5-2009

Racial Microaggression at Work: Implications for Caucasian and African-American Employees

Deborah R. Lee
Western Kentucky University, deborah.lee312@wku.edu

RACIAL MICROAGGRESSION AT WORK:

IMPLICATIONS FOR CAUCASIAN AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN EMPLOYEES

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of Psychology
Western Kentucky University
Bowling, Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Psychology

By
Deborah R. Lee

May 2009

RACIAL MICROAGGRESSION AT WORK:

IMPLICATIONS FOR CAUCASIAN AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN EMPLOYEES

Date Recommended _____

_____
Director of Thesis

_____

_____

_____
Dean, Graduate Studies and Research   Date

Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank my parents, Mary Lou and Richard, for their constant support and love. My brothers, D. Ryan and Nicholas, I thank you for always believing in my abilities and for supporting me throughout the years. I would also like to tell Andrew Tyler, that with his steady support and love, I have become a stronger person and I thank you for everything.

I would also like to Thank Tony Paquin and Kathi Miner-Rubino for their patience and tenacity in this project. Finally, I would like to thank my fellow classmates in the Industrial/Organizational Psychology. You have made this time memorable.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

RACIAL MICROAGGRESSION AT WORK:

IMPLICATIONS FOR CAUCASIAN AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN EMPLOYEES

Deborah R. Lee   May 2009   42 Pages

Directed by: Anthony Paquin, PhD., Reagan Brown, PhD., and Jacqueline

Pope-Terrance, PhD.

Department of Psychology   Western Kentucky University

The present study is designed to extend the finding of Miner-Rubino and Cortina (2007) on bystander experiences of sexual harassment to bystander experiences of racial microaggressions. Racial microaggressions are a form of subtle racism, which are short, quick, everyday encounters that send degrading messages to people of color. The affects of racial microaggression on psychological, physical, and occupational outcomes were examined for both Caucasian and African-American employees. The results of the study indicate that racial microaggression are negatively related to psychological well-being for both races, as well as correlated to multiple negative work outcomes such as job burnout, job withdrawal, and a decrease in job commitment. The overall results demonstrate that subtle racism is pervasive in the workplace and detrimental to employee well-being.

Racial Microaggression at Work:

Implications for Caucasian and African-American Employees

Racist attitudes have changed in American society; they have shifted from being explicit and hostile to implicit and subtle (Brief, Dietz, Cohen, Pugh, & Vaslow, 2000). In fact, a 1998 presidential advisory board found that racial inequalities in American society are practically invisible in part because they are so deeply ingrained and inconspicuous. The board also found that the majority of Caucasian Americans are unaware of the preference and advantages they receive, and that Caucasians' attitudes and actions continue to discriminate against racial minorities, especially African-Americans (Advisory Board to the President's Initiative on Race, 1998). These subtle, implicit forms of racism have been labeled by researchers as modern racism, symbolic racism, and aversive racism and are all covert and developed from explicit racism (Sue et al., 2007).

The manifestation of these forms of racism has been termed *racial microaggression*. According to Sue et al. (2007), racial microaggressions are short, quick, everyday encounters that send degrading messages to people of color. They are common environmental, behavioral, and verbal slights that are negative and insulting to the targeted minority. These microaggressions can be either intentional or unintentional, and come in three different forms. The first is *microassaults*, which are explicitly racist, discriminatory actions such as name-calling or avoidant behavior by the perpetrator (e.g., "African-American people are always so loud."). The second type of racial microaggression is *microinsult*, which entails rude communication that degrades the target's racial identity, such as if a co-worker asked an employee of color if they were an affirmative action hire. *Microinvalidation* is the last form of racial microaggressions, and

3

is characterized as communication that denies or negates the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of the target. For example, Sue et al. describe the situation in which Caucasians maintain that they do not "see color." This form of microaggression denies the existence of racial difference by ignoring the unique heritage of the target. All three of these forms of microaggression can certainly occur in the workplace, and can have negative effects, such as disengagement, for the targeted minority (Sue et al.).

The purpose of this study is to investigate the affects of racial microaggression in the workplace on Caucasian and African-American employees, specifically the effects on physical, psychological, and occupational outcomes. Since there is very little literature on racial microaggression in the workplace, or the experiences of bystander racial microaggression, much of the supporting literature is drawn from research on sexual harassment. Sexual harassment literature was utilized because of multiple studies examining the affects of sexual harassment on bystanders instead of targets. In addition, the similarities in the negative affects on targets of both sexual and ethnic harassment support the choice of drawing from sexual harassment literature. The affects of bystander sexual harassment (Glomb et al., 1997, Miner-Rubino & Cortina, 2007) are utilized to predict the affects of bystanders to racial microaggressions. Glomb et al. found that a climate of ambient sexism had equally negative effects for direct targets of sexual harassment and bystanders of sexual harassment. Another study by Low, Radhakrishnan, Schneider, and Rounds (2007) found that bystanders of ethnic harassment also suffered similar negative consequences at the targets of the harassment. The following sections introduce the literature and theory used to support the hypotheses, including theories of biased incivility (Cortina, 2008), Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1982), and a new theory

on the affects of racism, the Negative Adaptation Theory (Thau, Aquino, Bommer, 2008).

Incivility

Cortina (2008) advocates a theory that incivility is actually a masked manifestation of a person's and/or culture's racism and sexism when directed towards the respective target. This is not describing a *general incivility*, which includes harmful conduct towards an employee that violates socials norms. General incivility, however, lacks a clear purpose to injure the target. In contrast, Cortina argues that some cases of incivility in the workplace are manifestations of racial bias, and these are cases of *selective incivility*. These forms of incivility could be categorized as racial microaggression if the uncivil behavior is based upon racist beliefs. Like the racial microaggression literature and theory, Cortina's theory of a biased incivility has roots in implicit modern racism.

Modern racists endorse egalitarian values and are explicit in their condemnation of racist values; however, these individuals still hold some implicit anti-minority views, which lead to a covert expression of their racist beliefs (Cortina, 2008). These expressions, just as with microaggressions, are often unconscious and not meant to harm. In order not to violate their egalitarian beliefs, modern racists only act upon their beliefs when the action can be blamed on other non-racist sources. For instance, a business justification, such as repeated tardiness, would justify remarks or actions taken because of racist beliefs. An important aspect of this selective incivility is that even though the uncivil act has harmful effects, the actual behavior can be attributed to other factors, such as personality or oversight (Cortina). This is likely because overtly racist behaviors

would surely violate the organizations and federal nondiscrimination policies. Since this behavior will not be tolerated, those perpetrators must mask their behavior as rational and excusable through racial microaggressions.

In her research, Cortina (2008) developed a hypothetical scenario where an employee with strong implicit and explicit egalitarian values works in a racist environment with co-workers who express racist beliefs on a regular basis. Although the employee would normally refuse to act in a racist manner, the possibility of exclusion from a peer group at work could pressure the employee to express covert racism. The possible result could be subtle discrimination aimed at a member of a minority, which would classify as a racial microaggression. These circumstances demonstrate how peer pressure could cause a non-racist to commit a racial microaggression, and contribute to an ongoing environment of racism (Cortina).

Bystander Experiences of Microaggressions

Research has documented that subtle forms of workplace mistreatment, such as microaggression, can pervade organizations and become part of the general workplace climate. As such, even bystanders of these subtle mistreatments can be negatively affected. In an early study exploring bystander experiences of mistreatment in organizations, Glomb et al. (1997) investigated the effects of indirect exposure to sexual harassment termed *ambient sexual harassment.* Glomb et al. defines this harassment as "the general or ambient level of sexual harassment in a work group as measured by the frequency of sexually harassing behaviors experienced by others in a woman's work groups" (Glomb et al., 1997, p. 309). Because many organizations contain work-groups, it is likely that other employees within the group will witness or hear the harassment of

others and suffer similar negative consequences with the target.

Glomb et al. (1997) found that ambient sexual harassment is negatively correlated with measures of job satisfaction and health outcomes, and is positively correlated with psychological distress. Glomb et al. also found that more experiences of sexual harassment and higher levels of ambient sexual harassment are reported when employees perceive their organization as tolerant of sexual harassment. The results of Glomb et al.'s study demonstrate the harm harassment inflicts, not only directly, but also indirectly, which creates an ambient level of harassment. Women and minorities may have similar experiences with harassment in the workplace. Women who experience ambient sexual harassment are negatively affected, and minorities who experience ambient racism would likely have similar negative consequences.

Building from previous research on ethnic harassment, Schneider, Hitlan, and Radhakrishnan (2000) showed that 40% to 67% of study participants experienced ethnic harassment and found that these targets experienced lower life-satisfaction and an increase in posttraumatic stress symptoms. Although previous research on bystander racial microaggressions is limited, a study by Low et al. (2007) proposed that employee bystanders to ethnic harassment cause negative outcomes similar to those of direct targets of ethnic harassment. *Bystander Ethnic Harassment* is defined as directly observing or having knowledge of incidents of ethnic harassment. Low et al. expanded on Schneider et al.'s research and found that 69.2% of study respondents experienced incidents of bystander ethnic harassment, and 36.2% of respondents reported bystander ethnic harassment but reported no direct ethnic harassment. This demonstrates that knowledge of co-worker ethnic harassment is distinct from direct ethnic harassment, as well as the

high frequency of bystander ethnic harassment.

Based on previous research (Cortina, 2008; Miner-Rubino & Cortina, 2007), Low et al. (2007) classified bystander ethnic harassment as a workplace stressor and found that participants who experienced both bystander and direct ethnic harassment possessed the most negative outcomes. It is important to include that Low et al. also found that participants who experienced direct ethnic harassment reported more incidents of bystander ethnic harassment. This could indicate that previous targets may be more aware of or sensitive to harassing behaviors because of their experience as a target. Low et al. also supported their hypotheses and demonstrated that the negative outcomes of bystander ethnic harassment are comparable to outcomes from direct ethnic harassment. Participants who only experience bystander ethnic harassment reported lower self-esteem, poorer health, dissatisfaction with their health, and lower job satisfaction. As racial microaggressions are workplace stressors similar to the stressors of bystander ethnic harassment, it is logical to predict that experiencing racial microaggression, as a bystander will also have similar negative consequences. As Low et al. is the only study that is directly related to exploring bystander racial microaggressions, the current study draws from Low et al.'s research and is based upon the research of Miner-Rubino and Cortina (2007) on gender microaggressions.

Recently, Miner-Rubino and Cortina (2007) examined how working in a climate of gender microaggression affected employees' well-being and withdrawal. They found that observing or perceiving the subtle mistreatment of women at work predicted lessened psychological, physical, and occupational well-being, which in turn related to heightened job withdrawal. More specifically, their findings showed that working in a climate of

gender microaggression related to heightened anxiety and depression, which in turn predicted physical illness and doctor visits, which then predicted job burnout and ultimately thoughts about leaving the organization. Working in such a climate also predicted lower job satisfaction, which in turn related to higher job burnout, lessened commitment to the organization, and greater turnover intentions. Their findings extended past research in that they identified job burnout as an important mediating factor between physical health declines and job withdrawal when working in negative interpersonal workplace climates. These results held even after controlling for observer negative affectivity and personal experiences of mistreatment. Results were also identical for male and female observers.

I extend the above findings in the present study by testing a model of how working in a climate of racial microaggression (i.e., being a bystander to racial microaggressions) affects employee outcomes. Based on past research and theory, I predict that working in a climate of racial microaggression will be related to lowered well-being (as indicated by more psychological symptoms and health complaints and by lowered job satisfaction), and that lower psychological well-being in turn would be related to increased organizational withdrawal (i.e., job burnout, turnover intention, and lower commitment). Figure 1 displays the proposed model and summarizes our specific predictions, showing which relationships are hypothesized (evidenced by an arrow between constructs) and the expected valence of each relationship (positive or negative).

Figure 1. Proposed Model, Showing All Expected Relationships and Their Predicted Valence
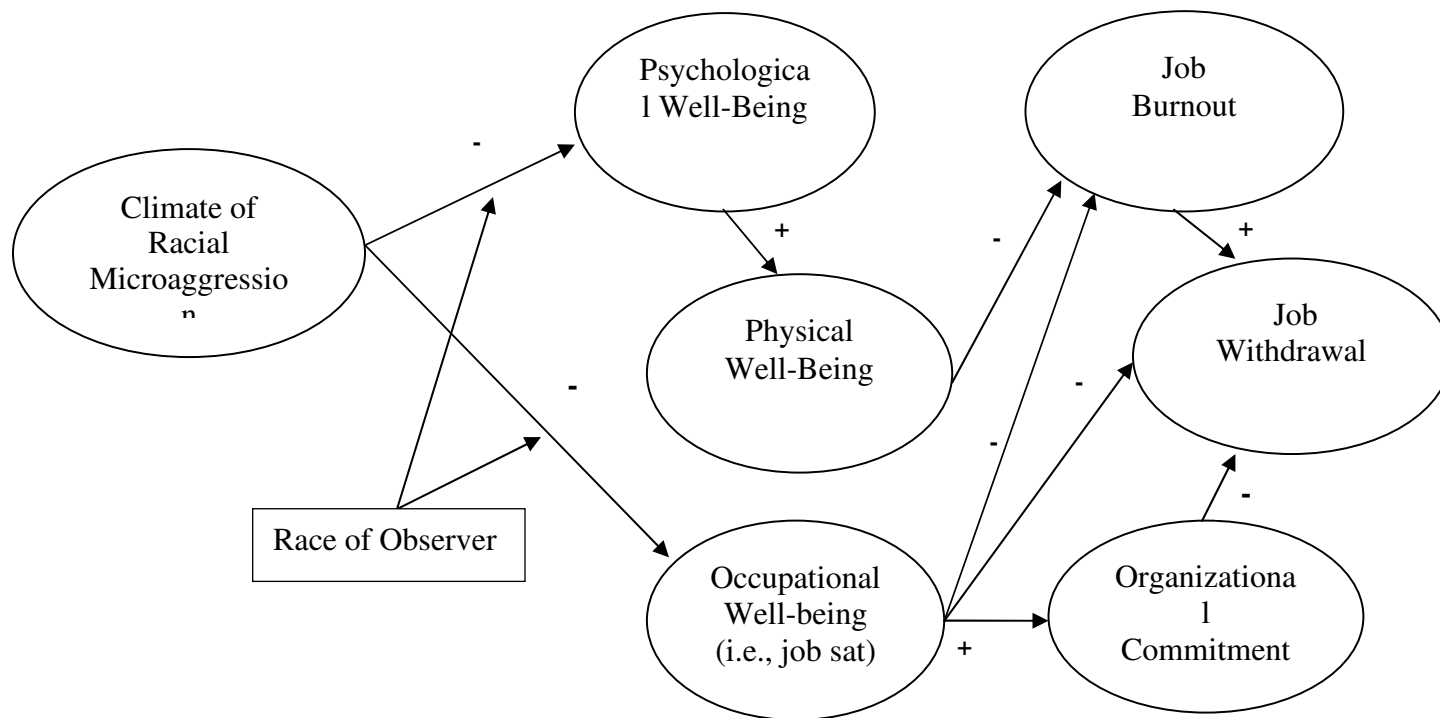
I also test whether the race of the observer moderates the relationship between bystander experiences of racial microaggression at work and employee outcomes, focusing specifically on the experiences of Caucasian and African-American employees. I describe my rationale and predictions associated with this examination below.

Race as a Moderator

I predict that the hypothesized relationships between perceived racial microaggression and employee outcomes will be moderated by race of the observer. First, I predict that Caucasian employees will be negatively affected by working in a racist climate. Racial microaggressions are stressors in the workplace, as they constitute a form of racism. Although they are subtle, their presence and negative effect on people of color may be evident to Caucasian employees because of the interdependence of employees and work-groups in many organizations (Cortina, 2008). The effects could be especially negative for those Caucasian employees who strongly hold egalitarian beliefs and directly witness racial microaggression in their workplace. Previous research has found that Caucasians and Hispanics were both negatively affected by direct and bystander ethnic harassment (Low et al., 2007; Schneider et al., 2000). Caucasian employees may be affected similarly by witnessing or having knowledge of racial microaggression, as previous research has shown.

How African-American employees will be affected by bystander racial microaggression at work is less clear. Indeed, theory purports two different ways in which African-American employees will respond; one theory suggests that African-Americans will be less negatively affected (Thau et al., 2008) than Caucasians by working in a climate of racial microaggression and another suggests they will be more

negatively affected (Tajfel, 1982). Adaptation Theory (NAT) proposes that African-American employees will be less negatively affected by racist mistreatment at work because they have adapted to living in a racist society. Adaptation Level Theory (Helson, 1964) similarly proposes that an individual's level of adaptation to certain stimuli shapes their response to stimuli-relevant situations, such that the more adapted an individual is to the stimuli, the less intense the response. This theory suggests that because minorities are subjected to racism in their everyday life, they have adapted to it and, as a result, their reactions to an implicitly racist workplace climate will not be as negative as those of Caucasian individuals who often live in an environment free of such mistreatment. In line with these ideas, Thau et al. reported that African-American employees were less likely than Caucasian employees to exhibit withdrawal behaviors when responding to negative treatment from a supervisor at work. African-Americans may also be less negatively affected when they perceive their workplace climate to be implicitly racist because they are accustomed to such contexts.

Conversely, Social Identity Theory (SIT) supports the prediction that when experiencing racial microaggression, African-American employees will be more negatively affected. *Social identity* is defined by Tajfel (1982) as the aspect of a person's self-concept that is derived from their knowledge of their group membership as well as the emotional significance and values the person places on their membership to that social group. SIT states that both social and cognitive aspects create a person's self-concept or the image they have about themselves (Hogg, 1996). "The core idea is that a self-inclusive social category (e.g., nationality, political affiliation, sports team) provides a category-congruent self-definition that constitutes an element of the self-concept" (Hogg, p. 66). These social categories contain certain attributes and characteristics that

are associated with a specific identity, express certain behaviors that are typical of someone who possesses that specific identity, and also defines the societal worth of the identity. This social categorization is innate in humans and automatically creates dichotomous in and out groups in society (Goar, 2007). When a particular status or group identity becomes salient, people tend to behave as the social category dictates.

SIT (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) proposes that most people show favoritism to their own ingroup (i.e., race) and asserts that social ingroups can provide a way to build a positive self-image, especially if the group has maintained some positive social and cultural ingroup characteristics. Intergroup conflict is bound to exist when there is ingroup favoritism (Tajfel), and this conflict can cause the social group to become more salient. If group members strongly identify with that group, their reactions to conflict will be based on their group membership and not on their individual identity (Goar, 2007).

Racism is pervasive and socially ingrained in Americans (Sue et al., 2007), and according to SIT, the African-American social groups have developed a 'real-life' group saliency in reaction to racist conflicts with outgroup members (Tajfel, 1982). Thus, when individuals who strongly identify with their racial group experience indirect racial microaggression, they should experience more negative consequences than Caucasian employees. Specifically, the attack on their valued group membership should produce more negative physical, psychological, and occupational outcomes for African-American employees. Similar to ambient sexism (Glomb et al., 1997) and bystander ethnic harassment (Schneider et al., 2000), African-American people who witness or hear racial microaggression will have similar negative consequences as the target of the microaggression.

Likewise, the principle of *homophily* posits that similarity breeds connection; when individuals are similar on some attribute, such as race, they are more likely to have contact and feel connected (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). The homophily principle suggests that African-Americans are likely to feel more connected to coworkers of their same race than they are to Caucasians in their workplace. Consistent with these theoretical ideas, research shows those racial minority students in a university campus setting perceived racist academic climates more negatively than did their Caucasian student peers (Pfeifer & Schneider, 1974; Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003). Similar results have been found in organizational environments. For example, Schneider et al. (2000) found that minority workers who experienced racial harassment at work were more negatively affected than other employees. These researchers found that harassment experiences were negatively related to life satisfaction and positively related to physical conditions and posttraumatic stress, even while controlling for participants' negative affectivity. Together, these findings suggest that African-American employees will be more negatively affected than Caucasians by bystander experiences of racial microaggression at work.

Based on these ideas, I hypothesized that observer race would moderate the relationship between witnessing and knowledge of racial microaggressions in the workplace and psychological, physical, and occupational outcomes. Specifically, I predict that Caucasian employees will be negatively affected (i.e., report lower well-being) by working in a climate of racial microaggression. However, as the literature seems to provide no clear indication regarding the impact of microaggressions on African-Americans (i.e., it could be more or less severe), I make no specific prediction

with respect to the nature of the moderation.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Working in a climate of racial microaggressions will be related to lowered well-being (as indicated by more psychological symptoms and health complaints and by lowered job satisfaction).

Hypothesis 2: Lower well-being as result of from working in a climate of racial microaggression will be related to increased organizational withdrawal (i.e., job burnout, turnover intention, and lower commitment).

Hypothesis 3: Employees will be negatively affected by a climate of racial microaggression as indicated by lower psychological, physical, and occupational well-being.

Hypothesis 4: Race will moderate the relationship between psychological and occupational well-being with racial microaggression.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Participants for this study included a nationwide sample of restaurant employees who completed an online survey examining "quality of life in the restaurant industry." The restaurant industry was chosen because recent research suggests that interpersonal workplace mistreatment is common but understudied in this occupation (Lu & Kleiner, 2001). Participant recruitment included the use of newspaper ads in major cities across the country, flyers posted in restaurants and major traffic areas, email, and internet postings (e.g., Craigslist.org, Facebook). In addition, letters and emails were sent to state chapters of the National Restaurant Association asking that they forward information about the study to their members. Before completing the survey participants read a consent form that described the purpose of the study, participants' rights, and researcher and institution contact information. This consent form also included information about the study's incentives; participants who completed the survey could supply their email address to be entered into a drawing for gift certificates. Consent was considered given if the participant completed the survey.

The sample included 446 employed adults. Participants were 92% Caucasian (n = 411) and 8% African-American (n = 35) with ages ranging from 16 to 61 (*M* = 27.85, *SD* = 9.48). Sixty-nine percent reported that they were currently working full time. Forty-one percent of the participants were servers, 16% were cashiers, and 12% were hosts/hostesses; the remaining portion of the sample held a variety of restaurant related positions. Tenure at their current job ranged from less than 1 to 10 years (*M* = 1.08, *SD* = 1.18). Participants reported working from less than 1 to 100 hours per week (*M* = 29.23) *SD* = 12.92) at various types of restaurants including quick service

(24%), mid-scale (50%), and fine dining (26%).

Measures

Climate of Racial Microaggression. Bystander experiences of microaggression were measured using a scale based on Fox and Stallworth's (2005) ethnic bullying scale, adapted to assess more general perceptions of the workplace environment. Specifically, participants rated nine items on a response scale from 0 (*never)* to 3 (*frequently*), asking how often in the past year they had observed incidents of racial microaggression from another restaurant employee. Sample behaviors include "made crude or offensive racial remarks either publicly or privately" or "told racial jokes or stories." Together, these nine observed-hostility items formed a reliable scale (α= .78).

Well-being measures. *Psychological well-being* was measured with the anxiety and depression subscales of the Brief Symptom Inventory (Derogatis & Spencer, 1983), which has been used extensively in both psychiatric and non-psychiatric populations. This measure asked employees to indicate the extent that each of a list of 12 symptoms (e.g., "feeling blue," "feeling fearful") had distressed or bothered them during the previous seven days, from 0 (*not at all*) to 4 (*extremely*). Extensive psychometric evaluations support the reliability and validity of this instrument, including strong correlations with relevant MMPI subscales (Boulet & Boss, 1991; Derogatis & Savitz, 2000). This measure was coded so that high scores represented higher psychological well-being (α= .87).

Physical well-being was assessed using the Spectors Physical Appraisal Scale (Pennebaker, 1982). Participants indicate how many days in the past month they were ill, visited a medical doctor, and/or missed work due to illness (α= .83).

Occupational well-being was operationalized as job satisfaction, and was

measured with items from the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins, & Klesh, 1979). Respondents indicated on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) the extent to which each of three statements characterized their work: "All in all, I am satisfied with my job," "In general, I like working here," and "In general, I don't like my job" (reverse-coded; α = .89).

  Withdrawal measures. Job burnout was measured using the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). This instrument assesses two aspects of job burnout: exhaustion (physical, cognitive, and affective) and disengagement from work. Respondents were asked to indicate, using a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with 12 statements such as, "During my work, I often feel emotionally drained" and "I get more and more engaged in my work" (reverse-coded; α = .72).

  Job withdrawal (i.e., turnover intention) was measured with Porter, Crampon, and Smith's (1976) 2-item measure. Respondents were asked to indicate, on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), their level of agreement with the statements, "I often think about quitting this job" and "I will probably look for a new job during the next year" (α = .60).

  Organizational affective commitment was measured using items from Allen and Meyer's (1990) affective commitment measure. Respondents were asked to indicate on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) the extent to which three statements reflect their feelings toward the university (e.g., "I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with [this organization]"). Allen and Meyer (1996) provide evidence for the reliability and construct validity of their measure. In the present study, internal reliability for this measure = .79.

Control variables. Following Miner-Rubino and Cortina (2008), *personal experiences of mistreatment* were included in analyses as a control variable to ensure that the climate effects on well-being and withdrawal were not actually due to personal experiences of hostility. The Workplace Incivility Scale (WIS; Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001) assessed the degree to which participants had been a target of disrespectful, rude, or hostile behavior in the workplace. Instructions asked participants to indicate whether they had experienced any of nine behaviors from another restaurant employee (e.g., "put you down or was condescending to you," "made insulting or disrespectful remarks to you") within the last year, using a response scale from 0 (*never)* to 3 (*frequently*). Together, the items formed a reliable measure of personal experiences of mistreatment ($\alpha = .85$).

Because previous research has demonstrated that *dispositional negative affectivity* may bias individuals' responses to items in a survey (such that they answer items with a pessimistic slant; Judge & Hulin, 1993; Levin & Stokes, 1989), I also included a measure of negative affectivity as a control. I used items from the Life Orientation Test (Scheier & Carver, 1985), which assesses dispositional optimism, and scored this scale such that higher scores represent lower optimism, or higher negativity. Instructions asked respondents the degree to which they agree or disagree with three statements, using a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Example items include, "If something can go wrong for me, it will" and "Every cloud has a silver lining" (reverse-scored; $\alpha = .76$).

Results

Descriptive Analyses

The data indicate that two-thirds (66%) of the participants reported working in a climate of racial microaggression. Out of the 66% of participants working within a climate of racial microaggression 61% of Caucasian participants and 5% of African-American participants reporting being a bystander to incidents of racial microaggressions. As shown in Table 1, racial microaggression was negatively correlated with psychological well-being, physical well-being, and affective commitment, and positively correlated with job burnout and job withdrawal. The outcome variables were also correlated with psychological well-being and affective commitment, as well as a strong relationship between job satisfaction and job burnout. The covariate, negative affectivity, was correlated with psychological well-being, job satisfaction, job burnout, job withdrawal, and affective commitment. The covariate personal experiences of mistreatment was related to psychological well-being, physical well-being, and racial microaggression, and was negatively correlated with job satisfaction.

Hypothesis Testing

The small sample size of African-American participants indicated that the structural equation modeling analysis should be run on the sample as a whole (i.e., both African-American and Caucasian participants) to conserve power instead of separately analyzing by race. It should be noted that the control of personal experiences of mistreatment was removed as a control, because when it was included the effects of racial microaggression on participants were eliminated.

Table 1.

Means, Standard Deviations, Scale Reliabilities and Intercorrelations among Study Variables

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Racial Microaggression	2.48	2.58	**.78**								
2. Psychological Well-Being	.65	.69	-.25**	**.94**							
3. Physical Well-Being	1.32	.25	.17**	-.29**	**.83**						
4. Job Satisfaction	4.46	1.67	-.08	.15**	-.07	**.89**					
5. Job Burnout	4.21	.98	.17**	-.25**	.08	-.73**	**.81**				
6. Job Withdrawal	4.17	1.86	.15**	-.19**	.06	-.64**	.64**	**.72**			
7. Affective Commitment	3.87	1.24	-.11*	.11*	-.03	.66**	-.62**	-.57**	**.78**		
8. Negative Affectivity	2.71	1.40	.05	-.28**	.07	-.19**	.23**	.16**	-.11*	**.90**	
9. Personal Experience of Mistreatment	1.91	.77	.46**	.34**	.52**	-.33**	.39**	.33**	-.27**	.13**	**.85**

Note. N = 446. Scale reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha) are in bold along the diagonal.
*p < .05, ** p <.01

Hypotheses 1 and 2 were tested via structural equation modeling with latent constructs. For latent constructs with two or three items, each item represented a single indicator. In cases where construct items divided into individual subscales (e.g., anxiety and depression for the psychological well-being construct), the items of each subscale were averaged to represent an indicator of the latent construct. In all other cases, items assessing each construct were randomly divided into two to three indicators. After constructing indicators and computing covariance matrices for the group (i.e., both Caucasian and African-American participants), I analyzed the matrices using maximum likelihood estimation as implemented by LISREL 8.5 (Jöreskog, Sörbom, duToit, & duToit, 2001). As suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), I proceeded with a two-stage approach to modeling. I first estimated the measurement model for the latent variables to ensure that the psychometric properties of the measures were adequate and loaded on the hypothesized factors. After testing the measurement model, I estimated the structural model. For all models, I evaluated overall fit using both "incremental" and "absolute" fit indices (e.g., Hu & Bentler, 1995, 1999).

I first estimated the parameters of the measurement model for the sample. As indicated from the goodness of fit indices in Table 2, the measurement model provided a satisfactory fit to the data. Standardized loadings for the multi-item factors ranged from .50 to .92, with a mean of .75. Hence, the items were strongly related to their corresponding latent variables. Because the measurement model showed an adequate fit to the data (See Table 2), I proceeded to test the structural model depicted in Figure 1. As shown in Table 2, I also found an overall good fit of the structural model to the data. Figure 2 depicts the standardized coefficients for the structural model.

Table 2.

Goodness of Fit Indices

Model	χ^2	df	RMSEA	CFI	NFI	NNFI
Measurement	5.59*	172	.09	.91	.89	.87
Structural	3.73*	179	.07	.94	.92	.92

p < .01

Supporting Hypothesis 1, a higher score of racial microaggression was associated with lower scores of psychological well-being (β = -.31) and job satisfaction (β = -.11); lower scores of psychological well-being was also related to lower scores of physical well-being (β = .35). In Cohen's (1988) terms, the magnitude of these effects ranged from small to moderate. It should be noted, however, that all of these paths represent effects of the variables on well-being after controlling for negative affectivity. Partially supporting Hypothesis 2, lower job satisfaction was related to more job burnout (β = -.43). Lower organizational commitment and higher job burnout also predicted more job withdrawal (β = -.14 and β = .12 respectively). These effect sizes ranged from small to moderate large (Cohen, 1988). Physical well-being was not related to job burnout, which I predicted.

Figure 2. Standardized Path Coefficients for the Revised Structural Model
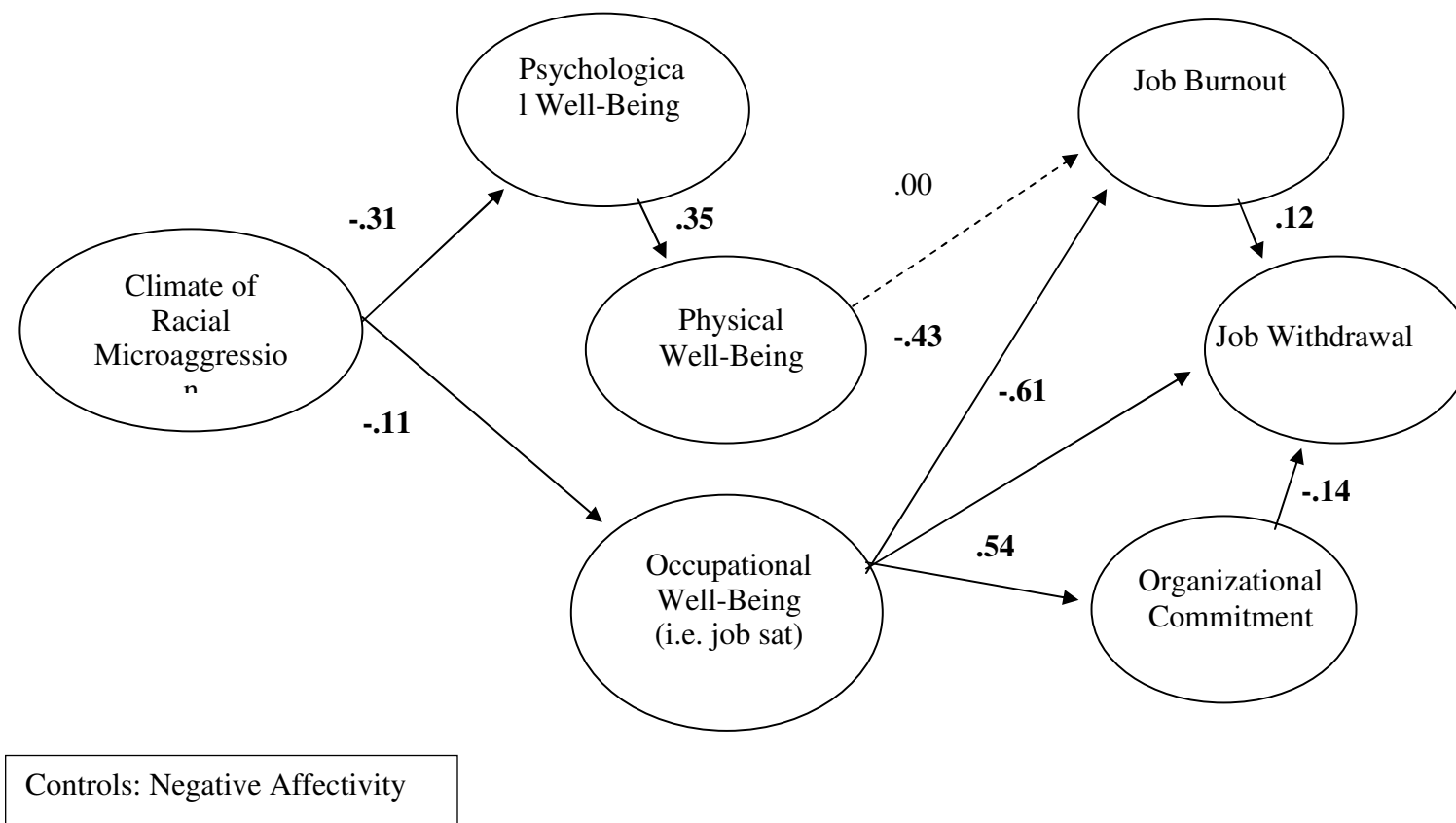
* *Note.* Dashed lines indicate nonsignificant paths, and significant coefficients are shown in bold. Not shown is the path from the control variables negative affectivity to proximal outcomes: psychological well-being (-.31, *p* < .01) and job satisfaction (-.11, *p* < .01).

To test the Hypotheses 3 and 4, a series of hierarchical moderated regression analyses were conducted where the control variable (i.e., negative affectivity) was entered on the first step, racial microaggression and race (Caucasian or African-American) were entered on the second step, and the 2-way racial microaggression X race interaction was entered on the third step. To correct for the multicollinearity that often accompanies testing moderating relationships, I centered the racial microaggression and race variables before computing interaction terms multiplicatively (Aiken & West, 1991). The criterion variables in the analyses were the proximal outcomes in the proposed model (See Figure 1): psychological well-being and job satisfaction.

As shown in Table 3, after controlling for negative affectivity, there were significant main effects for race and racial microaggression, which accounted for 6% of the variance in psychological well-being. Consistent with the correlation and regression analyses, more exposure to racial microaggression at work related to lower psychological well-being. Despite these main effects, the analysis showed a nonsignificant racial microaggression X race interaction on psychological well-being, and thus Hypothesis 4 was not supported (see Table 3). In other words, race did not moderate the relationship between racial microaggression with job satisfaction and/or psychological well-being.

Table 3:

Hierarchical Regression Table

Variable	Psychological Well-Being			Job Satisfaction		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
	B (β)	B (β)	B (β)	B (β)	B (β)	B (β)
Negative Affectivity	-.14 (-.28)**	-.14 (-.27)**	-.14 (-.27)**	-.47 (-.19)**	-.47 (-.19)**	-.46 (-.19)**
Race		.23 (.09)*	.23 (.09)*		.24 (.02)	.24 (.02)
Racial Microaggression		-.06 (-.23)**	-.14 (-.51)**		-.11(-.08)†	-.20(-.15)
Race X Racial Microaggression			.08 (.28)†			.10 (.07)
Total R^2	.08**	.14**	.15**	.04**	.04**	.04**
ΔR^2	.08	.06	.01	.04	.01	.00
ΔF	38.04**	15.98**	2.89†	16.44**	1.48	.16

Note. †$p < .10$, *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$. Race coded 1 = Caucasian, 0 = African-American.

Discussion

Results indicate that racial microaggression does have a significant impact on employees in the workplace. In support of Hypothesis 1, data demonstrated the negative effect of racial microaggression on psychological and occupational well-being, and lowered psychological well-being is related to lowered physical well-being as well. It is important to note that these relationships are still significant, even after controlling for negative affect in the participant. This demonstrates the reality of the presence of racial microaggression in the workplace, as well as, the seriousness of the outcomes. Glomb et al., (1997) established that a workplace climate of ambient sexual harassment was also negatively correlated with job satisfaction and health outcomes and positively related to psychological distress. Although racial and sexual discrimination have different targets, environments rife in harassment are related to the above negative work outcomes. The strong correlation results between racial microaggression and negative work outcome illustrates the negative impact that racial microaggressions have on employees.

Hypothesis 2 is partially supported in that all the predicted relationships were significant except for the relationship between job burnout and physical well-being. It is possible that there is a direct relationship between psychological well-being and burnout, instead of a path through physical well-being to burnout. However, the significant relationships and paths between the other outcome variables (i.e., job burnout, job withdrawal, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction) signify the multiple negative outcomes that are related to a climate of racial microaggressions. Similar negative outcomes were found by Low et al. (2007) for both direct targets and bystanders of ethnic harassment. The multiple negative outcomes illustrate the pervasiveness of the impact of racial microaggression in the workplace.

The result of race moderation on the effects of racial microaggression and work outcomes was not significant. This is consistent with results found by Schneider et al. (2000), which did not find a significant interaction between ethnicity and ethnic harassment. Similarly, Low et al, (2007) failed to find a moderation effect for race on ethic harassment. The results of the present study are consistent with the previous research, as a negative effect was found for all races, but failed to find significant differences between the races. This demonstrates that racial microaggressions not only negatively affect the target race, but also have a similar negative impact on bystanders of the majority race.

The results of the race-moderated relationship between racial microaggression and job satisfaction were also not statistically significant, however, a graph of the interaction (Figure 3) suggests that there may actually be a difference between Caucasian and African-American employees. The graph indicates that African-American participants reported lower levels of psychological well-being than Caucasian employees. It is possible that the low number of African-American participants could have contributed to the non-significant results. I believe that with a larger sample of African-American participants, it is possible that a significant moderation could have been found between psychological well-being and racial microaggression.

Figure 3. Graph of race X racial microaggression interaction
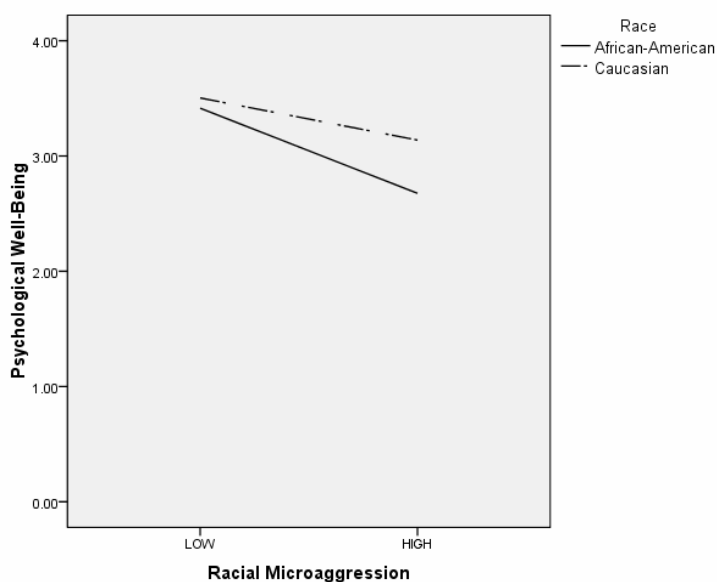
As reported in the results section, personal experiences of mistreatment was removed as a control in the structural equation modeling analysis. The variable was strongly related to other variables; however, when entered as a control, the effects of racial microaggression on negative outcomes are eliminated. Schneider et al. (2000) found that participants who were direct targets of harassment were also more likely to report instance of bystander ethnic harassment. This could be the result of heightened sensitivity to harassment resulting from a personal experience of harassment. In the current study, when personal experiences was implemented as a control, the participants who reported being a target where eliminated from any subsequent analyses. The majority of participants who indicated that they were targets of microaggression, however, also reported experiencing this as a bystander. Removing their bystander data reduced the power of the analyses, which resulted in nonsignificant pathways

A significant relationship exists between racial microaggression and an increase in negative physical health symptoms as reported by employees. Although a significant relationship exists, a direct path was not hypothesized or added during analysis from racial microaggression to physical well-being. First, this study is based on the accepted model in

Miner-Rubino and Cortina (2007), and the path between physical well-being and climate of sexual harassment in that study was nonexistent. Second, the addition of this path would not have significantly increased the model fit. Lastly, the current model is a satisfactory fit to the data without a direct path from racial microaggression to physical well-being.

The present study is based on a study by Miner-Rubino and Cortina (2007) and similar results were found in both studies. The same significant paths were found on both models, with the exception that the present study did not find a path from physical well-being to job burnout. In the Miner-Rubino and Cortina study, results indicate that gender does not moderate the relationship between being a bystander to sexual harassment and well-being outcomes. This demonstrates that both men and women are similarly affected by uncivil and sexual harassing behaviors towards women in the workplace. Similarly, the present study found that race does not moderate the relationship between racial microaggression and negative well-being outcomes. In totality, the results of the present study help support the current Miner-Rubino and Cortina model of incivility (i.e., racial microaggression in present study) on negative psychological, physical, and occupational well-being.

The implications of the present study demonstrate the negative affects of racial microaggressions on an organizations employees. Racial microaggression in the workplace is strongly related to multiple negative outcomes, including lowered job satisfaction, greater turnover intention, and greater levels of job burnout. Both Caucasian and African-American employees were significantly negatively affected by working in a climate of racial microaggression. This indicates when racial microaggressions are present in the workplace, that negative outcomes will be pervasive. Organizations should be proactive in monitoring and intervening in instances of workplace racial microaggressions to prevent negative consequences

for the employees.

Limitations

The one obvious limitation to this study is the use of self-report measures, which could lead to inaccurate self-evaluations and, in turn, affect the validity of the measure. Single source self-report data could also give rise to common-method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). According to Podsakoff et al., however, the use of negative affectivity as a control (which was done in the present study) can reduce the common-method bias. Furthermore, the use of self-report measures was required in this study because the research questions were concerned with individual perceptions of a climate of racial microaggressions.

In addition, the focus on subtle racism in this study might cause a social desirability bias in the data (Nederhof, 1985). Since the perception of possessing racist tendencies is negative, this might cause participants to structure their response to match the more socially acceptable egalitarian views. The negative perceptions of society towards racism could have also caused participants to alter or fail to report some instances of racial microaggressions. An additional limitation is that this sample consisted of only restaurant workers; therefore, the generalizability of the findings is limited to organizations with similar characteristics. One way to control for social desirability would be to add an empirically tested social desirability scale, such as the scale developed by Schuessler, Hittle, Cardascia (1978). This social desirability scale was designed to be used with survey research and attempts to ascertain if participants are anwering items truthfully or in a socially desirable manner. The inclusion of an additional scale would help to control for a social desirability bias in the data. Another limitation to the present study was the elimination of the personal experiences of mistreatment control. Since this control was eliminated, the results are limited to discussing a racist climate. There cannot be an absolute distinction between participants who were targets of racial microaggression, and those participants who were only bystanders.

32

A final limitation is the small sample size of African-American participants. This prevented conducting the structural equation modeling for each sample separately, which was the original intent. It is appropriate, however, to use regression to assess a moderated relationship, as was done in the current study (Arnold, 1982). Nevertheless, a larger sample of African-American participants would have also increased the power of this analysis, and perhaps could have revealed a significant interaction in the experiences of Caucasian and African-American workers.

Future Research

There are several possibilities for future research from this study. Examining the racial composition of the company might give better insight to what composition of workers might create a racist climate. For example, if the organization is more diversified does this decrease the likelihood of a racist work climate? Future research might also focus specifically on the effect that racial microaggressions have on bystanders of the majority race, such as feelings of sympathy and/or guilt. The evidence that the majority is negatively affected by racial microaggressions is clear; however, the reasons why the majority is almost as negatively affected as the targeted minority should be further investigated.

One important aspect of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1982) is that an individual identifies with their social group (e.g., race). Therefore, in order to investigate more extensively the application of SIT in a climate of racial microaggressions, data should also be collected on a measure of racial identity. This would allow further analysis to examine if SIT is an applicable theory to determine if the race of those participants who highly identify with their racial group will moderate the relationship between racial microaggressions and the specified outcomes.

In addition, the effects of additional workplace factors could be utilized as an indicator of the work climate for minorities. Indicators could include minorities in upper-level positions, organizational policies dealing with possible holidays and/or religious requirements of minorities in an organization. Employees, especially minorities, may perceive these indicators as a reflection on the organization's value of their minority employees.

This study was designed to examine the African-American minority population specifically. To expand to results of the present study, the inclusion of all minority participants would allow an examination of the results generalizability to all minorities. The relationship

34

between racial microaggression and negative work outcomes could also be analyzed by each minority race. Another interesting study might be one designed to examine if a minority member is more negatively affected when a member of his or her own race is insulted than when the insult is aimed at another minority race. This would investigate if the negative effects of racial microaggression vary as a function of the racial microaggression target.

Conclusion

It is evident that racism is still pervasive with only 34% of the sample reporting no incidents of racial microaggressions, meaning almost two-thirds of the sample reported working in a climate of racial microaggressions. The tested and accepted structural model demonstrates racial microaggressions' relationship to negative work outcomes. The evidence of the negative psychological, physical, and occupational outcomes is apparent on both Caucasian and African-American employees. The significant negative effects of subtle racism illustrate the need for open dialogue between ethnic groups, to help combat some of the stereotypes that drive racial microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007). Organizations should maintain a proactive approach to monitor, as well as, express strong disapproval for any racially motivated incivility in the workplace

References

Advisory Board to the President's Initiative on Race. (1998). *One America in the 21st century: Forging a new future*. Washington D. C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Aiken, L. S., & West, S. G. (1991). *Multiple regression: Testing and interpreting interactions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Allen, N. J., & Meyer, J. P. (1990). The measurement and antecedents of affective, continuance, and normative commitment to the organization. *Journal of Occupational Psychology, 63,* 1-18.

Allen, N. J., & Meyer, J. P. (1996). Affective, continuance, and normative commitment to the organization: An examination of construct validity. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 49,* 252-276.

Anderson, J. C., & Gerbing, D. W. (1988). Structural equation modeling in practice: A review and recommended two-step approach. *Psychological Bulletin, 103*, 411-423.

Arnold, H. (1982). Moderator variables: A clarification of conceptual, analytic, and psychometric issues. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance, 29*, 143-174.

Boulet, J., & Boss, M. W. (1991). Reliability and validity of the Brief Symptom Inventory. *Psychological Assessment, 3,* 433-437.

Brief, A. P., Dietz, J., Cohen, R. R., Pugh, S. D., & Vaslow, J. B. (2000). Just doing business: Modern racism and obedience to authority as explanations for employment discrimination. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 81*, 72-97.

Cammann, C., Fichman, M., Jenkins, D., & Klesh, J. (1979). *The Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan.

Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences* (2nd ed.). Hillsdale, NJ:

Erlbaum

Cortina, L. M. (2008). Unseen injustice: Incivility as modern discrimination in organizations. *Academy of Management Review, 33,* 55–75.

Cortina, L. M., Magley, V. J., Williams, J. H., & Langhout, R. D. (2001). Incivility in the workplace: Incidence and impact. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 6,* 64-80.

Demerouti, E., Bakker, A. B., Nachreiner, F., & Schaufeli, W. B. (2001). The job demands – resources model of burnout. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 86,* 499-512.

Derogatis, L. R., & Savitz, K. L. (2000). The SCL-90-R and Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI) in primary care. In M. E. Maruish (Ed.), *Handbook of psychological assessment in primary care settings* (pp. 297-334). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Derogatis, L. R., & Spencer, P. M. (1983). *The Brief Symptom Inventory: Administration, scoring, and procedure manual I.* Baltimore: Clinical Psychometric Research.

Fox, S., & Stallworth, L. E. (2005). Racial/ethnic bullying: Exploring links between bullying and racism in the US workplace. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 66*, 438-456

Goar, C. D. (2007). Social identity theory and the reduction of inequality: Can cross-cutting categorization reduce inequality in mixed-race groups?. *Social Behavior and Personality, 35,* 537-550.

Glomb, T. M., Richman, W. L., Hulin, C. L., Drasgow, F., Schneider, K. T., & Fitzgerald, L. F. (1997). Ambient sexual harassment: An integrated model of antecedents and consequences. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 71,* 309-328.

Helson, H. (1964) *Adaptation level theory: An experimental and systematic approach to behavior*. New York: Harper and Row.

Hogg, M. A. (1996). Intragroup processes, group structure and social identity. In W. P. Robinson

(Eds). *Social groups & identities: Developing the legacy of Henri Tajfel*. (pp. 65-94). Oxford: Butterworth: Heinemann.

Hu, L.T. & Bentler, P.M. (1995). Evaluation model fit. In R.H. Hoyle (Ed.), *Structural Equation Modeling: Concepts, Issues, and Applications* (pp 76-99). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Hu, L.T. & Bentler, P.M. (1999). Cutoff criteria for fit indexes in covariance structure analysis: Conventional criteria versus new alternatives. *Structural Equation Modeling, 6,* 1-55.

Jöreskog, K. G., Sörbom, D., duToit, S., & duToit, M. (2001). *LISREL 8: New statistical features*. Chicago: Scientific Software International

Judge, T. A., & Hulin, C. L. (1993). Job satisfaction as a reflection of disposition: A multiple source causal analysis. *Organizational Behavior & Human Decision Processes, 56,* 388-421.

Levin, I., & Stokes, J. P. (1989) Dispositional approach to job satisfaction: Role of negative affectivity. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 74,* 452-758.

Low, D. K., Radhakrishnan, P., Schneider, K. T., & Rounds, J. (2007). The experiences of bystanders of workplace ethnic harassment. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 37,* 2261-2297.

Lu, C. J., & Kleiner, B. H. (2001) Discrimination and harassment in the restaurant industry. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy, 21,* 192-205.

McPherson, M., Smith-Lovin, L., & Cook, J. M. (2001). Birds of a feather: Homophily in social networks. *Annual Review of Sociology, 27,* 415-444.

Miner-Rubino, K., & Cortina, L. M. (2007). Beyond targets: Consequences of vicarious exposure to misogyny at work. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 92,* 1254-1269.

Nederhof, A. J. (1985). Methods of coping with social desirability bias: A review. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 15*, 253-280.

Pennebaker, J. W. (1982). *The psychology of physical symptoms.* New York: Springer-Verlag.

Pfeifer, C. M., & Schneider, B. (1974). University climate perceptions by African-American and Caucasian students, *Journal of Applied Psychology 59*, 660-662.

Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., Lee, J.Y., & Podsakoff, N. P. (2003). Common method biases in behavioral research: A critical review of the literature and recommended remedies. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 88*, 879-903.

Porter, L. W., Crampon, W. J., & Smith, F. J. (1976). Organizational commitment and managerial turnover: A longitudinal study. *Organizational Behavior & Human Decision Processes, 15,* 87-98.

Reid, L. D., & Radhakrishnan, P. (2003). Race matters: The relation between race and gender campus climate. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 9,* 263-275.

Scheier, M. F., & Carver, C. S. (1985). Optimism, coping, and health: Assessment and identification of generalized outcome expectancies. *Health Psychology, 4*, 219-237.

Schneider, K. T., Hitlan, R. T., & Radhakrishnan, P. (2000). An examination of the nature and correlates of ethnic harassment experiences in multiple contexts. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 85*, 3-12.

Schuessler, K. F., Hittle, D., & Cardascia, J. (1978). Measuring responding desirability with attitude-opinion items. *Social Psychology, 41,*224-235.

Sue, D. W., Capodilupo, C. M., Torino, G. C., Bucceri, J. M., Holder, A. M., Nadal, K, L., et al. (2007). Racial microaggression in everyday life: Implications for clinical practice. *American Psychologist, 62*, 271-286.

Tajfel, H. (1982). Social psychology of intergroup relations. *Annual Review of Psychology, 33,* 1-39.

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. (1979). An integrating theory of intergroup conflict. In W. Austin & S. Worschel (Eds.), *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (pp. 33-47). Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Thau, S., Aquino, K., & Bommer, W. H. (2008). How employee race moderates the relationship between non-contingent punishment and organizational citizenship behaviors: A test of the negative adaptation hypothesis. *Social Justice Research, 21,* 297-313.