



## *The Croydon Chronicles*

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*Shriya and Isobel would like to thank everyone who has put in the effort to help them launch this project.*

*They will be welcoming contributions from the school community for future editions. If you would like to write an article to be considered, please email [e.webb@cry.gdst.net](mailto:e.webb@cry.gdst.net).*

## *'You speak so well!'... 'How was I supposed to talk?'*

Expectations. Assumptions. Judgements. Broad conclusions. Where is the line crossed into a territory of unconscious bias and, dare I say, an unintentional embracement of racism.

This past couple of years has, for lack of a better word, been unprecedented. 2020 hit the ground running with the year having opened with threats of a potential third world war, the death of a legendary sports icon and the announcement of Kanye West for President. No one could have predicted the rise of one of the deadliest pandemics in history.

Coronavirus has been the metaphorical 'ripping off' of society's bandaid, which was well overdue. With topics such as social justice, inequality, the class divide and government inefficiency being brought to the forefront of everyone's minds. In particular, the senseless murder of George Floyd, a black man in the States has once again raised conversations about race and the inherent racism embedded within our culture. But the boundless names of black men and women who have fallen victim to the malignant entity of racism is too long to be mentioned in this article - Eric Garner, Trayvon Martin, Breonna Taylor, Sandra Bland - and these are just the ones that have been in the mainstream media. Many uncomfortable questions have been laid out flat and the reality of the pervasiveness of racism has been highlighted. Let us not forget that in every aspect of society, be it the justice system, education, health or employment black individuals are disproportionately finding themselves at the bottom of the barrel. It is not only police brutality which affects the black community.

Extensive questions must be asked: how is it that even amidst a pandemic, black people are affected unfairly, with them being 1.9 times as likely to die from Covid 19 as white people? Or why during lockdown, even though they make up only 3 percent of the population, the Black British community were stopped and searched disproportionately during lockdown. As cited in a Guardian news article: "Young black men were stopped and searched by police more than 20,000 times in London during the coronavirus lockdown – the equivalent [of] more than a quarter of all black 15- to 24-year-olds in the capital."

By no means are the answers to these questions simplistic, rather they are buried beneath multifaceted layering of historical oppression combined with systemic discrimination and finally, unconscious bias. It may seem at times that the grandiosity of the issue is outside one's capacity to effectively bring about change but one thing I ask of those reading this article is to educate yourselves on the dynamic forms racism takes, not just the ones you perceive it to have. Most dangerously, I would say, racism comes in the form of implicit and subconscious biases or what has become known as microaggressions. By definition, microaggression is a term used for brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative prejudicial slights and insults toward any group, particularly culturally marginalised groups.

Microaggressions are a key component of perpetuating and instilling racism within various institutions. To better understand the large scale issue, it can be broken down and explained in the context of the school environment.

As arguably one of the most important institutions of society, the school environment is pivotal for preparing young people to be valued members of society. Yet there are intrinsic faults which see black students encounter microaggressions daily.

One of the most common microaggressions faced by black people across all stages of life ,including education, is the notion of them being confrontational, intimidating or 'aggressive'. Having had these

titles ascribed to myself I know first hand the deep rooted emotional, mental and psychological effects it has on young black students. We begin seeing ourselves as a threat or danger and start to reflect on why the people [teachers] who are meant to see the best in us, view us as anything but. These attitudes encourage black students to unconsciously turn these negative perceptions of blackness inward and, a lot of the times, become resentful of the skin they are in - soon it becomes a prison of which we are desperate to escape.

With these harsh stereotypes of violence attached to the black students many teachers, unconsciously, act according to these views. As a result we see the application of behavioural protocols, to the fullest extent, to penalise these misunderstood students. This unfair treatment is reflected in the disproportionality of the exclusion rates between white and black students. Government statistics show that in the year 2017 to 2018, Black Caribbean students had some of the highest exclusion rates, being nearly 3 times as likely to be permanently excluded as White British pupils. With such high rates of black students leaving mainstream education, they become more prone to engage in anti-social behaviour and are inadvertently ostracised by society. In comparison their white counterparts, who are also temporarily excluded, are more likely to be reintegrated into mainstream education and attain the vital transferable skills needed to thrive in society. Can you see the wide scale implications one's opinion/ views can have on a whole sector of society?

Furthermore, the saddening reality that BME students, can tend to feel isolated from a system which, they feel, does not always address their experiences of racism, discrimination and prejudice. Many times, reports from black students who say they feel they have been treated unfairly are at best met with indifference and at worst outright hostility. A persistent narrative has been written where black students are deemed to be 'overreacting ' or merely 'hypersensitive'. The issues which accompany such encounters are that they relegate black students to positions of subservience, essentially silencing other black students who are suffering similar discrimination but are fearful of the repercussions they may face.

Finally, another damaging and sadly frequent microaggression is the constant alignment of black young people with criminality or gangs. The notion that groups of black students are intimidating or appear threatening continues the cyclical idea that black people as a whole are dangerous - criminalising an entire sector of society. All of the above examples may seem outlandish but they are the stark reality for many students from the Black British community whilst growing.

The above examples are sadly just a few of the many microaggressions faced by the black community. Others included:

- Being surprised when black students and individuals speak well/ eloquently or appear sophisticated.
- Automatically using cultural dialects (e.g. Jamaican patois) with black people you do not know or have just met.
- Overly using slang when first meeting a black person.
- Saying, "I'm not racist, I have black friends".
- Saying, "All lives matter" in response to Black Lives Matter

Shocking statistics:

- Only 26.9% of Black Caribbean pupils achieved Grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE compared to 42.7% of White British pupils at 42.7%. (England, 2017/18)

- Black people are 9x more likely than white people to be stopped and searched
- Only 10% of MPs in parliament are BAME
- unemployment rates were significantly higher for ethnic minorities at 12.9 percent compared with 6.3 per cent for White people
- Black workers with degrees earn 23.1 percent less on average than White workers
- In Britain, significantly lower percentages of ethnic minorities (8.8 per cent) worked as managers, directors and senior officials, compared with White people (10.7 per cent) and this was particularly true for African or Caribbean or Black people (5.7 per cent) and those of mixed ethnicity (7.2 per cent)
- Black people who leave school with A-levels typically get paid 14.3 percent less than their White peers
- rates of prosecution and sentencing for Black people were three times higher than for White people, 18 per thousand population compared with six per thousand population for White people

In conclusion, the challenge that is fighting racism is longstanding, and will continue to be fought into the foreseeable future. A major obstacle in this fight for racial justice and equality is the overthrowing of ideologies and societal perspectives of black and ethnic minority communities which are inaccurate. Legislation can only take us so far. It is up to all of us to equally begin educating ourselves on the society that we wish to achieve.

## *The Ferocious Culture of Workaholicism*

Work, and completing mentally stimulating activities is incredibly significant, going hand in hand with social, and personal life. However, in recent years - the importance of work-life balance has been distorted, with people in society taking a well-deserved break to rest and recover being seen as lazy and even lethargic. The unimportance of taking a break has been stressed to such a great extent, that taking a sick-day will earn you the nickname of being 'work-shy' or a 'good-for-nothing'. It's important, as a society to recognize the difference between hard-workers and workaholics, as well as recognizing exactly why being a workaholic - or as an employer, why creating a workaholic environment is toxic, and detrimental to not only employees but ultimately - businesses.

Many people forget to make the distinction between hard-workers and workaholics, with some not knowing the difference. Workaholicism typically entails valuing work over everything, including activities, meeting friends and family, and the person in question's health. Workaholicism is similar to an addiction - which the person fails to make the distinction between determination and obsession. When work is the only priority, having no other interests - or when work becomes overriding or joyless - then it is an addiction. On the other hand, hard-workers deeply care about their profession, putting many hours into work while reaping those benefits. These people still enjoy other activities and pursue interests in free time, while enjoying time with their loved ones.

This distinction is important to make, as in creating a workaholic professional environment, you are essentially punishing hard-workers - or colleagues who out-perform their workaholic counterparts while taking frequent breaks or working a shorter day. According to BLS.org, in 2017, 80.4 million Americans were paid at hourly rates aged 16 or over - which is a majority. Creating a workaholic

professional environment essentially punishes the 40-hour a week star performer, and rewards the mediocre 60-hour a week since the latter 'put in more time.' This is not economical for the business in question and punishes efficient workers!

Furthermore, another reason why creating a workaholic environment is toxic, is because Workaholics tend to have worse health, leading them to miss more work - causing economic issues that can be detrimental to companies worldwide. A study in the Netherlands showed that 33% of workaholics have migraine headaches because of the stresses of their job, which can easily be avoided, by implementing vital work-life balance. Furthermore, people who work 11 hours a day or more have a 67% greater chance of suffering from coronary heart disease when compared to those who work normal hours, and anyone working 12 or more hours a day is 37% more vulnerable to suffering a job-related injury, even in an office environment. This damages to the employees' health are not only counterproductive personally, it is inimical to the employers and the company. This is because these employees will be out of work for days - weeks even, leading to economic damage.

Overall, hopefully, the importance of work-life balance has been stressed and reinforced to you. The human body needs energy, and a break to recover from stressful work - to recharge and become even more productive for the next working day - Take a break!

<https://willory.com/workaholic-culture-good-or-bad/>

<https://www.careercast.com/career-news/truth-about-workaholics>

[www.bls.org](http://www.bls.org)

<https://brandongaille.com/21-significant-workaholic-statistics/#:~:text=3%25%20of%20workaholics%20feel%20physically,a%20typical%208%20hour%20day.>

## *The Importance of Yoga*

Yoga is a way of life used to help the mind and body heal, and over the last fifteen years - yoga has gained popularity in the western world. There is credible research that shows that yoga can improve general wellbeing, relieve lower-back pain, help people quit smoking, and help people lose excess weight. For example, according to a 2014 report which evaluated 484 participants in which yoga was used to prevent the need to smoke. In most of the participants, yoga was linked to fewer cravings and the number of cigarettes smoked overall. Furthermore, in the United States, national survey data concluded that 86% of adults who practised yoga said it reduced stress, and 63 per cent said it motivated them to exercise more regularly. Of course, there are obvious dangers and risks associated with yoga - therefore, you should only practice yoga under the guidance of a qualified instructor.

<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga-what-you-need-to-know>

## *Why should you have a change of scene?*

A change of scene can help recenter the mind and attract your focus back to its original state. Though it can be out of your comfort zone, it helps prevent the brain from becoming distracted. Changes of scenery may range from walking, swimming, running, gardening/ going to your garden, or going to a cafe, anything that allows the brain to be in a relaxed place. It also helps the brain from feeling claustrophobic in its environment. This is due to the stress you may be putting yourself under, which

can make you feel trapped and under a lot of pressure. However, if you take a step back and find a way to take yourself out of this scene and put yourself in an environment, where stress isn't directly proportional, then the brain will relax, and you will feel as though you have reduced the amount of stress you feel. This allows for a refocused approach to your work when you have finished reaching that relaxed state.

### *Is listening to music beneficial to learning?*

When studying for a difficult exam, some pupils will choose to play music of their choice - stating that it helps them concentrate. On the contrary, other students believe that music is a distraction! Research has concluded that listening to music can trigger the release of dopamine - which promotes feelings of happiness and lower cortisol levels - which is the hormone responsible for anxiety and stress. Therefore, for long study sessions perhaps background music will be beneficial for you - as students who are not stressed and in a good mood, will become determined and concentrate further. Furthermore, study.com has concluded that memory formation works better whilst you are in a positive mental attitude - and dopamine levels are high. On the other hand, students who use music to memorise find it difficult to apply this information in a silent environment later on. Moreover, pupils who listen to music while completing cognitively stimulating activities, such as reading and writing - tend to not absorb as much information as their music-hating counterparts. Additionally, according to the University of Phoenix, listening to music with lyrics leads to little absorption of information whilst you are studying. This is because your brain tends to struggle with 'multitasking', as your brain is processing lyrics as well as foreign material - considerably difficult! Overall, if you tend to become distracted - do not listen to any music. However, if you enjoy studying in a good mood, listen to some calm, lyric-less tunes!

<https://study.com/academy/popular/is-it-good-to-listen-to-music-while-studying.html>

<https://www.studyinternational.com/news/does-listening-to-music-while-studying-make-you-a-better-student/#:~:text=Research%20has%20found%20that%20listening%20to%20music%20actually%20lowers%20your%20cortisol%20levels.&text=For%20long%20study%20sessions%2C%20background,studying%20for%20a%20longer%20time.>

### *The importance of cleaning your room*

Cleaning your room is not only significantly important for your mind, but your body as well. For example, researchers from Princeton University concluded that a messy room can make it difficult to concentrate and to apply your mind to intellectually stimulating tasks. The reason that clutter distracts your mind is that the "visual cortex" can find it difficult to allocate specific attention and complete tasks, as the visual cortex is overwhelmed by irrelevant clutter. Additionally, a tidier room with fewer distractions can surprisingly lead to a calmer, more peaceful sleep - so there is entirely no purpose to not clean your room!

<https://paw.princeton.edu/article/psychology-your-attention-please>