skinta & Torres-Harding, 2022). They argue that such strategies serve as preventative and ameliorative strategies to help potential and actual targets of microaggressions to build resilience to endure such microaggressions, and increase their sense of belonging and inclusiveness. For example, Huber et al. (2021) propose a model of microaffirmations which highlights the role played by cultural resources, counterspaces, and everyday affirmations and validations from bystanders in serving as protective factors for people from minority groups who experience microaggressions. Recent research on allyship also highlights the role that others may play in helping targets reflect on and make sense of their negative experience of microaggressions at work, attenuating their destructive outcomes (Kim & Meister, 2023), and proactively addressing discrimination in the workplace (Collier-Spruel & Ryan, 2024; Jun et al., 2023).

Conclusion

The present article presented a systematic review of the literature on workplace racial microaggressions. It highlighted that the scholarly investigation of racial microaggressions in the workplace is in its relative infancy. The major insight from this review was that empirical work on this topic, to date, has typically been exploratory in nature and has primarily been situated within qualitative paradigms. Furthermore, there was a limited reliance on theory in the majority of studies reviewed. As such, we develop an agenda for future research that aims to address such gaps in the literature. Better understanding how individuals from ethnic and racial minorities experience racial microaggressions is important in addressing gaps in our scholarly knowledge, as well as being a vehicle to catalyze and advocate change in the workplace to eradicate the potential detrimental impacts of the experiences of workplace racial microaggressions. Such detrimental impacts can include negative effects on individual wellbeing, productivity at work, and career progression. It is our hope that this article will aid researchers to take stock of what is currently known about racial microaggressions in the workplace and to subsequently develop future research initiatives to understand and tackle this insidious social issue.

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Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors have no conflicts of interests to disclose.

Ethical Standard This is a systematic review of prior empirical work. The Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Melbourne does not require ethics approval for this type of study given it does not involve the collection of new data or analysis of secondary data.

Human or Animal Rights and Informed Consent As this research did not involve the collection of data from human or animal subjects, informed consent is not required.

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