

Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Manifestation, Dynamics and Impact

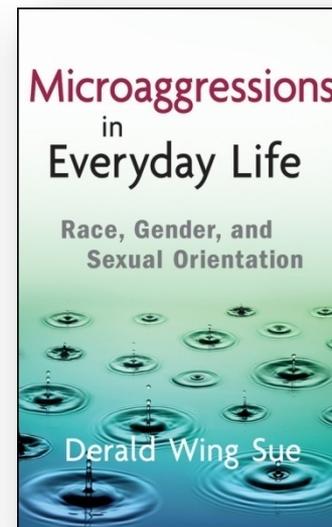
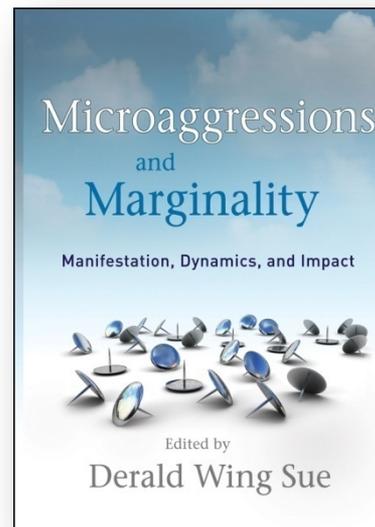
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Dedication

Maya Angelou

1928-2014

Still I Rise

**"You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may tread me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise."**

**"You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise."**



Some Personal Examples

- **“You speak excellent English!”**
- **“Where were you born?”**
- **Campus Climate –
Environmental Microaggressions**

Racial Microaggression Impact

- *“It gets so tiring, you know. It sucks you dry. People don’t trust you. From the moment I [African American male] wake up, I know stepping out the door, that it will be the same, day after day. The bus can be packed, but no one will sit next to you.....I guess it may be a good thing because you always get more room, no one crowds you. You get served last...when they serve you, they have this phony smile and just want to get rid of you....you have to show more ID to cash a check, you turn on the TV and there you always see someone like you, being handcuffed and jailed. They look like you and sometimes you begin to think it is you! You are a plague! You try to hold it in, but sometimes you lose it. Explaining doesn’t help. They don’t want to hear. Even when they ask, ‘Why do you have a chip on your shoulder?’ Shit...I just walk away now. It doesn’t do any good explaining.” (Sue, 2010, p. 87).*
- **Questions:** Is life as hard as this Black man describes? Is he exaggerating or misreading the action of others? Is he oversensitive or paranoid? Is he right in concluding that others don’t want to listen to his explanations? Why is he so angry and resentful? Do you believe him or not? If not, what are your reasons?

Racial Microaggression Impact

- *“I [Chinese American award-winning journalist] went to Fridley to interview the president of a large manufacturing company. I arrived a few minutes before noon and told the receptionist at the front desk I was looking for the president's executive assistant. "Oh. Are you delivering food?" she asked.....It wasn't the first time I was mistaken for a Chinese food delivery guy. In college, I had arrived at my girlfriend's dorm with dinner and the front desk dude assumed just that. I was embarrassed, to be sure, but let it go. That's the burden of being a Chinese-American with a penchant for baseball caps, jeans and takeout food. Yet the receptionist's inquiry stunned me. I was wearing a dress shirt, black slacks and black dress shoes. True, I was sporting a backpack and sunglasses, but how many food delivery guys whip out kung pao chicken from a Gap bag? After realizing her error, the receptionist offered a rather clumsy explanation. "I only asked because [the executive assistant] always orders food," she said. Nice try, lady....At least she didn't speak extra slowly and offer a tip.” (Thomas Lee, Star Tribune, 2009).*
- **Questions:** Have you ever mistaken a person of color for a service worker? Or, as a White person, have you ever been mistaken for a service worker? What were your reactions? How did you handle the situation? Did you make up an excuse? Were you offended? Why is it such a big deal? Is there a difference between being mistaken for a service worker as a White person or a person of color? What are the differences?

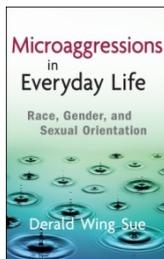


Has President Obama Experienced Microaggressions?

- **After the George Zimmerman Verdict:**
 - **1. Locking of car doors.**
 - **2. Monitored while shopping.**
 - **3. White woman in elevator reactions.**

Microaggressions

- **Microaggressions can be defined as**
 - **brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral or environmental indignities,**
 - **whether intentional or unintentional,**
 - **which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights, invalidations, and insults**
 - **to an individual or group because of their marginalized status in society.**



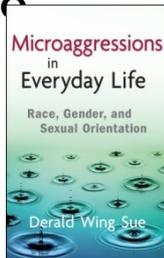


Microaggressions

- Microaggressions are “subtle, stunning, often automatic verbal and non-verbal exchanges which are ‘put downs’.
- They have also been described as subtle insults delivered through dismissive looks, gestures and tones (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) toward people of color, women or LGBTpersons often automatically or unconsciously.

Microaggressions

- **Simply stated, microaggressions are brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to marginalized groups.**
- **In the classroom, students of color, for example, often describe microaggressions as a pattern of being overlooked, under-respected and devalued because of their race.**
- **When racial microaggressions occur, they present a highly charged racial situation that challenges both teacher and students alike.**
- **The perpetrators (whether teachers or other students) are often unaware that a microaggressive event, incident or communication has occurred. They may, however, sense that something is brewing but be unable to identify or articulate it.**



Microaggressive Examples

- Racial Microaggressions

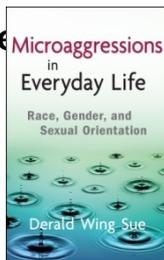
A Black student is complimented by the professor as being articulate and bright. (Hidden Message: Most Blacks are inarticulate and lack intelligence.)

A third generation Asian American student is complimented by a White classmate for speaking such “good English.” (Hidden Message: Asian Americans are perpetual aliens in their own country.)

- Gender Microaggressions

A female resident (physician) wearing a stethoscope is mistaken by medical students for a nurse. (Hidden Message: Women should occupy nurturing and not decision-making roles. Women are less capable than men.)

Male students in private refer to a female professor as a “bitch” while their male counterparts are described as “decisive and assertive teachers.” (Hidden Message: Women should be passive and allow men to be decision makers.)



Microaggressive Examples

- Sexual Orientation Microaggressions

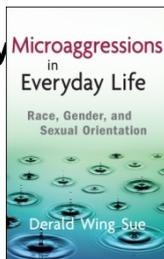
Students in class refer to a fellow straight student as “gay” (“That’s so gay!”) who is socially ostracized. (Hidden Message: People considered weird, strange, deviant or different are “gay.”)

A lesbian client reluctantly discloses her sexual orientation to a straight counselor trainee by stating that she was “into women.” The counselor indicates he is not shocked by the disclosure because he once worked with a client who was “into dogs.” (Hidden Message: Same-sex attraction is abnormal and deviant.)

- Other Socially Devalued Group Microaggressions

When bargaining over the price of a used book, one student says to the other “Don’t try to Jew me down.” (Hidden Message: Jews are stingy and money-grubbing.)

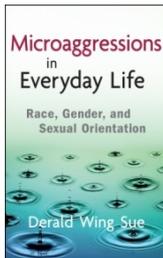
A blind student reports that the professor and fellow students raise their voices when speaking to him in class. He responds by saying “Please don’t raise your voice; I can hear you perfectly well.” (Hidden Message: A person with a disability is defined as lesser in all aspects of physical and mental functioning.)



Microaggressive Themes and Examples Among Faculty

Faculty of color and women often

- experience the campus climate as isolating, alienating, extremely stressful, risky and invalidating (Harlow, 2003; Stanley, 2006; Turner, Gonzalez & Wood, 2008);
- more likely experience being “the only one” that leads to feelings of isolation and loneliness (Alexander & Moore, 2008);
- lack mentors who possess knowledge of the “minority experience (Stanley, 2006);
- have their research and scholarship devalued and considered illegitimate (Guzman, Trevino, Lubuguin, & Aryan, 2010);
- have their racial or gender identities assailed (Harlow, 2003);
- experience elevated levels of stress and distress (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2008);
- be subjected to biased promotion and tenure decisions (Fenelon, 2003), and
- have many more students and colleagues question their qualifications or credentials to hold the status of “Professor (Harlow, 2003).”





Six Basic Assumptions

- **1. We have been socialized into a society in which there exists individual, institutional and societal biases associated with race, gender and sexual orientation.**
- **2. None of us are immune from inheriting the biases of our ancestors, institutions and society.**



Six Basic Assumptions

- **3. It is not “old-fashioned” racism, sexism and heterosexism that is most harmful to people of color, women and LGBT persons but the contemporary forms known as *microaggressions*.**

Disparities: Old Fashioned Bigotry or Microaggressions

White EuroAmerican males are only 33% of the population:

- 1. They occupy 80% of tenured positions in higher education.**
- 2. 80% of House of Representatives**
- 3. Over few years between 80%-90% of the U.S. Senate**
- 4. 92% of Forbes 400 Executive CEO level positions**
- 5. 90% of Public School Superintendents**
- 6. 99.9% of Athletic Team Owners**
- 7. 97.73% of U.S. Presidents**

Six Basic Assumptions

- **4. The characteristics of these forms of bias are their invisible, unintentional and subtle nature; usually outside the level of conscious awareness.**
- **5. Racial, gender and sexual orientation microaggressions create psychological dilemmas for the perpetrator and recipient because they represent a clash of racial, gender and sexual orientation realities.**
- **6. Microaggressions create a hostile and invalidating climate for marginalized groups, saps their spiritual and psychic energies, and their cumulative nature can result in depression, frustration, anger, rage, loss of self esteem, anxiety, etc.**



Harmful Impact Controversy

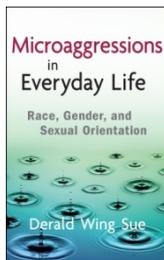
1. Microaggressions are constant and continual without an end date (an everyday hassle may be time limited).
2. Microaggressions are cumulative and any one may represent the feather that breaks the camel's back
3. Microaggressions must be deciphered because they contain double messages (especially microinvalidations)
4. Microaggressions are constant reminders of a person's second class status in society
5. Microaggressions symbolize past historic injustices (enslavement of African Americans, incarceration of Japanese Americans and the taking away of land from Indigenous peoples).

Harmful Impact

Studies reveal, that microaggressions, while seemingly trivial in nature have major consequences for marginalized groups in our society because they:

- (a) assail the mental health of recipients (Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008),**
- (b) create a hostile and invalidating campus climate (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000),**
- (c) perpetuate stereotype threat (Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002),**
- (d) create physical health problems (Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999),**
- (e) saturate the broader society with cues that signal devaluation of social group identities (Purdie-Vaughns, Steele, Davies, & Dittmann, 2008),**
- (f) lower work productivity and problem solving abilities (Dovidio, 2001; Salvatore & Shelton, 2007).**
- (g) and are responsible for creating inequities in education, employment and health care (Purdie-Vaughns, et al, 2008; Sue, 2010).**

Far from being benign slights, microaggressions have major detrimental consequences for people of color, women and LGBTs.





Plane Incident: Psychological Dilemmas

- **1. Clash of Racial Realities**
- **2. Invisibility**
- **3. Perceived Minimal Harm**
- **4. Catch-22**

Figure 1 – Categories and Relationship of Racial Microaggressions

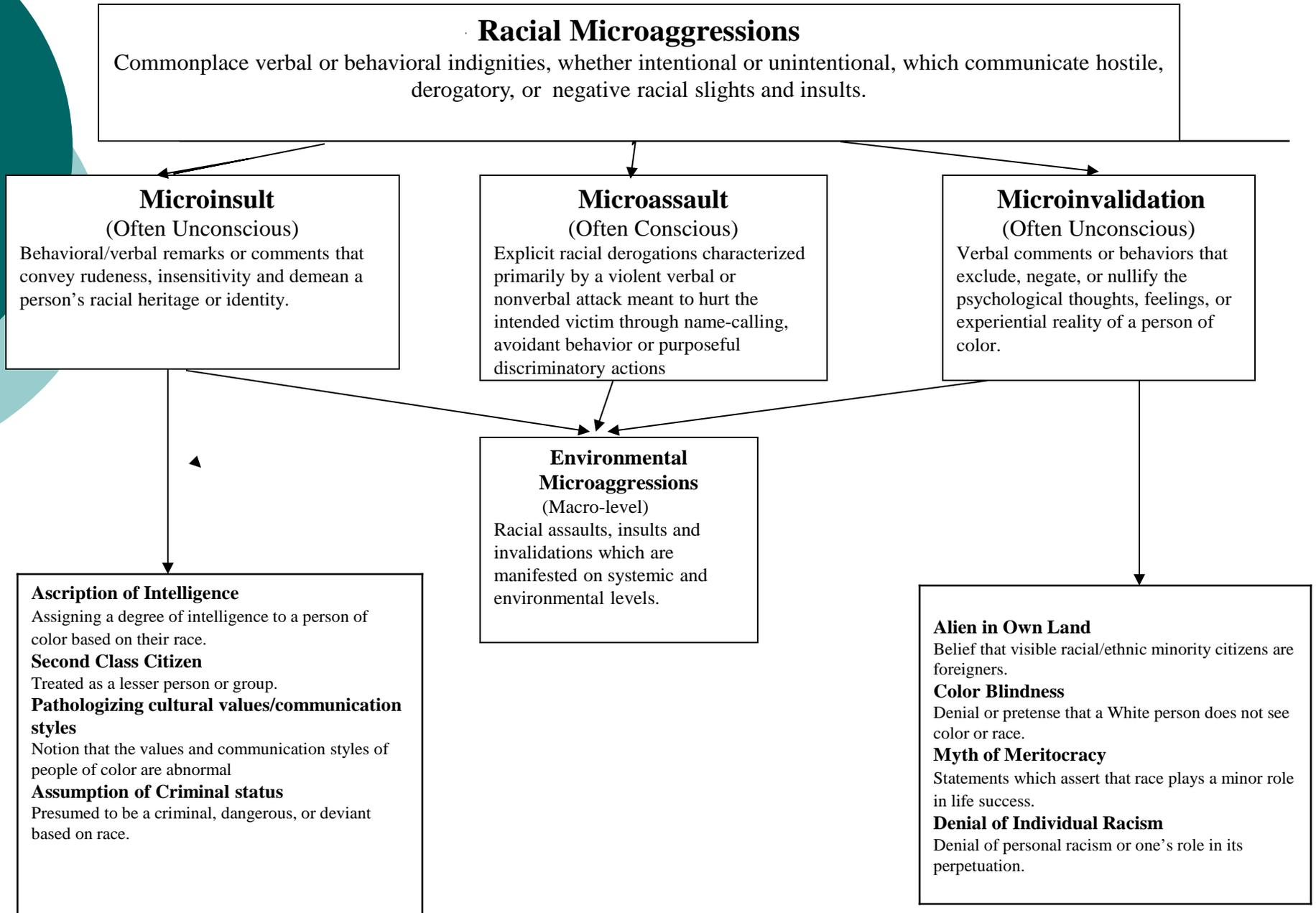


Table 1: Examples of Racial Microaggressions

Themes	Microaggression	Message
<p>Alien in Own Land When Asian Americans and Latino Americans are assumed to be foreign-born</p>	<p>"Where are you from?" "Where were you born?" "You speak good English." "A person asking an Asian American to teach them words in their native language."</p>	<p>You are not American. You are a foreigner.</p>
<p>Ascription of Intelligence Assigning intelligence to a person of color based on their race</p>	<p>"You are a credit to your race." "You are so articulate." Asking an Asian person to help with a math or science problem</p>	<p>People of color are generally not as intelligent as Whites It is unusual for someone of your race to be intelligent. All Asians are intelligent and good in math/sciences.</p>
<p>Color Blindness Statements that indicate that a White person does not want to acknowledge race</p>	<p>"When I look at you, I don't see color." "America is a Melting Pot" "There is only one race, the human race"</p>	<p>Denying a person of color's racial/ethnic experiences. Assimilate/acculturate to dominant culture. Denying the individual as a racial/cultural being.</p>

<p>Criminality/Assumption of Criminal Status</p> <p>A person of color is presumed to be dangerous, criminal, or deviant based on their race</p>	<p>A White man or woman clutching their purse or checking their wallet as a Black or Latino approaches or passes.</p> <p>A store owner following a customer of color around the store.</p>	<p>You are a criminal.</p> <p>You are going to steal/ You are poor/ You do not belong.</p>
	<p>A White person waits to ride the next elevator when a person of color is on it.</p>	<p>You are dangerous.</p>
<p>Denial of Individual Racism</p> <p>A statement made when Whites deny their racial biases.</p>	<p>"I'm not racist. I have several Black friends."</p> <p>"As a woman, I know what you go through as a racial minority."</p>	<p>I am immune to racism because I have friends of color.</p> <p>Your racial oppression is no different than my gender oppression. I can't be a racist. I'm like you.</p>
<p>Myth of Meritocracy</p> <p>Statements which assert that race does not play a role in life successes.</p>	<p>"I believe the most qualified person should get the job"</p> <p>"Everyone can succeed in this society, if they work hard enough."</p>	<p>People of color are given extra unfair benefits because of their race.</p> <p>People of color are lazy and/or incompetent and need to work harder.</p>
<p>Pathologizing Cultural Values/Communication Styles</p> <p>The notion that the values and communication styles of the dominant/White culture are ideal.</p>	<p>Asking a Black person: "Why do you have to be so loud/animated? Just calm down."</p> <p>To an Asian or Latino person: "Why are you so quiet? We want to know what you think. Be more verbal." "Speak up more."</p> <p>Dismissing an individual who brings up race/culture in work/school setting</p>	<p>Assimilate to dominant culture.</p> <p>Leave your cultural baggage outside.</p>

<p>Second Class Citizen</p> <p>Occurs when a White person is given preferential treatment as a consumer over a Person of color</p>	<p>Person of color mistaken for a service worker.</p> <p>Having a taxi cab pass a person of color and pick up a White passenger</p>	<p>People of color are servants to Whites. They couldn't possibly occupy high status positions.</p> <p>You are likely to cause trouble and/or travel to a dangerous neighborhood.</p>
	<p>Being ignored at a store counter as attention is given to the White customer behind you</p> <p>"You people..."</p>	<p>Whites are more valued customers than people of color.</p> <p>You don't belong. You are a lesser being.</p>
<p>Environmental Microaggressions</p> <p>Macro-level Microaggressions, which are more apparent on systemic and environmental levels</p>	<p>A college or university with buildings that are all named after White heterosexual upper class males</p> <p>Television shows and movies that feature predominantly White programs, without representation of people of color</p> <p>Overcrowding of public schools in communities of color</p> <p>Overabundance of liquor stores in communities of color</p>	<p>You don't belong/ You won't succeed here. There is only so far you can go.</p> <p>You are an outsider/ You don't exist.</p> <p>People of color don't/shouldn't value education.</p> <p>People of color are deviant.</p>