

Experiences of Name-Based Microaggressions within the South Asian American Population

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## ABSTRACT

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Psychological literature regarding South Asian American mental health and race-related issues is scarce (Daga & Raval, 2018; Nadimpalli, Kanaya, McDade, & Kandula, 2016; Pyke & Dang, 2003). In particular, discriminatory practices involving individuals' personal names of ethnic origin have primarily been explored within educational research (Kholi & Solórzano, 2012); the present study conceptualizes these experiences within a psychological context as *name-based microaggressions*. Name-based microaggressions represent a promising avenue by which to advance racism-related theory and research in that they may be reasonably expected to occur throughout the interpersonal interactions of a wide variety of individuals, including the educational system, the employment process, and everyday casual conversations with others. The present study used consensual qualitative research (CQR) to analyze the narratives of South Asian American participants regarding name-based microaggressions (Hill, Knox, Thompson, Williams, Hess, & Ladany, 2005). The study sheds light on microaggressive events among this racial minority population whose experiences are infrequently studied by psychologists and who are generally underserved by mental health practitioners. The results have implications for the multicultural awareness for counselors working with South Asian American clients, and for psychological awareness about the existence and impact of a little-studied microaggression.

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## DEDICATION

Mom and Dad:

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## Chapter I

### Introduction

The South Asian American population is one of the fastest growing Asian subgroups within the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). South Asians identify as having origins in the regions of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka (Asian American Federation, 2012). Despite their growing presence within America, psychological literature regarding South Asian American mental health and race-related issues is scarce (Daga & Raval, 2018; Nadimpalli, Kanaya, McDade, & Kandula, 2016; Pyke & Dang, 2003). South Asians may often be identified as being part of the “model minority” group, which implies protection from racism and oppressive acts, however this population has increasingly become the target of overt and covert discrimination through oppressive interactions based on their skin tone, cultural clothing, and ethnic accents (Daga & Raval, 2018; Inman, Tummala-Narra, Kaduvetoor-Davidson, Alvarez, & Yeh, 2015; Nadimpalli, et al., 2016; Wong & Halgin, 2006; Yoo, Gee, & Takeuchi, 2009). Along these lines, research has suggested that unique ethnic names are correlated with less attractive characteristics in comparison to “common” names, or White European names (Cotton, O’Neill, & Griffin, 2014; Mehrabian, 2001). This finding exemplifies the tendency for White European names (and Whiteness itself) to be perceived as normative, whereas racial minorities with names of religious and ethnic origins may be seen as an inconvenience, which can result in experiences of discrimination and ostracism (Gebauer, Leary, & Neberich, 2012; Palsson, 2014; Wykes, 2017). South Asian Americans with names of ethnic and religious background may experience these incidents within their daily lives.

**Microaggressions.** Despite the Civil Rights Legislation of the 1960’s and the reduction in blatant racism within the United States, racism persists in contemporary forms that include

*racial microaggressions*, the subtle forms of racism that are expressed through daily verbal and behavioral interactions (Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009). Microaggressions can also be conveyed through looks and gestures that have a racist undertone (Sue, et al., 2009). Research indicates that experiences of racial microaggressions by people of color can undermine emotional wellbeing through symptoms that include suicidal ideation, depression, anxiety, and lowered self-esteem (Nadal, Griffin, Wong, Hamit, & Rasmus, 2014; Nadal, Wong, Griffin, Davidoff, & Sriken, 2014; O’Keefe, Wingate, Cole, Hollingsworth, & Tucker, 2015). Moreover, people of color who experience microaggressions may experience lower energy levels, poorer emotional well-being, lower social functioning, poorer sleep, and express higher levels of pain (Nadal, Griffin, Wong, Davidoff, & Davis, 2017; Ong, Cerrada, Lee, & Williams, 2017).

**Asian Americans, South Asians, and microaggressions.** For Asian Americans, continued exposure to everyday microaggressions can lead to an increase in negative affect and somatic symptoms (Ong, Burrow, Fuller-Rowell, Ja, & Sue, 2013; Ong, et al., 2017). For example, Asian Americans have been found to experience such microaggressions as perpetually being seen as an alien in their own land, and not “real” Americans despite their citizenship status (Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, & Torino, 2007). This perceived racial discrimination has, for example, been associated with increased risk for psychological distress, suicidal ideation, anxiety, and clinical depression for Asian Americans within the college setting (Hwang & Goto, 2008). At the same time, it is evident that a lack of research specifically addresses the South Asian American population, their acculturative processes, as well as their common microaggressive experiences. There are many factors that should bring attention to the South Asian American population at this time. Not only has this minority group continued to grow within the United States, the recent changes in immigration policy following the 2016 United

States presidential election have perpetuated negative stereotypes and assumptions regarding this population. South Asians have been subject to racial microaggressions within educational settings. Eight different microaggression themes were developed based on the experiences of South Asian Canadian undergraduate students (Poolokasingham, Spanierman, Kleimanan, & Houshmand, 2014). The first theme was *being perceived as “fresh off the boat”* which encompasses assumptions that South Asians do not appropriately integrate into society. A second microaggressive theme was an *exclusion from social life*, where White peers held assumptions of South Asians as not wanting to socialize, go to parties or drink alcohol, or not being “allowed” to do these activities. There was also an assumption that participants, particularly men, had *ties to terrorism*. South Asians were assumed to be *cultural experts* and were often tokenized, or singled out, due to their skin tone. The sixth theme was *ascription of intelligence* based on their cultural background. Participants described an *invalidation of interethnic and racial differences* where their White peers minimized or rejected the differences between the subgroups of South Asia. They also experienced *invisibility* and reported being frequently overlooked.

**Name-based microaggressive experiences.** The concept of *name-based microaggressions* has been addressed to some extent within educational research. Experiences of name mispronunciation within the education system has been shown to lead to internalized racism for racial minority students (Kholi & Solórzano, 2012). Names can hold great importance to people, as they can represent an individual’s family of origin and ethnic group (Kholi & Solórzano, 2012; Kumar, Niessen-Ruenzi, & Spalt, 2015; Palsson, 2014; Wykes, 2017). *Racialized re-naming*, which is the perpetuating belief that non-White names are unwanted and are an inconvenience within Western society (Kholi & Solórzano, 2012), can have a significant effect on the self-esteem and development of minority children. This often happens when

authority figures or peers shorten or change an individual's ethnic name due to the unfamiliarity of the name within the dominant culture. At times this change in name may help some racial minorities more easily acculturate, yet others feel stripped of an important identity that ties them to their ethnic roots (Department of Homeland Security, 2016).

Name bias has been shown to be prevalent within the hiring and employment process, particularly in relation to responses of employers to racialized names on resumes. Numerous studies have shown employers giving preference to resumes with White European names in comparison to resumes with names of racial and ethnic origins (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Derous & Ryan, 2012). Name bias has also been shown to be prominent in the courtroom, as jurors have been found to make assumptions about individuals based on their racially representative names and have shown bias within their judgement of court cases (Clark, et al., 2013).

Mental health counselors have also been found to hold implicit bias in regards to their callback responses to perspective clients with racially distinct names (Shin, Smith, Welch, & Ezeofor, 2016). Results of a comparison study indicated a statistically significant difference in the amount of returned calls between the two racially distinct names, in that "White American" names received more return calls than individuals with names associated with a racial minority group. It is clear that bias and microaggressive behavior can be perpetuated through such acts on the parts of mental health counselors.

**The study.** Educational researchers have started the conversation on name-based microaggressions, however psychologists have yet to explore the implications of these experiences for applied specialties such as counseling psychology, as well as the impact of microaggressions upon South Asian Americans' emotional wellbeing.

The present study used consensual qualitative research (CQR) to allow South Asian American participants to narrate their individual experiences regarding name-based microaggressions. The results of the study shed light on the common microaggressive experiences of this racial minority population within the United States. The study has relevance, therefore for the multicultural competence of counselors working with South Asian American clients as well as psychological awareness of the existence and potential impact of a little-studied microaggression.

## **Chapter II**

### **Literature Review**

As a psychological specialty, the field of counseling psychology endorses an understanding of client issues from a multicultural and social justice perspective (Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2016). Counselors strive to understand their clients' worldview, which includes acknowledging the interaction of their multicultural identities with the overarching biases and beliefs of society (Ratts, et al., 2016). In 2002, the American Psychological Association (APA) released a revised policy on multicultural education, training, and research practices for psychologists. The document states that the United States is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse, which increases the urgency for culturally responsive psychological practices and services (APA, 2002). It also states that psychologists are in a position to be agents of change and a voice of societal understanding to fight against the various forms of oppression and societal racism that occurs throughout the country (APA, 2002).

Psychological research has affirmed the existence of the misperception that Asian Americans, including South Asian Americans, are largely protected from the experiences of discrimination (Alvarez, Juang, & Liang, 2006; Sue, et , 2007). In the current discussion, the term Asian American will refer to Americans of Asian descent who have ancestral origins from the continent of Asia. The term South Asian American is used to distinguish Americans who have ancestral origins specifically from the territories of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Several explanations have been offered regarding the notion that Asians are exempt from many forms of prejudice, such as the model minority myth which assumes that Asians have "made it" within society, as well as White individuals' tendency to view racism in solely Black and White terms (Atkin, Yoo, Jager, &

Yeh, 2018; Kiang, Huynh, Cheah, Wang, & Yoshikawa, 2017; Liang, Li, & Kim, 2004; Wong & Halgin, 2006). In fact, discriminatory interactions with Asian Americans can occur based on many multicultural indicators such as skin tone, hair texture, clothing, and accent (Inman, et al., 2015; Yoo, et al., 2009).

Along these lines, research suggests that unique ethnic names and/or unusual spelling of names can imply less attractive attributes and characteristics as compared to “common” names (Mehrabian, 2001). According to critical Whiteness studies, a “common” name is often represented by an apparently White European American name, thereby reflecting the overarching bias off Whiteness as “normal” (Cotton, et al., 2014; Palsson, 2014). Gebauer, et al. (2012) reported that names that are labeled as “negative” can result in negative interpersonal interactions such as discrimination and ostracism, which in turn influences life outcomes and self-esteem levels. For South Asian Americans with names of ethnic and religious origins, this can be assumed to occur.

Occurrences such as these correspond to a subtle form of racism that is expressed through daily verbal and behavioral interactions calls *racial microaggressions* (Sue, et al., 2009). Asian Americans and South Asian Americans who experience racial microaggressions are more likely to exhibit negative mental health symptoms and increased somatic symptoms (Nadal, Wong, Sriken, Griffen, & Fujii-Doe, 2015; Ong, et al., 2013; Ong, et al., 2017). It is important for counseling professionals to understand and explore microaggressive instances with their South Asian American clients in order to be an advocate and place of understanding for this underserved population within the field of psychology.

There is a gap in the counseling psychology literature addressing the existence and implications of microaggressive experiences for the South Asian American community and of



name-based microaggressions in general. In addressing this gap, this review of the literature begins with a summary of the manifestations of racism within American society, including the negative physical and mental health effects of racial discrimination on people of color. It will then move towards an overview of microaggression theory and the existing knowledge about the effects of microaggressive interactions. Next, the review will build toward a greater understanding of the Asian and South Asian American population and the microaggressive experiences that they face in regards to identity-related characteristics such as race, ethnicity, accent, and religion. The conversation will then turn towards the impact of names as multicultural identities within various social spaces, the name-based microaggressive experiences that result from these identities, and how such interactions coincide with racism. Considerations will be given to the current political and societal climate and its direct impact on how South Asian Americans with names of ethnic and religious origin operate socially within the world today. The review will conclude with implications for the counseling profession when working with South Asian American clients.

### **Manifestations of Racism**

Racism is defined as negative treatment of individuals on the basis of their racial identities (Smedley & Smedley, 2005). It includes participating in actions, attitudes, and beliefs that privilege White individuals over people of color (Carter, 2007). Race at its inception was a culturally invented concept (Smedley & Smedley, 2005). As such, race became a means of restricting access to various resources and giving power to White people while taking away the rights and freedoms of people of color (Smedley & Smedley, 2005). Racism has divided, stereotyped, and socially ranked individuals, and has been documented as a constant part of American history and society (Jones, 1997). Carter (2007) explained that racism can occur on

three different levels, individual, institutional, and cultural, and can be connected back to emotional and psychological responses that result from discriminatory experiences and unequal treatment.

Despite the Civil Rights Legislation of the 1960's and the reduction of blatant discrimination, it is clear that racism continues to be present within our society in many different ways (Sue, 2003). Historically, the cultural assumptions that accompany the U.S. racial divide have portrayed the White "in-group" members as more intelligent, successful, and educated, while people of color, or "out-group members," are met with the stereotypes of laziness, aggressiveness, and impulsivity (Blair, 2001). A difference has been established between *dominative* versus *aversive* racism (Pearson, Dovidio, & Gaertner, 2009). Dominative racism corresponds to blatant racism where individuals express their bigoted beliefs outwardly; In contrast, aversive racism can take the form of non-conscious prejudiced beliefs towards people of color by persons who outwardly maintain themselves as non-prejudiced (Pearson, et al., 2009). Acts of aversive racism are just as harmful to people of color as they allow White individuals to operate from a colorblind perspective (Pearson, et al., 2009). There is evidence of these types of disparities and discrimination in various sectors of United States society such as earned wages, access to health care, access to employment opportunities, housing, and access to quality education (Pearson, et al., 2009).

**Racism and health.** Research indicates that experiences of racial inequality and discrimination can result in negative mental and physical health outcomes for people of color (Carter, 2007; Pascoe & Richman, 2009). Perceived discrimination has been tied to symptoms and conditions such as hypertension, self-reported poor health, breast cancer, obesity, high blood pressure, and substance use (Williams & Mohammad, 2009). The fact that discrimination is often

uncontrollable and unpredictable increases the impact on health for racial minorities due to the activation of a stress response. Racial discrimination is correlated with a physiological stress response, negative psychological stress responses, increased unhealthy behaviors, and decreased participation in healthy behaviors (Pascoe & Richman, 2009).

**Racism and wellbeing.** Racism's negative effect on the mental health of people of color has been well documented. Experiences of racial and ethnic discrimination have been found to lead to negative psychological symptoms such as depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and low satisfaction with life (Pascoe & Richman, 2009). A link has also been found between racial discrimination and increased experiences of anger, which also in turn increases unhealthy physical and psychological effects (Terrell, Miller, Foster, & Warkins, 2006). In a study investigating the long-term impacts of racial stressors on depression symptomatology for African American college students, students reported more depressive symptoms when they experienced a negative racial event (Hoggard, Byrd, & Sellers, 2015). It was also emphasized that the stress and strain that is put on African American individuals to protect themselves from the ongoing threat of racial discrimination can lead to poor mental health outcomes (Hoggard, et al., 2015). Black men and women experiencing perceived racial discrimination during emerging adulthood is associated with increases in anxiety and depressive symptoms, as well as increase in alcohol use (Hurd, Varner, Caldwell, & Zimmerman, 2014). In another study conducted by Hwang and Goto (2008), the authors looked at the impact of perceived racial discrimination for the Latino college student population. Results indicated that perceived racial discrimination was correlated with negative mental health outcomes such as psychological distress, suicidal ideation, anxiety, and depression. In looking at the experiences of minority groups of color, it is clear that racism has an impact on their physical and mental health.

**Racism and trauma.** Perceived racial discrimination has also been associated with trauma-related symptoms for people of color. In a study conducted by Pieterse, Todd, Neville, and Carter (2012), it was found that for Black Americans, exposure to the stress of racist events leads to a greater likelihood of reporting mental distress. Acts of racism can have similar emotional effects on the psyche and one's personality as that of community violence, being held captive, and being psychologically tortured (Wallace & Carter, 2003). In his Race Based Traumatic Stress Injury Model (2007), Carter proposed that the severity of raced based discrimination should be evaluated through the strength and intensity of the individual's reaction as well as the symptoms that are produced. These incidents can come in the form of three different classes; racial discrimination, racial harassment, or discriminatory harassment. Racial discrimination is defined as a class or type of avoidant racism that is reflected in behaviors, thoughts, policies, and strategies that are intended or accidental in minimizing contact between majority and minority racial groups (Carter, 2007). Racial harassment is a type of hostile racism through actions, strategies, and behaviors (Carter, 2007). Lastly, discriminatory harassment describes experiences and encounters that are aversive and hostile in nature that capture a minorities experience in entering into a space that they were once excluded from (Carter, 2007). Carter noted that these types of encounters can lead to symptom manifestations of race-based traumatic stress such as intrusion and avoidance of the trauma stimuli (Carter, 2007).

### **Microaggressions**

A construct that encompasses many experiences of racism is *microaggressions* which describes the more subtle and aversive racial experiences that people of color face on a day to day basis. The term "racial microaggressions" was first coined by Pierce in the 1970's and refers to subtle, demeaning, and sometimes non-verbal exchanges that are directed towards people of

color (Sue, et al., 2007). This term encompasses the concepts behind modern racism, symbolic racism, and aversive racism, terms that have previously been used in psychological literature (Sue et al., 2007). Microaggressions are defined as brief everyday exchanges with a negative racist undertone that can be sent through looks, gestures, and tones (Sue et al., 2007). These types of comments can often be dismissed or overlooked as innocent, yet evidence suggests that these exchanges can be harmful to people of color (Sue et al., 2007). Within the literature three forms of microaggressions have been identified; microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations (Sue et al., 2007).

**Types of microaggressions.** *Microassaults* can be defined as explicit racism in the form of both verbal and non-verbal attacks. These interactions are meant to hurt the person of color and are considered to be blatant racism, as they are conscious actions, although they may take place privately rather than displayed as public opinion (Sue et al., 2007). *Microinsults* are exchanges that contain unconscious insults that convey a negative message about the targeted person of color (Sue et al., 2007). These types of comments often come up when speaking about topics such as affirmative action within college admission processes, such as expressing the assumption that a person of color received admission solely because of their race and not their abilities (Sue et al., 2007). Lastly, *microinvalidations* are comments that negate a person of color's cultural and racial background (Sue et al., 2007). An example of this is when American born Asians are complimented on their use of English, when in fact they were raised in this country. Microinvalidations also occur when people of color speak about their experiences of mistreatment and White individuals respond that they are being "too sensitive." These comments essentially invalidate the person of color's reality as a racial and culture being.

**Microinsults and microinvalidations.** Four categories of microinsults and four categories of microinvalidations were uncovered within the research in order to further delineate the common experiences of people of color (Sue et al., 2007). For microinsults, the first is *ascription of intelligence* which involves assigning a degree of intelligence on to a person based on their race, followed by being treated as a *second class citizen* or “less than” the dominant group. The next two describe *pathologizing cultural values and communication styles* as abnormal, followed by making assumptions of an individual’s *criminal status* based on their race. The themes of microinvalidations start with the concept of being treated as an *alien in their own land*. This is the belief that people of color are constantly perceived as foreigners despite their citizenship status. The next theme is that of *colorblindness*, which is when White individuals deny that color exists or state that they do not see color when they view people within their surroundings. Next is the *myth of meritocracy*, or microaggressions related to the notion that race plays a role within a person of color’s success. Lastly is the *denial of individual racism*, or negating one’s own personal part in the perpetuation of racism (Sue et al., 2007).

**Microaggressions and wellbeing.** In a study conducted by Nadal, et al. (2014) the authors examined the correlation between racial microaggressions and mental health. With a sample of five-hundred and six individuals of varying racial backgrounds, results indicated that individuals who experience and perceive racial microaggressions are more likely to exhibit negative mental health symptoms such as depression, anxiety, negative affect, and lack of behavioral control. The ANOVA results showed that although the total amount of microaggressions experienced by Asians, Latinx, and Black participants were the same, certain racial groups may experience a particular type of racial microaggression more than others. Black and Latina/o participants reported more inferiority-related microaggressions, Black participants

were targets of criminality-related microaggressions, and Asian participants had more experiences of exoticization microaggressions.

Another study considered the relationship between experiences of racialized microaggressions and suicidal ideation among people of color (O'Keefe, et al., 2015). It was found that African Americans presented with the greatest number of experiences of racialized microaggressions, Native Americans with the least amount of such experiences, and Asian Americans and Latina/o's with no differences from each other in experiences (O'Keefe, et al., 2015). Results of this study added to previous research indicating a correlation between experiences of racial microaggressions and depressive symptoms. Along with this, a positive correlation was found between racial microaggressions and suicidal ideation as a result of depressive symptoms. These findings were supported by another study that included 135 African American participants who completed questionnaires looking at the correlation between six racial microaggression dimensions (invisibility, criminality, low achieving/undesirable culture, sexualization, foreigner in own land, and environmental validations), two interpersonal dimensions (belongingness and perceived burdensomeness), and suicidal ideation (Hollingsworth, et al., 2017). It was found that African Americans who experience everyday racial slights had increased perceptions of being a burden on others, which in turn led to suicidal ideation (Hollingsworth et al., 2017).

**Microaggressions and self-esteem.** Research has also indicated a correlation between experiences of microaggressions and self-esteem levels. People from less privileged backgrounds are more likely to develop low self-esteem due to an increased amount of distress (Nadal, et al., 2014). Through this study, the authors wanted to explore whether racial microaggressions were associated with low self-esteem, if there were specific types of microaggressions that lead to

lower self-esteem, and if individuals of diverse racial backgrounds experienced microaggressions differently. Two hundred and twenty-five undergraduate participants of varying racial backgrounds completed an online survey that took approximately 30 minutes to complete, which explored the connection between racial microaggressions and self-esteem levels. Results indicated that the more racial microaggressions one experiences, the lower their self-esteem will be. Specifically, microaggressions in education or workplace environments had a negative impact on self-esteem levels. It was found that there were no significant differences in the experiences of racial microaggressions for Black, Latinx, and Asian American participants. Due to the impact of stereotype threat for people of color, it is important for educators and working professionals to be aware of the microaggressions that are put upon people of color within these settings.

**Microaggressions and health.** Experiences of racial microaggressions have also been tied to negative physical health conditions. In a study of 277 individuals of varying racial backgrounds, it was found that people of color who experience more microaggressions tend to have lower energy levels, poorer emotional well-being, lower social functioning, and express higher levels of pain (Nadal, et al., 2017). It has also been found that college students of color who experience racial microaggressions have an increased risk for high anxiety, and adverse health experiences due to binge drinking (Blume, Lovato, Thyken, & Denny, 2012).

**Microaggressive experiences and Black/African Americans.** Many studies within the racial microaggression research focus on the experiences of the African American population. For example, in a study by Smith, Hung, and Franklin (2011) the authors described the concept of *racial battle fatigue*, which can be defined as the emotional, psychological, and physiological distress that occurs as a result of racially microaggressive experiences. This study aimed to



explore the role of microaggressions in predicting mundane, extreme, and environmental stress for African Americans (with the first letters of those words corresponding to the acronym MEES). Pierce (1995) described race-related and societal stress as *mundane* because it is often taken for granted, *extreme* because it has a great amount of influence on internal reactions, *environmental* due to its place in history and institutionalized hierarchy, and lastly produces *stress*, because these experiences take up time and energy that could be used towards more productive goals (MEES). Through structural equation modeling, the study looked at experiences of racial microaggressions, societal problems often experienced by Black individuals, as well as the impact of MEES on the population. Findings suggest that racial microaggressions increase MEES for African males as they move up within the educational system. Another finding is that societal problems have a great influence on MEES throughout all educational levels. Lastly it was found that racial microaggressions and societal problems contribute to 40% of mundane stress for African American men. These results are reflective of the educational experience for people of color and the presence of microaggressions within the education system.

Another study looked at how group status and legitimizing ideologies, or holding justified beliefs as to why racism occurs, can predict the perception of acts of subtle racism (Liao, Hong, & Rounds, 2016). Black and White identifying college students completed measures regarding their legitimizing ideologies, and then were asked to watch a video clip of an ambiguous interracial conflict. Results indicated that Black individuals were more likely to perceive the subtle racism within the video clip. Additionally, those who were less likely to endorse ideologies were more likely to detect the racial cues and racism within the video. Through this study, it is evident that there are perpetual differences in how minority individuals take in a decode race-based interactions in comparison to White individuals (Liao, et al., 2016).

**Microaggressive experiences and Latinx.** Ethnicity based microaggressions have also been found to be prevalent specifically within the Latinx population. In a study conducted by Torres and Taknint (2015) the authors looked at the association between ethnic microaggressions and levels of depression amongst Latinx individuals while also examining self-efficacy as a moderator within the connection. One-hundred and thirteen participants completed a survey package which was offered in both Spanish and English. Results indicated that ethnic microaggressions were associated with increased traumatic stress symptoms. This correlation also predicted increased depression. The strength of the connection of the trauma or stressful event to depression was dependent on the individuals' level of ethnic identity or self-efficacy. This study gives insight into the negative mental health impacts of ethnic microaggressions.

Researchers often conceptualize Latinx participants as a monolithic ethnicity group and do not often analyze the demographic and cultural differences within the population- a characteristic that is shared by the research on the South Asian population. Nadal, Mazzula, Rivera, and Fujii-Doe (2014) conducted an exploratory study looking at microaggressive experiences of the Latinx population and whether they varied based on gender, ethnicity, and/or immigration status. Three hundred and eleven participants completed a written survey either in person or online, and the results indicated differences of experiences based on gender and education level. Latina women experienced greater amounts of microaggressive experiences than men, and Latinx who were more educated and older experienced less microaggressive interactions. Ethnic differences in experiences were also found, as Dominicans were more likely to report exoticization microaggressions, and Puerto Ricans were more likely to be treated as second-class citizens. Along with this, Latinx who were born outside of the United States were

treated as inferior in comparison to those born in the United States. This study emphasized the importance of intersectionality considerations within microaggression research.

Another study examined the association between acculturative stress and depressive symptoms amongst a sample of college students of Mexican ancestry (Cheng, Hitter, Adams, & Williams, 2016). It also looked at how familism, ethnic identity, and gender operated as moderators within this relationship. Results indicated that the more the participants experienced minority stress, the more they self-reported depressive symptoms. Conversely, for those participants who endorsed having strong family values, the relationship between experienced minority stress and depressive symptoms was weaker. Holding traditional cultural values was shown to serve as a protective factor for the participants of the study. Additionally, holding a strong ethnic identity was protective for female participants when considerable amounts of acculturative stress was experienced. This study gives insight into the importance of looking into various cultural variables within microaggression research.

### **Microaggressive Experiences and Asian Americans**

Within the psychological literature, there is an extant body of research that addresses the Asian American population and their experiences with racism and microaggressive encounters, yet very little of it addresses the experiences of the South Asian population in particular. Although the various regions of Asia have different cultural traditions, values, and practices, the overarching, more general body of research will be presented to illustrate common themes that can serve to orient counselors to the experiences of the South Asian population.

**Exceptionalizing stereotypes.** Tran and Lee (2014) studied a specific type of microaggression that often is applied to the Asian population entitled the *exceptionalizing stereotype*. This can be defined as a type of microaggression that is framed as an interpersonal

compliment but perpetuates a negative stereotypical view of a racial/ethnic group (Tran & Lee, 2014). In this study, 70 Asian-identified participants completed an in-laboratory experiment to test interpersonal reactions to “highly racially loaded” and “low racially loaded” messages from a White confederate. The participant and confederate had a brief five-minute conversation, and while leaving the room the confederate stated one of three phrases; 1.) Nice speaking with you. You speak English well. 2.) Nice speaking with you. You speak English well for an Asian. 3.) Nice speaking with you. The first option is the low racially loaded message, the second is the highly racially loaded option, and the third is the control option. The participant then completed an appraisal of their interviewer. Results indicated that those in the highly racially loaded group rated their counterparts less positively, reported lower levels of perceived acceptance, and felt less similar to their partner. They also rated the interaction as less enjoyable and felt their interviewer did not get an accurate view of them. This study shines light on the fact that microaggressive experiences involving compliments to English skills can affect interpersonal relationships for Asian Americans.

**Microaggressive themes for Asian Americans.** Sue, et al. (2007) conducted a qualitative study that included two focus groups of five participants who all self-identified as Asian American and who were open to having a discussion about their microaggressive experiences. The group was conducted through a semi structured interview where eight themes of microaggressions were developed. The first theme identified is described as being seen as an *alien in their own land*, through which Asian Americans are seen as perpetual foreigners and not “real” Americans despite being born and living in the United States. This perception corresponds to the assumption that being American is being White. The second theme is the *ascription of intelligence*. This occurs when intelligence is assigned to Asian Americans based on their race,

as within stereotypes that assume that Asians are good at math and science. Although these statements seem to convey a compliment, the participants described feeling pressured to conform to the stereotype and experienced associated increases in tension between Asian Americans and other racial minorities. The third theme is the *denial of racial reality*. According to this theme, Asian Americans are encouraged to believe that Asians are as privileged as Whites, which ignores the racism, inequities, and discriminatory treatment they have experienced currently and throughout history. The next theme is the *exoticization of Asian American women*. Participants reported that Asian women are often approached by White men in keeping with sexual fetishes and are accordingly seen as sexual objects. The fifth theme is the *invalidation of interethnic differences*. These can be represented by the belief that all Asians look alike, which sends the message that differences between different groups do not exist or do not matter. The sixth theme is *pathologizing cultural values and communication styles*. Within some Asian cultures silence is valued, whereas in Western culture, silence can be viewed as being disinterested or disengaged, negatively-valanced interpretations that show a cultural bias. The seventh theme is *second class citizenship*, whereby Asian Americans are treated as lesser beings in comparison to their White counterparts. The eighth and last theme is *invisibility*, such as the conversation of racial identity solely upon Black and White individuals but not acknowledging Asians as a racial minority group. Sue, et al. (2009) emphasized the fact that Asian Americans are most likely to experience microaggressions around being seen as an alien in their own land and invalidation of interethnic differences in comparison to other racial categories.

**Asian American microaggressions and health.** Another study attempted to build upon this research by looking at how exposure to everyday racial microaggressions can influence affect and the development of somatic symptoms for the Asian American population (Ong, et al.,

2013). The authors wanted to look at the different types of microaggressions that Asian Americans encounter. They also believed that Asian Americans who reported more microaggressions within their daily lives would also report higher levels of negative affect and somatic symptoms, and lower levels of positive affect. One hundred and fifty-two Asian American college freshman participated in the study. At the beginning, subjects were asked to complete a baseline questionnaire that gathered general background information. Each day for fourteen days, participants received an e-mail to complete their “daily diary,” or daily survey including measurements of both microaggressive experiences and affect. The results indicated that 78% of participants experienced at least one racial microaggression over the fourteen-day period. Microinvalidations were shown to be the most frequent type of microaggression for Asian Americans, especially involving themes surrounding being seen as an alien in their own land and being exoticized. On days when more microaggressions were experienced, there was an increase in negative affect and somatic symptoms, while positive affect was unaffected.

A study conducted by Ong, et al. (2017) looked at the association between daily racial microaggressions and sleep disturbance within the Asian American population. The authors recruited 152 Asian American college freshmen. Participants were asked to complete a daily survey for 14 days which included a questionnaire with items regarding race-based stigma consciousness, everyday microaggressions, and self-reported sleep duration/quality. Results indicated that daily racial microaggressions were associated with poorer and shorter sleep (Ong, et al., 2017). Increased reports of stigma consciousness were a direct predictor of sleep difficulties. These findings underscore the negative health consequences of microaggressive experiences for the Asian American population.

**Interethnic differences and microaggressions.** Another study examined the microaggressive experiences of Asian Americans, as well as how this experience of discrimination may vary based on Asian American subgroup (Nadal, et al., 2015). Participants were asked to complete a demographic form and an online survey that lasted approximately thirty minutes. Results showed that education was an indicator of mental health in that those who reported less education had an increase in mental health difficulties. Age was a predictor of workplace and school microaggressions as those who identified as older had more experiences of microaggressions. Individuals who reported having bachelor's degrees had higher levels of microinvalidations than individuals without bachelor's degrees. Microinvalidations were the most significant predictor of negative mental health. Individuals without a bachelor's degree were more likely to be exoticized, while individuals with a bachelor's degree were more likely to face microinvalidations in school or at work. It was also found that participants from the Northeast were more likely to experience microaggressions than those from the West Coast. This study emphasized the need for Asian American research to consider interethnic differences within the population as well as various forms of intersectionality.

**Asian American microaggressions and wellbeing.** A study conducted by Wei, Heppner, Ku, and Liao (2010) addressed the correlation between racial discrimination and depressive symptoms for the Asian American population. This study specifically controlled for both general stress and perceived discrimination. The study found that racial discrimination alone accounted for 4% of the variance in predicting depressive symptoms, which supports the contention that racial discrimination merits consideration on its own and not merely as a component of general life stress. Two moderators were also found to be significant within this study. Asian American participants who used more reactive coping mechanisms, which involves

having a strong emotional response, showed a heightened association between racial discrimination and depressive symptoms in comparison to those who used reactive coping less frequently. Moreover, family support and collectivism were found to lessen the association between discrimination stress and depression. This study brings attention to the differing coping strategies within the Asian American cultural context, as well as the need to further analyze racial discrimination as a single construct beyond influence of daily stressors.

Liang, Alvarez, Juang, and Liang (2007) also studied the relationship between racism and racism-related stress, and examined coping as a moderating factor for the Asian American population. The study considered these connections all within the context of gender. Data analysis showed that men were more likely to report experiences of racism, and women were more likely to use support-seeking methods of coping than men. Chinese Americans were found to use less active coping mechanisms in comparison to Filipinos and other Asian Americans, while Filipinos were found to have more racist encounters than individuals from other subgroups of Asia. It was found that for all demographic groups, racism was associated with racism-related stress. While women were found to use three or more types of coping methods for their racism-related stress, men used only avoidance and support-seeking methods, which speaks to the differences for Asian American men and women within these experiences.

A study conducted by Hwang and Goto (2008) looked at perceived racial discrimination and its impact on mental health outcomes for the Asian American college population. Findings showed that perceived discrimination was associated with increased risk for psychological distress, suicidal ideation, state and trait anxiety, and clinical depression. It also was found that younger college students were at higher risk than older college students. This finding once again



brings attention to the need for increased research addressing the perceived discrimination that Asian Americans are experiencing within the college setting.

Another study explored the race-related nature of a microaggressive event for Asian American individuals (Wong-Padoongpatt, Zane, Okazaki, & Saw, 2017). Specifically, it looked at whether a White American perpetrator of microaggressions would elicit more stress in comparison to an Asian American perpetrator. Results indicated that White American perpetrators enacting the microaggression resulted in increased stress for the Asian American participants in comparison to Asian American perpetrators. This may be due to perpetual feelings of being seen as a foreigner in their own land and feeling oriented to an inferior social status when interacting with White individuals (Wong-Padoongpatt, et al., 2017).

Further scholarship is needed to more fully understand the Asian American population's experiences with racism and microaggressive attitudes, especially in a way that addressed potential difference among the many subgroups that fall within Asia. In the United States, current discrimination research primarily focuses on Chinese, Filipino, Vietnamese, and Korean populations (Gee, Ro, Shariff-Marco, & Chae, 2009). Relatively little scholarly attention has been dedicated to the discriminatory experiences of the South Asian American population--a growing ethnic group in the United States (Nadimpalli, et al., 2016; Pyke & Dang, 2003; Tummala-Narra, Deshpande, & Kaur, 2016). The following sections will outline the transition of these groups into American culture through migration and acculturation, and the present psychological research in this area.

### **Culture, South Asian American Migration, and Acculturation**

Carter defines culture as a system of meaning with values, norms, behaviors, language, and history that is passed on from one generation to the next through socialization and

participation in the group's organizations and institutions (Carter, 2007). American racial groups have been historically and systematically separated, therefore distinct groups retained and sustained their cultural practices (Carter, 2007). According to the United States census, South Asian Americans are one of the fastest developing Asian American cultural subgroups, growing by 81% between 2000 and 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). South Asian Americans can be identified as having origins from the regions of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka (Asian American Federation, 2012). Despite their increasing presence within the United States, their immigration history and contributions to this country are rarely addressed. The following background information on South Asian American immigration will give insight into the difficulties and discriminatory practices this population faced when initially coming to this country, and how it continues to be perpetuated in society today.

The presence of South Asians in the United States began to be recognized in the late 1800s (SAADA, 2017). Individuals primarily from India and Bangladesh settled in New Orleans and then expanded to other communities where there were people of color such as in Detroit, New York and Baltimore (SAADA, 2017), while other South Asians moved towards California as well as Canada to create new communities for themselves. Living conditions and social experiences for South Asian immigrants were inadequate at this time due to the increase of anti-Asiatic sentiment and discriminatory practices in the United States (SAADA, 2017). In 1917 Congress passed the Literacy Act, also called the Asiatic Barred Zone Act, which prevented individuals from Asian regions from entering the country (Hutchinson, 1949). These regions included the whole subcontinent of India. It also forced immigrants to participate in literacy tests in order to enter the country. In 1923, the Supreme Court heard the case of Bhagat Singh Thind, who attempted to petition for naturalized citizenship in the United States under the

Naturalization Act of 1906. This act was only open to White individuals and people of African descent (Gee, Spencer, Chen, Yip, & Takeuchi, 2007). Thind's petition was rejected due to the fact that he was not White, and following the ruling, all new applications from individuals of Indian descent were denied and previous applications were retroactively dismissed. South Asians did not gain the ability to apply for naturalizations until 1946, and even then, only one hundred naturalizations per year were allowed. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 eliminated the immigrant quotas, which provided for an increase in immigration to the United States from South Asian countries (SAADA, 2017).

**South Asian American acculturation.** For ethnic minorities, the acculturative process can be challenging in that it requires finding a balance between adaptation and maintaining one's own identities. Acculturation is defined as cultural socialization to the majority culture (Kim, Atkinson, & Umemoto, 2001). Enculturation is the maintenance of cultural socialization to an individual's culture of origin (Kim, et al., 2001). Acculturative stress can be defined as the challenges or stress accompanying acculturation (APA, 2002). This stress results from many challenges that come with adjusting to a new and unfamiliar culture, such as the lack of English skills, different familial roles, and various forms of discriminatory experiences (Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013). Acculturative stress is also experienced by South Asian American individuals who identify as "*third culture kids*" (Pollock & Van Reken, 1999). This can be defined as an individual who has spent a large part of their developmental years in a culture that is different from that of their parents, which causes them to develop a relationship with both cultures, while continuing to feel that they do not have full ownership of either (Pollock & Van Reken, 1999). Research has shown that third culture kids notice the subtle differences between them and their peers, and never fully adjust to American life (Pollock & Van Reken, 1999). They instead find

ways of presenting themselves that align with the dominant culture (Pollock & Van Reken, 1999). A number of studies have looked at the acculturation of Asian Americans and South Asian immigrations, however these studies neglect the unique intracultural experiences of South Asian Americans, also known as third culture kids (Pollock & Van Reken, 1999; Rahman & Rollock, 2004). Despite the increase in the South Asian American population within the United States, little research has addressed their acculturation and enculturation processes (Tummala-Narra, et al., 2016).

**Acculturation and somatization.** Studies that focus on acculturation among the South Asian American population include an examination of the interaction of acculturation and somatization. In a study conducted by Lesser, Gasevic, and Lear (2014) the authors addressed the concept of the “*healthy immigrant effect*” whereby Canadian immigrants seem typically to immigrate in better health than the individuals who are native to the country. Health levels for the South Asian population may have begun to deteriorate due to the increased stress from language difficulties, socioeconomic difficulties, and changes in social support. The study also described “*dietary acculturation*” in which the minority group adopts the nutritional practice and diet of the host country. The goal of this study was to explore dietary patterns and awareness of healthy nutrition within the South Asian immigrant population to Canada. Results indicated that there was an increase in intake of soft drinks, dessert, and eating out amongst immigrants as a result of this cultural change. These changes were accompanied by an increase in disease risk such as cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes.

A study by Meghani and Harvey (2016) looked at depression, acculturation, and enculturation paths as predictors of depressive symptomatology for Indian Asian international graduate students within their first year in the United States. The goal of the study was to look at

individual differences within these three factors, and examine whether they are predictive of depressive symptoms. Results indicated that the more students were identified with American culture upon arrival to the United States, the more their depressive symptomatology would improve over the year. Enculturation did not appear to be significant within this process. Social support was also a predictor of depressive symptomatology. Another significant finding was that Asian Indians who held more traditional attitudes about gender roles, which are prevalent in Indian culture and traditions, had increased depressive symptomatology in comparison to those who did not hold those beliefs as strongly.

**Acculturation and coping.** Tummala-Narra, et al. (2016) studied the positive and negative experiences that come with being a South Asian in the United States, the nature of familial and personal relationships for South Asian adolescents, and the coping strategies that South Asian adolescents use in the face of acculturative stress. The authors used a qualitative methodology to explore their research questions and conducted sixteen interviews with South Asian identified adolescent students. Results indicated that the participants had a strong connection to their family and saw this as a unique part of being part a South Asian family. Relatedly, participants gained social and emotional support from their ethnic communities. Participants described experiencing increased distress due to their parents not wanting them to become “too Americanized.” Female participants also described difficulties understanding the role of girls and women due to conflicting messages from the South Asian culture and the mainstream American culture. Many participants spoke of a dual sense of self, as they tended to behave differently depending on the ethnic identity of their social context. The authors described some of the experiences of acculturative stress that are common amongst the South Asian adolescent population and which may often continue into adulthood.

In addition to the acculturative stress that accompanies the migration process for South Asians within the United States, there is also the potential stress associated with stereotyping and microaggressive interactions. The following section presents the microaggression literature with regard to the South Asian population.

### **Microaggressive Experiences and South Asian Americans**

There are a number of factors that highlight the relevance of attention to South Asian Americans, such as the continuing growth of the U.S. South Asian American population and the threat towards South Asian identified individuals since the 2016 U.S. presidential election in regards to changes in immigration policy. There is a relative lack of research regarding the specific microaggressive experiences of South Asian Americans, yet there are studies of microaggressions that pertain closely to this population.

**Religious microaggressions.** Researchers have addressed religious microaggressions that are experienced by South Asians, especially for those individuals of Hindu and Muslim faiths, as one-third of the South Asian population identifies as Muslim (Bukhari, 2003). A *religious microaggression* can be defined as “subtle behavioral and verbal exchanges that send denigrating messages to individuals of various religious groups” (Nadal, Issa, Griffin, Hamit, and Lyons, 2010, p. 297). In a qualitative study of the microaggressive experiences of Muslim Americans, six themes emerged from the analysis of the data; *endorsing religious stereotypes of Muslims as terrorists, pathologizing the Muslim religion, assuming religious homogeneity, exoticizing Muslim religion, Islamophobic and mocking language, and feelings of being an alien in one’s own country* (Nadal et al., 2012, p. 22). The authors developed a microaggressions flowchart to describe the process of experiencing a religiously-based microaggression (Nadal et al., 2012). It starts with an incident that can be described as religiously motivated. Following this, the

individual may then ruminate about the experience and think further about the individuals who are involved, as well as the emotional reaction to the contact. There may be a motivation or sense of empowerment to respond to the threat. The individual then may interpret the experience as one of the six listed themes of the microaggressive experience.

**Microaggressions in the college setting.** Due to the large population of South Asians within Canada, microaggression literature has been developed within this region to explore commonalities for this subgroup. Poolokasingham, et al. (2014) used a qualitative research method to explore the experiences of racial microaggressions towards the South Asian community at a Canadian university. Seven participants were recruited from varying parts of South Asia and were asked to participate in a focus group that centered around their personal experiences. A consensual qualitative research method was used to analyze the data. Eight different microaggression themes were developed from the data that specifically targeted South Asian Canadian undergraduate students. The first theme was *being perceived as “fresh off the boat.”* This meant that participants were perceived as not assimilating normally within society, could not speak English proficiently, and could not appropriately integrate. Women within the group emphasized the intersectionality of social class within this experience. They expressed that if they were dressed nicely or physically appealing, there would be lower risk of being called a “FOB.” A second microaggressive theme was an *exclusion from social life.* Participants expressed that White peers hold assumptions of South Asians as not wanting to socialize, go to parties or drink alcohol, or not being “allowed” to do these activities. This was often assumed to be due to increased parental control within the culture. Another salient theme was the assumption of *ties to terrorism.* Men specifically were often the target of this microaggression, and felt pressure to avoid this stereotype due to the potential consequences. The fifth theme is that South

Asians were assumed to be *cultural experts*. Individuals were held with expectations by their peers to be aware and knowledgeable about all parts of their culture, and often were tokenized due to being the only brown person within a social space. They also felt pressure to break stereotypes of their culture due to being the only representation for the individuals around them. The sixth theme was *ascription of intelligence* based on their cultural background. The South Asian participants were perceived as experts in math, science, engineering, as well as information technology. The seventh theme described *invalidation of interethnic and racial differences* in which participants observed their White peers minimizing or rejecting the differences between the subgroups of South Asia. The final theme concerned *invisibility*, as participants described being overlooked within the classroom and other social settings.

Another qualitative study conducted in Canada explored the microaggressive experiences and coping mechanisms of South Asian and East Asian international students at a Canadian University (Houshmand, Spanierman, & Tafarodi, 2014). Six microaggression themes emerged from the data. The first one described experiences of feeling *excluded and avoided* both passively and actively within Canadian society due to differences in culture and racial backgrounds. Participants also expressed being *ridiculed by others* due to their accents and language proficiency. Participants faced an *ascription of intelligence*, stating that others made assumptions about their heightened academic abilities based on racial stereotypes. There was also the belief that they would *not engage in social activities* due to concentration on academic responsibilities. Participants reported that they coped with these microaggressive experiences by engaging with their own cultural communities in order to feel more understood in their identities, avoiding academic environments, and gaining comfort from the fact that they are part of a diverse community.



**Coping with prejudicial practices.** A qualitative study explored the ways that first generation Asian Indian immigrants perceive and cope with race-based discrimination and microaggressive experiences (Inman, et al., 2015). The authors conducted nine focus groups using semi structured interview questions with participants who identified as Indian Asian. There were four personal attributes that participants felt contributed to their experiences of discrimination from others, including physical appearance, professional status, personal behaviors of Indians, and level of acculturation. Skin color caused individuals to feel that they were not seen as American enough within society, but their professional occupations at times played as a protective factor, as they reported that they were perceived as well educated. In speaking about perceptions of race-based discrimination, participants spoke about their experiences on individual, cultural, and institutional levels. An example of an individual level discriminatory comment was when a participant was told to go back to his/her country, or when Indian Asians are searched more thoroughly when traveling. At the cultural level, Sikh identified individuals have faced increased discrimination due to a lack of information about their religious beliefs. Participants spoke about discriminatory practices at the institutional level via racial profiling, law enforcement, and keeping Asian Indians out of certain housing communities. Common coping strategies that were expressed by the participants included avoidance of emotionality around the events, overcompensation and overachievement as a means of making up for the negative stereotypes, as well as addressing the discrimination directly to fight for the community. South Asians may often be the targets of microaggressions, negative stereotypes, and assumptions based on their race, and they cope with their distress by avoiding their emotions and leaning on members of their cultural group for support.

Another study examined the associations between self-reported discrimination and mental health factors amongst Asian Indian individuals, and whether holding traditional cultural beliefs was a protective factor against these relationships (Nadimpalli, et al., 2016). Community based sampling data was utilized for the analysis. Results indicated that higher levels of reported discrimination were associated with higher levels of depression. Additionally, those who indicated having strong cultural beliefs had weak associations between experiences of discrimination and feelings of anger. In sum, it was shown that experiences of discrimination adversely impacted the mental health of these South Asian participants, and that these experiences may be better coped with by having strong South Asian cultural beliefs (Nadimpalli, et al., 2016).

### **Name-Based Microaggressive Experiences**

Another common type of social interaction that can characterize the experiences of ethnic groups such as South Asian Americans involves others' responses to names from ethnic origins, which can be referred to as *name-based microaggressions*. This phenomenon has received attention from educational researchers, who have suggested that experiencing a racial microaggression through name mispronunciation can lead to internalized racism for students of color (Kholi & Solórzano, 2012). Research has highlighted the significance of names, in that children begin derive understanding of who they are through the pronunciation of their names by caregivers (Kholi & Solórzano, 2012; Palsson, 2014). Names can hold significant connections to family origins, ethnic groups, and ancestors that represent the story of an individual's family and journey to the United States (Kholi & Solórzano, 2012; Palsson, 2014; Wykes, 2017). The practice of *racialized re-naming* can be defined as perpetuating the belief that non-White names are unwanted and are an inconvenience within Western society (Kholi & Solórzano, 2012).

Racialized re-naming often happens when names are shortened or changed due to the unfamiliarity of the name within the dominant culture. The process of racialized re-naming has been common in American history as represented through the United States immigration process that took place at Ellis Island between 1892 and 1954. During this time, immigrants arrived to the U.S. where an identification record would be created by someone who often could not communicate clearly with them. In some instances, a substitute name would be given instead of the ethnically distinct name that they arrived with (Department of Homeland Security, 2016). While some immigrants welcomed the change as a means of assimilation to the Western world, others felt stripped of an important part of their cultural identity (Department of Homeland Security, 2016).

Palsson (2014) discussed how some of the most severe cases of racialized re-naming comes from the history of slavery. Palsson states that slaves were often given names by their slaveholders that were similar names given to livestock and pets. The author noted that slaves had to accept being renamed, as this was a symbol of the erasure of their history and identity as a whole. When slaves were freed, they often requested a new name to mark the ending of the oppressive acts they had been experiencing and to begin a new life (Palsson, 2014).

Wykes conducted a study exploring the importance of names, and how they are often “racialized”, which can influence the naming choices of multiracial and multiethnic parents (2017). For a name to be “racialized”, this involves someone deriving racial meaning based on the sound or appearance of an individual’s name, and to build an understanding of the individual based solely on this information. Wykes conducted 31 semi-structured interviews with female identified individuals who had two different last names which they understood to be of two different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Results of the study indicated that both the participants

and the people they have interacted with saw their names as important markers of racial identity. Participants discussed how foreign names are often more visible, and can result in increased racism and discrimination. Names that were perceived to be more Anglo appearing were seen as having more privilege. Participants discussed a desire for their children to have names that are more “passable” within the dominant culture in order to have access to white privileges, however felt powerless in this decision, as it further strengthened the racial and cultural hierarchy (Wykes, 2017).

**Racialized renaming in education.** The process of racialized renaming can occur within the K-12 education system and may have a significant effect on the self-esteem and development of minority children. A qualitative study was conducted to explore the connection between racial microaggressions and internalized racism experienced by students of color in the K-12 school system specifically as it relates to their names (Kholi & Solórzano, 2012), and several children with South Asian names were represented. A student named Nitin had experienced racialized renaming by his middle school teacher when the instructor was unable to pronounce his name. Instead of spending time to learn about him and the pronunciations within his culture, the teacher crossed his name out in the attendance book and made an announcement to the classroom that he would now be called “Frank.” Students began to call him Frank, and soon enough Nitin was introducing himself as Frank to new peers (Kholi & Solórzano, 2012). Another name-based microaggression example within this article was one that targeted Nirupama, a South Asian girl who was one of the few minority group members within her high school. During roll call, Nirupama’s biology teacher asked her to pronounce her name slowly. Following this, he thanked her, stating that he would not want to call her “Gandhi” by accident (Kholi & Solórzano, 2012). This experience further tokenized the student within her racial identity, as Nirupama is one of the

only racial minorities within her education system, and the civil rights leader Mahatma Gandhi is one of the few prominent Indians acknowledged within American society.

The concept of name-based microaggressions was also studied via a study of one hundred and thirty elementary school teachers (Anderson-Clark, Green, & Henley, 2008). The teachers were given one of four different vignettes describing a fifth-grade student in which the only difference among conditions was the race and name of the student. The teachers were asked to estimate the student's level of motivation within the classroom. The four combinations included a White student with a White sounding name, a White student with an African-American sounding name, an African-American student with an African-American sounding name, and an African-American student with a White sounding name. Results indicated that teachers had increasingly negative expectations for students with African American names in comparison to White sounding names-- teachers gave that hypothetical student lower ratings for achievement regardless of the race of the student.

In another qualitative study regarding perceptions of race based discrimination towards Asian Indians in the United States (Inman et al., 2015) participants spoke about racism at the individual level through the mispronunciation of their names. One participant shared his frustration with people who are willing and able to pronounce other names from European countries such as Poland without difficulties, but are not able to pronounce South Asian names.

**Perceptions of Whiteness as American.** Whiteness has been studied as an invisible norm, in that individuals perceive being American as being White (Cotton, et al., 2014), and the same seems to extend to names. Business students at a university were asked to complete a survey in which they evaluated names that fell into four different categories; common, African-American, Russian, and unusual. Questions on the survey asked whether the name was familiar

to the participant, what racial group the name may belong in, whether the name was a “good” name, and whether it likely referred to a person with a college degree or an income of more than \$10,000 a year. Results indicated that individuals with “common” names tended to be seen as White and American as well as more likely to have a college degree, to make more money, and to be seen as less “different” than the participants.

A field experiment was conducted in which the researchers sent out resumes in response to “help wanted” ads and assessed the number of call-backs and interviews that were received for each resume sent (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004). A White name was assigned to half of the resumes, and an African-American sounding name to the other half. Credentialing was also varied on two levels of job experience, resulting in four conditions. Approximately 5,000 resumes were sent out in total. Results indicated that applicants with White sounding names needed to send out 10 resumes to get a call back, while individuals with African-American sounding names needed to send out approximately 15 resumes, which implies a 50% gap in callbacks. In terms of resume quality, White applicants with more experienced resumes received 30% more callbacks than White applicants with less experienced resumes. However, for African-American resumes, the quality of the resume had less impact on callbacks, highlighting the intersection of name and race within the hiring process, and how differential treatment by race continues to exist. Along the same lines, Derous and Ryan (2012) sent out 600 resumes in response to 150 advertisements for employment using eight templates of resumes with Arabic and Dutch names. Results indicated that Arab identified resumes had significantly higher rejection rates in comparison to Dutch applicants.

Similarly, a large scale audit discrimination study was conducted by Booth, Leigh, & Varganova (2012) to measure labor market discrimination across different minority groups. The

authors submitted CV's for entry level jobs using ethnic names that were of Anglo-Saxon, Indigenous, Italian, Chinese, and Middle Eastern backgrounds. Results indicated significant differences in callback rates and discrimination against Middle Eastern and Chinese names. It was reported that Middle Eastern and Chinese individuals would need to submit 50% more applications in order to receive the same number of callbacks as Anglo candidates (Booth, et al., 2012).

**Name bias in the courtroom.** Racial bias anchored to names has also been detected within the courtroom, where offenders who are also racial minorities seemed to be at a disadvantage during trials and at times receive harsher punishment in comparison to White individuals. Jurors may make inferences about the race, country of origin, and religion of the individuals on trial based on their names, which could be a cue for stereotyping. Clark, et al. (2013) studied jurors' assumptions and stereotypes based on a racially representative name corresponding to White, Black, and Arabic racial backgrounds. Two hundred and forty-nine jury-eligible participants received a crime vignette concerning a physical assault following a verbal fight; the only item that varied was the name of the individual who was assaulted. Results indicated that jury members were less likely to blame the assailant when the victim held an Arabic name.

**Anglo and original names.** Zhao and Biernat (2017) examined White Americans' reactions to racial minorities who had either an Anglo name or who used their original Chinese names. Within this field experiment, the authors tested the way that professors responded to a students' request to meet with them based upon their names. Four-hundred and sixteen White American faculty members were chosen, and e-mails were sent from a simulated undergraduate student who wanted to discuss further graduate training with the professor. Results indicated that

Anglo names had more positive outcomes and responses in comparison to e-mails that used original Chinese names. The authors interpreted their findings as providing evidence that Americans feel more closely connected and similar to Chinese students who adopt Anglo names in comparison to those who use their original names.

Another study was conducted by Zhao and Biernat (2018) exploring the connection between adoption of Anglo names among Chinese students in the United States and self-esteem, along with other psychological outcomes such as acculturative well-being and health. Results indicated that adopting Anglo names was associated with lowered self-esteem, which further predicted lowered health and overall well-being. Chinese students' often made the decision to utilize an Anglo name and assimilate in this way to mainstream culture due to the perceptions that Americans would not be able to pronounce or remember their ethnic names (Zhao & Biernat, 2018).

**Counselor implicit bias towards names.** According to a study by Shin, et al. (2016), counselors may also hold implicit bias that affects their callback responses for potential clients with racially distinct names. Using two racially distinct names, the research identified mental health counselors through an online referral website. Each phone number was randomly assigned to a condition, and pre-recorded voicemails were left for the counselors with a name that was either White or Black identified, along with return contact information. Results indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in the amount of return calls between the two racially distinct names, with the more "White" and "American" sounding name receiving more return calls in comparison to the Black sounding name. Although there is an underutilization of services within many minority groups, this research brings attention to the fact that perpetuated racial attitudes and beliefs on the behalf of counselors may be part of the equation.



Although name-based microaggressions and discriminatory practices have been explored within education and social justice research, psychologists have yet to explore the clinical implications of these experiences, either generally or for South Asians. It is apparent from previous research that names have a significant effect on how one is received within society; hence, it was important within this study to delve further into the potential mental health effects that may result from these experiences for ethnic and racial minorities.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Name-based microaggressions and associated discriminatory practices have been primarily explored within educational research. As such, psychologists have yet to fully address the manifestations of these microaggressions and/or their clinical implications in regards to the South Asian American experience. Experiences of name-based microaggressions represents a promising avenue by which to advance this area of inquiry, in that they are reasonably expected to occur throughout the interpersonal interactions of a wide variety of individuals, including the educational system, the employment process, and even everyday casual conversations with others. This study was designed to contribute to the counseling psychology literature, therefore, by shedding light on the racism-related experiences of a little-studied U.S. ethnic group via a form of social interaction that is likely to be broadly present within participants' experiences. . As counseling psychologists' orientation to practice prioritizes social justice/multicultural knowledge and competence, such a study has relevance within the scholarly literature of that specialty in particular. More specifically, the study addressed the following research questions:

- What characteristic reactions, if any, do South Asian participants receive when they introduce themselves with their racially/ethnically distinct names?
- Do South Asian participants encounter assumptions and stereotypes based on their names?

- If and when name-based microaggressions occur, what are the associated emotional and physical reactions?
- Are coping mechanisms used to avoid or manage negative named-based social interactions?  
If so, what are they?

## Chapter III

### Method

Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) was the method used to analyze the narrative data collected for this study (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997). This chapter will present the specific research sample, the recruitment methods that were used, and the steps that were taken to maintain confidentiality. It will also describe the informed consent process and how data collection was conducted. Following this, the demographic questionnaire, the interview protocol, and the data coding process will be described.

#### Qualitative Research Design

The aim of this study was to explore the name-based microaggressive experiences faced by South Asians within the United States and to gain an understanding of the negative mental health consequences that may result from these social interactions. This study was designed with the aim of adding to the multicultural competence literature within the counseling profession and supporting the creation of culturally-appropriate interventions for the South Asian population. Due to the limited research on the subgroups of Asia and the lack of understanding of their common microaggressive experiences, a qualitative methodology was proposed in order to address this gap with data that derived closely from South Asian participants' own descriptions of their experiences.

The Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) method was developed by Hill, et al. (1997) as a means of making qualitative research more accessible, robust, and standardized for researchers to learn and use. CQR is influenced by other qualitative methods such as *grounded theory*, however it is unique in its emphasis on using multiple researchers, coming to consensus when creating themes within the data, and finding representativeness across all participants (Hill,

et al., 1997). CQR aligns with the qualitative research descriptors created by Henwood and Pidgeon (1992) in that the aim is to describe the experiences of a population rather than giving an explanation for them. Along with this, the authors emphasize the importance of researchers seeing their participants' statements as a way of peering into their reality and understanding the context of their experiences. The authors feel that qualitative research is one that encourages natural themes to emerge based on the direct experiences of the participants, rather than researchers imposing their pre-existing beliefs and biases on the research (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992).

CQR methodology uses a semi-structured interview model in order to set a frame for the conversation between researcher and participant, while still allowing for the participant to speak freely about their experiences (Hill, et al., 1997). It relies on the words of a small number of participants rather than a large sample of quantitative data. The method utilizes a consistent team of researchers throughout the data analysis process (Hill, Knox, & Thompson, 2005). The consensus process is a hallmark of this methodology, and it allows researchers to speak to their differences in opinions when coding the data as well as the rationale behind their choices, resulting in a common understanding by all researchers of the participants' experiences (Hill, et al., 2005). Through this process, inductive themes and conclusions emerge from the data. The research team generally includes three to five individuals, as well as one to two auditors to ensure that all data has been evaluated accurately.

### **Research Sample**

In order to gather data that reflects the experiences of the South Asian population, eligible participants for this study included self-identified South Asian individuals who are eighteen years old or older with origins from India, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives,

Nepal, Pakistan, and/or Sri Lanka. Participants must have had American citizenship or been in the United States for over fifteen years in order to assure their consistent interaction within educational and/or social spaces of America. Participants also had to identify as having a name of ethnic origin in order to speak to the interactions they have had pertaining to their “non-White” name. The primary researcher recruited 14 eligible participants, a number that corresponds with the recommended range for CQR of eight to 15 participants (Hill, et al., 2005).

### **Procedure**

**Recruitment.** The snowballing method was used to recruit participants for this study. When a participant was recruited that met inclusion criteria for the study, the researcher invited the individual to share news of the study with any within their circle who may also be eligible and interested in participating. Public outreach was also used as a means of recruitment through educational messaging boards and within local institutions that are primarily meeting the needs of the South Asian population. These include South Asian associations on school campuses, local South Asian religious organizations, and South Asian community centers. Recruitment materials included flyers and a standardized e-mail (Appendix D) that included a description of the study and the contact information for the primary researcher. Those who were interested in the study were encouraged to contact the primary investigator to gain more information about the study and to schedule an interview time and location.

**Confidentiality and informed consent.** Prior to beginning the interview process, participants fully reviewed the confidentiality and informed consent agreement with the investigator (Appendix A). This included discussing the purpose of the study, the potential risks and benefits that could result from participating in the study, disbursement of the primary investigators contact information should they have any questions or concerns following the

interview, and a thorough review of the audio recording process. Participants were asked to sign the confidentiality and informed consent document, and the investigator also signed to indicate that they had thoroughly discussed the procedure.

**Data collection.** The semi-structured interviews were conducted in person by the primary investigator within a private space on the Teachers College Columbia University. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes. All interviews were conducted by the author as a way to reduce variability in the interview conditions, and to maintain an environment of shared South Asian identity between participants and the interviewer. Once all 14 interviews were conducted, the data was transcribed verbatim in order to begin the data analysis process.

## **Instruments**

**Demographic questionnaire.** Following the informed consent process, participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire that included questions about identities such as age, birth place, race/ethnicity, generation, citizenship status, years living in the United States, profession, education level, social class status, marital status, sexual orientation, and religion. Participants were also asked whether they identified as having a name of ethnic/racial origin in order to assure that they met inclusion criteria.

All interviewees identified as South Asian American, with 13 participants being United States citizens, and one being a permanent resident. All participants identified as cis-gender. With regard to sexual orientation, ten participants identified as heterosexual, one as queer, and one as gay. The average age of participants was 27 years, with ages ranging from 20 to 36. One participant identified as upper class, nine as upper-middle class, two as middle class, and two as lower-middle class. In terms of religious affiliation, four participants identified as Hindu, two as Islam, two as Muslim, two as Atheist, two as Buddhist, one as Zoroastrian, and one as Jain. Six

participants identified as first-generation immigrants, while the remaining eight participants identified as second-generation immigrants. In terms of their education level, eight participants held masters degrees, five held undergraduate degrees, and one held a high school diploma. Four participants identified as married and ten as single. One participant identified as a parent.

**Interview protocol.** Participants participated in a semi-structured interview consisting of ten open ended questions (Appendix C). These items were created on the basis of microaggression literature and were developed to elicit information on the participants' relationship with their name, the degree of connection they felt towards their race/ethnicity, the various social interactions they may have experienced in regards to their name in educational and social environments, the mental health consequences of these experiences, and the coping mechanisms that participants developed as a result of name-based microaggressive experiences. Questions were presented in an open-ended manner so participants could respond freely and emphasize issues that were most relevant to them.

### **Data Analysis**

CQR analysis is a three-part process that begins with developing domains, followed by creating core ideas within those domains, and categorizing the data across interviews. The auditor, who enters the process following major stages of the analysis, helps to assure that biases were not influencing the evaluation of the data and that the conclusions made were representative of the data.

**Domain development.** Following the transcription of the interviews, the research team came together to begin creating an initial domain list, otherwise known as a *start list*. These domains were proposed based on the interview protocol and review of relevant literature. They were used to label groups of relevant data under a similar topic (Hill, et al., 1997). The research

team took the first two interviews and independently domained blocks of data with the initial start list of domains. Once all researchers completed the process, they came to consensus on which domains fit accurately, which needed to be edited, and which needed to be eliminated completely. The two domained interviews were then sent to the auditor for feedback. The researchers incorporated the auditor's feedback to domain the remaining interviews with the edited domain list. Two were put aside for the stability check.

**Core ideas.** A core idea is defined as a summary of the content within a domain for each "case", or interview participant (Hill, et al., 1997). Once again, each research team member independently read all of the data under a given domain, and briefly summarized it with a core idea. The goal was to capture the essence of what the participant was saying within a given domain in a clear, concise manner (Hill, et al., 1997). It was essential for team members to be cognizant of their biases during this step, as researchers strive to make as few assumptions as possible when interpreting the data. Once team members developed their core ideas independently, they came together to discuss all ideas to consensus and developed one core idea for each domain per participant. Two interviews were cored and the information was sent to the auditor to assure accuracy of the data analysis. After edits were completed, the team proceeded to core the remaining ten interviews while still keeping the final two aside for the stability check.

**Cross-analysis.** During the cross-analysis phase, the research team looked within each domain across the twelve cases, while the remaining two cases were withheld for the stability check. The team investigated whether there were similarities in the core ideas within each domain and generated various categories that described the similarities of the core ideas. Once completed, the auditor checked over the work to determine that the categories created were reflective of the core ideas.



**Stability check.** Following the full data analysis of twelve participant interviews, the remaining two interviews were analyzed as a means to assure that the domains, core ideas, and categories created thus far were also applicable to the remaining cases. This is an important legitimizing step within the research process. Researchers domained, cored, and categorized the two interviews and determined whether they could be integrated into the existing structure. Given the good fit of the category structure to these cases, the team concluded that the stability of the findings was adequate.

**Frequency labels.** Each data category was given a frequency label in keeping with CQR practice. If a category was reflected in the experience of all participants or all but one, then it is labeled a *general* category. If at least half of the participants endorsed a category, it is labeled as *typical*. When less than half of the participants endorse a category, then it is labeled as *variant*. If only one to two participants endorse a category, it is labeled as *rare* and is not reported in the data as it is not considered to be representative of the sample.

**Research team.** The analysis team for this study was comprised of three members. This includes the primary investigator who identifies as a second-generation South Asian, Indian American, cis-gender, partnered, straight female who is currently a Counseling Psychology Ph.D. student of middle class background. The primary investigator recruited two additional researchers for the team who were interested in the specific topic of name-based microaggressive experiences within the South Asian population, who represent diverse backgrounds, and who approached the consensual research dynamic with respect and commitment. One co-researcher identified as a South Asian, Indian citizen, cis-gender, bisexual, upper class female, and the other identified as a White-Latina, American citizen, cis-gender, heterosexual, upper class female.

**Ethical considerations and ensuring trustworthiness.** Due to the vulnerability of the South Asian population as a racial and ethnic minority within the United States and a target of racism and hate crimes, it was important for this research to come from a multicultural and feminist perspective. This required all participating researchers to be trained in multicultural counseling techniques, to have cultural awareness of the experiences of this population, and to be able to self-reflective about their personal biases as a researcher (Fassinger & Morrow, 2013). The primary investigator made it a priority to conduct socially just and multiculturally competent research by accurately reflecting the experiences of the sample of participants in a way that reflects the systematic injustices that marginalize this minority group (Fassinger & Morrow, 2013; Morrow, 2005).

## Chapter IV

### Results

This chapter presents the results of the Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) analysis. The chapter is organized using the structure recommended by Hill and colleagues (2012) according to domains and categories. Each category is assigned a frequency label that represents how common the experience was across the 14 research participants. Categories that represented the experiences of 13 to 14 of the participants were labeled as *general*, categories that applied to eight to 12 participants were labeled as *typical*, and categories that applied to two to seven participants were labeled as *variant*. Categories that applied to only one participant are considered rare and are not reported in the analysis as they are considered to be unrepresentative of the data.

#### Composite Case Narrative

Hill (2012) suggested that the results report for a CQR study should begin with a prototypical case narrative, which is a composite narrative created to represent the most commonly shared experiences across the study sample. In keeping with this recommendation, the typical participant in this study is a young professional under the age of 35 who self-identifies as South Asian. When she was young, her parents made the decision to pick up their lives in South Asia and immigrate to United States in hopes of achieving the American dream. Her parents successfully settled in the U.S. and they have been living here for at least the past fifteen years. The participant received the majority of her education in America and has had a high degree of exposure to American culture through peers, interpersonal experiences, and the media. The ways in which she endorses or rejects her South Asian identity is often based on the specific environment that she is in. She feels connected to both her American and South Asian identities,

however she finds it difficult to navigate between the two cultures because she does not feel that she fits perfectly within either one. A particular challenge has involved the use of her first and last name, which are ethnic in origin, in social spaces. She is aware that the ethnic and racial connotations of her name influence the way that others treat her. She has experienced negative interactions and stereotyping in association with the use of her name, primarily with White individuals. Some individuals have refused to learn her name, leaving her to feel that her name is a nuisance or an inconvenience to Americans due to unfamiliarity or differences in pronunciation. Although these experiences have caused her distress, she has learned to cope by showing empathy for others in their difficulties with South Asian names, mitigating the discomfort by altering her own name, and regarding such experiences as normative for immigrants.

Table 1.  
Domains, Sub-Domains, Categories, and Frequencies\*

<i>Domains</i>	<i>Categories</i>	<i>Label</i>
1. Immigration to America	My parents wanted to achieve the American Dream	Typical
	My family relocated to the United States based on my father's intentions	Typical
	My parents are entrepreneurs in the United States	Variant
2. Family Values and Cultural Traditions	My family maintains South Asian Culture through language, religion, diet, media, community, dress, and/or values	General
	My family engages in American beliefs and traditions	Typical
	There are differences in maintenance of cultural traditions between generations of my family	Variant
	My parents are open minded about how to lead our lives	Variant
3. Identity Related Environmental Influences and Experiences	My interactions/connections with the South Asian Community influenced my feelings of belongingness to the culture	General
	Developing a comfortable sense of my South Asian identity has been difficult because of my cultural and interpersonal environment	Typical
	My interactions/connections with the White community influenced my feelings of belongingness in the American culture	Typical
	Being in America has influenced my family to adopt American culture	Variant
4. Personal Experiences of Cultural Identity	I feel connected to both my South Asian and American identities	General
	My ties to their South Asian and American culture differ from my family	Variant

Table 1 (cont.)  
Domains, Sub-Domains, Categories, and Frequencies\*

<i>Domains</i>	<i>Categories</i>	<i>Label</i>
4. Personal Experiences of Cultural Identity (cont.)	My relationship to my religion is something that I have reflected on	Variant
5. Personal Significance Of Name	I have positive feelings about my name	Typical
	My name represents who I am and where I come from	Typical
	I have had negative feelings about my name	Typical
	I have reflected on the impact of carrying my name into my future family life	Variant
	I am more than my South Asian name	Variant
6. Interpersonal Experiences With Names	People of authority struggle with my name	General
	People have taken interest in learning or helping others learn my name	Typical
	I am not bothered by others' mispronunciations of my name	Typical
	Others have assumed I am Hispanic or from another culture when seeing my name	Variant
	Others may learn the correct pronunciation of my name when there is an expectation that we will have a long-term relationship	Variant
6.6 Negative Interpersonal Experiences with Names	People have difficulty pronouncing/spelling my name	General
	Difficulties around my name have caused me distress	General
	I have had negative interactions with authority figures with my name	Typical
	I experienced teasing based on my name	Variant

Table 1 (cont.)  
Domains, Sub-Domains, Categories, and Frequencies\*

<i>Domains</i>	<i>Categories</i>	<i>Label</i>
7. Nicknames and Altered Names		
	I have used a different name or have altered my name	Typical
	I feel frustrated when others assign me a nickname	Variant
	I appreciate having a nickname	Variant
8. Coping with Name-Based Microaggressions		
	I practice understanding and empathy for others and normalize the process	Typical
	I have strategies for avoiding disappointment	Typical
	I utilize humor	Variant
	My parents gave me a pronounceable name/I will give my children/others more pronounceable names for the ease of White Americans	Variant
	I spell out/emphasize certain syllables of my name	Variant
	I offer others a name-association phrase	Variant
	I correct mispronunciations of my name	Variant
	I use a rehearsed explanation to introduce myself	Variant
9. Reactions to Study		
	I know of many experiences that relate to the purpose of the study	Typical
	I have had a positive reaction to the participation in the study	Variant
	I have never been asked about my experiences in relation to my name	Variant

*Note.* General = applicable to 12-14 cases; Typical = applicable to 8-11 cases; Variant = applicable to 2-7 cases.

## Domains

**Domain 1: Immigration to America.** The first domain of the study captured participants' journeys to America and their family's overall goals in moving to the United States. These responses fell into two typical categories and one variant category. With regard to the former, it was typical for participants to report that their *parents wanted to achieve the American dream*. The idea of the "American Dream" was described primarily as educational and financial opportunities that felt more lucrative than within their home countries. As one participant explained, "I guess the biggest American belief that we do believe is the American dream side of it." Another participant stated, "You know, it was the immigrant story of, parents want something more for themselves and for their kids. I know they were working really hard to come to the States in whatever way they could."

It was also typical for the *family to relocate based on the father's intentions*, such as for a job change or higher education. A participant reported, "I think that's what my dad came here for. Growing up always seeing big images of being able to make it in the U.S., and that's been his path here." In many cases, the father's job or educational opportunity first led the father to leave the home country, and the rest of the family would follow.

The variant category reflected *participants' parents becoming entrepreneurs in the United States*, as some families began business ventures once coming to America. As one participant stated:

Work-wise, they went through working at the mall and doing gas stations, to now my dad owns his own business and my mom manages a clinic. It was quite a transition that I've seen over the last 20 or so years.



**Domain 2: Family Values and Cultural Traditions.** This domain captured the ways that participants maintained and engaged with their bicultural identities within their families. It emphasized the ways and levels to which their families participated in South Asian and American traditions. Of the four categories that were created, one was general, one was typical, and two were variant. First, it was a general theme that the participant's families *maintained South Asian culture through language, religion, diet, media, community, clothing, and values* to some extent. A participant said:

Yep so we grew up in a very, I think the best answer is culturally centric household. So, a lot of our extracurricular activities, at least for me, were focused on...I learned classical Indian dance, I learned classical Indian music, a lot of my friends from those activities were kind of my core group of people. I did a lot with our own version of Sunday school that focused on Hindu basics and understanding what good values are and the vast majority of my parent's social circle on weekend family activities were all Indian. So, I think in that sense it was a very conservative effort to surround ourselves with the culture.

It was typical for participants and their families to *engage in American beliefs and traditions*. American beliefs included holding a westernized mentality that emphasized patriotism and freedom, watching American media, and the celebration of American holidays such as the fourth of July and Christmas, although the latter was identified as a Christian holiday. As a participant noted:

I mean we tend to celebrate all of the holidays that people celebrate here. Like Independence Day, Valentine's Day. You know, even if it's in a minor way. Mother's Day, Father's Day. And a lot of these have been adopted in Sri Lanka now, but I don't think they were there like 20 years ago. Halloween, Christmas even though that's more of

a religious thing. I mean it's become kind of a cultural thing in the US. We've had a Christmas tree that we've always put up. We were totally into it. Our parents didn't really try to keep us away from those things. We always really embraced them, and I guess they weren't really concerned about the meshing of the cultures.

Variant categories included *acknowledging that there are differences in the maintenance of cultural traditions between generations of the families*, as many participants were less stringent about maintaining South Asian rituals in comparison to their parents. Some chose to engage in traditions to please their parental figures. As one participant noted:

Kind of, as I got older, especially after I moved, I've changed a lot. After I was 18, I went to college in [a US State], and I came home and we started going to temple every time before I went back to school...I would just do it because it made my mom happy.

A variant number of participants also reported that *their parents are open minded about how to lead their lives*. This included encouragement from parents around pursuing passions within their careers and to formulate their own beliefs. One participant described their father's encouragement this way: "Do what's most passionate for you and go after it and don't worry about the money because if you're really good and passionate about it, the money and backing will come from it."

**Domain 3: Identity Related Environmental Influences and Experiences.** In this domain, the participants described the impact of their environment on the development of their cultural identities. The participants reported on experiences within their South Asian and American communities and described how these shaped their connection or disconnection to their culture. Their responses fell into one general category, two typical categories, and one variant category. With regard to the general category, all participants expressed that *their*

*interactions and connections with the South Asian community influenced their level of belongingness to the culture.* Some reported primarily interacting with South Asians, whereas others only had very few other South Asians within their school systems and other environments. Some participants expressed feeling like their experiences were normalized as they interacted with people of similar backgrounds. One participant noted, “And then when I went off to university, I met other Muslims that had weird names like I do... So, it was nice that I found a community of people who had weird names like me.” Other participants felt discomfort interacting with people of similar South Asian background, finding that they did not feel “South Asian enough” within those communities, which led to a decreased sense of belonging. As one participant stated, “I felt like they weren't accepting me until I passed this test, you know? And it turned out that I was more Indian or more South Asian than they were in certain respects.” Another participant reported, “It's interesting that my experience is that I've had a harder time fitting in with groups of Indian people, never being welcomed or being accepted.”

A typical response referred to the *difficulties in developing a comfortable sense of their South Asian identity because of cultural and interpersonal environments.* Participants described factors such as a lack of diversity within their educational systems, the assumptions that others made about them because of their cultural backgrounds, the pressures they felt to quickly assimilate, and the discomfort of being culturally misidentified by individuals around them. One participant stated:

The school was very dogmatic in their way of going ... We've had assemblies where the principal would stand up and tell the whole school body that you need to work hard or the immigrants are going to come and take your jobs. This was preached to everyone, and I would have people ask me after that assembly, "So what did you feel?" I was like, "I

don't know. I don't feel welcome here because we've just had an assembly with the head person telling us that immigrants are going to come and take our jobs and that you need to work hard because of that in school." I didn't really feel like I had much ground there.

Another participant noted:

So, in middle school, I acted as though I was not Indian. Which sucks, but I did it. In middle school, I was like, I'm not Indian. I used to straighten my hair every day, wear those expensive Abercrombie outfits. I was not Indian.

Another typical response under this domain conveyed that *participants' interactions and connections with the White community influenced their feelings of belongingness in American culture*. A participant stated, "I went to school in [a U.S. State], there was a lot of White people...I'm brown skinned with black hair, it was just a realizing moment, where you cannot cover up so much."

Another participant stated:

Yeah, exactly. My only interaction with Americans and when I say Americans, I mean specifically White Americans, has been sort of almost like they've been glorified because they almost seemed like ... it sounds bad, but they almost seem like a superior race, as a kid, for me.

A variant response corresponded to participants feeling that *being in America has influenced their family to adopt American culture*. This includes developing American characteristics, being open to interacting with and dating with Americans, and celebrating American holidays, although many participants referred to these as Christian holidays as well. As a participant stated, "being in Texas is also just like, even if you're not American, you're expected to kind of follow Christian traditions, and stuff like that."

**Domain 4: Personal Experiences of Cultural Identity.** When participants were asked to describe their cultural identity as a South Asian living in America, one general and two variant categories emerged. All participants stated that *they feel connected to both their South Asian and American identities*. One participant stated, “As a person, I carry both of those worlds with me. I've seen enough of the U.S. and enough of India to where I found that I didn't fall into either one quite neatly.” Another participant noted:

Yeah. I guess there's definitely an element of merging the two, because I feel like a lot of people run into this, where they ... I mean, I've never been to Pakistan or India, but I know that if I went there, I would definitely feel out of place. In the same way, growing up, I may have felt out of place in American circles, just because when you're a hyphenated identity, you're not fully part of either, but you're kind of a mix of both.

A third participant stated:

Obviously, I'm going to be this mix wherever you go, and I don't know if you have this experience but for me it's always like I'm not ever going to be Indian enough. I'm not ever going to be a White American.

The first variant response among participants was that *their ties to their South Asian and American culture differ from that of their family*. A participant stated, “I think they still feel like, ‘Hey, we're Pakistanis living in America’ whereas I feel like I'm an American who has Pakistani heritage or like Pakistani background.” The second variant category included participants speaking to *their relationship to their religion as something they have reflected on*. One participant noted:

I feel like when I moved to college I became less religious, but ... It's kind of a process, I think, when kids move away, because it's like figuring out what parts of religion are still salient and... which parts you still want to keep up with because they're cultural.

**Domain 5: Personal Significance of Name.** Within this domain, participants reflected on their sense of connection and/or disconnection to their name, the meaning they give to having a South Asian identifying name, and the emotions that come up for them when reflecting on experiences they have had with their names in America. This domain included three typical and two variant categories. It was typical for participants to *have positive feeling about their names*. As one participant explained:

I haven't met other [participant's last name]'s. That's a very unique last name as well, so there's a uniqueness to that, and there's a lot of pride to that last name as well and the history to it. I resonate with that. I hope to carry it with me.

Another typical participant response was for them to feel that *their name represents who they are and where they come from* due to the family connection, the commonality of their name in their home country, and the representation that it holds within their lives. A participant described his experience of sitting down with his family and discussing the importance of their last name as a unifying identity. He remembers his uncle emphasizing, "This is what our family looks like. This is what our last name looks like."

At the same time, it was also typical for participants to *have negative feelings about their names*. A participant noted:

I'm kind of mixed in terms of how I value my name. I like the intent behind it and I like the uniqueness behind it, but there's also that downside in my mind of spending that extra two minutes trying to get the patient or the person to say it the correct way.

Another participant stated, “And even aside from the pronunciation, I think the meaning is stupid...And I'm like, why does my name mean smelling good versus being something powerful. Why doesn't it mean something?”

A variant category captured how participants have *reflected on the impact of carrying their name into their future family life*. As one participant reflected on giving her son a South Asian name, she stated, “I don't know what he'll be like when he's older. I want him to remember, even if it's painful, where he's coming from.” In an additional variant category, participants reported that *they are more than a South Asian name*, meaning they are more than the stereotypes behind their name including the cultural traditions and professions that are assumed to be obtained by individuals with South Asian names. A participant said, “It gets to the point where I'm more than just my name, and I would like to be seen as that.” Another participant stated, “I do not want to be seen as another Indian doctor” emphasizing the discomfort that comes with the stereotypes surrounding their South Asian name.

***Subdomain 6.6: Negative Interpersonal Experiences with Names.*** This subdomain was created to capture participants' negative interactions with others regarding their South Asian names, along with the many difficulties and obstacles they have encountered with others regarding their names. This subdomain helps to differentiate negative interpersonal experiences and understand the emotionality more thoroughly in contrast to other more general interpersonal experiences with names. The subdomain resulted in two general categories along with one typical and one variant category. Every participant within the study reported that *a.) others have difficulty pronouncing and spelling their name*. A participant stated:

I mean, a lot of people can relate to this, but growing up, everyone would pronounce my name wrong. People still do. And I would always be mad at my parents, like why couldn't

you name me something I wasn't made fun of for, you know? My own family would pronounce it incorrectly.

Another participant said:

When I was in England everybody could say it fine. Then when I came to America, the very first questions was, "Oh my God, do you have a nickname?" I noticed that Americans tend to hyperventilate if they see a name that is other than five letters.

Another general category reflected participants' unanimous report that *difficulties around their name has caused them distress*. One participant stated, "Yeah. I talked to a lot of people about my name, actually. It's definitely been a point of turmoil in my life." Another said:

When you send an email and it starts with like, hi, my name is so and so, there will be people who will not want to read through the rest of your email because it's just like an ugly name...another person in that box, another Indian or whatever. And I mean that was a little disappointing to hear. I would rather be informed of it than not know that that's happening so I was glad that you told me that, but at the same time it's disappointing, 'cause there's really nothing I can do about it.

Typically, participants had *negative interactions with authority figures regarding their name*, primarily with teachers during their educational development. A participant said:

Both first and last name, as you can imagine are uncommon here, so it was always like I didn't like the beginning of the day where they do roll call. That would always get me anxious, and whatever.

Another participant stated:

There's this one professor who is notorious for memorizing everybody's names before you get to school. So he'll make a whole production of knowing your name, knowing



your kids, your school, everything about you. And he'll work it into a conversation...He'll go out of his way to do this but then he called me [the wrong name], and I was like, "Like the one time, you could get it right. You get everybody else's name and you don't get mine." And people were actually surprised I actually corrected him when he got it wrong.

A participant also added:

Teachers, I mean, yeah, teachers don't even try. They like, look at it, and they make a face (in front of) the whole class, and it was your name that they're stuck on, or they start laughing, and be like, oh, I'm going to mess this one up.

There was one variant category in this domain which centered around d.) *experiencing teasing based on their name*. A participant reported:

I know it's a family name, but it's always been butchered as a kid. Whether it was at graduation or some kind of award ceremony, or anywhere. I mean the crowd always got a laugh, because they knew (my name was) coming up and they were going to misspell my name or mispronounce it. But, yeah, I never really liked my last name, just because it's so hard to say for everyone.

Another participant said:

I didn't really like (my) name that much just because it was so bizarre sounding to everyone else, so everyone would just be like, "Wait, how do you pronounce that?" You know what I mean? And they would like make fun of it, that kind of stuff. Was not ever really a fan of my name that much.

**Domain 6: Interpersonal Experiences with Names.** Throughout the interviews, participants discussed common social and interpersonal experiences that they have had with others regarding their names as well as their emotional reactions to these incidents. This includes

people within peer groups as well as people of authority in their lives. One general, two typical, and two variant categories emerged from this domain. It was a general experience for participants to experience *people of authority struggling with their name*. One participant commented:

I was the new kid in that classroom and she essentially just phonetically spelled out my name and put it on the board, for her sake, so she could remember how to say it...And that really stuck out to me as, okay, this is apparently the way that everyone's going to call me, and this is what I have to remember as I move forward, because this is how people acknowledge my name.

Another participant stated:

Definitely stakeholders, so people that are I guess way above me in the hierarchy, will care less to learn my name, especially because, I think, I'm new. Like, I've just now started. And I don't work at their company, either. Like, they're my client, so there isn't a reason for them ... I guess there's no incentive for them or reason for them to care about me as a person. It's just like, they want me to do my job. Then whenever I'm on the phone with them, they're always messing up my name, you know?

Typically, participants reported that *people have taken interest in learning or helping others learn their name*, and many mentioned how appreciative they are when others make an increased effort to pronounce and learn their name correctly. A participant stated:

But I think that there's a lot of joy that I get when somebody remembers my name or like, puts in that effort...some people like, really try and I think that's really sweet and really nice. And that has happened like a few times and I think that that's really lovely.

Another participant said:

It makes me feel like they care, in a way, just because they want to get it right. It shows some sort of ability or initiative to get it right, and start off on the right foot, rather than just assume it's pronounced the way they're pronouncing it and not care.

Another typical response was for participants to report that they were *not bothered by others' mispronunciations of their name*. They reflected on how they do not let the experience “get to them” or try not to “fault others.” One participant noted:

I think that built a huge sense of empathy for people who were trying to understand and read my name out loud. Like, no one's going to try to forcefully butcher your name, it's just that they don't know how to pronounce it.

Another participant said, “I know people have a difficult time with my name in general. And I know people want to try.”

A variant category under this domain described participants experience that *others assume they are Hispanic or from another culture when seeing their name*. One participant said, “I guess there's one example, for some reason I had a chorus teacher that kept wanting to call me Estefan, which I didn't understand.” In the last variant category, participants noted specifically that *others may learn the correct pronunciation of their name when there is an expectation that they will have a long-term relationship*. As one participant reported:

But I think those that had to only deal ... not "deal with," but pronounce my name for a short amount of time, would have less care than those that knew they would be investing in me as a person over a course of a longer period, you know?

**Domain 7: Nicknames and Altered Names.** This domain corresponds to the experience of participants adapting their names in order to make them more convenient for Americans, as

well as the process of having their names altered by others through the assignment of a nickname. One typical and two variant categories emerged from this domain. Participants had typically *used a different name or altered their name in some way*. Several participants reported using an American name or an Americanized version of their name within social contexts. A participant explained, “Because I knew kind of, from day one, I realized that people can't say my name right in school. Now I pretty much have an Americanized name ... an Americanized pronunciation I go by.” Another participant stated:

Like, in a selfish way I'm just like, do they really need to know my name? You know, I'm just going to say [another name] because it's quicker. They're not going to ask me how to spell it, and maybe I have somewhere to be.

Another participant reported:

I've kind of shortened it to [another name] in the scenarios that I've been presented with lately, in the sense that I've been meeting a lot of people as I interview for various positions and things of that sort, and it's kind of hard to get somebody to kind of fully grasp the name and then use it. I think in this day and age, when our time with people is so short, spending 45 seconds to a minute getting the name right is kind of a lot more than I bargained for in the context of my name, so I kind of just go by [another name] from now on.

A variant response was *feeling frustrated when others assign them a nickname*. A participant stated:

So, when I first came in sixth grade ... So, it was a predominantly White school, and there were a lot of Kathys, Johnnys, Brians, Jeffs, and then here I come with this incredibly, it has eight letters and there's a Z at the end. And I remember it was just very, very

challenging for people to say it, and they would always ask do you have a nickname? And, even before me giving an answer they were like, oh, we're just going to call you [another name]. It's like no, I didn't give you permission to do that, you just thought that it would be okay because you didn't want to bother to learn how to say my name.

In contrast, another variant category was *feeling appreciative of having a nickname*. A participant noted:

In high school, all of the young teachers gave me nicknames... Which is fine. Like it wasn't, it was part of the experience, I was like oh, okay. But I wasn't upset about it. It didn't feel isolating, and in a lot of ways it kind of felt freeing because it took away a barrier.

**Domain 8: Coping with Name-Based Microaggressions.** Interviewees discussed the various ways that they manage situations in which they are facing name-based microaggressions. Two typical and six variant categories were formulated from this domain. A typical response for participants was to *practice understanding and empathy for others to normalize the process of learning a South Asian name*. These participants reported attempting to keep in mind that others are not purposefully mispronouncing their name and trying to put others at ease when they were having difficulties with the pronunciation. A participant said, "I think letting people call me [another name] was like kind of like one of those, let me make this as easy as possible for people to like know me." Another participant reported:

If somebody from, you know, some random weird place, what I consider weird, you know, depths of the Amazon jungle, they came, and they told their name, I would probably have difficulty pronouncing their name, right? So, it's understandable that people can't pronounce [my name] or whatever confusing Indian names there are.

Another typical response was for participants to *have strategies for avoiding disappointment*. This included anticipating that others would mispronounce their names and cutting people off if they seemed stuck in the midst of an attempt to say their names. One participant stated:

When I first introduce myself to somebody, I usually say [my first name] and then if I recognize they're having trouble processing that, I just, like, for their benefit, I don't know, or my benefit, I don't know. But I'll automatically go, it's okay, it looks hard on paper, just call me [another name]. And they get that sense of relief...

A variant category that emerged corresponded to the *utilization of humor* as a coping mechanism for uncomfortable interactions around their name. As one participant explained:

That's always interesting, because [the teachers] are up there, and they're naming off all these names, and then when it comes to my name, they stumble, or they look around confused, or they start laughing. The way I cope with that is, I laugh harder. So that's my way of saying, like, a bullet proof kind of, because I'm just like, hah, you can't read, stuff like that, which sometimes I feel like I'm being disrespectful, but it's just my way of being like, ha ha, everybody, she can't say [my name], or that's my way of doing it.

A second variant category reflected the fact that *their parents had given them a pronounceable name, and/or they desire to give their own children more pronounceable name for the ease of White Americans*. One participant voiced an intention to give future children pronounceable names, as well as feeling resistance to pass on a last name due to the difficulties experienced during youth. Others stated that their parents had purposefully made decisions to shorten their name or give them names that were easy to say in preparation for Americans' difficulty with their names. A participant reported, "So if I would have kids in the future, I wouldn't want to

give them that last name, because I just wouldn't ... I don't know how they would deal with it. People deal with things in different ways.” Another said, “And when... actually when my brother was born, I kind of took charge and I was like, I'm going to name him, using all the problems I had with my own name.” An additional participant noted:

So, my real last name is [family name] so socially if we're around at dinner parties and stuff, I'm known as [name] but my Dad when we were growing up actually chopped it in half, so my middle name became [name] and my last name became [family name].

Because he was like this is just ludicrous, you can't, in America, on a standardized test, copy your whole name. It's just not gonna work.

A third variant category captured the way that participants *spell out and emphasize certain syllables of their name* to help others hear it better. A participant noted, “I also take the time to say, to make sure when I say my name, I say it slow enough so that they actually hear me pronounce it.” A fourth variant category was the *offering of a name-association phrase or mnemonic device*. This can be defined as a phrase that one utilizes when helping others learn their name, which may include American words that have the same phonetic sound of their non-American name. Due to confidentiality purposes, direct quotations of name-association phrases could not be included in this text, however, by way of example, the primary investigator also utilizes a name-association phrase to clarify the pronunciation of her name. The phrase involves stating, “Ranjana, like you are going for a run. *RUN*-jana.” Another example could be for the common South Asian name, Yash. An example of a phrase that one could utilize would be, “My name is Yash, like the word Gosh, but with a Y. Gosh Yash!” Within a fifth variant category participants reported that they do *correct mispronunciations of their name*. A participant explained:

I think I'm really proactive in fixing it from the onset. So, not letting it fester and not letting people develop a bad behavior. I think that's the best coping, if that's what you want to call it, that I've kind of put into place.

The final variant category included participants *using a rehearsed explanation to introduce themselves*. This included giving cultural context about their name as well as the meaning of their name in order to inform or entertain others. A participant stated:

Whenever I introduce myself, I just say it's [name]... people are very very very intrigued in a positive way. People are usually like, "Oh, wow. That's an interesting story." When I tell the story to people, I try to make it like...I sort of try to make it like this quirky thing that happened that is a part of my life. People are usually entertained, or amused, or they're interested.

Another participant said:

Oh, every time, whenever I'd go into the interview, there was that "Oh, am I pronouncing it right? "and then sometimes they'd ask me "Where's that from? Where are you from?" I would say, "Oh, it's [name], and I'm from Pakistan, but I grew up in America, I came here when I was five," and all that. I'd give them the whole spiel.

**Domain 9: Reactions to Study.** Participants' responses that pertained specifically to the process of being an interviewee in the study emerged within one typical and two variant categories. Typically, participants stated that *they know of many experiences that related to the purpose of the current study*. Some mentioned wanting to refer others within their family to participate and described the nature of the study as very personal to them. A participant said, "So for me, I felt very connected with the purpose or the kind of key concept of the study."



The first variant category included participants who *had a positive reaction to participating in the study*. A participant said, “All my life, I've had trouble with my name and so that's why I was sort of like, you know, I was like, someone's actually studying this.” The last variant category emphasized the fact that participants *had never been asked about experiences in relation to their name*. The study provided them the opportunity to reflect on this aspect of their identity on a deeper level. A participant noted:

I think what piqued my interest most was that no one had ever even asked me to think about my name. Like, I wasn't ever asked to think about my name, especially in the context that I live in today. I found that pretty intriguing. I think it would require me to think in a way that I've never had to before, and about things that I've never had to before. It's always good to reflect on where you come from, and I thought this would put me in an environment where I had to do that.

### **The Subjective Experience of the Principal Investigator**

Hill and colleagues (2005) suggested that principal investigators of qualitative studies such as this one should reflect on their subjective experiences of the project and the impact of the process upon them. Along these lines, I am a South Asian woman with a first and last name of ethnic origin. I have undergone many experiences through the educational system as well as within various work settings that made me feel “othered” because of my name. When designing this study, I reflected on the distress that I experienced as a child and an adult when having to introduce myself in different settings, and the frustration I felt in having a name that was perceived as different by the majority of those around me. I believe this has been further heightened due to my multiple minority statuses of being a brown woman specifically within the time period around the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Being misidentified and labeled based on a

combination of my skin tone and my non-American name has shaped my identity development in many ways. My motivation for completing this study was to amplify the voices of South Asian individuals in telling their own stories of microaggressive encounters not only in relation to their names, but as minority group members living within the United States.

Through this process, I learned a great deal about the various perspectives other South Asians hold. Although many have shared experiences that were similar to mine, others have navigated through their communities in completely different ways. I found myself experiencing a range of emotions from devastation and shock to pure joy when reading through the interviews and finding places of connection with each of my participants. The study is something I have been thinking about since the first week of my doctoral studies, and to see it come to life was a beautiful process to experience. I feel fortunate to have had this opportunity to sit with these individuals who found the study helpful and important for them in their lives. They inspire me to continue this work of advocating for the mental health needs of South Asian Americans.

## **Chapter V**

### **Discussion**

The present study aimed to introduce psychological dialogue and study regarding name-based microaggressions and to expand the multicultural literature addressing the experiences of South Asian Americans. First and last names are prominent identifiers that can often tell the story of one's ethnicity, cultural background, and familial lineage (Kholi & Solórzano, 2012; Palsson, 2014). Individuals with racially and ethnically distinct names can experience both pride and discomfort in association with the use of their names (Kholi & Solórzano, 2012; Palsson, 2014). Examples of name-based microaggressions include being assigned an unwanted nickname, having assumptions and biases made about an individual based on their name, and being teased due to the cultural aspects of a name. Educational researchers have started the conversation around the concept of name-based microaggressions; however more exploration was needed to identify appropriate interventions to be utilized by clinicians and educators. Relatedly, few studies within the field of psychology have focused on the mental health needs of the South Asian American population despite their increasing presence within the United States (Daga & Raval, 2018; Nadimpalli, et al., 2016; Pyke & Dang, 2003). The present study brought these lines of inquiry together by attending to the phenomenon of name-based microaggressions via the following research questions:

- What characteristic reactions, if any, do South Asian American participants receive when they introduce themselves with their racially/ethnically distinct names?
- Do South Asian participants encounter assumptions and stereotypes based on their names?
- If and when name-based microaggressions occur, what are the associated emotional and physical reactions?

- Are coping mechanisms used to avoid or manage negative name-based social interactions?  
If so, what are they?

The opening sections of the following chapter are organized according to key themes within the data. These begin with the overarching emphasis on cultural identity and how the acculturation process impacted participants' level of personal connection to their names of ethnic origin. It will then discuss the typical reactions that South Asian participants faced when interacting with their ethnic sounding names. The chapter will explore assumptions and/or stereotypes that participants encountered based on their names, bringing attention to the emotional reactions that individuals experienced during these social interactions. Next, the chapter will consider the specific coping mechanisms that participants used to manage these experiences. These themes will be synthesized and summarized as responses to the research questions posed above. Throughout, implications of these findings in regard to psychological theory, policy, and clinical practices within the fields of psychology and education will be addressed. Lastly, the chapter will explore the limitations of the study and present future directions for research. Under each heading, attention will be given to how the results of the study confirm, contradict, or contribute to filling gaps in the current multicultural psychology literature regarding name-based microaggressive experiences within the South Asian American population.

### **Connection to Cultural Identity**

An important cross-cutting theme that emerged across analyzed categories concerned the relationships of participants to their own cultural identities. Each participant within the study endorsed a level of connection to both their South Asian and American cultural identities. South Asian culture was reported to be maintained through language, religion, diet, media, values, and

cultural traditions. Although participants seemed at times to have greater difficulty describing their American traits, they frequently reported being more attached to American culture than to South Asian culture. By contrast, for many White Americans, culture and ethnicity are not salient parts of their identity, as they have the freedom to choose what role it will have in their lives given the widespread commonality of their identity within their communities (Carter, 2007; Waters, 1990). On the other hand, when individuals' cultural and ethnic group membership is characterized by racial difference, it appears to be a more prominent part of self-identification in comparison to White Americans (Carter, 2007; Waters, 1990). The participants in this study were able to clearly define their South Asian culture due to the stark differences between South Asian cultural practices and the dominant American culture. In contrast, it was difficult for participants to describe the ways in which they engaged in American culture, as it was perceived more as a belief system around individualism, rather than a cultural practice. Despite their strong connections to their American identity, participants often did not feel comfortable identifying exclusively as American, as their brown skin differentiated them from the common White American individual. This speaks to the operation of race as a prominent part of self-identification for racial minorities, and to the false conceptualization that to be American is to be White (Cotton, et al., 2014),

This study's results suggested that the interactions that participants had with both brown and White people in their communities served as precipitating factors in influencing feelings of belongingness to their South Asian and/or American identities. This finding is supported by current research on acculturative stress within the Asian American population (Deshpande & Kaur, 2016; Slaten, Elison, Lee, Yough, & Scalise, 2016; Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013). Research has indicated that South Asian participants interact differently depending on the ethnic identity

of their social context (Tummala-Narra, et al., 2016). In a qualitative study conducted by Tummala-Narra and colleagues, results indicated that South Asian participants experienced a dual sense of self, as they behaved differently at home than at school amongst their White peers (2016). Some participants reported the need to “hide” the American parts of themselves while in the presence of their South Asian family members, as there was an intense pressure to maintain South Asian cultural traditions and to not become “too Americanized” (Tummala-Narra, et al., 2016). Additionally, participants experienced sadness and frustration when faced with racism from White individuals, which impeded their feelings of acceptance within the dominant culture (Tummala-Narra, et al., 2016).

Related research has also shown that Asian international students had a greater sense of belongingness when engaging in friendships with individuals of their same cultural background, as well as with U.S. born students (Slaten, et al., 2016). Friendships with students of similar nationality were shown to provide the participants a sense of security for participants, while friendships with U.S. born students allowed for a better understanding of U.S. culture (Slaten, et al., 2016). It is evident that both forms of social connectedness were needed to feel a secure sense of belongingness. Holding a bicultural identity has been shown to be an affirming experience for those who have positive interactions with people of minority backgrounds and White American individuals, while others who perceived themselves as “not enough” for either group struggle to feel a sense of belongingness in either identity (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005). The potential for such detachment from South Asian identity sheds light on a critical implication of internalized racism that is manifested in the equation/conflation of “American” as Whiteness (Cotton, et al., 2012).

The results of the present study also connect to research conducted on the phenomenon of the “third culture kid”. This description refers to an individual who has spent a large part of their developmental years in a culture that is different from that of their parents, which causes them to develop a relationship with both cultures while continuing to feel that they do not have full ownership of either (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Research suggests that third culture kids notice the subtle differences between them and their peers, and continue to feel like a foreigner within their own country (Fail, Thompson, & Walker, 2004; Morales, 2015; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). They set aside aspects of their own identity in order to assimilate to the dominant culture (Fail, et al., 2004; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Research has suggested that third culture kids who have negative feelings about their home culture may be at higher risk for adjustment difficulties (Abe, 2018). In a qualitative study conducted by Moore and Barker (2012), they investigated cultural identity with 19 self-identified third-cultural individuals. Through semi-structured interviews, emerging themes indicated that although the participants were easily able to adapt to different cultural environments, they did not feel they truly belonged in any culture.

Within the current study, many of the participants’ difficulties in finding acceptance and comfort in using their South Asian names aligns with the stress experienced by third culture kids. Participants attempted to change or adjust their names in order to present themselves as more “American” so as to lessen the impact of racial differences between themselves and their peers. Participants described distress in association with this process given their desire to fit in while also maintaining their cultural identities, a conflict that exemplifies the ongoing assimilation process that occurs for this population.

## **Personal Significance of Names**

Participants in this study endorsed having both positive and negative feelings about their names of ethnic origin. They described how having a South Asian name brought further attention to their cultural background and the racial differences between them and their community, which was both validating and difficult to navigate. They reported feeling pleased that their names were unique, and set them apart from others in their classrooms. Participants discussed the ways that they would carry their names into their families, and generally imagined their future children as having South Asian names as a way of maintaining their ethnic heritage. Many also reflected on their own appreciation for having a name that represents their cultural background given their connection to their South Asian identity, despite the unwanted reactions they often encountered. In contrast, some disliked their names due to their inconvenience within social and professional settings. For participants who assisted their families in naming their younger siblings or who identified as parents, it was imperative for them to explore the meanings of each perspective name and the pronunciations that would best serve the future child before they navigated their lives in the United States. This deeper level of thought around how names would be carried into future family life shows the impact that having a racially and ethnically distinct name had on their own developmental experience, and the ways in which they hoped to reshape this experience for others.

Along these lines, names can hold significant connections to family origins, ethnic groups, and ancestors that represent the story of an individual's family and journey to the United States (Kholi & Solórzano, 2012; Palsson, 2014). Names are personal identity markers as well as important indicators of race that can make individuals more susceptible to experiences of racism and discrimination (Cook, Logan, & Parman, 2014; Kumar, Niessen-Ruenzi, & Spalt, 2012;



Palsson, 2014; Wykes, 2017). Limited studies have been conducted to explore the rewarding and positive aspects of having an ethnic name, although some have addressed parents' roles in giving children ethnic names as a way of carrying their culture forward over time (Twenge, Abebe, & Campbell, 2010; Wykes, 2017). Parents in the United States seem to have become more likely to give their children names that reflect their ethnic heritage and to appreciate that it allows them to be more distinct and individualized within their communities (Twenge, et al., 2010).

At the same time, limited research has been conducted on the implications of having a “unique” name, specifically one that is bound within the South Asian culture. Existing research has suggested that unique ethnic names are correlated with less attractive characteristics in comparison to “common” names, or White European names (Cook, et al., 2014; Cotton, et al., 2014; Mehrabian, 2001). A qualitative study conducted by Wykes (2017) explored how names are often racialized, which can affect the naming choices of multiracial parents. Parents in this study discussed their concerns around potential discrimination of their children based on their names, as well as a conflicting desire for their children to carry their ethnic heritage forward through their names (Wykes, 2017).

Notably, name bias has been shown to be prevalent within the hiring and employment process, particularly in relation to responses of employers to racialized names on resumes. Numerous studies have shown employers giving preference to resumes with White European names in comparison to resumes with names of racial and ethnic origins (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Booth, et al., 2012; Deros & Ryan, 2012). Name bias has also been shown to be prominent in the courtroom, as jurors have been found to make assumptions about individuals based on their racially representative names, and have shown bias within their

judgement of court cases (Clark et al., 2013). Mental health counselors have also been found to hold implicit bias in regards to their callback responses to perspective clients with racially distinct names (Shin, et al., 2016). Given the vast amount of settings in which name bias occurs within the United States and the negative impact that it has on racial and cultural minorities, it is understandable that this study's participants engaged in a deeper thought process when deciding upon names for people within their families.

### **Characteristic Reactions to Racially and Ethnically Distinct Names**

Participants in this study reported that others in their lives struggled with the pronunciation, spelling, and cultural intricacies of their first and last names. The most difficult interactions were shown to be with people in authoritative positions, particularly classroom teachers and company executives. For those participants who experienced their teachers struggling with their names, introducing themselves became a moment of anxiety and dread throughout their lives. Some chose to alter their names to avoid presenting an inconvenience to people in power, while others did so to increase their own comfort and ease in social interactions. In contrast, participants highlighted the fact that their peers were typically their biggest advocates in guiding people-in-power to learn the correct pronunciations of their names. In a related study conducted by Zhao and Biernat (2018), Asian Americans who adopted Anglo names reported lower self-esteem, which further predicted lower levels of health and well-being. Participants chose to utilize Anglo names due to perceptions that Americans could not pronounce or memorize their ethnic names. This study speaks to the ongoing effects of name-based discrimination on health and well-being for Asian Americans.

One of the biggest factors in participants' choice to alter their names was the length of relationship they expected to have with an individual. Participants reported that if they were to be

in communication with a person of authority over a long period of time, they would put greater effort into advocating for the correct pronunciation of their names. In contrast, if a short-term relationship was indicated between the participant and the person of authority, less effort was apparently invested by either party in assuring that the name was said correctly. Given that educational relationships often take place over a longer period of time, it is likely that name use by educators plays an important part of this developmental process.

Research affirms that some of the most fundamental relationships through which children develop a sense of self are those with their teachers (Davis, 2003; Wang, Swearer, Lembeck, Collins, & Berry, 2015; Zee & de Bree, 2017). Particularly for ethnic and racial minority students, educators can hold a great amount of influence in how children may feel about their current and future abilities (Anderson-Clark, et al., 2008; Clark, et al., 2006; Davis, 2003; Mehrabian, 2001; Wang, et al., 2015; Zee & de Bree, 2017). Racial and ethnic disparities in educational achievement have been shown to be explained by the effects of race-based stressors such as perceived discrimination and stereotype threat (Levy, Heissel, Richeson, & Adam, 2016). Often, White teachers and professors, who may not always prepare for race-related classroom encounters, are positioned at the front of the classroom (Smith, Kashubeck-West, Payton, & Adams, 2017). Research has indicated that at times, teachers can hold biases against students due to their ethnic and racially based names, which in turn negatively affects students' self-esteem and social skills (Mehrabian, 2001). This notion aligns with the findings of the present study, as participants reported being greatly affected by their teachers' pronunciations of their names vis-a-via the development of their social identities over time. Participants also highlighted the ways that their educational leaders approached minority students in general, which also influenced their feelings of belongingness within their educational communities.

## **Assumptions and Stereotypes Based on South Asian Names**

During experiences of name-based microaggressions, participants reported that assumptions were voiced by others about the origins of their names. Others also made their preferences known regarding how participants should alter their ethnic names. Multiple participants were assumed to be of Hispanic origin. These experiences may be associated with a lack of public awareness of the numerous minority identities represented within America. Mainstream cultural categorization systems allow for those in privilege to continue to hold the power and ignore the important details of cultural identity for all racial minorities (Carter, 2007).

Additionally, it was frequently assumed by people in authority that participants would accept their assignment of a nickname due to their presenting with “difficult” names. This experience is akin to the concept of *racialized re-naming* (Pais, 2018; Palsson, 2014). Racialized renaming refers to the belief that non-White sounding names are unwanted and are an inconvenience within Western society (Kholi & Solórzano, 2012). Racialized re-naming often operates so that names are shortened or changed due to their unfamiliarity within the dominant culture (Cook, et al., 2014; Pais, 2018; Palsson, 2014). Along these lines, some participants reported feeling frustrated when racialized renaming occurred, and expressed a lack of control over how their identity was formulated by people in power. In contrast, others described feeling a sense of relief, as it reduced the emphasis on their ethnic identity and allowed them to seamlessly assimilate to American culture, which directly contradicts the supposition that being assigned a nickname is always or only a negative experience.

## **Emotional and Physical Reactions to Name-Based Microaggressive Experiences**

Most participants within this study reported experiencing distress in reaction to name-based microaggressive experiences. Additionally, they reported being teased about their names

by classroom teachers and peers, which led to negative emotions towards others as well as the potential for ongoing internalized racism and low self-esteem. For Asian Americans, continued exposure to everyday microaggressions has, in fact, been associated with an increase in negative affect, somatic symptoms, psychological distress, suicidal ideation, anxiety, and clinical depression (Ong, et al., 2013; Ong, et al., 2017; Hwang & Goto, 2008; Wei, et al., 2010).

Alternatively, some participants described feeling nothing in reaction to mispronunciations of their names. This absence of emotion may be related to coping strategies used by minorities, as well as to the belief that this is a “normal” experience for minority individuals within America (Liang, et al., 2007; Sue et al., 2007). Relatedly, emotional expression is often discouraged within the South Asian cultures; therefore, expressing distress or dissatisfaction with this experience may not align with their cultural values (Inman, et al., 2015; Liang, et al., 2007).

### **Evidence of Coping Strategies**

Prior research has suggested that South Asians engage in coping strategies to combat experiences of race-based discriminations (Nadimpalli, et al., 2016; Tummala-Narra, et al., 2016). Similarly, various tactics were described by participants in this study to manage negative experiences of name-based microaggressions. Typical strategies included practicing understanding and empathy for others in order to normalize the process of being challenged by a racially and ethnically distinct name. Participants attempted to interpret the struggles that may be experienced by people of authority and to find acceptance of their name mispronunciations in that way. It was also typical for participants to have strategies by which they could avoid being disappointed by others’ use of their names. This included holding low expectations of others, cutting people off when they attempted to say their names, and moving through introductions quickly during social conversations. Participants discussed the pressure that they experienced

during the introductory portion of social interactions. They reported a desire for their names to not interfere with their ability to connect professionally and emotionally with others. Participants would often sacrifice the correct pronunciation of their names in order to take away attention from this cultural identifier so that more emphasis could be placed on their other attributes. Humor was also identified as a commonly utilized tool to move through name-based microaggressive interactions. Some felt comfortable directly correcting mispronunciations; however, this was less-frequently endorsed in comparison to other coping strategies mentioned.

Additionally, the use of a *name-association phrase* was revealed as a frequent tool by which participants made their names more memorable to others. This can be defined as a phrase that one utilizes when helping others learn their name, which may include White American words that have the same phonetic sound of their non-American name. According to the participants of this study, name-association phrases made introductions easier when interacting with White individuals, and made South Asian names more relatable and approachable in the eyes of others, rather than intimidating.

Participants acknowledged the numerous strategies they have had to incorporate into their daily lives in anticipation that a negative interaction will occur with their racially distinct names. No prior research has been done around the use of coping strategies regarding *name-based microaggressions* or on the use of personal *name-association phrases*, as these are new concepts that are being proposed through the completion of this study; however they speak to the level of assimilation in which South Asian Americans must engage to navigate American culture, and the need for additional research in this area.

## **Summary: The Research Questions and the Study's Findings**

The preceding profile of key themes among the findings makes it possible to revisit the research questions that guided the study.

**What characteristic reactions, if any, do South Asian participants receive when they introduce themselves with their racially/ethnically distinct names?** This research question refers to the central interests of the study – do participant accounts, in fact, suggest that name-based microaggression exist as a coherent, commonly-experienced feature of life as an American of South Asian heritage? All participants did indeed note characteristic reactions, primarily from White individuals and authority figures, when interacting with their racially and ethnically distinct names. They reported others having difficulty pronouncing their names, and they observed that these others at times appeared to be overwhelmed after hearing their names, immediately asking for a nickname to use instead. Participants were aware of the facial expressions of White teachers and supervisors that projected this discomfort, and they described being teased for their racially and ethnic names by both teachers and peers. Given these typical reactions, it is apparent that name-based microaggressions have a presence in the lives of South Asian American individuals.

**Do South Asian participants encounter assumptions and stereotypes based on their names?** Some participants reported instances in which people of authority imposed a nickname on them. Through racialized re-naming, participants were not asked for their permission to change their name. They did not get to choose their nickname, and they were assumed to be accepting of their new name. Additionally, some participants were automatically assumed to be of Hispanic cultural background by White individuals after hearing or seeing their ethnic name, highlighting a lack of awareness of the numerous cultural backgrounds that are represented

throughout the United States. Participants also discussed how they want to be seen as “more than [their] name.” Participants explained that they wanted to be perceived in ways that extend beyond the stereotypes that often come with having a South Asian name, stereotypes that include traditional South Asian professions such as medicine, law, or engineering, as well as South Asian traditions such as dietary choices and spoken languages. The findings suggest that assumptions and stereotypes are often placed on South Asian American individuals based on the look and sound of their ethnic names.

**When name-based microaggressions occur, what are the associated emotional and physical reactions?** Participants were emotionally expressive when reflecting on the personal meaning of having a South Asian name. Many described their positive feelings about their unique South Asian names and the pride they feel in carrying their family name forward. They were pleased to have a name that represents who they are and where they come from. At the same time, many participants reported experiencing negative feelings in association with their names, primarily due to the difficulties that they have in microaggressive interactions with others. As for the emotions that accompanied name-based microaggressions, many participants reported experiencing distress when faced with these experiences. Some participants reported developing anxiety around their names, particularly with regard to situations like roll call within their early education. In contrast, other participants reported not feeling bothered by name-based microaggressive experiences and participants typically had empathy and understanding for those who mispronounced their names. This reaction may be an example of an additional coping strategy that aligns with the South Asian cultural norm of avoiding expression of strong emotions (Inman, et al., 2015; et al., 2007). In regard to racialized re-naming, some participants reported feeling frustration with this process given the lack of control over how their names were



transformed. In contrast, other participants reported feeling appreciative of having a nickname that allowed for easier assimilation to the dominant culture. Based on the participants' reactions, it seems that there are a range of emotions that accompany experiences of name-based microaggressions, and that they may be influenced by one's level of comfort within their environment.

**Are coping strategies used to avoid or manage negative named-based social interactions? If so, what are they?** It seems safe to say that coping strategies were employed by participants when they encountered name-based microaggressive experiences. Some participants coped by having empathy and understanding for others. Internalized beliefs related to being a foreigner in their own land (Fail, et al., 2004; Morales, 2015; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Sue, et al., 2007; Wong-Padoongpatt, et al., 2017) makes these types of reactions understandable and common for immigrants and children of immigrants (Sue, et al., 2007). Participants also had strategies by which they avoided disappointment, such as being aware of contextual clues that others were struggling with their names and jumping into the conversation to reduce the tension within the interaction. They also described using humor to cope by making fun of themselves or laughing along when others made fun of their names. Additionally, participants voiced that they coped with their negative experiences by insuring that their future children and/or younger siblings would not have to go through the same experience. Having become very cognizant of how South Asian names are perceived by the dominant culture, they made sure to give others names that were more easily accepted within America. Participants also reported taking an active role in assisting people in learning their names as a way of coping. This included spelling out and emphasizing the syllables of their names, correcting mispronunciations, using a rehearsed explanation to introduce their name to others, and offering a name association phrase. The

participants' utilization of coping strategies was often dependent on the level of power and authority the other individual had over them, as well as the assumed consequence that could result from being more proactive in correcting a mispronunciation.

### **Scholarly and Professional Implications**

**Microaggression theory.** Racial and ethnic microaggressions have been shown to be directly linked to increased psychological distress for minority individuals (Sanchez, Adams, Arango & Flannigan, 2018; Sue, et al., 2009; Wong-Padoongpatt, et al., 2017). The current study helps to fill a gap in the counseling psychology literature by expanding understanding of the existence and implications of microaggressive experiences for South Asian Americans, and shedding light on the unique experiences of South Asian Americans with ethnic names. Furthermore, this study proposed the addition of *name-based microaggressive experiences* to existing microaggression frameworks. The findings highlighted how frequently names are misused, the distressing impact that they can have, and the subtle forms of racism that can be experienced based on this cultural identifier.

**Professional practice.** Although a small amount of research exists regarding culturally-competent professional practices for work with Asian American populations, the need remains for researchers to consider interethnic differences within the Asian American population, as well as various forms of intersectionality that could be present (Nadal, et al., 2015). Guidelines for clinical work could helpfully advise clinicians regarding names of South Asian origin and other ethnic names. Based upon the research findings, the following are recommended clinical and professional practices for educators and psychologists working with South Asian Americans who have racially and ethnically distinct names.

- a) Review your students' and patients' names prior to meeting them for the first time. The more you are exposed to the names, the less intimidating they may feel.
- b) Participants reported feeling validated when others asked for the correct pronunciation of their name. It is therefore recommended that clinicians and educators ask individuals how their name is pronounced and put their best effort into repeating it back to them as it was said. Participants also indicated that they had empathy and understanding for the learning process of ethnically distinct names, which opened the opportunity for authority figures to learn through practice.
- c) Recognize that asking for a nickname from your students and/or clients can feel invalidating within their multicultural identities, as they may feel like an inconvenience to those within the dominant culture. Similarly, placing a nickname onto a student, or participating in racialized re-naming, can also be distressing given the individual's lack of power in choosing how they will be referred to. It is recommended that the student or client is given the power to voice how they would like to be referred to in the room.
- d) Some individuals may prefer to utilize a nickname or a different pronunciation of their South Asian American name. It is recommended that clinicians utilize their multicultural training to engage the individual in a conversation about their preferences around their names, acknowledge the difficult nature of having a racially and ethnically distinct name within the United States, and show care and concern for pronouncing their name correctly. Equally, clinicians should respect the decision of the individual regarding they would like to be referred to in the room, whether that be with a nickname, an Americanized version of their name, or the traditional South Asian pronunciation of their name.

- e) Encourage students and patients to correct your mispronunciations, and be open to receiving the feedback.
- f) Be aware of the various coping strategies that the individual may utilize within a name-based microaggressive experience, and be open to discussing it.
- g) Be cognizant of racialized and name-based teasing that may occur within your environment. Attempt to engage others in conversations around cultural backgrounds, the uniqueness of names, and the beauty of having a wealth of diversity within any setting (Sue et. al, 2007).

**Educational and psychological policy.** The participants of this study noted that racial and cultural representation within their educational environments was influential in feeling a sense of belongingness within their cultural identity. For participants in White dominant schools, they described putting a great amount of effort into hiding their South Asian culture from their peers and teachers in order to appear more “American”. This included primarily speaking English, wearing certain American clothing brands, and being cognizant of displaying their South Asian culture only in the confines of their homes. For those in educational environments with increased South Asian representation, participants reported feeling “normal” within their cultural identity and could identify peers who had shared cultural experiences.

Additionally, participants reported that teachers had a significant influence on how they felt about their names throughout their development. When teachers perceived their names as inconvenient and placed alternative nicknames upon them, participants learned that their names diverged from the dominant culture and that they needed to adapt their names in order to fit in. As they navigated additional educational and professional situations over time, many participants developed expectations that their names would be mispronounced and changed, and that this experience is “normal” for immigrants and children of immigrants within the United States.

Research indicates that school environments and educators are highly influential within the developmental trajectory of children (Anderson-Clark, et al., 2008; Clark, et al., 2006; Davis, 2003; Mehrabian, 2001; Wang, et al., 2015; Zee & de Bree, 2017). Additionally, it has been emphasized that having teachers that embody similar characteristics and identities to their students is beneficial at every stage of the educational process (Davis, 2003). This finding directly relates to the phenomenon of name-based microaggressive experiences. Teachers may often affect what students perceive as “normal” both inside and outside of the classroom. Teachers who avoid engaging in name-based microaggressions with their students increase the potential for ethnic and racially distinct names to be increasingly normalized within the United States educational system. Additionally, having classrooms with students and teachers of varying cultures and ethnic names/backgrounds may result in an increased sense of belongingness for students and educators alike.

Additionally, these issues could be addressed by making adjustments to educational and psychological policy in a way that increases multicultural competency. Specifically, changes can be made within educational literature and teaching materials. Research has indicated that students spend 80 to 95% of classroom time using textbooks, and that teachers make the majority of their teaching decisions based on the outlines of these books (Sadker & Zittleman, 2007). The educational materials assigned to students within the United States promote Eurocentric, upper-class perspectives, and have limited representation of minority groups within the curriculum (Perez Huber, Johnson, & Kohli, 2006; Sleeter, 2008). This may lead students to feel an additional lack of inclusion within their educational environment. In implementing more multiculturally diverse names within American literature and promoting authors of varying

culture backgrounds, all students will be exposed to these names, which could allow them to become increasingly normalized within the education system.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study placed importance on assuring that the consensual qualitative method and analysis process aligned with the recommendations established by its authors (Hill, et al., 1997). In addition, all members of the analysis team had received multicultural training through their academic institution and spent time assessing their own biases and assumptions before beginning their research. Despite these efforts, limitations to this study remain and should be considered in an interpretation of its results. Beyond the study's inclusion criteria, many of the participants happened to share other characteristics, identifying as students, single, between young and middle adulthood, and of upper-middle social class. Moreover, all but two participants identified as heterosexual, and only one identified as a parent. It is unclear how the predominance of these other identities beyond South Asian cultural heritage may have influenced the data, and future studies may wish to be purposeful in extending participation to other groups.

Qualitative research procedures often require relatively small sample sizes, and the sample size in this study corresponded to CQR guidelines. At the same time, qualitative results are not properly generalized to a broad population that exceeds the scope of the study, and the same qualification should be borne in mind in the interpretation of the present results. Like all qualitative research, the findings of this study are based upon the self-reported narratives of the participants. This feature can be considered both a strength and a limitation: it allows for participants' own words to shape the outcome of the findings, and it also means that we have no independent knowledge of the events that they described.

A further potential limitation is that the research team was composed of members who were all associated with the same counseling psychology program, a program that prioritizes multicultural theory, inclusion, and social justice advocacy. These theoretical foundations likely impacted the analysis of the data.

### **Directions for Future Research**

Given that the current research is introducing the study of name-based microaggressions, the results point to several areas that could be developed by future researchers. One potential direction concerns the deliberate process that South Asian American parents engage in when naming their children. This experience may be different for parents who identify as South Asian versus children who have bicultural or other family structures. Additionally, future research could focus on the experience of biracial children with South Asian names to learn how this affects their feelings of belongingness within multiple levels of culture. Given the increased diversity of the United States and growth in multicultural and multiracial partnerships, the exploration of intersecting identities via future studies such as these holds promise.

In light of the specific impact that educators reportedly had on the study's participants, it would be useful to develop studies that invited the perspectives of teachers on their own experiences with South Asian students who have names of ethnic origin. This may further inform best practices within the field and increase multicultural competence within the classroom.

Each participant reported having a positive experience participating in the study, and emphasized that they had never before been asked about experiences with their names despite the distress that had occurred in their lives. Future studies should continue to explore these untapped experiences and incorporate name-based microaggressions within the frameworks of microaggression-related analyses.

Although this study brings attention to the experiences of both first and second-generation South Asian Americans, the age bracket of the participants was limited. It would be helpful to understand the various struggles that older generations of South Asian Americans might have had within their immigration processes with regard to their names of ethnic origin. Given the progress that has occurred within the United States in bringing awareness to the importance of multicultural competence, it is imagined that the experiences of the older generation may greatly vary due to the differing ways racism was expressed during their formative years.

Lastly, name-based microaggressions can be assumed to occur among numerous ethnic minority populations, and researchers could therefore address different groups' specific experiences of name-based microaggressions, which will also increase the multicultural literature and provide additional understanding of this phenomenon.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this study illuminated experiences of name-based microaggressions among the South Asian American population and the ways that South Asians attempt to cope with these experiences. This exploration suggests tangible practices that educators and clinicians can utilize when working with South Asian Americans who have names of ethnic origin. The best practices that emerge from this study can assist educators, clinicians, and scholars in becoming increasingly mindful of the potential for name-based microaggressions before they occur. These practices have the potential to encourage increased cultural responsiveness among psychologists and educators as they counteract taken-for-granted patterns of power and oppression between racial and ethnic groups.



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## APPENDIX A

Teachers College, Columbia University  
525 West 120<sup>th</sup> Street  
New York NY 10027  
212 678 3000  
[www.tc.edu](http://www.tc.edu)

### **INFORMED CONSENT**

**DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH:** You are invited to participate in a research study exploring the experiences of South Asians with regard to interpersonal interactions that relate to their first and last names. This invitation was given to you because you are South Asian identified, over 18 years old, and identify as an American citizen or living in the United States for at least fifteen years. Interviews will be held in a private office or room at Teachers College, Columbia University and will be audiotaped. The audiotapes will be utilized to create transcriptions of the interviews; transcripts and data collected will never be associated with your name. The researcher will destroy the audiotapes after the transcription of the research data. Participants will also be asked to complete a form that inquires as to your age, birthplace, race/ethnicity, generation, citizenship status or years within the United States, profession, educational level, marital status, sexual orientation, religious orientation, income level, and whether you identify as having a South Asian name of ethnic/racial origin.

**RISKS AND BENEFITS:** The potential risks associated with this study may include discomfort associated with discussing the topic of name-based interpersonal interactions, and/or mild fatigue from participating in an hour-long interview. There are no direct benefits for participation in this study.

**PAYMENTS:** There is no monetary payment for participation in the study.

**DATA STORAGE TO PROTECT CONFIDENTIALITY:** Your identity/information will never be associated at any time with the data once it has been collected. Furthermore, I will redact any potentially identifying information from the transcripts. All data and related materials will be stored electronically on the primary investigator's computer and will be password-protected. All interview data will only be utilized to analyze interview transcripts, from which general themes will be drawn to inform the research manuscript. All data will be destroyed once analysis is complete.

**TIME INVOLVEMENT:** Your participation will take approximately one hour (sixty minutes).

**HOW WILL RESULTS BE USED:** The results of the study will be used for educational purposes, conference presentations, research manuscripts, and eventually for journal publication.

### **PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS**

Principal Investigator: Ranjana Srinivasan

Research Title: Exploring Named-Based Experiences within the South Asian Population

- I have read and discussed the Research Description with the researcher. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the purposes and procedures regarding this study.
- My participation in research is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw from participation at any time without jeopardy to future medical care, employment, student status or other entitlements.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at his/her professional discretion.



- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue to participate, the investigator will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research project that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- If at any time I have any questions regarding the research or my participation, I can contact the investigator, who will answer my questions. The investigator's phone number is (973) 917-9465.
- If at any time I have comments, or concerns regarding the conduct of the research or questions about my rights as a research subject, I should contact the Teachers College, Columbia University Institutional Review Board /IRB. The phone number for the IRB is (212) 678-4105. Or, I can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120<sup>th</sup> Street, New York, NY, 10027, Box 151.
- I should receive a copy of the Research Description and this Participant's Rights document.
- I understand that audio taping is part of this research, and

( ) I consent to be audiovideo taped

( ) I do NOT consent to being video/audio taped.

- The written, video and/or audio taped materials will be viewed only by the principal investigator and members of the research team.
- Written, video and/or audio taped materials ( ) may be viewed in an educational setting outside the research / ( ) may NOT be viewed in an educational setting outside the research.
- My signature means that I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Investigator's Verification of Explanation

I certify that I have carefully explained the purpose and nature of this research to \_\_\_\_\_ (participant's name) in age-appropriate language. He/She has had the opportunity to discuss it with me in detail. I have answered all his/her questions and he/she provided the affirmative agreement (i.e. assent) to participate in this research.

Investigator's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX B**  
Demographics Form

*Please do not write your name on this form. It will be stored separately from any other information that you provide during this study and will not be linked to your responses in any way. The information will solely be used to provide an accurate description of the sample.*

1. Age: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Birthplace: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Race/Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_

a. Generation of immigration to the US: \_\_\_\_\_

-You are **first generation** if you immigrated to the U.S. from South Asia

-You are **second generation** if you were born in the U.S. and your guardian(s) immigrated to the U.S. from South Asia

-You are **third generation** if the caregiver(s) of your guardian(s) immigrated to the U.S. from South Asia

Are you a United States Citizen? (Yes/No) \_\_\_\_\_

b. If not a United States Citizen, how many years have you lived in America? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Profession: \_\_\_\_\_

If student, please indicate level and year: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Highest Level of Education: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Socioeconomic Status (low, lower-middle, upper-middle, upper, other): \_\_\_\_\_

7. Marital Status: \_\_\_\_\_

8. Sexual Orientation: \_\_\_\_\_

9. Religion: \_\_\_\_\_

10. Do you identify as having a South Asian name of racial/ethnic origin? (Yes/No) \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

### Semi-Structured Interview Protocol Exploring Name-Based Experiences within the South Asian Population

Queries are followed by possible follow-up prompts.

1. After reading the description of the study, what piqued your interest and made you agree to participate?
2. All participants being interviewed for this study identify as South Asian and are currently living in America. Please tell me about your and/or your families journey to America.  
*Ask for family educational history and line of work.*
3. Are there ways in which you/your family preserve South Asian traditions? (If yes) What are they? *Examples: Food, language, religion, attending temple, wearing traditional clothing, etc.*
4. Are there ways in which you/your family accept American beliefs and traditions? (If yes) What are they?  
How American do you feel like you are/ your family is?
5. Tell me about your feelings of connection to your American side or your South Asian side or both?  
*What past experiences in regards to your name have helped you develop those feelings?*
6. Please tell me about your name.  
*How do you feel about your name?*  
*Ask about origins of the name, meaning of name.*
7. Please tell me about your experiences or interactions within the education system in regards to your name.  
*Examples: during role call in class, when interacting with classmates, when interacting with professors.*
8. Have you had any memorable experiences or interactions in other social settings, such as a coffee shop or the post office, in regards to your name?  
*Examples: Giving your name for your coffee order, others asking for a nickname, others assigning you a nickname, job applications.*
9. (If negative experiences are mentioned) How have you felt or reacted to negative interactions with others in regards to your name?  
*What are ways in which you cope with or avoid those experiences?*
10. Is there anything else that I have not asked you that you would want us to know?

## **APPENDIX D**

### **Recruitment E-mail Invitation**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I hope this message finds you well! My name is Ranjana Srinivasan and I am currently a Doctoral student at Teachers College, Columbia University in the Psychological Counseling Program. I am writing to you today about a study exploring the experiences of South Asians in relation to the use of their ethnic first and last names. If you are 1) South Asian identified who is 2) over 18 years old, and you 3) either are a United States citizen or have lived in America for a least fifteen years, you're invited! These confidential interviews will take approximately one hour. If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me for further information at [rs3359@tc.columbia.edu](mailto:rs3359@tc.columbia.edu). Thanks for your consideration of this invitation!

Best Regards,

Ranjana Srinivasan

Table 1.  
Domains, Sub-Domains, Categories, and Frequencies\*

<i>Domains</i>	<i>Categories</i>	<i>Label</i>
1. Immigration to America	My parents wanted to achieve the American Dream	Typical
	My family relocated to the United States based on my father's intentions	Typical
	My parents are entrepreneurs in the United States	Variant
2. Family Values and Cultural Traditions	My family maintains South Asian Culture through language, religion, diet, media, community, dress, and/or values	General
	My family engages in American beliefs and traditions	Typical
	There are differences in maintenance of cultural traditions between generations of my family	Variant
	My parents are open minded about how to lead our lives	Variant
3. Identity Related Environmental Influences and Experiences	My interactions/connections with the South Asian Community influenced my feelings of belongingness to the culture	General
	Developing a comfortable sense of my South Asian identity has been difficult because of my cultural and interpersonal environment	Typical
	My interactions/connections with the White community influenced my feelings of belongingness in the American culture	Typical
	Being in America has influenced my family to adopt American culture	Variant
4. Personal Experiences of Cultural Identity	I feel connected to both my South Asian and American identities	General
	My ties to their South Asian and American culture differ from my family	Variant

Table 1 (cont.)  
Domains, Sub-Domains, Categories, and Frequencies\*

<i>Domains</i>	<i>Categories</i>	<i>Label</i>
4. Personal Experiences of Cultural Identity (cont.)	My relationship to my religion is something that I have reflected on	Variant
5. Personal Significance Of Name	I have positive feelings about my name	Typical
	My name represents who I am and where I come from	Typical
	I have had negative feelings about my name	Typical
	I have reflected on the impact of carrying my name into my future family life	Variant
	I am more than my South Asian name	Variant
6. Interpersonal Experiences With Names	People of authority struggle with my name	General
	People have taken interest in learning or helping others learn my name	Typical
	I am not bothered by others' mispronunciations of my name	Typical
	Others have assumed I am Hispanic or from another culture when seeing my name	Variant
	Others may learn the correct pronunciation of my name when there is an expectation that we will have a long-term relationship	Variant
6.6 Negative Interpersonal Experiences with Names	People have difficulty pronouncing/spelling my name	General
	Difficulties around my name have caused me distress	General
	I have had negative interactions with authority figures with my name	Typical
	I experienced teasing based on my name	Variant

Table 1 (cont.)  
Domains, Sub-Domains, Categories, and Frequencies\*

<i>Domains</i>	<i>Categories</i>	<i>Label</i>
7. Nicknames and Altered Names		
	I have used a different name or have altered my name	Typical
	I feel frustrated when others assign me a nickname	Variant
	I appreciate having a nickname	Variant
8. Coping with Name-Based Microaggressions		
	I practice understanding and empathy for others and normalize the process	Typical
	I have strategies for avoiding disappointment	Typical
	I utilize humor	Variant
	My parents gave me a pronounceable name/I will give my children/others more pronounceable names for the ease of White Americans	Variant
	I spell out/emphasize certain syllables of my name	Variant
	I offer others a name-association phrase	Variant
	I correct mispronunciations of my name	Variant
	I use a rehearsed explanation to introduce myself	Variant
9. Reactions to Study		
	I know of many experiences that relate to the purpose of the study	Typical
	I have had a positive reaction to the participation in the study	Variant
	I have never been asked about my experiences in relation to my name	Variant

*Note.* General = applicable to 12-14 cases; Typical = applicable to 8-11 cases; Variant = applicable to 2-7 cases.