~ Making the Invisible Visible ~
First-Generation Japanese Women's Working Experiences in the US

Chiaki Kasahara, Master of Arts Candidate
Human Dimensions of Organizations, The University of Texas at Austin

Introduction

Going through my working experience in the United States, I simply wondered and wanted to find out what other first-generation Japanese women's working experiences in the US are like.

- "Are there others who have had similar experiences, or am I the only one?"
- "By sharing my research, I hope to bring some insight and guidance to those going through similar experiences."

In my research, I explored what Japanese women (born in Japan and who moved to the US after their teenage years) experience and think about their careers and the organizations they work in.

Methods

❖ **Literature Review**

➢ Japanese women's history in the US
  - First Generation - Issei
  - Second Generation - Nisei
➢ Model Minority Myth on Asian/Asian-American
  - What is the Model Minority Myth?
  - Why the Model Minority Myth is Dangerous?
➢ Intersectional experiences of microaggression faced by Asian Women/Asian-American Women
  - What is microaggression?
  - Racial Microaggressions Taxonomy
  - The Concept of Intersectionality
  - Gendered racial microaggressions
  - Experiences of gendered racial microaggression against Asian American women

❖ **Semi-Structured Interviews**

➢ Combination of purposive and snowball sampling
➢ 11 first-generation Japanese women working in the US (5 - US companies, 6 - Japanese subsidiaries)

Key Findings

1. Self-consciousness about Race and Microaggression Experiences

- Participants who are self-conscious about their race expressed their recognition/experience of microaggression in their workplace more than participants who are not/less self-conscious about their race.

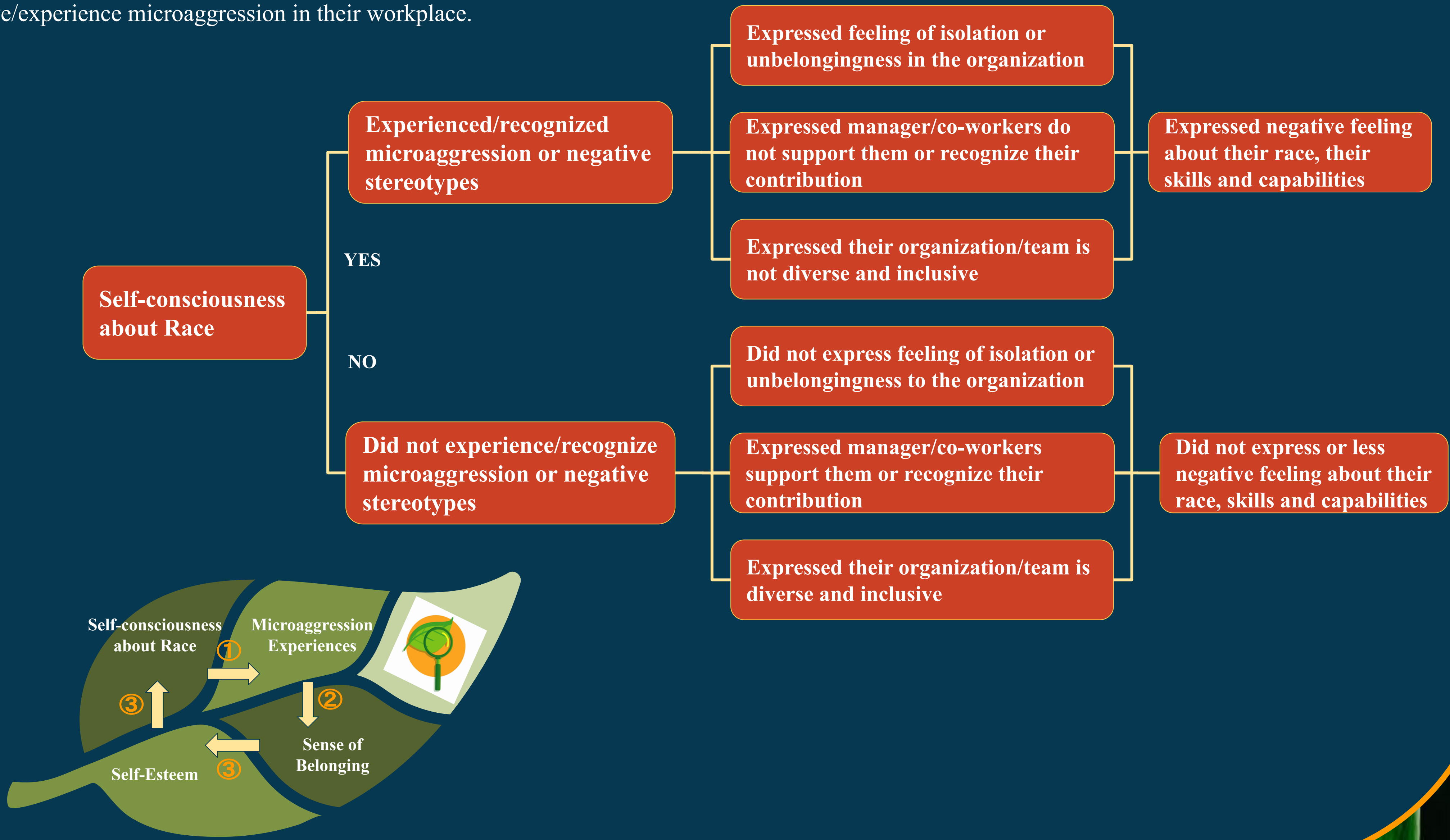**2. Microaggression Experiences and Sense of Belonging**

- Participants who recognized/experienced microaggression in their workplace expressed their feeling of isolation and less belongingness to their organization/team more than participants who did not recognize/experience microaggression in their workplace.

3. Sense of Belonging and Self-Esteem

- Participants who expressed their feeling of isolation and less belongingness to their organization/team had more negative feelings about their race, skills and capabilities than participants who did not express feelings of isolation and less belongingness.

4. Self-Esteem and Self-consciousness about Race

- Participants who expressed lower self-esteem are more self-conscious about their race than participants who did not express lower self-esteem.

Self-consciousness about Race → YES → Experienced/recognized microaggression or negative stereotypes → Expressed feeling of isolation or unbelongingness in the organization / Expressed manager/co-workers do not support them or recognize their contribution / Expressed their organization/team is not diverse and inclusive → Expressed negative feeling about their race, their skills and capabilities

Self-consciousness about Race → NO → Did not experience/recognize microaggression or negative stereotypes → Did not express feeling of isolation or unbelongingness to the organization / Expressed manager/co-workers support them or recognize their contribution / Expressed their organization/team is diverse and inclusive → Did not express or less negative feeling about their race, skills and capabilities

Self-consciousness about Race ① → Microaggression Experiences ② → Sense of Belonging ③ → Self-Esteem ③ →

Reflections

For someone who has experienced microaggressions and struggled with feelings of isolation, low self-esteem, and mistrust in others, this capstone project helped me take a step toward healing. This project helped me to be able to reflect on my experience objectively through retrospection, research, and, most importantly, by discovering that other people have gone through similar experiences. I am sure I will encounter difficult situations in the future. However, I will take each one of them as an opportunity to grow and continue to take on the challenge to help create a safe workplace for everyone to be able to share their authentic selves and express their thoughts and ideas.

Recommendations

Here are recommendations for first-generation Japanese women working in the US:

★ Speak up and raise issues constructively when necessary.
★ It is alright to be hard-working and take on challenges as long as you can maintain your emotional and physical well-being.
★ Balance your and others' need. It is ok to think about yourself. It is not selfish. Don't become a doormat!
★ Analyze and understand your own values. Communicate them to your surroundings to maximize your impact.
★ Do not suppress your emotions. Find your support group to share your feelings. Processing your experience with others will help you gain perspectives.
★ Do something creative to express your feelings about the experience (e.g., write your feelings in a journal).

Literature Cited

❖ Glenn, E. (2010). Issei, Nisei, war bride. Temple University Press.
❖ Gupta, A., Szymanski, D. M., & Leong, F. T. L. (2011). The "model minority myth": Internalized racialism of positive stereotypes as correlates of psychological distress, and attitudes toward help-seeking. Asian American Journal of Psychology, 2, 101–114.
❖ Kim, J. Y., Block, C. J., & Yu, H. (2021). Debunking the 'model minority' myth: How positive attitudes toward Asian Americans influence perceptions of racial microaggressions. Journal of Vocational Behavior, 131, 103648.
❖ Shih, K. Y., Chang, T., & Chen, S. (2019). Impacts of the model minority myth on Asian American individuals and families: Social justice and critical race feminist perspectives. Journal of Family Theory & Review, 11(3), 412-428.

Contact Information

Chiaki Kasahara
chiaki.stout@gmail.com
(512) 758-3996
https://www.linkedin.com/in/chiaki-kasahara-038771b/