

**Contemporary Racism in Canada:
Lived Experiences of Canadian South Asians**

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Abstract

The project analyzes contemporary forms of racism in the Canadian context. The study looks at experiences of South Asian Canadians and their experiences of racial microaggressions. The intent of the study is to investigate if racism still exists, what forms it may take, the impacts on potential victims, and the implications for clinical practitioners and those working in the human services field. This ethnographic exploratory study looks at Canadian-born South Asians, as this is a unique population consisting of those who identify as Canadian but are often treated like foreigners and experience racism throughout their lifetime. Future considerations are addressed.

Summary Key Words

Racism, Microaggressions, South Asian Canadians, Canada

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To my dear husband,

I do not know if I would have been able to do this without you. Your encouragement and support have been vital, from the moment of applying to graduate school to right now as I type these very words. There is no one else I would rather have by my side through this journey. You have helped turn my dream into a reality.

To the true heroes who participated in the study,

Thank you to all the participants who had the courage to come forward and tell their stories. Your courage today will help propel the conversation forward so that one day people of colour will be seen and truly, deeply, feel like equals.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

In 2018 I took a course in Diversity during graduate school, and I learned about the term “microaggression.” It was like a light bulb turned on, and I was given language for something I had been experiencing my whole life. I had been in the human services field for almost a decade working in different capacities with vulnerable populations, including children, youth, families, and those who had experienced addiction, poverty, homelessness, grief, sexual exploitation, abuse, criminal justice involvement, and homicide. As I worked across different cities in British Columbia, Canada, I realized there was a lack of South Asian Canadians accessing services. The South Asian population is not immune to the difficulties communities face, such as poverty, addictions, violence, divorce, and mental health. Being a woman of Indian descent, I realize there is a cultural pressure to keep conflict within the home a secret. However, there was an entire population such as myself, who have been born and raised in Canada and are still not accessing help. I began to wonder if some behaviour from service providers might be contributing to the problem. As I began to research, I could not find anything helpful in answering my questions. With the assistance of my thesis supervisor, I began looking at the American context where this work is being done with people of colour. There are no simple answers to my questions, but through this study I have come to understand that what people of colour experience goes far beyond the issue of not accessing mental health services. The research suggests microaggressions currently manifest in powerful institutions, including the judiciary, post-secondary institutes, the criminal justice system, healthcare, and schools; the cumulative burden of these experiences is staggering. What began with exploring if my story of experiencing subtle forms of racism and discrimination was a similar experience for other

coloured Canadians unfolded into a journey of hearing story after story of how people of colour are suffering profoundly in silence.

My story

I was born in Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada, in 1991. The total population of East Indian residents in British Columbia at the time was 2.75% of the total population in the province (Statistics Canada, 1991). I was born and raised in a semi-traditional Indian family. I grew up in a home with my mother, who was raised in Canada, and my father, who was raised in India. My father immigrated to Canada after he married my mother at the age of 23. My grandmother also lived with us and was my and my two older brothers' primary caregiver, as my parents always held between one and three jobs. My grandmother lived through Partition, was a baptized Sikh, and did not speak English. Both of my older brothers were born and raised in B.C. along with me. At any given time, there would be between one and three of my parent's nieces and nephews living with us who immigrated from India to Canada. My cousins lived with us for a few years until they got married or saved enough money to live independently.

Living in a five-bedroom home with six to nine people was both delightful and chaotic. There was always support if you needed help, and I truly felt like I was raised by a village (as I was the youngest). The Indian culture had a significant influence on in my upbringing. Its values and beliefs included performing traditional gender roles, respecting your elders, heads of the family making the decisions, which were not allowed to be questioned, and practicing modesty. As a female in this household, I was raised (trained might be a more appropriate word) to participate in household tasks such as cooking and cleaning, and I was socialized to be quiet, modest, and serve my father when he asked for anything. I was taught to take the opinions of

other Indian people in the community very seriously and instructed that all my behaviours outside of the home were a reflection on the entire family. I was told that the social expectations I adhered to in the home were to be fulfilled outside of the home as well. At the age of nine, I was told it was inappropriate to play with the opposite sex, and from this point until my twenties I was not permitted to mention the existence of a boy. At the age of 14, I was told I wasn't allowed to play sports anymore. Things like school dances, boy-girl birthday parties, and playing with my brother and his friends were off the table well before I finished grade school.

Growing up in the interior of B.C. during that time, it is fair to say there was only a sprinkle of visible ethnic minorities in Kelowna. I did not know I was brown until the third grade, when the other children began asking me questions. I remember that in the third grade one of my friends asked why I had arm hair. Another time, a friend was visiting, and she inquired why there was a cup next to each toilet in our house. In grade four, I remember one of my friends spending the entire year guessing what ethnicity I was, even though, after each guess, I would reiterate that I am Indian, and my parents came from India.

Being a visible minority did not become a "problem" until I entered middle school. I began to realize that my brownness meant that I was never going to be seen as attractive, as smart, or would quite feel accepted. At this point in my life, I did not know why, but I knew that it was better to be white than what I was. I began to notice what I was expected to carry out a certain set of behaviours outside the home to be successful and a different set at home to be accepted there. At Spring Valley Middle School, though I didn't know it then, a lifetime of questioning my identity—figuring out what was too brown, and what was too white—would become a question that would affect my everyday existence and become one of the thickest threads in the story of my life.

My brownness affected how I was referred to, where I got invited, and a host of questions regarding why I could not do the things everyone else was doing. I can remember with clarity the time my pretty, white best friend received an invite to a party, and when she said she was bringing her friend Gurleen, the boy's response was, "What's a Gurleen?" Another time, she was met with the response, "Is that your Hindu friend?" My brownness became a full-fledged problem for me in high school, if I could have rubbed it off my skin, I would have.

In university, I moved to the Lower Mainland, where seeing and interacting with visible minorities was not the exception but the norm, there were Indian people everywhere. In this stage in my life, I began receiving the message that I was a 'cool' Indian person because I had interests that were socially accepted in white culture. My ability to perform whiteness was a skill so developed that I didn't even think twice when someone said, "You're different from other brown people."

For every time I was asked "where I was from," I pulled out my suitcase of explanations of why I was here, and my cultural heritage, explaining why my brownness was in a room full of white people. It wasn't until 10 years later that I would realize every person of colour had a similar suitcase of explanations. And every single time a person of colour leaves their house, they carry this suitcase full of,

"Well, my mother was born in India, but she was raised in Terrace, B.C., since she was two. My dad's from India and immigrated to Canada in his twenties after marrying my mom. I was born in Kelowna, and that's why I don't have an accent... I was born here in Canada."

We hope that this suitcase of explanations for our existence will result in the person asking us to give us permission to exist in peace and go on with our business. My hope as a person of colour was that if I proved why my brownness was in the room, that I could continue to be there with some dignity and grace.

After graduating and getting married, I began to experience others' perceptions that I was not brown enough. I started to hear things like "Gurleen is whitewashed." The people around me joked that they could treat me poorly and say whatever they wanted in Punjabi, because I would not know what they were saying about me. When I asked about centuries-old traditions we were carrying out, I was laughed at and mocked. It was as though at this point in my life, the scale had tipped in the other direction, and suddenly I was not brown enough.

Throughout all these experiences, I made sense of them by telling myself, "this is just a part of being brown," because no one talked about it. There was no social discourse of performing whiteness, white fragility, microaggressions, and how to deal with the polite forms of contemporary racism that exist in Canada. The rhetoric did not exist; we were all in our silos experiencing the same things and not talking about them. It wasn't until I was in graduate school, where I was given the language to describe these experiences, that the bubble of silence popped, and I became enraged. I could not believe I had gone through 27 years of life, lived in five cities, held multiple jobs and volunteer experiences, and travelled the world and never engaged in the conversation of being sick of always thinking about my brownness. I thought of how many times I had had conversations about gender, how widely accepted it was to stand up to gender discrimination, and the proverbial high-fives you get in a room when you stand up to a patriarchal, misogynist perpetrator. I noted how the response would be very different in a room where a white person perpetrated a racial indignation: if the person of colour pointed it out, they

would be seen as oversensitive or an agitator. It was through this epiphany in graduate school that I became aware that the faces of racism have evolved, just as in any another social construction, for example, the use of money, transitioning from using paper and pen to using bills and cash, to now using plastic cards and cell phones. Just as racism in Canada has proceeded through colonizing a peaceful population, decimating the population through law and disease, and placing the young in residential schools, our behaviours have evolved into subtle, seemingly innocuous ways of making anyone not white feel less-than and forcing people of colour to carry a suitcase full of justifications of why they exist.

My goal with this research is not to persuade those with power and privilege that racism exists, or that it hurts whether it is done with or without intention. My goal is to share stories, give voice to those that have been silenced, and contribute to a much needed dialogue. I am here to create space in the world of academia and science for the voices who have been muffled. South Asian Canadians have been in BC since 1902, and in 2020 they have every right to be next to white people in any space and not be questioned. My initial goal of this research was to see if racism still existed in Canada, and I have found that there is a silent epidemic.

Framing the problem

There is a lack of data on Canadian-born South Asians and their experiences with racism and discrimination. In the Canadian context, to my knowledge, no study looks at the experiences of Canadian-born South Asian people. A study conducted in 2014 by Poolokasingham, Spanierman, Kleiman, and Houshmand looked at South Asian immigrants and their experiences with microaggressions in a university setting. Under their recommendation, it was suggested for future research to investigate Canadian provinces other than Ontario to see if and how microaggressions manifest in other places. Other recommendations included investigating if

microaggressions exist differently across different contexts and collecting more information on participant backgrounds, such as ancestral origin. They also suggested looking at the differences in gendered racial microaggressions, as their study only included two men. The researchers also recommended understanding strategies for how to navigate experiences of microaggressions and how to respond. During their study they found, in the American context, South Asians have been included in two studies; however, they made up less than 10% of the sample and were categorized with other Asian Americans.

While the study by Poolokasingham, Spanierman, Kleiman, and Houshmand (2014) was the first of its kind in looking at South Asian immigrants in a university context and their experiences with racial microaggressions, I was unable to find research on South Asians born and raised in Canada. To my knowledge, this study is the first of its kind looking at a population that is born in Canada and identifies as being Canadian before acknowledging their cultural heritage or familial immigration history. This population is in a unique situation, as they identify as being Canadian but wear their cultural history on their skin, resulting in overt and mostly covert forms of discrimination. The ability to easily downplay microaggressions is so great that it is vital to record and study this type of racism, or threats and insults will continue without challenge (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007).

Chapter 2 – Review of the Literature

Literature review introduction

In 2010, Lund and Carr suggested that in Canada, overt acts of racism are for the most part considered unacceptable behaviour. Their study looked at the nature of racism in Canada and found that blatant racist behaviour is widely unacceptable, but racism is still a part of the fabric of our social reality. The research suggested conversations about race and racism are taboo, and the topic of racism is not considered polite conversation in Canada and is therefore not often discussed. Furthermore, power relations in Canada allow white people to bear the privilege of never having to talk about race if they do not want to. While displays of discriminatory actions have changed, the act of white Canadians perpetuating racism against South Asian Canadians dates back over a century (South Asian Studies Institute, 2018). White Europeans perpetrating violence against South Asians in the Canadian context has been a part of the social fabric since 1902 (South Asian Studies Institute, 2018).

The South Asian diaspora

The South Asian population has a unique history and culture. The ancestral heritage of South Asian countries includes a history of colonized British rule and has historically been exposed to Western ways of living and the English language (Poolokasingham, Spanierman, Kleiman, & Houshmand, 2014). As such, this population has a unique culture with rituals, traditions, food, clothing and languages. South Asian Canadians are a diverse diaspora, with migrants from Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, and India (Poolokasingham, Spanierman, Kleiman, & Houshmand, 2014). Immigration of South Asians to Canada, with respect to Sikhs, began in 1902, with the first official recorded immigration in 1903 (South Asian Studies

Institute, 2018). The University of the Fraser Valley published a timeline of the History of South Asians in Canada, where extreme acts of racial hatred were recorded as early as 1907 when South Asians were openly denied the right to vote. An article in the local newspaper, titled *Hindus may not vote in Vancouver*, described how people of Asian descent were denied the right to vote, which continued until 1947 (South Asian Studies Institute, 2018). There seems to be an intergenerational pattern of South Asians experiencing racism at the macro level, specifically Sikh people, who have been treated with malice and rejection. With immigration restrictions, such as the law of continuous passage, and the boatloads of Indian people hoping to immigrate to Canada though rejected, discriminatory treatment of the South Asian population in Canada has been a long-standing tradition (South Asian Studies Institute, 2018).

While there are no longer race riots where the properties and businesses of people of colour are being burned to the ground, a glass ceiling for people of colour still exists. Inside the board rooms of powerful institutions, organizations, and businesses, the lack of representation of South Asian Canadians in prominent positions is evident. It is clear that people of colour continue to be treated as second-class citizens. In 118 years, Canadians have not closed the gap between white and non-white people and it is still necessary to talk about discrimination, violence, and, at times, the utter lack of respect people of colour receive. The dominant discourse in Canada is that the Anglo white North American way of life is the ideal; that discourse is built into powerful institutions. In a study by Poolokasingham, Spanierman, Kleiman, and Houshmand in 2014, they found that South Asian Canadians are more likely than their white counterparts to hold a degree and, despite having higher levels of education, they experience higher rates of unemployment. In addition to having a higher unemployment rate, South Asian Canadians on average earn lower incomes than their white counterparts, which exemplifies the glass ceiling

effect on South Asians. This data, obtained from Statistics Canada, suggests that South Asian Canadians are experiencing racism at a macro, systemic, institutional level. The landscape of racism has moved from overt acts of hate to subtle, seemingly innocuous daily reminders that looking, acting, and being white is the gold standard.

Critical race theory

In the 1980s in the United States at Ivy League universities, there was a lack of feminist and race rhetoric (Delgado, Stefancic, & Harris, 2001). After the civil rights achievements, activists felt there was a lull in equal rights progression and began noticing that discrimination was beginning to occur in subtler forms (Delgado, Stefancic, & Harris, 2001). After a series of conferences and meetings, leading figures in critical race theory, including Kimberlé Crenshaw, Angela Harris, Charles Lawrence, Mari Matsuda, and Patricia Williams, created the law-inspired body of work that we now call Critical Race Theory (CRT). The basic tenet of critical race theory is that race is a social construct that places power and privilege with white people and maintains white interests while creating the rise of poverty and criminality for people of colour (Curry, 2018).

Delgado and Stefancic (2001) discuss the importance of the theme of structural determinism in critical race theory. Structural determinism refers to “the idea that our system, because of its structure and vocabulary, cannot redress certain types of wrong” and highlights the lack of language we do not possess to name and address the racial indignities people of colour experience. An example is provided suggesting that the Inuit have 26 words to describe snow and how problematic it is that we have very few words to describe the varying forms of racism.

The authors further discuss the many forms of contemporary racism: “intentional racism; unintentional racism; unconscious racism; institutional racism; racism tinged with homophobia or sexism; racism that takes the form of indifference or coldness; and white privilege- reserving favours, smiles, kindness, the best stories, one’s most charming side, and invitations to real intimacy for one’s kind or class.” It becomes easy to see how CRT, the first of its kind to address racism in academia, became the foundation for spin-off movements. As the depth and breadth of CRT developed, subgroups emerged, and of those subgroups is microaggression theory.

Microaggression theory

In the 1970s, Pierce coined the term “microaggressions” and defined them as “subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are ‘put-downs’” (Pierce, Carew, Pierce- Gonzalez, & Willis, 1978). Microaggressions come in many forms and can be seen in the realm of gender, sexual orientation, and disability; they can be perpetrated against disabled, female, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender individuals (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007). Professor Derald Wing Sue has dedicated his life to researching racial microaggressions in the American context. Derald Wing Sue recognized that Asian Americans are a unique population and experience racism and discrimination in different ways. Dr. Sue (2003) asserts that Asian Americans tend to experience racism in the form of microaggressions. In his research, he has found that no group in society is immune from inheriting racial biases due to cultural conditioning, and he uses microaggression theory to make sense of the experiences of the victims, giving language to this subtle and seemingly innocuous form of racism. Sue breaks microaggression theory down further by categorizing interactions into three types: microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations.

Lund and Carr (2010) describe the difference between macro and micro levels of racism. At the macro level, racism can be seen as systemic discrimination embedded in policy, discourse, and practices that keeps power and privilege within white groups. The result is the gap between those who have access to power and privilege and those who do not; the access some have remains constant over time and maintains white superiority. At the micro-level, visible minorities continue to be direct victims and experience racism in daily life.

Sue and his colleagues (2007) define microaggressions as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of colour.” These intentional or unintentional racial slights can result in the person of colour feeling dismissed, neglected, overlooked, unworthy, and like they do not belong (Sue, 2003). The delivery of these micro-interactions tends to be subtle, such as dismissive look, a lack of interaction, or a tone, and are often dismissed as being innocent (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007). Microaggressions come in many forms and can also be subtle, such as professionals being mistaken as service workers, being ignored or looked over, given poor service, treated without kindness or dignity, or having strangers act fearful or avoidant around the person of colour (Sellers & Shelton, 2013). According to Sue and his colleagues' study conducted in 2007, microaggressions tend to be subtle, indirect, and unintentional and are most likely to occur when there are alternate rationales available to write off the accusation. They also found that when perpetrators feel like they are in a safe environment, they state their opinions and share racist philosophies. The study also suggested that white people tend to commit microaggressions when the excuse of “colour blindness” is

available, thus being able to say they did not see the person as being ethnic, resulting in eliminating all responsibility.

In 2007, Sue and his colleagues authored *Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Implications for Clinical Practice*, where they defined microassaults, microinsults and microinvalidations. A microassault is the easiest for a bystander or person experiencing it to recognize. A microassault is defined as “an explicit racial derogation characterized primarily by a verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behaviour, or purposeful discriminatory actions.” Microassaults tend to be intentional and are most similar to what is considered “old fashioned” racism. An example of a microassault would be if a white person shouted a racial epithet at a person of colour. Sue argues that microassaults are easier to respond to and talk about because they are visible. When it comes to microinsults and microinvalidations, people are more easily able to hide behind their good intentions (Sue, 2003).

Sue and his colleagues (2007) define microinsults as being “characterized by communications that convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person's racial heritage or identity.” Microinsults tend to be less obvious and less easy to recognize when compared to microassaults. Microinsults can be intentional or unintentional, and at the time the perpetrator may not know they have committed one; meanwhile the person of colour experiences the situation by hearing and feeling a hidden message. An example of a microinsult maybe includes asking a Canadian-born South Asian if they had an arranged marriage. The message is that they are a perpetual alien and that all South Asian couples participate in a dated marital tradition regardless of being born in the same place as the perpetrator.

A microinsult can occur through non-verbal communications as well. For example, in a social studies class, if the topic is Indian culture and the white teacher turns and stares at the Canadian-born Indian student for insight and to serve as a representative for all Indian people and their history. The consequence could potentially be mortifying for the student, who may not know much about India as they were born in Canada, which may result in the student feeling inferior. Furthermore, they may feel like an outsider from their fellow students, as they have now been pointed out as being different. The stress and pressure to act as a representative for a culture with many dialects, subgroups, and languages also adds to the burden on the young person, who may be already struggling to form their complicated identity. Microinsults can appear to be harmless but can have a lasting effect on the person of colour (Sue, 2003).

In 2007, Sue and his colleagues defined racial microinvalidations as being “characterized by communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color.” They found that this type of microaggression tends to be the most invisible and hard to recognize. An example of a microinvalidation would be if a Canadian-born South Asian person is repeatedly asked where they are from. The act of being repeatedly asked where one is from invalidates the person's Canadian identity. The situation may feel complicated and shame the person of colour, as they are just as much Canadian citizens as are their white counterparts.

Colour blindness is also a significant form of microinvalidation. It is difficult to confront this type of microaggression because white people claim they are not prejudiced and can make statements such as “I don't see colour” (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007). Statements claiming one does not see colour negate the cultural and historical experiences people have had because of their colour and denies the victims their entire reality

(Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007). Statements denying racism exists deny the very skin that the person of colour has. An example of colour blindness would be if a non-white person attempts to talk to their friend about a microaggression and the white person responds, “Oh that wasn't racism, they just didn't see you,” or “Don't be so sensitive, not everything is about race.” In the attempt of the person of colour trying to talk about their experience, it becomes nullified, and the message is that their experience did not occur or is not important. This essentially pathologizes the person of colour as being the problem.

Microaggression theory describes in detail the how racism has evolved from overt acts of hatred to more subtle and insidious ways of making people of colour feel like second-class citizens. Through the language of microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations, it becomes easier to recognize and describe people of colour's experiences and make meaning from their suffering. It is important to be able to give language to the experiences and is equally important to explore the effects of this reality.

Effects of Microaggressions

The cumulative burden of experiencing microaggressions can affect victims psychologically, socially, spiritually, biologically, and professionally (Wong, Derthick, David, Saw, & Okazaki, 2014). Microaggressions can come in many forms and manifest from person to person or as an environment (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007). People of colour may experience a series of negative consequences from experiencing racial microaggressions. Some of these consequences include increased levels of anger, mistrust, loss of self-esteem, and barriers to forming relationships with white people from whom they have experienced so many racial slights (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007). Other potential consequences include increased stress, depression, shame, and

anger (Jones, 1997). The cumulative burden of experiencing microaggressions contributes to the psychological toll on recipients. In the United States, in a study with African Americans, it was found that the effects of experiencing microaggressions throughout their lifetimes can result in devastating effects. Those results include self-doubt, frustration, isolation, and living in a negative racial climate (Solo´rzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Racial microaggressions also impact white people, as they are impeded from viewing racial realities from outside of their own (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007). Confronting microaggressions can also become a stressful experience because the person of colour must determine if a microaggression has even occurred. Furthermore, they may be fearful of confronting the perpetrator and be at a loss of how to respond (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007).

When a person of colour experiences a racial microaggression, there is a series of questions filled with uncertainty that may spiral in their minds. Some of those questions might include: Did what I think happened really happen? Was this deliberate or unintentional? How should I respond? Should I say something? Even if I say something, how would I prove it? Is it really worth the effort? Should I drop it? This type of reaction is not unique to only one person of colour. It tends to be a common reaction, and it all begins with the difficulty of determining whether a microaggression even happened (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007).

The burden of identifying, confronting, responding and repairing with the perpetrator is placed on the person of colour when a microaggression occurs, if they choose to cope with transgression in that way (Hernández Carranza, & Almeida, 2010). The idea of confronting a

white person about potentially being racist is extremely uncomfortable and can even be turned around to make the non-white person look combative. There is a narrative that, if the victim confronts the perpetrator, the person of colour is being oversensitive or is petty (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007). The consequences of responding to a racial microaggression with anger or disgust may result in the person of colour running the risk of being accused of being overly sensitive, paranoid, or worse. They could potentially result in greater hostility by the white person/people in this encounter or in the future (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007). If the person of colour chooses to confront the perpetrator(s), they may leave wondering if their response made any difference at all, which could potentially result in flattened confidence and self-doubt (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007).

Choosing not to respond can also have devastating effects. Some victims may feel that no matter what they try, addressing the slight will not do them any good. The consequence of choosing not to respond may result in psychological harm (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007). Wong and his colleagues (2014) found that if a person of colour believes they have experienced a racial slight and chooses not to confront the perpetrator, there are potential consequences. When a non-white person bears the burden of denying their reality in order to keep the peace, they may lose a sense of integrity. Furthermore, pent up negative emotions may contribute to potential social, psychological, and biological harm. There is a lack of research on how people of colour can respond to racial microaggressions in a way that disarms and educates their perpetrator and results in the white person or group refraining from repeating the pattern in the future (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007).

The invisibility of microaggressions

Microaggressions have an insidious nature that leaves victims with a feeling of being attacked, disrespected, or that something is not right (Reid, & Radhakrishnan, 2003). The power of a microaggression lies in that, after a perpetrator and victim walk away from the conversation, neither of them would be able to label the transgression, thus making it invisible. Even after an incident has occurred, people of colour tend to engage in analysis, wondering if it even happened. People of colour try to understand if a microaggression has occurred and, during that analysis, engage in the process of reminding themselves that not everything is racial (Hernández, Carranza, & Almeida, 2010). When a person of colour tries to identify or determine if a microaggression has occurred, they compare that experience with previous ones across different times and places, as well as with the experiential reality of others (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007). The person of colour's experiential reality tends to be full of context and takes into consideration experiences from many parts of their life (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007). White people tend to look at the situation in a vacuum and look at their behaviour and intentions in that moment (Sue, 2003). White counterparts also rarely engage in intercultural dialogue, as it is not a necessity that bears weight on their success, and their lives do not depend on this type of information due to their equal access to power (Gorski, 2007).

Microaggressions tend to be easily explained away with a logical, non-biased reason by the perpetrator and, thus, leave the victim wondering whether the event truly occurred (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007). It becomes difficult to talk about racial transgressions because of potential excuses from the perpetrator and the lack of so-called

evidence. It is almost easier for victims to speak about overt acts of racism than the subtle forms of racial indignities because of the covert nature.

The dilemma remains of how to prove a microaggression has occurred. Even if a person of colour works up the courage to confront the aggressor, they are often encouraged to keep silent and avoid rocking the boat (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007). Dr. Derald Wing Sue (2003), argues that these covert, subtle, and seemingly innocuous forms of contemporary racism are more problematic and damaging than overt acts of racism, because overt acts of racism are more easily recognized and able to be addressed.

Counselling and Microaggressions

There is a lack of data in the Canadian context regarding the relationship between microaggressions and the mental health profession. Due to this lack of research, the neighbouring American context will be examined. Through previous research, it has been suggested that when a white therapist is working with a person of colour, they may not be aware of their cultural conditioning and implicit bias. White therapists run the risk of committing racial microaggressions against their clients (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007). Microaggressions are frequently perpetrated unintentionally by well-meaning white people. The therapeutic environment is not excused from the cultural conditioning that professionals are subjected to throughout their upbringing.

According to Dr. Sue and his colleagues (2007), clinicians view themselves as helping professionals and would not intentionally create hostile or derogatory environments, and consequently run the risk of excusing themselves from a phenomenon that occurs across all parts of society. Counsellors and mental health professionals are not excused from the societal

impression that racism is on the decline and that they are good people, and the nature of their work is to help not harm. Therefore, it is easy to possess the belief that one could never perpetrate racism against a client. Mental health professionals are in positions of power where they can create diagnoses, treatment plans, and have the potential to impact the lives of their clients significantly. Racial microaggressions tend to be invisible, and a practitioner may not know if one has occurred within a service exchange. Many Asian Americans have reported feeling like perpetual aliens in their land, and these types of microaggressions come up in therapy.

An example of a counsellor making a person of colour feel like an outsider would be if a person of colour is repeatedly asked where they are from. Another risk is that, because the counsellor or mental health worker is in a position of power, the client may suppress their thoughts and beliefs and question their views. One of the most damaging things a practitioner can do is further oppress a person of colour while attempting to do good (Gorski, 2007). Statements such as “I don't see colour,” “there is only one race,” or providing feedback that supports the dominant white culture as being the ideal may leave the client feeling misunderstood, invalidated, and unimportant (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007).

In 2007 Sue and his colleagues explored the potential consequences of microaggressions and counselling. White therapists can impose North American values and ways of living as ideal and pathologize clients of colour in believing that their cultural ways of living are inferior or wrong. The research suggested when a white practitioner has a lack of understanding of the culture of the client of colour, the client may feel misunderstood or may be given unhelpful or dangerous encouragement to speak or act out against their families in a culture that operates from

a collectivist perspective. Their study also suggested that white therapists may not realize that what they are saying may be disrespectful or irrelevant to the client's culture. Moreover, the counsellor may apply an individualistic view in a situation where it is not possible, safe, or conducive to the situation. The study suggested if a racial microaggression has occurred between the practitioner and the client, the client may not feel comfortable in confronting the service worker, who is in a position of power, which can lead to further oppressing and silencing the victim. Other potential consequences could include early termination, weakened rapport, a breach of trust, and potential harm if the client feels judged and walks out feeling worse than when they came in. If a person of colour decides to terminate services because they do not feel understood or have experienced a microaggression, they run the risk of not accessing therapy or getting help at all.

When therapists are uncomfortable with the topic of race and racism, they shut down an avenue for clients to explore issues of bias, discrimination, and prejudice. It is crucial for service workers in the helping professions to do more than learn tactics, tips, and behaviours; instead, they should develop a shift in consciousness (Gorski, 2007). If a client is seeking support because they have experienced racial microaggressions at the hands of someone else, professionals need to work alongside the oppressed person and with them in social reconstruction, which is only possible when the therapist understands their social location and privilege (Gorski, 2007).

White perpetrators

The role of the perpetrator is important as this phenomenon would not occur without them. In 2007, Sue and his colleagues found that, in the United States, nearly all white Americans inherit racial biases. They suggested that most times when someone is voicing that a

racial indignity has occurred, it is a member of the disempowered group. They also found that white perpetrators often hold the following views regarding ethnic minorities: they are better off in life; racism is not a significant barrier in this day and age; equality exists; and discriminatory occurrences are few and far between. This notion is further exacerbated when white people believe their well-intentioned comments and questions cannot be hurtful (Sue, 2003). White perpetrators struggle to understand that their attempts to connect with a person of colour are quite hurtful and damaging.

The white perpetrator tends to view themselves as a kind and moral human being, thus making it challenging to be able to recognize their racial bias and acts of discrimination (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007). When a white person is confronted with perpetrating a racial microaggression, they tend to look at their behaviour in this specific interaction and evaluate what has happened in the isolation of this one incident. The white person does not have multiple experiences of being confronted, so they fail to see their place in the pattern of perpetrating microaggressions against people of colour (Sue, 2005). White people can take the stance that their intentions were good, use their morality as a defence, and can righteously deny that their behaviours were motivated by race (Sue, 2005). While the white person thinks that their intentions are pure and that their comment is helpful, the result is the person of colour feels minimized and misunderstood (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007). The person of colour may avoid confronting the white person as they do not appear to be comfortable with speaking about racial issues, and the perpetrator could easily hide behind their good intentions. Despite having good intentions, white people tend to support the dominant hegemony of white ideals rather than challenging them (Gorski, 2007).

A common and damaging response that white people have when a person of colour is trying to talk about their experience is trying to relate it to their own experiences. The attempt to convey they understand what the person of colour is going through may result in the non-white person feeling invalidated. An example would be if a person of colour is talking to someone they trust about a microaggression that they had just experienced, and the white person responds, “I understand. As a woman, I experience discrimination too” (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007). The message is that there is no difference between gender discrimination and racism. Furthermore, the matter becomes complicated if the person of colour is female.

In summary, since the arrival of South Asians in Canada, they have experienced macro and micro forms of racism and discrimination. Through critical race theory and microaggression theory, it was suggested that Asians experience unique forms of racism and discrimination in the American context due to their unique culture and languages. Microaggressions can be further broken down into three categories: microassaults, microinsults and microinvalidations. The effects of microaggressions can be devastating for people of colour, as the cumulative burden can cause stress, anxiety, and can impact people physically, socially, psychologically, and spiritually. The indivisibility of this contemporary form of racism and the ability of white perpetrators to hide behind their good intentions adds to the complicated nature. It is crucial to note that professionals are not excused from this societal phenomenon. The literature was drawn heavily from the American context, as there is a lack of clinical research in the Canadian context. The population of South Asians arriving in Canada dates back to as early as 1902, and there still much work to be done in understanding their experiences and the impacts.

Chapter 3 Methodology of the Research

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to improve cultural competency in mental health practices in the Canadian context. This study is investigating how to best support the South Asian Canadian population when addressing microaggressions and provide helpful information for those working in the human services field. Currently, research is limited, and the hope is that information from the study can be used to add to the literature of microaggressions and fill the gap in research explicitly about South Asian Canadians. As there is no current literature on Canadian-born South Asian populations experiencing racism, this study will document the existence of this form of modern-day racism and investigate the harmful impacts of these types of interactions. The proposed outcome is that professionals in the human services field and those looking to improve their cultural competency skills will have a greater understanding of how to work with people of colour, specifically South Asian Canadians, and avoid perpetuating racism through racial microaggressions.

Research questions

The study used a semi-structured interview method, and each interview had a set of questions that was asked to every participant. The researcher took a conversational approach to the interviews, and more questions were asked within the interview to gain a greater understanding of the context of the participant's experiences and of the impacts and hopes of the participant. Biographical information was collected at the beginning of each interview, and those questions included name, phone number, email, age, gender, occupation, current place of

residence, birthplace, and time spent in Canada. The question regarding time spent in Canada served to learn the ancestral history of how long the participants' family has been in Canada, as this study was looking at Canadian-born participants. After collecting biodata, the broader questions about experiences were introduced.

There is a lack of documentation of recorded experiences of racism experienced by South Asian Canadians. The first question in this study was to ask if this population experiences racism through microaggressions and, if so, what those experiences were. The next question was, “How did those experiences impact you?” This investigated the consequences of experiencing racial microaggressions. The third question on the pre-set semi-structured interview question sheet investigated what perpetrators of microaggressions can do to take corrective action once they have perpetrated a microaggression. The question varied from interview to interview but was something along the lines of “If a perpetrator has realized what they said and how it was hurtful, how do you wish that person would have responded? What would have been helpful? What would you have needed at that moment?” The fourth question was “How do those experiences continue to impact you?” This question served to understand if there are long term consequences of experiencing racial microaggressions. The fifth question intended to investigate implications for clinical practice and asked if the participant had any recommendations for professionals or organizations. The last question asked if the participants had anything that they would like to add.

Research Design

To explore participant's experiences, critical race theory and microaggression theory were used. Using microaggressions theory, the terms and concepts were explained to participants via

email and during an introduction in the interviews. After participants were identified, an information and consent form was sent via email. After participants returned the signed consent form, a time was set for the interview, which was intended to be between 30 and 60 minutes long. Some conversations extended to 90 minutes, as the interviewer did not want to cut off the participants from sharing their stories. The interview was recorded with permission, transcribed, and analyzed for themes. The spiral method of qualitative research was used as the researcher began by analyzing the data and generating codes (Biber & Leavy, 2006). Through this method, the researcher was able to jump back and forth between examining data, creating and adjusting codes, and re-examining previous work. It was important for the researcher to remain reflexive as the data was participants' life experiences. The researcher triangulated the data by working closely with the supervising faculty member.

Recruitment

The methodology was semi-structured interviews with up to 20 participants. By using qualitative interviewing, the research was meant to capture the voices of participants and comprehend the meaning of their experiences within the context of the study. The primary researcher used convenience sampling for this exploratory research and then transitioned to the snowball sampling technique to expand the sample size. The researcher contacted TRU alumni, community organizations, posted recruitment images on social media accounts such as Instagram and Facebook, and requested colleagues and contacts to share a request for participants that potentially met the criteria. The phone number and email address were provided on the recruitment flyer, allowing potential participants to contact the researcher for further information and follow up for participation.

Participants

The sample included 14 people who identified as being South Asian Canadians from the ages of 22 to 61. Six participants identified as being male and eight participants identified as female. Participants were anywhere from first-generation to second-generation Canadian and were born in Calgary, Merritt, Quesnel, Kamloops, Vancouver, Surrey, and New Westminster. Participants experienced microaggressions in Vancouver, Williams Lake, White Rock, Surrey, Langley, Kamloops, Quesnel, Merritt, Richmond, Delta, Burnaby, and Calgary. Participants had parents who identified as being immigrants of families of Indian descent from Nairobi, Kenya, Punjab India, the Middle East, and England. Some participants had family members who were some of the first Sikh immigrants in Canada as early as 1905 and 1908. Others had immigrant parents, and two participants had one parent from Britain and one parent from India.

Methods of Data Analysis

The initial research questions informed the themes that were found. Microaggression theory was also used as a framework to analyze the experiences of the participants. Audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed and printed. The data was analyzed closely by the primary researcher, and a second analysis was carried out between the principal researcher and faculty supervisor to ensure consistency and triangulation. The researcher began coding the interviewee's stories by colour. The researcher cut and paste the colour coded statements into a new Word document. The researcher analyzed the examples for clarity and created another document for the cases that were to be used in the final paper. The researcher remained reflexive and created new codes throughout the data analysis process.

Ethical Considerations

Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, the researcher explained how confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained in two different ways. The primary researcher explained confidentiality and anonymity would be protected through the information and consent form as well as verbally before beginning the interview. The interviewer explained that the participant's names would be changed in the final paper, and participants were informed that they could retract their interview and stop at any point. Participants were aware that they had the right to withdraw at any point during or after the interview process. Participants in the study knew that their participation was entirely voluntary. There were no known risks for participants in the study. However, if participants felt uneasiness or had an emotional response, they were directed towards local and national counselling supports. This study abided by all Thompson Rivers University human ethics research policies and requirements.

Presenting Findings

I presented my preliminary findings from this study to graduate students at Laval University in Quebec City at the CRIEVAT Student Symposium in March 2019. The initial results were also presented to graduate students at Heidelberg University who were taking a Diversity course in October 2020. I also presented to staff members at Interior Community Services, a not-for-profit organization in Kamloops, B.C. Lastly, the findings were also presented to professionals and students in the Family Therapy Certificate program at the Centre for Response Based Practice Interior. I have also been invited to speak to the leaders of the Girl Guides organization of the Kamloops-Caribou regions as well as the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association annual conference in 2021. Research findings will also be disseminated to stakeholders, including the participants in the study and community organizations.

Chapter 4 Research Findings

Seven themes emerged from the data. The seven themes are: (1) microassaults, (2) microinsults, (3) microinvalidations, (4) perpetual alien, (5) microaggressive environments, (6) gender and microaggressions, and (7) impact. Participants also addressed implications for clinical practice, but that will be discussed in the next section. Some of the stories from the participants aligned with previous microaggression research from the American context. The theme of feeling like a perpetual alien has been discussed in previous research by Sue and his colleagues in their 2007 article, “Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Implications for Clinical Practice.” For other themes that emerged, such as microaggressive environments as well as gender and microaggression, the current study is the first of its kind in looking at the Canadian context. It was important for this study to give voice to those who have been marginalized. Therefore, this section will mostly serve to capture the voices of the participants and share their stories verbatim from the interviews.

Microassaults

The findings indicate racism still exists in Canada and includes overt visible acts. The results indicate overt racist acts still occur in contemporary Canadian society. The research suggests males tend to experience more overt and violent acts of racism than women experience. Participant's stories vary from verbal attacks of racial epithets to death threats. Overt racism occurs across various areas of life, including recreational settings, healthcare, schoolyards, politics, and the Canadian judicial system. The following stories from the participants include an element of vicious intent from the perpetrator to send a message of white supremacy. The perpetrator intended to say something of a racist nature. As mentioned earlier, “micro”

aggression refers to a person-to-person interaction and is not indicative of the intensity of the assault.

In this example, the participant was talking about Canadian provincial judges speaking amongst each other behind closed doors. This participant is speaking of his experiences of microaggressions from judges and lawyers. He is speaking about judges, lawyers and those who work in the criminal justice system when he refers to “the best and the brightest.”

But there was from within the judiciary at the highest level, there was racism directed at me. Stereotypes... And they're supposed to be amongst the best and the brightest. But I heard, “Why do your people lie?’, “Why do your men beat their women?”, and “These days you can't get appointed unless you have tits and a tan.”

The same participant experienced an overt act of aggression in the Kamloops-Caribou region when his life was threatened,

I'm born here, and I was a top-notch student and even when I articulated after law school in Kamloops, and I remember one time... I'm articling here to serve some documents at the North Hills Mall, and I remember these two guys pulled up their big pickup truck and threatened to run me over.

While that participant experienced overt racism in the judicial system, similarly, this next interviewee experienced it in the political sphere. A participant who is considered a professional in the community experienced racism while participating in the Canadian political scene. In this example, he speaks about his own experiences during the time he was campaigning. His staff and family were affected by the microassaults as well. The experiences that he had extended to the people in his political party who were supporting him, and his wife and children bore the weight of hearing the racist comments towards their loved one. They admitted carrying the burden alone as they did not want to place stress on the participant. The effect on the people around the

participant demonstrates how microaggressions can create isolation and disconnection. In this example, the microaggression had a ripple effect that travelled from the person experiencing it to his political supporters, to his family, and to those supporting him through this journey.

I ran federally here as a candidate. Parliament in XXXX for the XXXXX Party and the riding is called XXXXXXXX, quite a large riding... I'm raised on the Caribou. I'm a son of the Caribou... But when I was campaigning, I experienced overt racism as well. People slam the door. Some people, "Are you a Muslim? Are you? Where are you from? Right? Go back to where you come from, or I'll never vote for you."

During this campaign, people of colour were accosted in the streets and told to go back to their own country. It is important to remember that the people participating in the study are Canadian. Participants were told to go back to their own country in schools, while walking down the street, and were often called Hindus or Paki's. One participant described being called "a black bastard. Go back where you come from." The following stories are examples of times when participants were called Hindus or Paki's:

I got yelled at at court one time by a person in custody said I'm not coming in front of this Paki when I was on the bench.

People calling you Paki...On the bus.

When you're coming off a school bus to go play basketball at the opposite school and get straight up, "Well, the Hindus are here."

Actually, that was an epithet that I heard commonly as a child' Hindu. God damn Hindu, go back where you come from you guys love cows.

The following example is of a young woman who describes her experience with being told she was going to get deported:

I've heard some people say to me, like, "Oh, you're going to get deported back to India." It's like, "How do I get deported back to a country I'm not even from? I wasn't born there. My citizenship is here; I was born in this country."

In this next story, a couple was eating at a local IHOP restaurant when they were accosted by the patrons sitting next to them:

I was on Scott road and, just for breakfast with my ex-boyfriend, and we were just sitting there, and there was a group of people in the booth next to us. And they were talking, we were obviously not paying attention to someone else's conversation, but they said something that stood out to both of us. And they said, "Hindus should go back to their own country," and we didn't really react at first because we're like oh that's weird, and then they said it again, and again. And then I felt super uncomfortable. My boyfriend at the time had a temper, and he said something. Which I should have done too, but I didn't... He said something, and he was kind of like "Oh, what was that?" They kept going on with it, and then they got up, and I guess were leaving, and then I remember, cuz we were sitting across from each other, and I remember getting out of my side and getting next to my boyfriend because I think a physical altercation would have taken place if I hadn't ...then the woman who was saying these things saying got like this close to my face... I just ignored it. Like, I didn't react to it because I didn't know what to say, I was kind of in shock...Then they left. And then my food came, and I didn't eat it because I lost my appetite... People were looking at us, and you know it was really uncomfortable and embarrassing.

As seen above, microassaults take place in restaurants, courtrooms, and on the streets.

Participants' stories indicate that people of colour can experience microassaults any time they

leave the house. The following examples take place in a hospital and schools. It is important to note that while participants talked about childhood experiences for this study, only cases of microassaults that occurred recently were used in this paper. A physician working in Kamloops described several instances in which their race was brought into the room by a patient. Here is an example of one of the cases:

We used to have an Indian technologist; her name was XXXXXX. One of the older patients, I think, wanted to get her attention, and she told one of the other technologists, "Can you get that Negro tech over here?"

Another example that happened recently in the Kamloops region in a public sphere was in schools. The following two examples are parents who dealt with racism and parenting and had to navigate how to respond and protect their children.

So, the next day, she comes home, and she says, "Daddy, you're going to be really happy with me." I said, "Oh, how come." She goes, "So-and-so pushed me to the ground, and I got up, and I didn't do anything back." I giggled. I said, "Isn't so-and-so your friend?" She goes, "Yeah." I go, "Why did he push you." And she goes, "Because his dad, his parents, said that they don't like our colour. Our kind of colour people."

I know my daughter had a rough time in elementary school because they're about four girls in her class who were Christians, and they often say to her, you know, you're, you're going to go to hell, "You're not a Christian. You have brown skin."

In sum, overt acts of racism continue to exist in Canada and can be seen through the numerous examples above. The idea that we live in a nonconfrontational mosaic-like society and have overcome racism is simply inaccurate. The above examples are undeniable and there are, at times, extreme examples of the hatred that continues to be permitted in this country. These

examples have been selected from over nine pages of stories from the participants. In these examples, it is easy to identify the discriminatory intent of the perpetrators, as there is a visibility of racism in their words and actions. The following two categories of microinsults and microinvalidations are rooted in intentional, and at times unintentional, racism but are harder to recognize and much easier to write off.

Microinsults

Microinsults are much more insidious than microassaults. Microinsults are often written off as a joke or a misunderstanding, and the perpetrator can get a free pass from taking accountability for their words or actions. Victims of microinsults are often left wondering if they are oversensitive. They are put in a position of not knowing if something of a racist or discriminatory nature occurred, even though they walked away from the interaction feeling one of many potential adverse effects of microaggressions. In this study, there were many examples of white people trying to make a joke or connect with a person of colour and knowingly or unknowingly causing distress to the person of colour. Microinsults occur across many facets in society, including hospitals, schools, the workplace, bars and restaurants, and in peoples' homes. The insidious nature of microinsults makes them harder to address and thus harder to process and recover from. In this particular sample, there were many professionals who encountered frequent microaggressions in the workplace. While some of the reactions included feeling frustrated with others, other responses included feeling like their achievements were undercut and the feeling of

not knowing if they achieved their rank and goals based on their merits. The following examples are microinsults that occurred in the workplace:

When I did that biopsy, I remember the technologist was Indian, and then the woman said, like, “Oh, do you have to have a tan to work here?”

We had a social worker. He repeatedly, a team leader, asked me, "Oh, do you live with your in-laws?" I'm like, "No, Steve. I told you I don't. I live with just my husband." He said, “*Oh, but that's just the thing you guys do, right?*”

I remember when I first became a lawyer, even in the in the central Caribou region of British Columbia, people couldn't imagine a lawyer can be brown. Twice judges thought I was the translator.

Yeah, in other words, when I was appointed, there were so few of us appointments that that they treated us like we were tokenistic, affirmative action appointments.

This happened last week, and I was at work and with people who let's say are like 40 and up in age. And I'm the only person of colour that works in the office. So the Chief Operating Officer came out, and he was like I would say that he's like the highest person in the office in position... And I remember my two coworkers were in the office at the time and he told us a story. The story started off with “I worked at a Morgue when I was younger, and my friend and I used to play pranks on other people that worked with us. We played a prank on this guy—it's because he's black. It's because he was black. No, it wasn't, but it was.” And then he went on to tell me about the prank and how he ended up quitting his job because he was so freaked out by it. And then I was just like staring at him like I didn't really know what to say because he's my boss and I was in a really awkward...And Sarah, who was on the other side she didn't care she just she just responded, “Oh you're a prankster!” And she didn't even notice. Even though I said, “That was racist.”

The following example comes from a young woman of colour who works in a private school in Vancouver. The participant did not experience the microaggression herself but felt incredibly frustrated as she listened to her co-worker describe how he actively perpetrates them against his young students.

He was like, “My Nigerian student said it was okay to do this.” I’m like, “Your Nigerian student is trying to figure out what it means to be black.” He said, “You’re really loud,” and they’d be like, “Yes, it’s part of my personality, not my colour.” He didn’t realize that he was attributing loudness to black students. They’re like, “No, this is part of my personality. I’m just a loud person; it’s not because I’m black.” He thought that was an empowering moment for him.

Another example in a school setting is again from a teacher to student:

I was a very good student. I remember the teacher saying to me in English class, “This is a very, very good essay, but you couldn’t have written it given your background,” like assuming that brown people couldn’t write in English

Microinsults occur in places where people of colour engage in daily tasks, like grocery shopping, and also happen in powerful institutions and from people who hold powerful positions. In the following example, a member of the legislative assembly of B.C, an elected official who is supposed to represent his people, made one of his constituents feel ashamed and like an outsider.

And that’s one of the extreme situations you see... So I was sitting at this table, and this guy joined our table, the MLA, the elected MLA. And something just came up, and I said some border liberal policy. And he was intoxicated, and he looked over to me and said, “See, look at these guys. Once you win, they all start to follow your bandwagon.” And that’s when his campaign manager was right next to him...and said, “You know what, it’s time for you to go”... He was

referring...to Indian people. Assuming that we all vote a certain way...and not knowing anything about me, or who I was, or anything.

Another type of microinsult that is common for people of colour to experience is when white people make assumptions about the individual or their families. I have personally experienced this type of microinsult my entire life. These types of microaggressions are frequently seen when a white person feels comfortable enough around a person of colour and begins to discuss highly offensive opinions or assumptions. Again, there were pages upon pages of examples, but for this study only two were chosen. The following example is of a man in his 20's who works as an accounting manager and struggled with a lack of representation of South Asian Canadians in professions outside of common stereotypes:

People to assume like your dad or your parents just drive a taxi or work on the farm. That's what their general assumptions are.... They assume your dad's a taxi driver, your uncles, a taxi driver or whatever...It's kind of frustrating because people just kind of assume... that because you're brown, you can only do these three things... You see, some of the people are doctors, some of them play sports, whatever, right. So it's kind of taking away that perception, growing up that what people thought. That you can only do those three things. That's what you're destined to do.

Similar to the previous example, this participant speaks to common stereotypes and notions. Battling stereotypes and being painted with the same brush as an entire community is a collective experience for people of colour in Canada. People of colour inside this study and outside this study have expressed that they struggle to be seen as an individual and instead

become representatives for an entire race. The following participant talks about the assumption that South Asian Canadians are wealthy and often times do not work hard for what they have:

I wouldn't really say it's a question per se. But there is a comment that really bothers me. Like some people have said, "Brown kids don't have to worry because their parents will pay for everything." They think brown kids don't have to worry because their parents will buy them cars. They don't have to go to school because they can take care of their parent's businesses, etcetera, etcetera. That really irritates me. They just assume that we're handed everything in life even if that's not the case. And they're working hard for what they get, whereas we are just given it, so it doesn't even count.

Microinsults are everyday experiences for people of colour in Canada. This type of microaggression can occur anywhere at any time. Participants did not previously have the language to describe these experiences of microinsults, yet when asked if they had ever been insulted, whether it appeared that the perpetrator was intentionally trying to or not, participants had many stories. It has been astounding to see how every single person of colour when asked this question has experienced some form of microinsult. People were asked inside of the study, outside of this study—friends, family, colleagues and over the dinner table—and most agreed that it was a frequent experience. The intensity of microinsults vary as seen in these examples, and the impact of these experiences will be discussed later. As previously mentioned, microassaults are the most visible form of contemporary racism, and microinsults and microinvalidations tend to be covert. Microinsults act like a dog whistle to people of colour and leaves them feeling othered, unworthy, and questioning themselves. Microinvalidations go a step further and indoctrinate this othering effect when a white person negates the experiences of the person of colour.

Microinvalidations

Microinvalidations can best be seen when a white person denies racism exists. Examples of microinvalidations are claims that we live in a post-racial society, or when a victim is told they are sensitive or overdramatic. Many of the participants, if not all, stated that this was one of the few times that they had ever talked about race and racism with vocabulary and language to describe something that they have experienced their entire life. Participants who were born and raised and have become professionals in Canadian society have learned that racism is an uncomfortable topic. Without overt and visible proof, their experiences can be easily denied. The following example is from a woman who works with a white male who actively denies racism exists and believes it is best not to talk about race. The white perpetrator is currently an eighth-grade science teacher.

“Race is divisive and it just pushes people apart instead of us coming together”... That's things he was talking about when he teaches because we're science teachers. When he teaches biology to his kids, he teaches that racism is just genetics... He was just very like, “I don't see colour or microaggressions at all.” I think the most important part is when I think about how he teaches the future generations, by completely—the concept of our erasure—that are our experiences are not valid. If you just chalk up race to mean like, “Oh, our genetics are just a difference of melanin,” that's really nice if you're lacking melanin... He felt like that it was divisive in nature to bring up race, it's divisive and it pushes people away and instead of talking about race, we should just move forward. He came up with that comment of like, “Oh, I didn't do anything to you.” As in like, “I haven't done anything, my white skin is not my choice and I haven't done any of this oppression to you.” He was just still fixating on the fact that white guilt... “I don't want to be culpable,” and I was like, “You aren't culpable for anything other than the fact that you're denying my experience right now...”

Another participant spoke about a white male who blatantly said racism does not exist anymore and brought up the term “reverse racism.” Reverse racism has become a response from white perpetrators for not taking accountability or addressing racism in Canada. I can remember trekking through Northern Vietnam with a group of 10 people from all over the world. My partner and I were living in Kamloops at the time and happened to meet another traveller from Kamloops. After a long day of trekking for 8 hours, we sat at the dinner table with our fellow tourists. We began discussing my research on racial microaggressions and the white male from Kamloops said, “Don't you think the straight white male is under attack? I feel like I can't say anything anymore.” He proceeded to bring up terms such as “reverse racism” and stated he did not see colour. The following example from a participant is similar in that they are describing a white male who cannot understand racism and denies its existence in contemporary Canadian society.

I remember, he just couldn't understand her perspective on things and she'd be like, “That was insulting,” or “That person was racist towards me.” He'd be like, “No. Racism doesn't exist anymore.” He was from East-Whiteville, Canada. He'd be like, “it's almost reverse racism”...She would call him out and be like... “You can't understand this because you're a privileged white male.” He'd be like, “That's reverse racism.” She's like, “No...Reverse racism is nonexistent thing. It does not exist. It's something made up by a white person. You cannot be discriminatory against someone who's not subordinated.”

In this next example of a microinvalidation, the participant was describing her experience of being in a post-secondary graduate course, and again a Canadian white male denied the experience of people of colour. In this particular example, the man was talking about black

people being persecuted in the United States. The participant was adversely affected by the denial of people of colour's experiences.

One type of micro-aggression I can actually tell you about happened here at TRU is I was taking a diversity course, and the Black Lives Matter thing came up, and someone had compared, it was a white male, he had compared the KKK to the Black Lives Matter, and said that Black Lives Matter is saying that all lives don't matter. It just really upset me because Black Lives Matter is not a hate group. When you say things like all lives matter, you're taking away from the fact that black people are being persecuted in the States. That they are facing things like racism, police brutality, sexual assaults, unequal opportunity for employment, going to university, and just being gentrified. That had really made me angry because I sat there thinking, "How can you compare Black Lives Matter to the Ku Klux Klan? One is a hate group and one is just trying to raise awareness for the hate that's being inflicted on them."

Another important theme also falling under the category of microinvalidation is the feeling of being a perpetual alien in one's land. This theme supports previous research on racial microaggressions by Dr. Derald Wing Sue in the Asian American context.

Perpetual Alien

One form of microinvalidation is when people of colour are repeatedly asked where they are from. The message is that because they are coloured, they cannot possibly be from Canada. However, it is because these people are born in Canada, they identify as being Canadian. Generally, they do not know another way of life; this notion that they cannot possibly be Canadian creates a divide and inequity. When white people repeatedly ask people of colour where they are really from, it creates a sense of mistrust. Participants also mentioned carrying around a cultural heritage bag of explanations because they know that when they state the

Canadian city they were born in, that it will not be enough. People of colour have learned that to be released from a line of questioning of where they are from, they must explain to the perpetrator how their cultural lineage has resulted in them being in the room. It is important to note that asking where someone is from is a fair question in some contexts, and when the question is coming from a place of curiosity, it can create a connection. On the other hand, when a person of colour is repeatedly asked where they are really from, the interaction crosses over to a place of entitlement and othering. The following examples illustrate times when people of colour have been repeatedly asked where they are from:

It's like how many times do we hear that? And we're like, "Oh we're Canadian," and they're like "No. Where are you REALLY from?" And they're like "Where you fr-what's your family from." And I always feel like that's kind of annoying...And they insinuate just because I'm not white that I'm not from Canada.

Like when you get asked, "Where are you from," then it's always like at first being like, "I'm from B.C, or from Richmond, or whatever from Vancouver"... Then it was a follow-up like, "No, like, where are you *actually* from"... It made you feel like an outsider almost. That was my first experience where I thought like, "Oh, that's weird. Okay, so what am I supposed to say? Am I not supposed to say Canada? Am I not supposed to say B.C? What does that question mean then to me?"

It's like why isn't it good enough to be Canadian? Why do you have to sit here and dig at where my roots are from? What are you going to do with that information? Why was it so validating for you to figure out where I was from? ... Why can't I just be Canadian?...That's where the frustration is. If I was a white person and I said I was Canadian, they wouldn't be like, are you from Britain? Are you from Germany?

Here is an example of how both parties in a conversation being first-generation Canadians. The participant is of Indian descent, and the colleague who he was speaking with was of Irish descent. The white first-generation Canadian male describes never being asked twice where he is from after answering the question the first time.

One time I asked him...“Hey...how many times have you been asked that...What's your cultural background?” He goes, “I'm a first-generation Canadian, but my parents are from Ireland.” I said, “How many times have you ever being asked where are you from, and you've had to answer by saying I'm from Ireland?” He goes, “Never.” I said, “We get that all the time.”

These participants describe how white skin is associated with being Canadian and how they are perpetually treated as foreigners even though they were born in Canada:

That's another thing, just because you aren't white, people are going to assume that you're from somewhere else. It's just amazing how even though we're on indigenous land, so many people have associated Canada with white skin. Not knowing that there could be a white person who's born in England, and there's me who was born in Canada, and I'm brown. I think that if you had to ask most people, they would assume that I'm the foreigner, not realizing this white person from England is probably the foreigner.

They notice that your skin's a different colour, or your facial features are different, or the fact that your name is foreign. When they notice that, they always ask you, “Where are you from?” I do think they ask not just because they are curious, but it's microaggressive in the sense of they assume that I'm a foreigner.

In sum, microinvalidations were commonly mentioned during the interviews and mentioned by most participants. Microinvalidations are challenging to identify as, at times, they sound reasonable. For example, the science teacher who chooses to describe race and racism as a

tool of divisiveness. He teaches his students race is a simple difference in melanin. Through this example, it is easy to see how the dominant discourse of Canada being a post-racialized society gets passed onto the next generation. It is apparent that those who do not experience racism can turn a blind eye and furthermore become righteously indignant when addressing the topic. A frequent microinvalidation that was mentioned by many participants was repeatedly being asked where they are really from, resulting in the feeling of being a perpetual alien in one's own land. While analyzing the data, it became apparent that there can be microaggressive environments. Along with microinsults and microinvalidations, microaggressive environments can also be difficult to recognize. Microaggressive environments can be challenging to understand for those who are privileged but can act as a dog whistle to people of colour.

Microaggressive Environments

Microaggressive environments can be described as places where there is lack of representation of people of colour, whether that is reflected in the staff, or in decor or posters around the office, or lack of anything communicating to people of colour that they are welcome. Microaggressive environments can also be created when there is prejudice in the hiring process and there are tens of thousands of non-white people in the region. In this study, participants mentioned environments with racial tension in schools from both the student's and teacher's perspective. Other microaggressive environments described by participants include the judiciary, politics, post-secondary institutions, and a not-for-profit organization.

In this first example, a woman describes how she felt uneasy being the only person of colour while working at a not-for-profit organization. She was hired as a counselling intern and did not complete her appointment in that office. The organization offered counselling services to

clients of colour, but there was no indication in the waiting room or office spaces, or amongst the staff, that this particular office conveyed cultural competency. The participant described experiencing microaggressions from a colleague and staff member. The intern who took the place of the participant, who is also a person of colour, also described having similar experiences at this agency.

I'm going to be really honest with you. When I was at intern...I was the only person of colour there. I think just, first of all, not even being from xxxx and then not being a white woman, definitely just off the bat made me feel like an outsider.

Similarly, a woman describes her experience in a post-secondary institution where the environment in the classroom became so problematic that it affected what food she would bring to class, how vulnerable she was willing to be with her colleagues, and eventually who she associated with for the remainder of the program as she learned in her peer group who was racist and who was not.

They would make these weird comments...Anytime one of the brown girls would say something, there were these particular two or three that would be like “ughhh” and like roll their eyes...Or if one of the brown girls was talking in class, they would make it like such a big deal like it was so disruptive, but if a white girl was talking during class they would not even bat an eye... I had never been in a situation like that, and to see that in real life, I was like wow... I had no idea people were like that... That’s what it was like at school...In the beginning I was kind of just friends with everyone and later in the year it segregated into like the white girls group, there was the low-key kind of racist white girls, there was the chill white girls, and then there was the brown girls. That’s literally like what it became. It made me sit somewhere else for sure. First, I was friends with these girls who ended up being kind of racist. I can say that now. They would always make these comments about the other brown girls in the class to me. And I would be like, “This is so weird. Why are

you saying this to me...Are you saying that I'm better than them because I'm sitting with you guys and I'm doing what you're doing?"

Similarly, a teacher in a private school in Vancouver described a similar situation. Even students attending prestigious private schools in Vancouver are being taught in microaggressive environments. In this example, the principal of the school acknowledges the hostile environment and encourages the participant to adjust her presentation about cultural competency, as she knew it was not going to be received well by the other faculty:

Our school is going through a review right now... One of the questions is like, "How does your school support minorities? How is your school culturally aware?" I was like, "Well, it isn't..." Even when I was having this conversation about the seminar with my principal, she really did caution me about, "You should make it student-centered because I don't think people are going to receive it well." So in order to keep it civil, keep it calm, and make it go well, I can't really be like, "Check your racism." Which is really frustrating.

A student in a post-secondary institution describes her frustrations with white Christian holidays resulting in school closures and how there is a lack of acknowledgement of the important cultural holidays of people outside of Anglo-European faiths.

For example, TRU was shut down for Easter weekend. Not everyone celebrates Easter. I think the school should still be open for students who need to use the resources, and who don't follow Easter. To me, that's an example where everything is just geared towards the dominant demographic in B.C and not really taking into consideration other cultures and other religions.

Additionally, microaggressive environments go beyond schools and academic institutions. A lack of representation of people of colour and their cultures can be seen in powerful institutions, such as the courts, judiciary, and politics. Illustrative of microaggressive

environments in powerful institutions in Canada, the following example of racism embedded in the judiciary emerged from an interview:

In the 90s, we had a new democratic government, there were about a dozen appointments to the Provincial Court of British Columbia, to the judiciary by the government that were diversity appointments, people whose origins might historically been in China or India or the Caribbean...And indigenous. And then soon as the NDP was defeated in 2001 B.C, liberals came in and for 40 straight appointments, they were all white. I know that. I researched it. And I spoke out against... And I think that also generated some discomfort in a kind of way because I was criticizing the appointment process...the chief judge of the day said I was being provocative.

Correspondingly, another example in the Canadian judiciary of a microaggressive environment is the requirement for citizens to take a religious oath on a Christian bible. A former judge recounts how he was the only provincial judge that he knew of who adjusted this procedure for the South Asian population in the courtroom.

I'd say, "What's your religion? Sikh? Okay. Do you want to take a religious oath or do you want to say..." So I just make them raise their hand and say, "Do you do swear a promise to tell the truth according to the teachings of the founding founder of the Sikh religion, Guru Nanak Dev Ji on the Guru Granth Sahib?"...No other judge ever did that.

Similarly, this participant talks about diversity appointments, how they were a cover up for a deeply rooted racist environment, and being treated as a tokenistic figure instead of an equal in the workplace:

They could put a silk robe on me. And they were happy to have me in the room because it made them feel good about themselves. Aren't they tolerant and accommodating and believe in diversity? But if you

didn't play the role, if you spoke up about shortcomings of the ability of judges to address societal needs, about a lack of diversity in the judiciary, or how judges should be doing better to [have] more social context education to judge people in a multicultural society better...[there was] all kinds of things that I heard in the background, stereotypes, racist comments about certain groups, including my own group.

In addition to racism being embedded in the judicial system, the following example illustrates a lack of representation of people in colour in important positions, such as the running of a municipality:

Recently when I gave the speech to the diversity walk, I could tell some people were uncomfortable, but we need to have an uncomfortable discussion. We need to have this discussion. The workforce of the city of Kamloops is not at all reflect the diversity of the streets. Why?

Microaggressive environments become breeding grounds for racial microaggressions. The lack of cultural competency creates room for microaggressions to occur and perpetuates the problem as the dominant group may not even be aware of what they are doing. In racially intolerant environments racial epithets can be said without consequence, inappropriate questions can be asked of people of colour, and the behaviour goes unchecked. Consequently, a lack of cultural competency contributes to a microaggressive environment. Other ways environments can act a dog whistle for people of colour is when there is nothing in the environment that indicates cultural competency or safety for the person of colour. It can contribute to potential defensiveness and a sense of suspicion. The participant who was a counselling intern in an office space with all white coworkers described feeling like an outsider before anyone even began to commit microaggressions. Conversely, if that same office had people of colour working there or

signified in some way through the decor or posters that the office was a safe space for minorities, the message to the intern could have been different.

Gender and Microaggressions

Findings suggest that males and females tend to experience different kinds of microaggressions. Females tended to experience sexualized microaggressions and ones that concern their physical appearance. Males tended to experience more overt and violent forms of microaggressions. Women reported being targeted by white males when describing experiences in the workplace or during recreational gatherings. Microaggressions regarding female participants' appearance were reported by almost every participant. The following excerpts from the interviews illustrate the microaggressions women receive:

You go out and meet people, they'll say things like, "You're really exotic" or "Where are you from?" Then if I say something like Merritt, they're like, "No, where are you *really* from?"

Don't you like it when you're cat-called type of thing? Don't you like it when we say you're beautiful because you're brown? Don't you like it when we say you speak well for a brown girl?

As a result of the constant judgement of their appearance and the emphasis on Anglo-European features as being the goal or the most beautiful, female participants disclosed feelings of insecurity. A couple of participants stated that they believed they are not and never will be beautiful because of their skin colour and traditional Indian facial features. As a result, these women describe having a profound sense of insecurity that continues to impact them today. There is a lasting impact of being told in subtle and seemingly innocuous ways that looking like a white person is the gold standard. The following female participants describe their experiences:

You start to see yourself as you're not pretty... You start to question your worth and you're like, is the only thing that I am defined by? Is the way I look?

I have lighter skin so a lot people always go "Oh you don't look Indian! You look like you're half white..." I don't know why, but that really pisses me off. As if I should be saying thank you that I look more white... I don't feel like it's a positive thing... Why is white people the standard? It's weird, I always feel like that hint of everyone wants to be white in their eyes.

The following participant is describing her experience of being a 'dark skinned' Indian woman:

If I was in a group of girls, I would always think, "Okay, those are light-skinned girls. Those are the pretty girls."

Women also described having their credentials second guessed in the workplace, specifically by older white males,

We do a lot of clinical trials... My credentials are usually second-guessed by older males, so they'll say something like, "Are you qualified to do this job? What are your qualifications? Where are you from? Oh, no, where are you *really* from?" It's a whole range of microaggressions because they question, "What significance does this woman play in the study? How is she qualified to do this?" Then on top of that, then they ask me next like, "Where are you from? How does this coloured woman know what to do at this clinic? Who gave her this job? Who gave her the authority to do this job?"... It's never women either, it's always men.

That question came from a lot of white males. They'd ask me like "Oh, what's your name?" I'd tell them and they'd say "Where are you from?" I'd say, "Merritt." Then they'd say, "No, where are you *really* from?" Then they'll list off a bunch of countries that aren't even in the same geographical area... "Are you Persian? Are you Indian? Are you from Afghanistan? Are you

Pakistan?” It's like “No... If you're asking me my ethnicity, yes, it's Indian, but if you're asking me my nationality, it's Canadian.” I just have to tell people like “No. I was born here.”

I actually don't usually have a lot of women ask me these questions, it's mostly men.

Female participants also mentioned their frustrations with how their brownness is perceived by white people. They described feeling tokenistic at times, and that sweeping assumptions are made about brown women as whole, while their individuality gets lost in the assumptions.

Whenever Disney comes out with a new movie, I feel like a lot of white people compare South Asian girls to Jasmine. They make brown girls into a fetish of some sort because they compare them to Princess Jasmine or assume that every East Indian woman is submissive and does everything for their husband... Not knowing that East Indian women are very in charge of their own selves and they're capable of doing anything that everyone else can do.

This participant used the analogy of women of colour being “shit converters” and are expected to clean up people's messes. When they do not stay within their expected roles of being meek, submissive, and all things considered traditionally ‘female’ and ‘feminine’ traits, then they are cast aside and considered useless.

We are constantly performing, and, of course, brown girls are not the only ones who have to deal with this. There's lots of women out there like Koreans, and Japanese, and Chinese, and Vietnamese. There's a whole slew of women in this sphere who've just been projected onto them this image of this pristine, porcelain shit converter, and as soon as you differentiate from that, you are soiled goods.

Alternatively, male participants did not report the same judgment of their physical appearance. They instead described experiences of overt racism and reported more microassaults than their female counterparts. The stories that the participants described were more violent in nature, included more threats, aggression, and physical assaults. The stories and experiences that the participants described took place during sports, at local pubs, and even involved perceived police brutality. The following participant describes his experience when he was arrested for being intoxicated in public in his hotel lobby:

I've never been in a physical fight in my life ever. Too small, you know... I wouldn't know what to do in a fight. So, the police took me into custody because I was very, very drunk. However, they never explained how I ended up with a cut in my mouth and blood on my shirt. And my hands would go numb for three months from the handcuffs. I had marks here on my wrist for six weeks, and then my hands would go numb for another three months from the handcuffs being too tight... I do believe—and I know this from my work—I worked in criminal justice... 35 years, I've heard thousands of stories. Police will often say the person was uncooperative or rude or had a bad attitude. Sometimes they do. Sometimes they don't. But I've also learned in my experience from hearing people in court. And I apply this theory to myself. If you question the police or you challenge them, they will label us uncooperative and belligerent... I'm getting at is when I'm in the police van, and I'm handcuffed, they say I fell and hit my face first, and that cut my mouth, and [that's why I had] had blood on my shirt. It's not unheard of at all if somebody [the] police don't like... [They] hit the brakes, guy goes flying, and that is likely in my case.

It can be argued that he was treated this way by the police due to his intoxication. Due to the insidious nature of microaggressions, however, it is hard to prove that a person of colour experiences an attack because of the colour of their skin. It is important to acknowledge that

many examples throughout this paper would not be able to provide physical proof that racism occurred. Nonetheless, in the above examples of microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations, it is evident that racism exists in Canada today. It is his belief that if a white male was in the same position as him, they would not have received the same treatment. In the interview he talked about how white people in prominent positions around him had engaged in poor behaviour far beyond being intoxicated in public, and they did not receive so much as a slap on the wrist. It is his belief that he was treated unfairly because he had previously been addressing diversity and cultural competency issues in the Canadian justice system, and this became an opportunity to punish and silence him. In this next example the participant goes on to describe his experience the following morning, when he was to be released from custody and an officer possibly intentionally put him in harms way:

You think about your children and in that moment, it was like in a powerful epiphany. I thought... Everything I've ever heard about my parents, my grandparents, my great grandparents, they suffered. And here no matter what, here I am, my face is in the dust again, almost imagine my face on the dust of India, on the ground... They brought me out of the cell. I don't have my glasses I can't see. And the police officer says to me "Stand right here and don't move." And I'm standing there for about five minutes. Another police officer comes by and says, "Why are you standing there?" I said, "Well I was told to stand here and not to move." He said "You shouldn't be standing here. They bring the prisoners to here and somebody might punch you."

Similarly, a participant mentioned an interaction with another person in a position of power. He was at a local pub with people he knew, and he was the only person of colour around. He had asked the local elected MLA about a policy and the white male's response was so inappropriate that his manager made him leave.

I've actually had a previous MLA who was GRABBED by his campaign manager and says, "You've had too much to drink. It's time to get out," because he made a comment towards me sitting in—around a table at a pub.

The same participant described his experience of when he was in a room where he was the only person of colour surrounded by white people, and a white male walked in, the people who knew the participant would "crack some jokes just to kind of break the ice to let their friends know this guy is okay." Female participants did not describe any similar experiences. Male participants also described how experiencing racism has resulted in violence on a soccer pitch:

I'm playing against the team, I'm the captain on the team... I've never had any kind of a yellow card. We're playing and I went after a 50-50 ball, and we collided. We bounced off each other. We landed and as we're getting up, he comes to me and says, "Go back to your own effin' country." He said this, emotions were high. I walked over to him, I grabbed him by his shirt and then I punched him. It was just a shock to everybody. It was the biggest shock to my life and even to me, and even to this day, I regret what I did. He got hurt. I got red-carded and I got suspended for a few days. First time I'd ever been suspended. There are kids, and families and wives on the sideline. Made myself look like a total ass... I have to come and tell my boss, "Hey look, I just want to be straight up with you. This is what happened." Blah, blah, blah. I get charged for assault, I go through the court process. There's a restitution order that's put in place and I have to pay this guy some money... When I look back at—without pointing fingers or blaming anybody—taking full ownership of what happened, I looked at that and said, "You know what? I reacted to something that was probably just layer upon layer upon layer upon layer..."

A participant describes a similar situation where he witnessed conflict and aggression in response to racist behaviour during sports:

I've seen those who can go towards the aggression when it comes to negative comments. I see it on the soccer pitch a lot... For instance... if someone says anything racist or anything close to racist that kind of leads to conflict... Like you see that a lot... The aggression. The aggression piece.

In summary, gender played an important role in analyzing micro aggressions in the Canadian context. Females experienced more sexualized forms of microaggressions such as being called “exotic” or being praised for having Anglo-European physical traits. Males on the other hand reported more instances of physical violence and aggression. More research is necessary to create a full picture of this phenomenon in the Canadian context.

Given the above examples of microassaults, microinsults, microinvalidations and microaggressive environments, it is evident that racism still exists in Canada. Microassaults vary from racial epithets being shouted at people to being threatened to be run over. Microinsults insinuate that people of colour have not worked hard for their achievements and result in them feeling undermined in the workplace across many professions. These experiences can be seen in schools, hospitals, the healthcare system, political spheres, and the Canadian justice system. It appears that no person of colour is immune from at some point being accused of being a foreigner or being treated like an outsider. South Asians who are born and raised in this country are currently experiencing racism from their peers and being treated like second-class citizens. The impact of these experiences and the cumulative burden of experiencing racism and discrimination throughout one’s lifetime will be discussed in the next section.

Impact

In each interview the participants were asked how microaggressions impacted their lives, and if the experiences continue to impact them today. The words and feelings participants used to describe the impact of microaggressions included anxiety, insecurity, struggle, pain, shame, panic, mistrust, and feelings of victim guilt and being appalled, sick, tired, disrespected, annoyed, angry, judged, defensive, embarrassed, guilty, disappointed in one's self, irritated, humiliated, bitter, almost broken, degraded, dehumanized, unsafe, horrified, abused, awkward, confused, and targeted. It is important to note that these descriptions are verbatim how participants described feeling after experiencing racial microaggressions from a white perpetrator. Visceral responses included wanting to vomit, biochemical responses inside the body, sweating, shutting down, shaking, crying, being unable to function, freezing, being unable to process words in one's brain or to articulate the experience in words, and the release of adrenaline and cortisol. Participants reported impacts go far beyond what happens in the moments after an incident. Participants described experiencing microaggressions throughout their lifetime; the cumulative burden can be huge. Interviewees reported microaggressions had an effect on their interactions with white people, careers, aspirations, openness to seeking help from a counsellor, and parenting choices, and resulted in internalized oppression and avoiding certain people and places for fear of experiencing racism. They also mentioned how it has impacted their identity development and sense of self.

Impacts of microaggressions are so profound that the experience almost becomes haunting for some participants. One participant described how, after a group of white people confronted her and her boyfriend while having breakfast in a restaurant, she could not shake off what had happened for months. When she was alone and things became quiet the memories

would come flooding back, along with the guilt and shame; she would question if she should have reacted differently. Other participants described the impacts of microaggressions in the following ways:

It's humiliating. It's degrading. When somebody is attacking you, not because of your character, or anything you've done wrong, it's just they just see you and they hate. They want to hurt you, degrade you as a lesser human being, or othering you simply by your appearance... It's the colour of your skin. It's really humiliating and degrading. It's really hard to explain that to somebody, like how dehumanizing it is.

It's covert, it's insidious. You walk away, you feel like shit. You question your worthiness.

It's exhausting. I can't take my face off... Do you want to know how many times I used to wish I was white? Do you know how lovely it would be to just like, "I don't want to have super dark brown eyes today? Let's just lighten my skin, let's just change my heritage." Wouldn't it be nice if we didn't have to fucking think about this all the time?

I don't feel comfortable being the only minority... Because there's so much fear of being judged... And it's not like I'm saying that they're all bad. You know, there's a lot of nice white people out there too. But it's just you don't know who it's going to be. I've never really had any positive experiences of white people... They always made it feel like us versus them.

The first incident when he started sort of interrogating me, I felt panic, sweaty. I can't function. I can't process the words that are in my brain and try and articulate them into words. The things that I said in that moment... I don't remember what I said. I remember generally what I was trying to say and I think I said, but I was in such a panic... I just remember completely shutting down.

It makes me feel uncomfortable... I don't know... It devalues you.

You start to condition yourself accordingly... It makes you insecure. It instills a lot of insecurities, and you feel like you've got to change yourself. You start to see yourself as you're not pretty...It devalues you, for sure. We were using like white skin products to change ourselves.

Even when we travelled, when we sat on the bus, where do we sit? Who do we sit by? You were always careful with who you befriended because even in all the years that I played soccer, there's only a handful of guys that I felt comfortable around.

I literally felt like I just wanted to vomit. There was a couple of times where I would just look around and be like, "I wish there was a bucket here so I can start vomiting."

I'll sing a little bit harder to Take Me Home, Country Roads so I can convince people that I'm one of them.

It's almost like that abuser moment, when you know what your abuser is like and you know how you have to perform for your safety.

I don't want to have these conversations all the time, I want to also just be happy and not have to have my race on my mind all the time.

I would just think "Oh that shouldn't have happened, I wish that didn't happen. I really, really wish that didn't happen because I feel really crappy. And every time I think about it—I feel...kind of sad. That it happened where it happened... It bugged me for weeks.

Maybe you'd wear more expensive shoes, or you'd wear a name brand clothing...as a deflection. You over-reached... You were afraid to bring people to your house, your friends...there's aromas in the house, there's different customs... so you'd always be a little afraid to bring them in because you didn't want to be embarrassed.

The findings also indicated that South Asian adults who experience microaggressions adapt their parenting strategies to protect their children. One participant described that he would advise his children to perform whiteness while at school to avoid the bullying he was victim to as a child:

During the day when you're going to school, just act in your normal, act in a normal manner.

The participant was insinuating that a child should follow the dominant hegemony in order to avoid experiences that he had as a young person, as he was bullied relentlessly. Other parents described how microaggressions are currently impacting their children or the young people in their lives. In this first example a young girl says to her mother that she wishes she looked more like a white person:

My sister was taking her kids to church when they were really young, xxxx actually told her, "Oh, I wish I had blonde hair." My sister didn't know what to say...

In the following excerpt, the participant is describing his thought on his children attending school in the British Columbia Interior Region. He knows, without a doubt, his children are going to be bullied because they attend a mostly Caucasian school:

If anyone is gonna get picked on, it's gonna be them.
Right?

Participants described feelings of being othered and targeted, which supports previous findings in American microaggression research of feeling like a perpetual alien. This participant described feeling targeted when being repeatedly asked where she is from:

I think the difference would be the way it makes you feel. I feel like if someone keeps saying "Where are you from", you feel targeted. It makes you feel small. It's like, "What are you saying? I don't belong here just because I'm not white?" Which is annoying when white people say that because we all know this is Native

Americans' land anyways. White people were never the first ones here. So it's like—nobody says that to white people! Nobody goes "Where are you really from?" They just go "Oh, Canada. Surrey, Richmond," or whatever and everyone's like "Okay." That's fine. They're satisfied.

Similarly, this participant describes how it felt to be the only person in the room having their origins questioned and explaining why they were there:

It feels—I'm confused at first why I'm the one that's being asked, but then it also feels a little bit like targeted almost because I know that no one else is getting asked these questions. Then there's some association of shame at the same time. It's kind of like, "Is it wrong to be from these places? Am I not like everybody else?" It's like that kind of a thing. Especially when it happens in a group and there's other people around you.

Participants spoke about how the impacts of microaggressions affected them in the workplace. One young woman described feeling scared to work with a white clientele due to previous experiences. During the interview, she described wanting to complete the service quickly so she could go back to feeling at ease. Other participants described never bringing ethnic foods to school or the workplace for fear of being bullied, made fun of, or singled out.

I still get nervous sometimes when I have like people that kind of look like him as my clients... And whenever I have like, older white males, I feel I don't know why I feel nervous now... Whereas when I see other people, it's like, I never have this feeling ... Usually I like to talk to patients a lot. Get them comfortable because you, like, you're going to be working in the mouth. A lot of people have dental anxiety, so you want them to be comfortable... But I just want to get them out as quick as possible.

It was one of those conversations where as soon as I accepted that this person's ideologies were inherently harmful to me, I just had to accept the fact that this

person, I would just have to keep them at an arm's length in order to keep my job safe, myself safe.

This participant described how at times he questions if he has earned his achievements truly by his own merits or if he was only a diversity appointment designed to fill the status quo for government positions in the Canadian criminal justice system:

Was I hired... because I'm a minority?

Another impact of experiencing microaggressions is the inability to be themselves when they are the only person of colour surrounded by white people. Participants described feeling anxious, fear of judgment, anticipation of racist remarks, and the inability to be one's true and genuine authentic self. In this example, a young woman talks about her experiences in a post-secondary institution in the lower mainland of B.C:

While I was with them is when I felt the most affected. It's like I never felt like I could be myself. I always felt like I talked a little bit less, made less jokes, never got close to them, never opened up. I always felt kind of nervous.

One of the impacts of South Asian Canadians experiencing microaggressions is that a person of colour may not willing to work somewhere where they are the only minority because of the potential vulnerability and isolation. For example, a young woman who works as a dental hygienist said:

I just need to know just another person of colour in here with me.

When the researcher asked the participant would accept the same job with a \$5 pay increase if she would be the only person of colour, the response was:

Honestly, I don't think I would take that. Because I wouldn't know what kind of demographic is about to be, the clientele as well. Plus, all the staff, nobody really would be able to relate to my experiences. I feel

like the office that I work at now is very multicultural. There's like Filipino, Indian, white, and I like it like that. I like a mix. And I feel like even when I was doing the job interview, I was kind of looking around for that like, "Oh, who else is working here? It's not just all white people, right?"

The impact of microaggressions goes beyond the individual and can even impact family systems. In the following example, a man describes how, when he was engaging in the political sphere, his family was affected by the racism perpetrated against him:

I put up with all my life. I can handle that, but I know that it took a toll on my family... I know after the election it came out slowly that my wife and daughter were quite hurt because when they went door knocking, they would be told "We're not going to vote for... one of those people."

In sum, the impacts of microaggressions go beyond what has happened in the moment and can place a burden on the person of colour for a long time, even a lifetime. Moreover, microaggression can impact identity development.

Impact on identity development

The participants in this study are a unique population, as they identify as being Canadian but wear their cultural heritage on their skin. As a result, participants described having dual or competing identities. They talked about the difficulties of being brown in a white world. The following examples speak to the complications of being a person of colour who was born and raised in Canada:

As a Punjabi person born and raised in Canada, you're a hybrid. You're not completely constant to your own customs... You know, when it comes to all of our cultural practices... I see it, I hear it, but I'm not that immersed in it. Then you're born here and... almost like because of your appearance, your skin, all that kind

of stuff... you're not fully accepted here either. It's like you're waffling back and forth.

When I graduated, I started to embrace myself even more. I don't know why. I think it's because you understand or you start to believe that you no longer have to be ashamed of who you are. I think ever since the truth and reconciliation came out with the indigenous community, I think that was the pinnacle for me to come out and say, "Yes, I'm East Indian. I have certain beliefs, and I have a certain culture that doesn't fit the Western image, but I'm proud of it now." Now I listen to the music, I watch Bollywood movies, I eat the food. I do all of it now.

We needed to be just Punjabi enough and just Canadian enough.

You've got to be somewhere in the middle. Like, you can't master both worlds.

It hurts... It takes energy. It's exhausting to have to defend your space in this society for people to see the fullness of who you really are rather than how they choose to see you.

It's like [white] people don't understand. Jake said this like fucked up thing in that conversation where he was like, "Don't you get ever tired of thinking about all this stuff and thinking about your identity?"

In this study both male and female participants described struggling to be seen as an individual. During the coding and data analysis process there were multiple pages of examples where white people made assumptions about a person of colour based on their limited knowledge of South Asian culture. White people would say things to people of colour that were offensive and hurtful. Participants lightheartedly mentioned how they knew it would be considered very inappropriate if the roles were reversed and they said something similar to a white person. The following excerpts describe the struggle of trying to be seen as a person and not a representative of an entire race:

People just look at you and they draw assumptions about who you are, and what you think, and what you must be, and they don't see you... Some people don't see you as a full-fledged Canadian just because you got brown skin. They assume you're an immigrant, they assume you have an accent, they attribute various qualities or characteristics to you which don't fit.

He would go on with his assumptions, "I feel like I can assume that you're here because blah, blah, blah"... And then it feels like, okay, but you don't know me. How can I feel comfortable now? When you've already made the story up in your head of who I am.

They just assumed that I did that because of cultural—because you're brown...And you can't do this. You can't do that. That's just what they've kind of always assumed. Like they kind of—instead of blaming it on like...personal choice... They'd blame it on your race.

Along with battling sweeping assumptions because of their skin colour, participants also described the feelings of frustration, shame, and embarrassment regarding their ethnic names:

Especially my name... I just call myself Jas. I don't like that. I've never called myself Jas, but I just say Jas at work...because it's just so much easier and I hate repeating my name or having to let them know what it is...It's just annoying. Nobody in my family calls me Jas.

It's horrifying to explain. The worst part was when I said, "My real name is Jasminder." I'm like, "You know me as Jasmin." I cleaved my name in half, because I know that my employability is lower if I'd go with my full name. If I write Jasminder on my resume, I know my employability has decreased and it's a working point that I want to be able to start introducing myself as, like, Jasminder.

Some of the participants described stories from their life with a high degree of detail and precision, even though these instances had occurred decades ago. It is important to note that those examples are not used in this paper, as the study is hoping to frame racism and its contemporary forms in Canada. It has been established that racism manifests in Canada to the

South Asian population in both overt and covert ways. The impact of microaggressions has also been discussed and the research suggests that the problem is so prevalent that people are willing to take pay cuts and are unwilling to reach for leadership positions to prevent the onset of experiencing further racial microaggressions. Since it has been established that racism continues to exist in Canada and its impacts are great, it was important to investigate how people and practitioners working with people of colour can shift their consciousness and work towards the beginning of the end of racism towards people of colour in Canada.

Chapter 5 Conclusions and Implications

Implications

The South Asian participants who shared their stories of contemporary racism in Canada drew a picture of how the problem continues to exist from the grocery store all the way to the justice system. After gaining an understanding of the ways people of colour currently experience racism and discrimination the study also explored the potential implications for clinical practice. This study also looked at recommendations for perpetrators for what to do when they realize they have committed a microaggression. Participants also gave insights for professionals who are working with people of colour in the human services field. The suggestions are recommendations for how to appropriately work with people of colour in a way that is supportive, respectful, and culturally competent. Lastly, participants mentioned ways institutions and organizations could address implicit bias for confronting racism in the workplace. When asked how a person who has committed a microaggression should respond, participants suggested the following:

Apologize if something comes out in the wrong ways and say, "I'm sorry, I meant this instead. It might've come out wrong way."

Apologize. Be like, "I'm sorry. My question was maybe offensive."

I wish he were doing some self-reflection. Something on, "You know what, my apologies. I didn't even realize."

Saying what was going through their mind to bring that comment up. Like how it fits. Maybe knowing...what caused them to ask me that comment...

I think he could have apologized right there and then and just acknowledged what he said was wrong and not

relevant to anything at that moment. I think if he acknowledged his behaviour without having xxxxxx to point it out. It would have been... it would have made me feel better.

Understanding why it's necessary to make that comment. Like why—how does that comment fit into the conversation? But if it's just something kind of out of the blue then why does that comment actually need to be there?

Just be like “Hey, am I offending you?” Some people might not be offended whereas it’s for the fourth time, I'm going to be offended.

A lot of the time it’s just like acknowledge where you're coming from and give people the space to talk. Allow people to navigate that conversation with you. Most people don't ask me where I'm from anymore because a lot of people recognize that that's a microaggression and if somebody is really curious, they'll only come and ask that question when it's relevant.

I think if me personally if I was to feel something and someone came up to me and said, “Hey, you know, that thing I said, it was uncool. Can we move on.” For me personally, just someone to come up and apologize, suddenly that distance between us closes a lot more. I feel a lot closer to that person, I feel like that person cares enough about me to be able to acknowledge my feelings and to be able to apologize for something that they did that hurt my feelings.

Frankly, speak about their intentions behind asking it. Because I know some people have really, really good intentions... I know one person asked me where I was from just because he wanted to know if I knew the place well enough to advise him on what local places he should check out when he travelled there and that was totally fine. I totally get that it didn't feel intrusive or I didn't feel attacked at all because I knew his intentions and I knew why he was asking and he was asking from a place of wanting to know or knowledge on that thing. It almost feels like when a person is

transparent about their intentions of why they're asking these questions, it's better I think.

This participant gives an example of her view of an appropriate and respectful response when struggling to pronounce an ethnic person's name. She advises it is helpful to place the onus on yourself as to why you can't understand what the person is saying. She suggests when there is scrutiny of her name, there is implied judgment that the name is odd and thus potentially creates an 'othering' response in the person of colour. Her suggestions are:

Not having any comments... That happens to me all the time where I don't know people's names. It's hard for me pronouncing, but [I'm] like "Oh my god, I'm so sorry. I really suck with names." Just being sincere about it as opposed to being like, "Oh, what was it? What is it?"

Well, just owning up to it... I understand my name's not always... super easy I guess to pronounce, but I understand if somebody makes a mistake, "Oh, sorry, Miss, how do you pronounce that?" as opposed to, "What does it mean? Where is it from? Is that your full name?...Do you have a middle name? Is it Kaur or Singh?"

In sum, participants suggested apologizing, taking responsibility for potentially being inappropriate, and stating the intention behind the comment or questions. By stating intentions, it may clarify any miscommunications. Participants also mentioned that they may feel close to the person if the microaggression is successfully addressed and resolved. Participants also addressed what counsellors, teachers, and people working in the human services field could do to address racial microaggressions in their professional lives.

Implications for professionals

Participants were asked what advice they had for professionals in the human services field regarding how to best support people of colour. Education and training on cultural competency was one of the common responses. Other recommendations included refraining from making sweeping cultural assumptions, being an ally to non-white coworkers, and addressing race if the client brings up the topic or if the practitioner has sufficient reason to believe it is relevant to the problem. The participants suggested the following to those who work in the education and human services field:

Don't rush to cultural-like questions because if the person is of a different culture, you wouldn't know what their culture is. You can only speak on what you've heard, or what you've studied, but you don't actually know what it is that they're doing culturally. They could be like, Indian, but they could be here for five generations and live in a Caucasian lifestyle... I feel like culture should be left out unless the client brings it up themselves... It's like the moment a health practitioner starts talking about 'oh in your culture'... This isn't going to help us. It could feed into their doubts, and they wouldn't get the treatment that they need... Which I felt it was easier to talk to a person who didn't just jump to their own assumptions.

I really think that people should explore more and take the time out to learn about other cultures and learn about the things that make people tick, so that when they're in a professional practice. One, they could maybe understand where their patient's coming from, and two, so they can avoid these kinds of microaggressions themselves...I think the only way to fix it is for us to get outside our comfort zones and try to learn about others...If we don't do these kinds of things, we ourselves are going to be putting out these microaggressions and microassaults or invalidations, and we're going to put someone else through that crap even though we're acting unintentionally... In order to bridge these gaps to kind of reduce these microaggressions and reduce racism further, we need to be speaking to one another, we need to be talking and educating each other.

I think they should talk about it if that person brings it up.

Putting yourself in their shoes, showing some empathy.... I always try and wear the other person's shoe. That's going to change the dynamics of our relationship. That's going to change how we interact with each other.

Now especially in our culture, one of the things is mistrust...No matter how hard you try and say, "This is all confidential, there's consents in place, it's all about your privacy"... They're going to always struggle with *is this guy is going to go home, he's going to be sitting at the dinner table with his family and the first amazing thing he's going to tell them is that I came to see this guy for counselling and the word's going to get out.* That's the first thing they struggle with... There's a lot of shame for them to come and see you. I have to really be tactful and to say, "Listen, I may not be able to change your opinion, but I can tell you that this is how important, confidentiality and privacy is that if I breach that I can lose my job."

It's just that cultural sensitivity that a lot of counsellors don't have. I think I come in there and they're into fixing mode, they're into therapeutic mode, but they don't understand the cultural insensitivities to what they haven't done enough research.

I wish people would understand that Canada is a very multicultural place, and to not have those assumptions that, that person's black, that person's brown, they're from another country. I would just wish people would stop assuming that this is a white, Christian, very conservative nation, and that's what that expectation is of what every Canadian is. I think the poster boy of what a Canadian is, is someone who is white, has a crew cut, wears a hockey jersey. I think that's what everyone's assumption is of a Canadian, when in fact it's not. Someone who is East Indian, wears a turban, that's a Canadian. Someone who is black and wears a dashiki, that's a Canadian. Someone who is indigenous and wears regalia, that's a Canadian. I wish people would eliminate those assumptions that if you are a

different colour, that you're from somewhere else, or that you're not Canadian.

We should try to just see the humanity in each other, and love each other, and listen to each other, but also be prepared to speak truth. Even the uncomfortable truth and defend each other.

I think it's approaching it like you would any other client almost without knowing that that's taking away that knowledge of their colour but not ignoring it at the same time. Having it be there in their mind but not telling or in some way letting the client know that what they're experiencing may be tied to their race unless the client themselves takes you there or opens up that page for you. At the same time, obviously not saying things like, "I don't see colour or I don't see race"... It's like if you have a black male come into your room about anxiety, it's almost like you assume that the anxiety is tied to the fact that all of his coworkers are white and he's black and he feels like he's different and that kind of thing. When really his anxiety is something completely different... It relates back to like how his mom used to make him feel or something like that. It's making that assumption that everything, no matter what the person is feeling, is tied to their race and nothing else.

I teach about race explicitly in my classroom. We talk about race, how racism works. We talk about race in Canada, we talk about racist incidents in Canada, we talk about white guilt, we talk about oppression. We dismantle the whole thing... but the first thing I always start off in every single time I teach this unit is like, "This is going to be uncomfortable for many people. You are going to feel gross, you're going to look at different parts of people, and you're going to feel a lot of things, and that is okay. As long as you move forward from those feelings, as long as you come up with ideas on how to progress, then you'll be able to process that"... I'll start with the older stuff... like first contact... and then I'll move on to residential schools, and I'll talk about... CP rail, and then I'll talk about more and more current until we're talking about Japanese internment, and that was not so long ago. I'll show a video of a student's grandfather talking about

his experience in an internment camp, and then I just keep moving forward.

I'm not saying you've done anything. I'm saying that your ancestors did shit to my ancestors and as a result, I don't benefit from that situation and you benefit from that situation. The only thing I ask from you is to be an ally, and what an ally means is that you uphold the space in which I exist to make sure my voice is heard.

Maybe give a free session... Maybe give us a free session so we can explain the cultural implications, so we're not having to pay for the hour of explaining our—something that a white person would never have to explain. I feel like especially with counsellors, because I know that I wouldn't want to go to a counsellor who isn't Indian.

I had a student once put up his hand while I was teaching and he's like, "Well, I don't get it. Why is this government just give free money to all the Aboriginal people?" Then I took that opportunity to discuss it as a class. But I think that's where it starts, a question like that.

Teach kids too. Teach it in school at a young age.

Don't make assumptions or judgments just based on someone's skin colour... It's just kind of like the nature of humans is to kind of make assumptions or perceptions or judgment right away. But to stop yourself from doing that is what makes you better. You kind of have to turn that off... You don't know how that's gonna affect them, so you shouldn't be saying that in the first place... Just forget about what someone looks like and just...focus on their personality.

Firstly, I think if they committed it to a client, I think it's only right that they should apologize. I think just simply apologizing, acknowledging that they said something, either intentionally or unintentionally and apologize. And finally, to remediate the issue with the client or the patient.

Participants covered a number of ways to improve cultural competency in the workplace for professionals in the education and human services field. They made suggestions in direct response to a question from the semi-structured interview guide. However, in addition to recommendations for professionals, some participants also had suggestions for the macro and systemic levels of society. They addressed how organizations can also increase cultural competency.

Implications for organizations:

Participants also had suggestions for organizations to address microaggressions in the workplace. Some of the recommendations included the importance of hiring more people of colour, analyzing ways the workplace is currently addressing the problem of racism, building bridges with other community agencies, and engaging in cultural competency or diversity training. Other suggestions included, when possible, pairing ethnic clients with a practitioner who is a person from that ethnicity if possible and, if there are existing structures within the agency, addressing diversity measures to re-evaluate if they encompass all people of colour or the indigenous population only.

I think we have to constantly remind people that they have to be open to training and education and engagement...And the commitment that in the work they do, that they incorporate an awareness of that and fulfill the needs of all the communities. And one component of that is also hiring... Hire people from diverse backgrounds.

We have to take it beyond that to all aspects of our society, the workplace, or universities or colleges, or churches, temples, social agencies, NGOs, whatever, civil society to try to continue to engage each other and build bridges.

I know we have the diversity committee and I know it's all about... Indigenous people, but maybe refocusing that onto every ethnicity, not just one.

When it comes to counselling services like EAP, just reassuring everybody that it's not just only for counselling when it comes to issues with your marriage... You can actually call them for anything that you're experiencing... Letting employees know that there's something available... If they don't feel comfortable in their workplace.

I'm going to benefit more from somebody who is culturally tied to who I am. If you did probation, for example, one of the things that's a huge problem in probation is that our First Nation's Aboriginal population is very low... I've always said from day one, I said, why don't we have more First Nations Aboriginal probation officers? Why is it that we don't have enough Aboriginal First Nations judges on the bench? Why don't we have enough First Nations Aboriginal lawyers? If they know the inner workings, the inner sensitivities, all the inner pieces of where all of this comes from... I've got some training that I've done with Aboriginal people with First Nations. I've worked with the First Nations health authority, but I'm still far removed. It's not about what I know, it's about how I present, the nonverbal part of it. When this person does something, a person walks into a counselling clinic and they're seeking services, there's some stuff going on for them, and all they see is people that are, for lack of a better word, different, they're already on their heels. There's already this sense of mistrust. There's already this sense of, "This person's not going to understand."

The other thing about diversity, it's important to talk about diversity. It's just that it's been co-authored by every segment even those who are racist. Everybody says, "Well, we believe in diversity," and you know, you get the group hug, but dig deeper. What do you mean by diversity? How are you practicing inclusion and equality?

I had a young girl, she was African [-Canadian] but she was adopted by a white female and the mother and

daughter came in for counselling. When I first saw her, I was doing co-counselling with another white woman, and the young girl was completely shut off. But when I took them on as a client myself, the young girl was a lot more—She spoke a lot more... I definitely think it was also that cultural thing seeing someone else of colour... I can't really remember, but I think she definitely and no fault of her own made the girl feel like all of her problems were attributed to the fact that she was adopted by a white female. Whereas the actual problems were just the fact that she just had body image problems. I feel like the race was brought into the room even though that wasn't part of what was causing her to feel these negative feelings.

In sum, the suggestions from the participants support previous findings of implications for clinical practice. Professor Derald Wing Sue and his colleagues from Columbia University (2007) suggest the first step for clinicians in overcoming fears or transgressions of microaggressions is to become self-aware of one's own racial biases and beliefs. Practitioners need to overcome their assumptions about the ethnic populations they are working with or encounter, and engage in a process of self-examination. For white practitioners in particular, it is important to understand what it means to be white and how it may intrude on people of colour. They also recommend understanding what microaggressions are and how to accept responsibility and take corrective actions to overcome racial bias. Simple pragmatic shifts are simply not enough, and transcending the dominant hegemony is fundamental when trying to engage in beneficial cross-cultural work (Gorski, 2007). It is vital in this work to understand how the dominant discourse that white North American culture is the ideal is damaging to the people of colour with whom we work. Only after understandings their own social location and privilege will practitioners be able to claim that their work decolonizes instead of colonizes (Gorski, 2007). People of colour who have experienced racism through microaggressions have also stated

that the support of white allies helped them seek validation and support after a confrontation (Hernández, Carranza & Almeida, 2010).

Conclusion

There is a lot of work to be done for individuals and institutions to recognize racism still exists and impacts people of colour in Canada. Racism has evolved into subtle and seemingly innocuous forms of racial microaggressions, which while they appear harmless can have shocking impacts. The impacts of experiencing microaggressions and the cumulative burden placed on people of colour impact identity development, parentings, ability to socialize, career decisions, and many facets of life. Based on this study, it is evident that people who are born and raised in Canada, Canadian citizens to their core, right now feel dehumanized and devalued. Only after identifying that this problem still exists and that Canada is not a post-racialized society can we begin to dismantle the dominant narrative that Anglo-European ways of life are the gold standard. The oppression people of colour experience becomes internalized and manifests in self-doubt across multiple areas of life. Through this research, participants discussed and challenged how the white narrative is the gold standard and the consequences of this standard in their lives. There are systemic advantages for the dominant group, which can be seen when peering into boardrooms and courtrooms.

The goal of this research is not to convince anyone that microaggressions exist, but instead to give a voice to people of colour and their stories. We need to put language to people's experiences, because the hurts are deep. It appears through this research that some professionals have already begun this work in classrooms, counselling offices, and in the criminal justice system. This patchwork of people of colour defending their space and at the same time educating

those around them is not enough. Without rhetoric and social structures, this problem is going to continue to exist in Canada. Racism has been perpetrated against the South Asian population in Canada since the first arrivals in 1902, and it has been going for 118 years too long. If we continue to ignore the ways in which people of colour feel like second-class citizens, the intergenerational trauma and affects are going to continue and pass on to the next generation. It is without a doubt clear that racism currently exists in Canada. The question is, what are we going to do about it?

Limitations of the study

Findings contribute to the lack of literature on South Asian Canadian experiences with racism, however there are limitations. The study looked at 14 participants and would have benefitted by including more in the sample. The study looked at South Asian Canadians in Western Canada and would have benefitted from including participants from other parts of Canada. There was also an over representation of Punjabi Sikhs in this study, and this population may experience microaggressions differently.

Recommendations for future research

To get a more complete picture of contemporary racism in the Canadian context, researchers could further explore the perspective of the white perpetrator. It would also be useful to extend the scope of understanding how racial microaggressions manifest in minority groups other than the South Asian population. It is also recommended that other parts of Canada be researched, as this study particularly looked at the population in western Canada. It would also be helpful to look at larger numbers of participants in order to make generalizations. It may also

be interesting to investigate if there is a relationship between India being colonized by white settlers and Canadian-born South Asians experiencing racism by Canadian white settlers. It would be interesting to examine if there are any impacts or correlations. Further research is required on the best way to educate professionals in the human services field on contemporary racism in the Canadian context. More research is also necessary on how mental health professionals can help Canadian South Asians who experience the implications of this subtle, but toxic form of 'invisible' racism.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

Hi family & friends!

I am collecting data for my masters thesis on racial microaggressions and am looking for interviewees/participants. The process would include a 30-60 minute interview regarding the lived experiences of South Asian Canadians. The study is considering participants 18 years or older, of South Asian descent, and first or second generation Canadian. If you know of someone that meets this criteria and would consider being interviewed for this research, please pass on this information



Student researcher - Gurleen Dhial Sangha
Dhialg17@mytru.ca questions 604-655-4586
 Supervisor - Pat Neufeld pneufeld@tru.ca

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#research #microaggressions #racismresearch #keepcalmandstopracism #datacollection
 #makeadifference #mentalhealth #mentalhealthawareness

Appendix B: Informed Consent and Information Sheet



Thompson Rivers University

805 TRU Way, Kamloops, BC V2C 0C8
Telephone (250) 828-5800

Microaggressions: Lived Experiences of South Asian Canadians
INFORMATION LETTER and CONSENT FORM

Study Title: Microaggressions: Lived Experiences of South Asian Canadians

Primary Research Investigator:

Gurleen Dhial Sangha

Email: dhialg17@mytru.ca

Phone Number: 604-655-4586

Background

- We would like to ask you to participate in a study that is being done in Kamloops with Indo-Canadians. We would like to hear the stories of those who have experienced the modern form of racism through microaggressions
- The results of this study will be used to inform those working with this population of how to better improve multicultural competency and become aware of the harmful impacts of these types of interactions

Purpose

- We hope that the information we learn from the study can be used to add to the growing literature of microaggressions and fill the research gap specifically pertaining to South Asian Canadians. Currently, the research is limited.
- We want to know how best to support Indo-Canadians when addressing microaggressions, and provide helpful information for those working in the human services field

Study Procedures

- If you agree to participate in the study, the researcher will contact you.
- There will be a 1 interview conducted that will last approximately 30-60 minutes. The discussions will be audio recorded.
- The interviews involve questions about your experiences and if it has impacted your life in any way.
- The discussions will be done in a casual manner. You will be asked questions about why you are interested in providing feedback, what you think is important for practitioners to know and why.

Benefits

- You will not receive any direct benefits from participating in the study. You may learn something about current literature on South Asians and microaggressions and have a direct impact in being able to influence the outcomes of the research.
- There are no costs for being involved in the research.

Risk

- There are no direct risks to participating in this study, some of the things discussed in the interview may cause some distress. For example, there could be discomfort related to discussing racial discrimination.
- If you become upset discussing your experiences, the interviewer will refer you to a counsellor.
- Counsellors can be accessed through TRU counselling services 250-828-5023, Interior Community Services 250-554-3134, Employment Assistance programs- please contact your employer for more information regarding your EAP plan, extended health benefits, BC Victims of Crime 1-800-563-0808, BC Crisis Hotline 1-866-661-3311

Voluntary Participation

- You are under no obligation to participate in this study. The participation is completely voluntary, and you are not obliged to answer any specific questions even if participating in the study.
- Even if you agree to be in the study you can change your mind and withdraw at any time.
- If you withdraw, we will seek your consent regarding using the data we have collected. But once the study has concluded data could no longer be withdrawn. The end date is approximately July 2019.

Confidentiality & Anonymity

- The research process and results will be included in a written document published in academic journals or for presentations.
- The information you provide will be kept confidential and only the primary research investigator or TRU supervisor will have access.
- No personal information about you will be shared publicly without your explicit permission.
- You will not be identified in any published work or presentation unless with your explicit permission. Direct quotes may be used in the publications with a false name or anonymously.
- The audio recordings will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and the files will be stored on a password-protected computer for 5 years following the end of the research project and destroyed.
- If you are interested, you will also receive a copy of a final report. An email will be sent at the end of the study seeking your interest.

Further Information

- If you have any further questions regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact:
- Gurleen at dhialg17@mytru.ca or 604-655-4586
- The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at Thompson Rivers University. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at TRU-REB@tru.ca or 250.828.5000. You may also contact the Dean in the School of Education and Social Work at TRU if you have any concerns at airini@tru.ca or 250.828.5249.

This study was explained to me by:

I agree to take part in this study.

Signature of Research Participant: _____

Printed Name:

I believe that the person signing this form understands what is involved in the study and voluntarily agrees to participate.

Researcher: _____ Printed Name:

As a participant I would like to receive a copy of the study findings (Circle Yes or No) YES / No

If yes, please indicate your email address for the findings to be sent:

I acknowledge receipt of obtaining a copy of the consent form

Appendix C: Interview Guide

| Interview Questions

Name:
Phone Number
Email:
Age:
Gender:
Occupation:
Current place of residence:
Born:
Time Spent in Canada (generation?):

1. What have been your experiences? And the ways in which you've experienced microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations
2. How did those experience impact you?
3. Lets say that person realized what they had said and how it could have been hurtful, How do you wish that person would've responded? What would have been helpful? What would you have needed in that moment?
4. How do those experiences continue to impact you?
5. I'm hoping to provide implications for clinical practice...What recommendations do you have for me to address in my research?
6. What have I forgotten to ask?