

# Microaggressions as Toxic Rain: Here, There, and Everywhere!

## “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.

Maya Angelou

Written by Maya Angelou, a renowned African American poet, writer, and Civil Rights advocate, the poem “Still I Rise” both empowers and validates those who have suffered oppression, abuse, bullying, humiliation, and injustice and pricks the conscience of “oppressors” for the hurt

and pain caused by their racial prejudice and discriminatory actions. It is also a testament to the courage, resilience, and strength of African Americans in their ability to survive and thrive in the face of constant hatred and bigotry. Although written primarily about the lived experience of Black individuals in the United States, the poem has universal appeal and application to all persons of color and to members of socially marginalized groups in our society.

There is perhaps no better way to introduce the topic of microaggressions than in these two selected passages. Most people who read the poem believe Maya Angelou is referring to overt and conscious displays of racism or hate crimes associated with bigots or White supremacists. That, however, is only a small part of the meaning of “Still I Rise.” In this poem and in her other writings, Angelou also addresses the everyday racism expressed by well-intentioned, dominant-group members who experience themselves as good, moral, and decent human beings, who would never consciously discriminate against people of color. Although she never used the term “microaggressions,” Angelou likened the everyday slights and indignities to “little murders” as distinct from the “grand execution” (hate crimes). These everyday and seemingly innocuous insults and putdowns (microaggressions) are what she labels “death by a thousand cuts.” The two passages indicate how microaggressions are manifested in the educational curriculum of our schools (“You may write me down in history with your bitter twisted lies”), verbally (“You may shoot me with your words”), and nonverbally (“You may cut me with your eyes”). In other words, microaggressions may be delivered contextually, verbally, and nonverbally. Let us use two examples to illustrate the manifestation, dynamics, and impact of microaggressions.

What do these incidents have in common? How does Maya Angelou’s poem relate to these two cases? In both examples, individuals with power deliver subtle, perhaps unconscious, microaggressions. In Example 1.1, a well-intentioned professor delivered racial microaggressions, and in Example 1.2, a commuter on the train and the vice president both delivered gender microaggressions. “Still I Rise” represents resilience of the targets. Before we analyze these two examples in greater depth, let us first define microaggressions in greater detail.

## Example 1.1

Standing before his classroom, Charles Richardson, a White professor, asked for questions from the class. He had just finished a lecture on Greco-Roman contributions to the history of psychology. An African American male student raised his hand.

When called upon, the student spoke in a frustrated manner, noting that the history of psychology was “ethnocentric and Eurocentric” and that it left out the contributions of other societies and cultures. The student seemed to challenge the professor by noting that the contributions of African, Latin American, and Asian psychologies were never covered.

The professor responded, “Robert, I want you to calm down. We are studying American psychology in this course, and we will eventually address how it has influenced and been adapted to Asian and other societies. I plan to also talk about how systems and theories of psychology contain universal applications.”

Rather than defusing the situation, however, Professor Richardson sensed that his response had raised the level of tension among several students of color. Another Black male student then stated, “Perhaps we are looking at this issue from different perspectives or worldviews. Just as language affects how we define problems, maybe we all need to evaluate our assumptions and beliefs. Maybe we are ethnocentric. Maybe there are aspects of psychology that apply across all populations. Maybe we need to dialogue more and be open to alternative interpretations.”

Throughout the semester, the professor had sensed increasing resentment among his students of color over the course content (he could not understand the reasons), and he welcomed the opportunity to say something positive about their classroom contributions. He responded, “Justin [who is a Black student], I appreciate your exceptionally thoughtful and intelligent observation. You are a most articulate young man with good conceptual and analytical skills. This is the type of nonjudgmental analysis and objectivity needed for good dialogues. We need to address these issues in a calm, unemotional, and reasoned manner.”

To the professor’s surprise, Justin and several other students of color seemed offended and insulted by the praise.

## Example 1.2

Kathleen, graduating with her master's in business administration, was dressed conservatively in a black blazer and matching skirt as she rode the number 1 subway train from Columbia University to downtown Manhattan. This would be her second job interview with a major brokerage firm and she was excited, sensing that her first interview with a mid-level manager had gone very well. She had been asked to return to be interviewed by the department vice president. Kathleen knew she was one of three finalists but also sensed her advantage in having unique training that was of interest to the company.

During the train ride, Kathleen endured the usual smattering of admiring glances as well as a few more lecherous stares. As she exited a very crowded subway train at Times Square, she attempted to squeeze out between the streams of commuters entering the train car. One man, seeing her dilemma, firmly placed his hand on her lower back to escort her out onto the platform. With his left arm, he steered her toward the exit, and they walked briskly toward the stairs, where the crowd thinned. Upon separating, the man smiled and nodded, obviously believing he had acted in a chivalrous manner. Kathleen did not appreciate being touched without her permission but thanked him anyway.

During the interview, the vice president seemed very casual and relaxed. Kathleen noted, however, that he referred to male employees as "Mr. X" and to female employees by their first names. Several times he called her "Kathy." She thought about telling him that she preferred "Kathleen" but did not want to alienate her potential employer. She very much wanted the job. When she inquired about the criteria the company would use to hire for the position, the vice president joked, "What do you need a job for, anyway? You can always find a good man."

When Kathleen did not laugh and remained serious, the vice president quickly said, "I believe the most qualified person should be offered the position. We treat all men and women equally. In fact, I don't even think about employees as men or women. People are people, and everyone has an equal opportunity to be hired and succeed."

Kathleen felt very uncomfortable with the response. She left the interview knowing she would not be offered the position.

## WHAT ARE MICROAGGRESSIONS?

The term “microaggressions” was coined by African American psychiatrist and Harvard University professor Chester Middlebrook Pierce in his work with Black Americans. He defined microaggressions as “subtle, stunning, often automatic, and nonverbal exchanges which are ‘put-downs’” (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Willis, 1978, p. 66). They also have been described as “subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously” (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000, p. 60).

While early theorizing focused solely on *racial* microaggressions, microaggressions can be expressed toward any marginalized group in our society. They can be linked to racism, sexism, genderism, heterosexism, classism, ableism, and other forms of oppression (Nadal, Whitman, Davis, Erazo, & Davidoff, 2016; D. W. Sue & Capodilupo, 2008). In this book we concentrate on specific forms of microaggressions that have garnered research support (e.g., racial, gender, and sexual-orientation microaggressions) and also feature a wave of research that emerged since publication of this book’s first edition, such as trans and genderqueer microaggressions (Nadal, Whitman, et al., 2016); religious microaggressions (Dupper, Forrest-Bank, & Lowery-Carusillo, 2014; Husain & Howard, 2017); classist microaggressions (Gray, Johnson, Kish-Gephardt, & Tilton, 2018; Smith, Mao, & Deshpande, 2016); and intersectional microaggressions (Lewis & Neville, 2015; Nadal et al., 2015). We introduce research from national contexts beyond the United States, including Australia, Canada, Mexico, and the United Kingdom. And, importantly, we introduce two new concepts: *macroaggressions* as distinct from microaggressions, and *microinterventions* to highlight resistance and resilience to microaggressions and macroaggressions (D. W. Sue, Alsaidi, et al., 2019).

It has been helpful for students learning about microaggressions to consider the components of the term to define it. First, in this case, “micro” does not refer to being small or innocuous but rather underscores the interpersonal, microlevel context of the act. Microaggressions denote some sort of interpersonal interaction involving a perpetrator and a target (marginalized group member). Second, we must keep in mind the term “aggression.” Most often, social psychologists have defined aggression as verbal or nonverbal behavior intended to harm. At the same time, some forms of aggression (indirect, social, and relational) may exclude others or harm their reputations,

with or without intention to do so (Archer & Coyne, 2005). These latter forms of aggression shape our understanding of *microaggressions* that take shape as insults, invalidations, or assaults.

Thus, microaggressions are verbal and nonverbal interpersonal exchanges in which a perpetrator causes harm to a target, whether intended or unintended. These brief and commonplace indignities communicate hostile, derogatory, and/or negative slights to the target (D. W. Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007). Importantly, microaggressions theory values the target's perception in identifying harm, as perpetrators often are unaware that they have engaged in an exchange that demeans the target. In Chapter 3, we elaborate on this point by describing four psychological dilemmas and dynamics of microaggressions.

To illustrate the concept of a subtle microaggression not intended to cause harm, the second author (Lisa Spanierman) recounts an experience boarding a flight on a major U.S. airline. An African American NFL Hall of Famer handed his first-class boarding pass to the gate agent. Without hesitation, the agent scoffed, "We are boarding *first class* now." It is unlikely that the gate agent meant to cause harm to this Hall of Fame running back. Rather, she was working from an assumption that African Americans do not belong in the first-class cabin. During the flight, Professor Spanierman told the football pro that she studies racial microaggressions; he replied that he encounters this experience all too often. Ironically, he was recognizable to many of the passengers who were shaking his hand and taking selfies with him as they boarded the aircraft. Professor Spanierman filed a complaint with the airline and received a generic reply from their customer service department ("Thank you for sharing your concerns ... we should have been more responsive"). Notably, in 2017, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) issued a warning to African American passengers about flying American Airlines due to several incidents that suggested a corporate culture of racial insensitivity and bias. Later we discuss the interplay between individual incidents of insensitivity and broader institutional and cultural forms of racism. It is the latter (systemic racism) that allows the former (racial microaggressions) to thrive.

Any one microaggression alone may be minimally impactful, but when they occur continuously throughout a life span, their cumulative nature can have major detrimental consequences (Holmes & Holmes, 1970; Holmes & Rahe, 1967; Jones, Peddie, Gilrane, King, & Gray, 2016; Meyer, 1995, 2003; Utsey, Giesbrecht, Hook, & Stanard, 2008; Utsey & Ponterotto, 1996). Many

White individuals, for example, fail to realize that people of color are, from the moment of birth, subjected to multiple racial microaggressions from the media, peers, neighbors, friends, teachers, and even in the educational process and/or curriculum itself. These insults, invalidations, and indignities are so pervasive that they often are unrecognized. In this chapter, we contextualize racial and gender microaggressions in larger systems of oppression and apply the concepts to the two examples provided earlier in the chapter.

## RACIAL MICROAGGRESSIONS

Similar to Philomena Essed's (1991) concept of everyday racism, racial microaggressions reflect a complex relationship between microinteractions and macrostructures. In other words, everyday racism and racial microaggressions are manifestations of systemic inequities in the larger society (e.g., income, wealth, education, and health disparities). Racial microaggressions often go unnoticed and unacknowledged because they seem so familiar in everyday settings, such as classrooms, shopping malls, restaurants, hotels, and offices. Next we describe social psychologist James Jones's levels of racism to highlight the dynamic interplay between microacts and macrostructures (Jones, 1997). Racial microaggressions are commonplace and make sense only in a world rife with institutional inequities grounded in the cultural superiority of the dominant group.

"Racism" may be defined as any attitude, action, institutional structure, or social policy that subordinates persons or groups because of their racial group membership (Jones, 1997; Ponterotto, Utsey, & Pedersen, 2006). The subordination of people of color is manifested in inferior housing, education, employment, and health services (D. W. Sue, 2003). The complex manifestation of racism occurs at three different levels: individual, institutional, and cultural (Jones, 1997; Jones & Rolon-Dow, 2018). All of these manifestations vary in their degree of overtness and conscious intentionality.

"Individual racism" is best known to the American public as overt, conscious, and deliberate individual acts intended to harm, place at a disadvantage, or discriminate against racial minorities. Serving Black patrons last, using racial epithets, preventing a White son or daughter from dating or marrying a person of color, or not showing clients of color housing in affluent White neighborhoods are all examples. At the other end of the spectrum, hate crimes against people of color and other marginalized groups represent

extreme forms of overt individual racism. In 2015, during Bible study at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, 21-year-old White supremacist Dylann Roof pulled out a Glock .45-caliber pistol and fired 70 rounds at the parishioners, killing nine people and injuring one. In his racist manifesto, he explained that he was fighting for the White race. He was charged with 33 federal hate crimes and convicted on all counts. Also reflecting individual acts of violence, a report in 2017 by the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs documented the highest number ever recorded of homicides of LGBTQ people (approximately one per week). When we think about these extreme forms of individual racism and violence, most people are able to say “That’s not me. I’m not racist ... I’m not homophobic.” It must also be noted, however, that the majority of individual racism and heterosexism is more subtle, indirect, unintentional, and outside the level of conscious awareness of perpetrators. Often these forms of expression are referred to as everyday racism (Essed, 1991) or implicit bias (Dovidio, Pearson, & Penner, 2019).

“Institutional racism” refers to any policy, practice, procedure, or structure in business, government, courts, places of religious worship, municipalities, schools, and the like by which decisions and actions unfairly subordinate persons of color while allowing White individuals to profit from the outcomes. Examples of this racism include racial profiling, segregated churches and neighborhoods, discriminatory hiring and promotion practices, and educational curricula that ignore and distort the history of minority group members. Institutional bias often is masked in the policies of standard operating procedures that are applied equally to everyone but that have outcomes that disadvantage certain groups while advantaging others (Jones, 1997; D. W. Sue, 2003). Systemic or institutional biases that reside in the philosophy, programs, practices, and structures of communities and organizations are referred to as macroaggressions (D. W. Sue, Alsaidi, et al., 2019). Before proceeding, it is important to distinguish between *microaggressions* and *macroaggressions*. First, microaggressions are manifest in the biased attitudes and behaviors of individuals, whereas macroaggressions reside in the rules, regulations, and sanctioned practices of institutions, communities, or society. Second, microaggressions generally are directed toward a specific individual target, while macroaggressions are group-focused and affect an entire class of people. Third, combating microaggressions means directing action toward the personal bigotry of the person (biased attitudes, beliefs,

and behaviors); confronting and eliminating macroaggressions means altering biased institutional policies and practices.

“Cultural racism” is perhaps the most insidious and damaging form of racism because it serves as an overarching umbrella under which individual and institutional racism thrive. It is defined as the individual and institutional expression of the superiority of one group’s cultural heritage (arts/crafts, history, traditions, language, and values) over another group’s, and the power to impose those standards on other groups (D. W. Sue, 2004). For example, Native Americans<sup>1</sup> have at times been forbidden to practice their religions (“We are a Christian people”) or to speak in their native tongues (“English is superior”), and in contemporary textbooks the histories or contributions of people of color have been neglected or distorted (“European history and civilization are superior”). These are all examples of cultural racism.

To summarize, individual racism is the source of microaggressions; institutional/structural racism is the source of macroaggressions; and cultural racism validates, supports, and enforces the expression of both (D. W. Sue et al., 2019).

As awareness of overt racism has increased, however, people have become more sophisticated in recognizing the overt expressions of individual, institutional, and cultural bigotry and discrimination. Because of our belief in equality and democracy, and because of the Civil Rights movement, we as a nation now strongly condemn racist, sexist, and heterosexist acts because they are antithetical to our stated values of fairness, justice, and nondiscrimination (Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakami, & Hodson, 2002; Sears, 1988). Unfortunately, this statement may apply only at the conscious level and may

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<sup>1</sup> Although most people likely prefer their tribal names (e.g., Blackhorse, 2016; Yellow Bird, 1999), “American Indian” and “Native American” remain the most widely used labels in the United States. An analysis of a U.S. Census survey found that 49% of people who self-identified as such preferred the term “Indian,” 37% preferred “Native American,” and 3.6% preferred “some other name.” About 5% expressed no preference (Tucker, Kojetin, & Harrison, 1996). While “American Indian” and “Native American” may be used interchangeably, separately, or not at all, “Native American” also is used more expansively. According to the Native American Rights Fund (n.d.), Native Americans include “all Native people of the United States and its territories, including Native Hawaiians and American Samoans.” Thus, we use “Native American” throughout the book and at the same time acknowledge the controversy inherent in the term.

be changing as President Donald J. Trump and his allies express widely publicized racist, sexist, and xenophobic sentiments. For example, in the current political climate where those in authority openly express bigotry, researchers found that such displays foster ethnic hostility contagion among adolescents who overheard or witnessed overt acts of prejudice (Bauer, Cahliková, Chytilová, & Želinsky, 2018). The experimenters found that harmful behavior directed toward a disliked minority group is twice as contagious as behaviors that harm members of one's own group. They issued an ominous warning that even in social situations or societies with minimal interethnic hatred, witnessing or publicly overhearing biased behaviors or comments can create a "social contagion" where overt prejudice and discrimination can thrive and spread quickly.

### *The Invisibility and Nebulous Nature of Everyday Racism*

Despite the apparent renewed overt expressions of bias and bigotry among a small group of the populace (explicit bias), the majority of well-intentioned White Americans continues to stand against open displays of racism, sexism, and heterosexism. Furthermore, in tracking the overt expressions of racism (hate crimes, physical assaults, use of racial epithets, and blatant discriminatory acts) over many decades, social scientists argue that its expression has morphed into a more contemporary and insidious form. Bigotry often hides in our cultural assumptions/beliefs/values, our institutional policies and practices, and the deeper psychological recesses of our individual psyches (DeVos & Banaji, 2005; Dovidio, Gaertner, & Pearson, 2017; Nelson, 2006; D. W. Sue, Capodilupo, Nadal, & Torino, 2008). In other words, race experts believe that racism has become invisible, subtle, and more indirect, operating below the level of conscious awareness and continuing to oppress in unseen ways (implicit bias). This contemporary manifestation has various names: symbolic racism (Sears, 1988; Sears & Henry, 2003); modern racism (McConahay, 1986); implicit racism (Banaji, Hardin, & Rothman, 1993); aversive racism (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1996); and color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, 2006; Neville, Awad, Brooks, Flores, & Bluemel, 2013; Neville, Lilly, Duran, Lee, & Browne, 2000).

Aversive racism is closely related to the concept of racial microaggressions (Dovidio, Pearson, & Penner, 2018). Dovidio and Gaertner (1996) contended that most White people experience themselves as good, moral, and decent

human beings who would never intentionally discriminate against others on the basis of race. Their studies reveal, however, that it is difficult for anyone born and raised in the United States to be immune from inheriting racial biases. In fact, many White individuals who may be classified as well-educated liberals appear to be aversive racists. Aversive racists truly believe they are nonprejudiced, espouse egalitarian values, and would never consciously discriminate, but they nevertheless harbor unconscious biased attitudes that may result in discriminatory actions. Dovidio and Gaertner (1991, 1993, 1996, 2000) have produced many studies in support of this conclusion.

Racial microaggressions are similar to aversive racism in that they generally occur below the level of awareness of well-intentioned people, but microaggressions researchers focus primarily on describing the dynamic interplay between perpetrator and target, classifying everyday manifestations, deconstructing hidden messages, and exploring internal (psychological) and external (disparities in education, employment, and health care) consequences (Dovidio et al., 2019; D. W. Sue & Capodilupo, 2008; D. W. Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008).

Racial microaggressions also overlap with color-blind racism. Neville et al. (2013) described color-blind racial ideology as the distortion, denial, and minimization of race and racism. It comprises a set of beliefs that support the myth of meritocracy (false perception of a level playing field where all people have an equal chance of succeeding) and is the dominant racial ideology in the post-Civil Rights era. Color-blind racial ideology may involve people saying “I don’t see race. I treat all people as individuals.” Or it might deny the existence of racism in contemporary society and blame people of color for their plight. This latter notion was evident especially after Barack Obama was elected as the 44th President of the United States. To some, the election of a Black man as the leader of the free world reflected the idea that racism had ended. Let us return to Example 1.1 to illustrate the dynamic interplay of racial microaggressions between the professor and the Black students.

The Black students in the class suffered a series of racial microaggressions and macroaggressions delivered unconsciously and unintentionally by Professor Richardson. Rather than thinking he was insulting or invalidating students of color, the professor believed he was teaching the “real” history of psychology, teaching students to think and communicate in an objective fashion, and giving praise to a Black student. That might have been his

conscious intent, but students of color perceived invalidating and demeaning hidden messages.

First, the professor neglected to entertain the notion that the history of psychology and the curriculum comes from a primarily White Eurocentric perspective that alienates and/or fails to capture the experiential reality of students of color (cultural racism). In the first edition of this book, we termed these sorts of environmental slights and indignities environmental microaggressions. In this case, the readings, lectures, and content of the course come from only one perspective and do not present the historical totality of all groups in our society or global community. In our current thinking, we now refer to these slights as environmental *macroaggressions* to underscore their manifestation in macrolevel institutions, structures, and cultural values. Although a biased program or policy may be a macroaggression, it is important to note that it is generally individually mediated. By this we mean that someone in authority (in this case, Professor Richardson) acts as an agent of a biased educational curriculum that potentially harms students of color.

Robert Guthrie, an African American psychologist, in the late 1970s produced the first edition of his now-classic book *Even the Rat Was White*, which took psychology to task for being primarily a White Eurocentric field, neglecting the contributions of people of color in historical storytelling, and unintentionally elevating the contributions of one group (primarily White males) while denigrating Asian, African, and Latin American contributors through “benign neglect.” The hidden message to students of color was that White American psychology is universal and superior (other psychologies are inferior), and that students of color should accept this “reality.” White students are affirmed, but students of color feel that their identities are constantly assailed or ignored in the classroom. Black students are likely to expend considerable emotional energy protecting their own integrity while at the same time being distracted from fully engaging in the learning process (D. W. Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009). Researchers documented a similar finding among South Asian Canadian undergraduate students (Poolokasingham, Spanierman, Kleiman, & Houshmand, 2014).

Second, Professor Richardson seems to equate rational discourse with approaching topics in a calm and objective manner. When he tells the Black student to “calm down” and implies that students are “too emotional,” the professor may unintentionally be delivering another racial microaggression with multiple hidden fears, assumptions, and biased values: (a) Blacks are

prone to emotional outbursts, can get out of control, and may become violent; (b) emotion is antagonistic to reason, and conversations in the classroom should be unemotional and objective; and (c) the communication style of many Black individuals is dysfunctional and should be discouraged (D. W. Sue & Sue, 2008). Pathologizing Black communication and learning styles has been identified as a common microaggression directed toward African Americans (Constantine & Sue, 2007; D. W. Sue, Capodilupo, Nadal, & Torino, 2008). Studies suggest that communication and learning styles of Black Americans may differ from those of White Americans (DePaulo, 1992; Hale, 2016; Kochman, 1981). For example, affect, emotion, and passion are considered positive attributes of communication among Black Americans because they indicate sincere interest and seriousness toward the material or subject matter while objectivity and unemotional responses indicate insincerity and lack of connection.

Third, some of the Black students found Professor Richardson's compliment of Justin's intelligent analysis and his ability to articulate the issues to be offensive. Why? To answer this question requires an understanding of historical racial stereotypes and their interactional dynamics. This situation is very similar to what occurred in the 2007 to 2008 democratic presidential primaries when both Senators Joe Biden (White) and Barack Obama (Black) announced their candidacies. After announcing his presidential run, Mr. Biden was asked by a reporter about the public's wild enthusiasm for a Black candidate, Barack Obama. Joe Biden responded, "I mean, you got the first mainstream African-American who is articulate and bright and clean and a nice-looking guy. I mean, that's a storybook, man."

There was an immediate uproar from many in the Black community who considered the statement insulting and offensive. To them, it represented a racial microaggression. Senator Biden, for his part, could not understand why a positive comment toward a fellow Democrat would evoke anger from Black Americans. It is important for us to understand that messages often contain multiple meanings. Although on the surface, the comment by Biden can be interpreted as praise, the metacommunication (hidden message) is "Obama is an exception. Most Black individuals are unintelligent, inarticulate, dirty, and unattractive." Such a racial microaggression allows the perpetrator to acknowledge and praise a person of color but also allows him or her to express group stereotypes. In other words, while praising the Black student might have come from the professor's best intentions, the comment was

experienced as a microaggression because it seemed to indicate that the professor was surprised that a Black student could be capable of such insightful and intelligent observations.

## GENDER MICROAGGRESSIONS

Like racism, sexism can operate at an overt conscious level or at a covert and less conscious one (Swim & Cohen, 1997). Blatant, unfair, and unequal treatment of women can be manifested in sexual harassment, physical abuse, discriminatory hiring practices, or women being subjected to a hostile, predominantly male work environment. Like overt racism and hate crimes, such sexist acts are strongly condemned by our society, and many men have become increasingly sensitive to their sexist actions (D. W. Sue & Sue, 2008). As our society has become more aware of what constitutes sexism and its harmful impact on women, the conscious, intentional, and deliberate forms of gender bias have seemingly decreased but also continue in the form of subtle and unintentional expressions (Butler & Geis, 1990; Fiske, 1993; Swim & Cohen, 1997). These subtle forms of sexism are similar to aversive racism in that they come from well-intentioned men who believe in gender equality and would never deliberately discriminate against women. Yet these men unknowingly engage in behaviors that place women at a disadvantage, infantilize or stereotype them, and treat them in such a manner as to deny them equal access and opportunity (Benokraitis, 1997; Fiske & Stevens, 1993; Glick & Fiske, 2001; Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 1995).

Similar to aversive and symbolic racism, theories of sexism identify both overt and covert forms—old-fashioned and modern manifestations (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Swim & Cohen, 1997; Swim et al., 1995). Glick and Fiske (1996) put forth ambivalent sexism theory to describe two different but complementary expressions of sexism. Hostile sexism is consistent with the overt brand of sexism we see in television shows like *Mad Men* and *The Handmaid's Tale*. It refers to the inherent superiority of men, which justifies their dominant position over women. In contrast, benevolent sexism is subtle in that it refers to chivalrous expressions of male superiority (Becker & Wright, 2011). Although seemingly positive, benevolent sexism restricts women's roles and perpetuates male dominance via stereotypic views of women (e.g., nurturing and deserving of men's protection).

Women report that gender microaggressions occur frequently and devalue women's contributions, objectify them as sex objects, dismiss their accomplishments, and limit their effectiveness in social, educational, athletic, employment, and professional settings (Banaji & Greenwald, 1995; Basford, Offermann, & Behrend, 2014; Benokraitis, 1997; Caplan & Ford, 2014; Kaskan & Ho, 2016; Morrison & Morrison, 2003). In the world of work, for example, many women describe a pattern of being overlooked, disrespected, and dismissed by their male colleagues (Sojo, Wood, & Genat, 2016). During team meetings in which a female employee may contribute an idea, the male chief executive may not respond or seemingly may not hear the idea. However, when a male coworker makes the identical statement, he may be recognized and praised by the executive and fellow colleagues. It has been observed that in classrooms, male students are more frequently called on to speak or answer questions by their teachers than are female students. The hidden messages in these microaggressions are that women's ideas and contributions are less worthy than those of their male counterparts.

In Example 1.2 involving Kathleen's job interview, several common gender microaggressions were delivered to her by well-intentioned male commuters and the interviewer.

First, it is not unusual for attractive young women to get admiring glances from men. Upon entering the subway train, Kathleen noted the looks that she received from male passengers and seemed to enjoy being noticed but also experienced a few stares as "lecherous." Some women seem to face a double-edged sword: wanting to be attractive and desired but also feeling objectified and treated as sex objects. The overt expression of sexual objectification often is communicated in forms ranging from overt whistles and cat-calls to more subtle cues such as stares that make a woman feel as if she were being undressed in public.

Second, although one of the male commuters meant well and saw a "damsel in distress," the liberty he took in placing his hand on Kathleen's back to guide her to the exit is an intrusion of personal space. For a stranger to place one's hand on the small of a woman's back or more boldly on her hips without her permission may be seen as a violation of her body. The messages in sexual objectification microaggressions are many: (a) a woman's appearance is for the pleasure of a man; (b) women are weak, dependent, and need help; and (c) a woman's body is not her own. Some women are

offended by these actions, as they appear demeaning. Yet the man who tried to help Kathleen probably acted with the best of intentions. In their expanded model of youth sexual violence, Gartner and Sterzing (2016) show overlaps between gender microaggressions and sexual harassment (unwelcome verbal or physical sexual conduct).

Third, referring to female employees by their first names and even calling Kathleen “Kathy” would not seem “disrespectful” if the interviewer did the same with male employees. Yet he consistently referred to men more formally by using “Mr.” and their last names. And by implying that Kathleen did not need a job but rather a “good man” to take care of her (even jokingly), the vice president sent a microaggressive message that women should be married, their place is in the home, they should be taken care of by a man, and Kathleen was potentially taking a job away from a man who has a family to support. This sequence of spontaneous and quick exchanges between the vice president and Kathleen trivializes her desire to find a job, treats her as a child, and does not take her seriously as a candidate.

Fourth, when the vice president is asked how candidates will be evaluated for the position, he responds by saying that the “most qualified person would be offered the job,” that everyone is treated the same, that he did not see gender differences, that all have an equal chance to be hired, and that “people are people.” Interestingly enough, from that interaction alone, Kathleen concluded she would not be offered the job. While it is entirely possible that it was an erroneous conclusion, we should inquire as to how Kathleen arrived at such a belief. As we discuss in Chapter 2, the vice president’s response reflects a worldview regarding the place of women in our society. Many women who hear the phrase “I believe the most qualified person should get the job” in the context of a job interview recognize this as a gender microaggression that communicates “women are not as qualified as men, so when a male candidate is selected, it has nothing to do with bias but concerns his qualifications.” Implicit in the interviewer’s statements is the notion that he is incapable of gender prejudice because he is gender-blind. People of color report a similar phenomenon regarding experiences with racial color-blindness. The vice president is unaware that denial of gender differences is a microaggression that ignores the experiential reality of women and allows men to deny their own privileged positions.

## SEXUAL-ORIENTATION MICROAGGRESSIONS

Heterosexism, like racism and sexism, can operate in overt and subtle ways (Nadal, Whitman, et al., 2016). Early conceptualizations of homophobia referred to fear of and aversion to gay individuals. Noting limitations of the term, Herek (1990, 2000, 2004) proposed a more nuanced terminology to better capture individual, institutional, and cultural forms of oppression directed at lesbian, gay, and bisexual people. He coined “sexual prejudice” broadly, as negative attitudes and hostility toward sexual minorities. He further defined “sexual stigma” as referring to society’s negative stance toward anything not heterosexual and “heterosexism” as the ideological system that justifies denigrating sexual minority identity, behavior, and communities. Subsequently, researchers have differentiated old-fashioned and modern forms of heterosexism (Cowan, Heiple, Marquez, Katchadourian, & McNevin, 2005; Eldridge & Johnson, 2011; Morrison & Morrison, 2003). “Old-fashioned heterosexism” refers to overt expressions of antigay and antilesbian attitudes and behaviors, taking form in hate speech and hate crimes, for example. Similar to modern racism and sexism, and germane to our discussion of microaggressions, “modern heterosexism” refers to subtle expressions of bias toward sexual minorities.

Nadal (2013) defined sexual-orientation microaggressions as brief, everyday insults and invalidations that communicate heterosexist and homophobic slights toward gay, lesbian, bisexual, and queer individuals. These microaggressions occur across social and physical locations—nobody is immune. Common examples involve comments in the classroom or schoolyard. For instance, a gay adolescent was frequently made to feel uncomfortable when fellow classmates described silly or stupid behavior by saying “That’s gay.” The hidden message is that being gay is something negative or deviant. In another example, during a conversation among a group of male fraternity brothers, one guy said, “I love you man,” followed by “No homo” as a way to reassert his heterosexual masculinity. The hidden message is that it is not okay to be gay.

Other examples often are evident in health care settings. In a mental health counseling context, for example, a lesbian client reluctantly disclosed her sexual orientation to a straight male therapist stating that she was “into women.” The therapist indicated he was not shocked by this disclosure because he once had a client who was “into dogs.” The microaggression involves the implication that being a lesbian is abnormal and akin to bestiality.

## MISUNDERSTANDING MICROAGGRESSIONS

In response to burgeoning scholarship on microaggressions and research addressing their effects on targets, critics have emerged. We have observed three common misunderstandings among critics about microaggressions theory and research: (a) making mountains out of molehills, (b) everything's a microaggression in this climate of political correctness, and (c) your analysis is flawed. We describe these below and also refer readers to Monnica Williams's (2019) incisive article.

### *Stop Making Mountains Out of Molehills!*

Critics have accused researchers of exaggerating the detrimental impact of microaggressions. As we explain throughout this book, microaggressions are constant and continuing experiences among members of marginalized groups in our society. If they happened just once or twice in a lifetime, perhaps targets could laugh or shrug them off. However, as Essed (1991) and others have suggested, these subtle exchanges are daily experiences. They are commonplace. Their cumulative nature assails the self-esteem of targets, produces anger and frustration, depletes psychic energy, lowers feelings of subjective well-being and worthiness, affects sleep duration, produces physical health problems, shortens life expectancy, and leads to suicidal ideation (Hollingsworth et al., 2017; Nadal, Griffin, Wong, Hamit, & Rasmus, 2014; Nadal, Wong, Griffin, Davidoff, & Sriken, 2014; Ong, Cerrada, Lee, & Williams, 2017; Solórzano et al., 2000; D. W. Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008; Williams, Neighbors, & Jackson, 2003; Wong-Padoongpatt, Zane, Okazaki, & Saw, 2017; Yoo & Lee, 2008).

Ofentimes undergirding efforts to trivialize and minimize microaggressions theory and research are notions that perpetrators neither want to change nor share their dominant-group privileges with others. We have seen this among our White colleagues manifested in statements of moral superiority, such as "I could have interpreted *your* comment as an ageist microaggression toward me, but I didn't. Why are you so hypersensitive?"

### *Everything's a Microaggression in This Climate of Political Correctness*

When critics argue that *everything* has become a microaggression, they are not acknowledging the larger sociohistorical context of oppression (Kraus & Park, 2017; Wong-Padoongpatt & Rider, 2018). Instead, these critics imply

that targets are like snowflakes, with weak character, who crumble in the face of the most trivial slights. Some contend that targets use “microaggression complaints” as a form of social control in a culture of victimhood (Campbell & Manning, 2018).

By recentring themselves, such critics ask, “Where do we draw the line?” and “Why am I made to feel like I am walking on eggshells?” They express concern about not being able to say what is on their minds and feel discouraged from even interacting with people from marginalized groups. What they do not ask is “What would it mean if the things I say and do actually have been hurtful to others?” What they do not consider is how interpersonal interactions that insult and invalidate someone’s identity are linked to broader social forces—long-standing hierarchies of dominance and oppression—that have powerful (and negative) effects on targets’ well-being.

### *Your Analysis Is Flawed*

The misunderstanding regarding flawed analysis takes shape both in the appraisal of empirical research on microaggressions (“Your research is invalid”) and in evaluations of targets’ perceptions of their experiences (“Your accounts are inaccurate”). We find it curious that scholars who have no expertise in studies of racial discrimination feel authorized to step into the racial microaggressions literature, name the overall project, rename the construct, and call for persons who do not acknowledge the influence of racism in society to be involved in generating items for new measures designed to document experiences with microaggressions. If we understand them correctly, these critics are seeking a set of universal operating principles that we could use to identify microaggressions reliably across all persons from a particular marginalized group (see, e.g., Lilienfeld, 2017). We disagree with this idea of homogeneous microaggression experiences, and instead we acknowledge within-group differences in how people interpret microaggressive statements. With a focus on context, we recommend investigations that seek to understand moderators (e.g., targets’ interpretations) of the link between microaggressions and negative outcomes. Since the publication of the first edition of this book in 2010, there have been hundreds of studies conducted on microaggressions. In the chapters that follow, we draw from the research to document the current state of the field and signal directions for future investigation.

Critics also point to supposed flaws in the scientific investigation of microaggressions (e.g., Lilienfeld, 2017; Nagai, 2017). They claim that interview questions have been biased because they ask respondents directly about their experiences with subtle forms of discrimination (Nagai, 2017). As we describe in Chapter 7, purposive sampling, which refers to selecting respondents because they have substantial experience with the phenomenon of interest, is a common practice in rigorous qualitative research (Patton, 2015). Critics also offer related critiques of microaggressions research, such as small sample sizes (Nagai, 2017) and lack of validity of subjective reports (Lilienfeld, 2017) that generally are postpositivist critiques of qualitative research. We refer readers to Chapter 7, where we highlight the importance of methodological diversity (qualitative and quantitative) in psychological research.

When critics challenge reports of microaggressions from members of marginalized groups, we understand such reports as subtle and perhaps even unconscious expressions of dominance that reassert the power to define reality. The argument is that if it was not intended as a microaggression, then it is not one. For example, we often hear remarks such as “You’re being hypersensitive” and “Maybe the gate agent reminds every person, regardless of race, that they are only boarding first class.” Sometimes there is a suggestion that naming the problem of microaggressions makes things worse. We have heard these statements: “*You* may be the one promoting disharmony in our community because of the way you *interpreted* the event” and “People who complain about microaggressions are entrepreneurs of outrage.”

It is possible that dominant-group members fear what it means to allow people who have been marginalized historically to give testimony to their experiences. A poignant example exists in Lee Mun Wah’s video, *Color of Fear*, in which a group of men from different racial backgrounds come together for a retreat to discuss racism and race relations. Despite testimony after testimony about their experiences with racism from each of the men of color, one of the White participants, David, continually expresses doubt about the credulity of their accounts. He referred to them as “unfounded” and even implied that the men were blocking their own progress. During a tense moment in the group, Lee Mun Wah made a critical intervention when he asked David, “So what’s keeping you from believing that that’s happening to Victor (an African American man)?” David replied, “Because it seems like such a harsh life. And I just don’t want to believe—I would assume, Victor, that your life is really that hard, difficult, and unpleasant.” Lee Mun

Wah inquires further, “What if the world were not as you thought ... [and subtle racism] actually is happening to lots of human beings on this earth. What would it mean to you?” Breaking down in tears, David clearly is overcome with sadness and says that he does not want to accept that humans can be so cruel.

## MICROAGGRESSIONS, MARGINALITY, AND HARMFUL IMPACT

Earlier we stated that microaggressions can be directed at any marginalized group. Groups that are marginalized by our society exist on the margins (lower or outer limits) of social desirability and consciousness. We may view them in negative ways (undesirable) and/or be oblivious to their existence and life experiences. Many sociodemographic groups in the United States are defined by disability, class (poverty), and religion (Islam and Judaism); are confined to the edge of a system (cultural, social, political, and/or economic); and may experience exclusion, inequality, and social injustice. When microaggressions make their appearance in interpersonal encounters, they are reflections of marginality and a worldview of inclusion/exclusion, superiority/inferiority, desirability/undesirability, or normality/abnormality (D. W. Sue, 2003).

Like racial, gender, and sexual-orientation microaggressions, microaggressions toward members of all marginalized social-identity groups are a common and continuing experience in their lives. Microaggressions against these groups are plentiful, as indicated by the next examples.

- A man with visual impairment reports that, when people speak to him, they often raise their voices. A well-meaning nurse was actually “yelling at him” when giving him directions on taking his medication. He replied to her: “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 functioning.)
- During a parent-teacher conference, a teacher suggested to a mother that her son, 16-year-old Jesus Fernandez, had learning problems. He was inattentive in class, unmotivated, late with homework, and frequently napped at his desk. The teacher was unaware that Jesus worked four to five hours after school to help support the family.

(Hidden message: Lack of consciousness about how dealing with poverty can sap the energies of people.)

- In referring to an outfit worn by a woman on TV, the viewer described it as “trashy” and “classless.” (Hidden message: Lower social class is associated with being lesser and undesirable.)
- A friendly neighbor wished a Jewish mother “Merry Christmas.” (Hidden message: Everyone is Christian.)
- While a customer was bargaining over the price of an item, the store owner commented, “Don’t try to Jew me down” (Hidden message: Jews are stingy.)

Countless examples of microaggressions are delivered daily without perpetrators’ awareness. Although these actions may appear harmless or innocent in nature, they are nevertheless detrimental to targets because they result in harmful psychological consequences and create disparities. Microaggressions sap the spiritual energy of targets (Pierce, 1995), lead to low self-esteem (Franklin, 2004), and deplete or divert energy for adaptive functioning and problem solving (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000). The following adapted passage, for example, indicates how microaggressions affect Don Locke, an African American.

**I am tired of—**

Watching mediocre White people continue to rise to positions of authority and responsibility.

Wondering if the White woman who quickly exited the elevator when I got on was really at her destination.

Being told I do not sound Black.

Being told by White people that they “don’t see color” when they interact with me.

The deadening silence that occurs when the conversation turns to race. Having to explain why I wish to be called “African American.” Wondering if things will get better.

Wondering if the taxi driver really did not see me trying to hail a ride.

Being told that I should not criticize racially segregated country clubs because I wouldn’t enjoy associating with people who belong to them anyway.

Being followed in department stores by the security force and pestered by sales clerks who refuse to allow me to browse because they suspect I am a shoplifter.

Never being able to let my racial guard down.

Listening to reports about people of color who failed as justification for the absence of other people of color in positions of authority.

Being told that “we are just not ready for a Black person in that position.”

Having to explain that my sexual fantasies do not center on White women.

Feeling racially threatened when approached by a White law enforcement officer.

Explaining that not all African Americans are employed to meet some quota.

Being told that I need to openly distance myself from another African American whose words have offended someone.

Having people tell me that I have it made and then telling me that I have “sold out” in order to have what I have.

Explaining why I am tired.

Being tired. (Adapted from Locke, 1994, p. 30)

It is important to note that microaggressions are not only confined to their individual psychological effects. They affect the quality of life and standard of living for marginalized group members in our society. Microaggressions have the secondary but devastating effect of denying equal access and opportunity in education, employment, and health care. Although seemingly minimal in nature, the harm they produce operates on a systemic and macro level.

If we return to our earlier case vignettes, we can conclude that the students of color in Professor Richardson’s class are being subjected to a hostile and invalidating educational climate. They expend energy in defending an assault on their racial/cultural identity and integrity (Solórzano et al., 2000; D. W. Sue, Lin, Torino, et al., 2009). They are placed in a situation of learning material from an ethnocentric perspective when they know a different history. They must comply and accept what they perceive as partial truths (and oftentimes mistruths) or fight to see themselves and their groups represented realistically in the curriculum. If they fight, they are likely to be labeled troublemakers and assigned lower grades. Even if they are exposed to relevant materials, they may lack the energy to be fully engaged in the learning

process (Salvatore & Shelton, 2007; Steele, 1997). If, however, they decide to accept the reality espoused by the professor, they may feel that they have “sold out.” Regardless of the actions they take, the students of color will be placed at an educational disadvantage that often is reflected in lower grades, lowered chances to be admitted to institutions of higher education, less education, and ultimately lower levels of employment.

Even when educational achievements are outstanding, as in the case of Kathleen, gender microaggressions may severely limit a person’s ability to be hired, retained, or promoted in the company (Hinton, 2004; Pierce, 1988). While the brokerage firm interviewer might on a conscious level believe that the company would offer the job to the most qualified applicant, his microaggressive behaviors reflect unconscious gender biases. Thus, he can in good conscience offer the position to a man and at the same time maintain his innocence or the belief that he chose a candidate without bias. Few employers realize that the high unemployment rates and the “glass ceiling” encountered by women and employees of color are reflected in the many microaggressions delivered by well-intentioned coworkers and upper managers (D. W. Sue, Lin, & Rivera, 2009). The inequities in employment and education are not so much the result of overt racism, sexism, or bigotry but the unintentional, subtle, and invisible microaggressions that place members of marginalized groups at a disadvantage. Ironically, hate crimes are illegal, but microaggressions are not (D. W. Sue, 2008).

## **The Way Forward**

### **Making the “Invisible” Visible**

Since the publication of the first edition of this book, there have been numerous publicized examples of White people calling 911 on Black people doing ordinary activities. From the example of actor Ving Rhames entering his Santa Monica home to Oregon State representative Janelle Bynam canvassing constituents in a suburban neighborhood, to a Yale University student sleeping in a university dorm common room, to women playing a round of golf at the Grandview Golf Club in York, Pennsylvania, to the example of two young men waiting for friends at a Starbucks in

*(Continued)*

Philadelphia, these incidents exemplify the focus of this book—everyday slights and indignities embedded in a macrocontext of societal oppression, which render them invisible to the perpetrator.

In the not-too-distant past, these kinds of daily occurrences were less publicized. Among the earlier well-publicized examples, one involved a renowned African American scholar and professor at Harvard University. Professor Henry Louis Gates Jr. was arrested on July 16, 2009, for disorderly conduct by a White Boston police officer, Sergeant James M. Crowley, because Gates “exhibited loud and tumultuous behavior.” What was said between the two is in dispute, but what we do know are the following facts. Gates had just returned from China, where he was filming a PBS documentary, *Faces of America*, and was driven back to his Cambridge home. For some reason the door to his home was jammed, and he asked the driver, a dark-skinned Moroccan man, to help force it open. A 911 caller reported two men forcing open the door to a house. Sergeant Crowley was the first to arrive and saw Gates in the foyer of his home. He asked Gates for identification; that is when the encounter seems to have escalated. Both men offer different versions of the event. Gates reports that he asked Crowley several times for his name and badge number, and Crowley reports that it took some time before Gates complied with his request to show identification. Within a short period of time, the street was clogged by six other officers who arrived at the scene. When Gates was asked to step out of the house, he reportedly did not initially comply. When he finally did, Gates was arrested, handcuffed, and taken to jail. The charges, however, subsequently were dropped.

The incident made national headlines as an example of police profiling Black men, and news programs and talk shows debated whether race had anything to do with the outcome. During a news conference held by President Obama, he described the arrest of Gates as “stupid,” and his remark brought on a huge outcry from primarily White citizens who came to the defense of the police. The outcry resulted in the president expressing regret at not “calibrating” his words more carefully. President Obama subsequently invited both Gates and Crowley to the White House to bridge misunderstandings over a beer.

The Henry Louis Gates Jr. incident is a prime example of the central thesis of this book, microaggressions (racial, in this case).

(Continued)

1. Reports that Sergeant Crowley was a sensitive White officer, level-headed, a role model to younger officers, and a man who devoted time to training others on diversity and how not to racially profile are documented by fellow officers. Gates is well known at Harvard and nationally as someone who has worked for improved race relations, is good at putting people at ease, is cool and calm under fire, and is devoted to social justice. In other words, both men could be described as good, moral, and decent human beings who believe in equality between the races. Yet as our later chapters indicate, no one is immune from inheriting the racial biases of their forebears. While we cannot definitively conclude that Crowley engaged in a series of microaggressions outside his level of awareness, the arrest of Gates reveals insensitivity to what it must be like for a Black man (the resident of the home he was suspected of breaking into) to be confronted with police officers. Even when he showed identification that confirmed he was the legal resident of the home, Crowley persisted in asking Gates to step out of the house and onto the porch.
2. The second point is that both men are operating from different racial realities. For Gates, his life has probably been filled with many incidents of racial microaggressions (suspected of being a criminal, less trustworthy, likely to be dangerous, etc.). To be considered a criminal in his own home was the ultimate indignity and insult. It is possible that Gates's reluctance to step out of his home as requested by Crowley may have been due to countless examples of law enforcement officers' mistreatment of African Americans, such as in the shooting of Amadou Diallo. In that event, police officers rushed toward an entryway to question a man whom they believed to be acting suspiciously. When Diallo reached into his pocket and pulled out his wallet, he was shot and killed because the officers thought he was reaching for a weapon. Even if unstated, Gates's belief that he was viewed more suspiciously than a White resident would not be unfounded or without merit. Yet Crowley probably believed that he acted within legal guidelines, that his actions were free of racial bias, and that he was not racially profiling. His White racial reality and inability to understand the reality of people of color represent major barriers to racial harmony.
3. The Henry Louis Gates Jr. incident represents an opportunity to dialogue about race in the United States. As some have said, it

*(Continued)*

represents a teachable moment. How do we begin to understand the racial realities of one another? The fact that many White Americans are unable to bridge their worldviews with those of people of color represents a major challenge to our society. The subtext to this incident involves the observation that a national dialogue on race is much needed, but it brings on so many fears, defenses, and antagonisms that even President Obama retreated from taking it on.

As long as microaggressions remain hidden, invisible, unspoken, and excused as innocent slights with minimal harm, we will continue to insult, demean, alienate, and oppress members of marginalized groups. In the realm of racial microaggressions, for example, studies indicate that racial microaggressions often are triggers to difficult dialogues on race in the classroom (D. W. Sue, Lin, Torino, et al., 2009). White students and professors, for example, experience anxiety and a confusing array of emotions when race issues are brought to their attention. Researchers have identified common reasons that might hinder White individuals’ exploration of race and racism:

1. White students and professors are confused and uncertain about what is transpiring (D. W. Sue, Torino, Capodilupo, Rivera, & Lin, 2009).
2. White students and professors are very “hung up” (defensive and anxious) about clarifying these racial interactions for fear of appearing racist (Apfelbaum, Sommers, & Norton, 2008).

When critical consciousness and awareness are lacking, when one is fearful about clarifying the meaning of tension-filled interactions, and when one actively avoids pursuing an understanding of these dynamics, the offenses remain invisible (Goodman, 1995; Henry et al., 2007). Indeed, avoidance of race topics has been likened to “a conspiracy of silence” (D. W. Sue, 2005).

Making the “invisible” visible is the first step toward combating unconscious and unintentional racism, sexism, heterosexism, and other forms of bigotry. Thus, the primary purposes of this book build upon the efforts in the first edition to:

- describe and make visible microaggressions
- explain the dynamic psychological interplay between perpetrators and targets

*(Continued)*

- depict the individual and societal consequences of microaggressions and macroaggressions
- reveal how microaggressions create maximal harm
- recommend individual, institutional, and societal strategies—micro-interventions—that will ameliorate the harms aimed toward members of marginalized groups in the United States and beyond.