



Pervasive Contemporary Racism

Much of current racism in the United States can be subtle, yet the messages and meaning of the insults, assaults and invalidations have damaging, cumulative negative effects. Directed verbally and/or non-verbally toward non-whites by dominant culture, white people, this covert, contemporary racism is pervasive throughout day to day encounters. Whether done consciously or unconsciously, the perpetrators of these disturbing and hurtful incidents must acknowledge both the intention and impact of their actions and inactions. As educators, we must work to combat their systemic devaluing cumulative effects. We need to recognize them in order to reduce their number. Working as allies across differences, we must find ways to collaboratively alleviate their devastating effects on individuals and society as a whole.

“Most White Americans experience themselves as good, moral, and decent human beings who believe in equality and democracy. Thus, they find it difficult to believe that they possess biased racial attitudes and may engage in behaviors that are discriminatory.” (D. W. Sue, 2005)

“Some racism is so subtle that neither victim nor perpetrator may entirely understand what is going on—which may be especially toxic for people of color.” (T. DeAgelis, 2009)

“Social scientists have coined a term ...: racial microaggression. The phrase describes the subtle indignities and insults directed at minorities during everyday exchanges. Their ambiguity is what makes them so vexing -- the recipient doesn't know for certain whether a slight is deliberate, making it difficult to know how to react.” (J. Troiano, 2007)

“Racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogative, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color.” (D.W. Sue, 2007)

“The power of racial micro-aggressions lies in their invisibility to the perpetrator and oftentimes, the recipient. (D. W. Sue, 2005)

For people of color “microaggressions may surprise you, stun you, enrage you, or even hurt your feelings. Even trivial microaggressions can put you off balance and distract you from the task at hand.” (C. Wells, 2007)

“A microaggression is not ‘micro’ in the sense that it is less disturbing and less hurtful than overt racism and hate speech and action. It is only ‘micro’ in the sense that privileged members of the community will regard it as trivial.” (C. Wells, 2007)

“Microaggressions look different depending upon whether the viewer identifies with the aggressor or the target class...We live in a society where it is difficult to escape the sharp elbows of difference, and this is an on-going challenge for all of us.” (C. Wells, 2007)

“There are overt and blatant forms of racism but there are also the constant and subtle negative experiences that can wear down one's spirit. The racism just below the surface. It is the accumulation of these racist events that wear you down...What bothers me is the constant retort from non-Hispanics that, 'I was being too sensitive about racial issues' (Chicano Biologist)” (D. Solorzano, 2007)

“Nouvelle Racist messages stink as much as the Original-Flavor variety, and are far more toxic in their subtlety and insidiousness.” (H.Y. Nahn, 1999)

“Racism, both overt and subtle, has been a feature of human interaction for centuries. But now that blatant public displays of prejudice are frowned upon -- and even criminalized -- the more subtle manifestations are receiving increased attention from researchers. By giving this phenomenon a name, social scientists hope to draw attention to how damaging such slights can be when multiplied by the thousands of times they may occur over a lifetime.” (J. Troiano, 2007)

Microaggression Themes <i>Adapted from the works of D.W. Sue & B. Abayan</i>	Examples in Oregon Schools	Messages They Communicate
ALIEN IN OWN LAND: <i>assumption that non-whites, like Asians and Latinos/as are foreign born and therefore are not living in this country in the same way that whites do.</i>	In talking with an Asian student, the teacher comments: "My, you speak such good English. Where were you born and how did you learn to speak so well?"	<i>You are obviously not a "real American" Because you are of Asian descent you must be a foreigner. Latinos/as must be illegal criminals.</i>
AScription OF INTELLIGENCE: <i>assigning intelligence to a person of color on the basis of race.</i>	A teacher praises a Native American student by saying: "You are a credit to your race. When I talk about Indians, I'm not referring to you. You're not like the rest of <i>them</i> . You're different! If only there were more of <i>them</i> like you."	<i>People of Color are generally not as intelligent as Whites. It is unusual for a person of your race to be intelligent.</i>
COLOR BLINDNESS: <i>white person's desire to ignore and fail to acknowledge the historical and current impact of race; negating the cultural values, norms, expectations, and experiences of people of color.</i>	Coach says to a player: "When I look at you, I don't see color. I don't think of you as Black. You're just one of the team."	<i>Denying impact of racial heritage. Assumption that race has no meaning ...If you don't see my race, do you really see me? Being truly blind about who I am.</i>
ASSUMPTION OF CRIMINALITY: <i>persons of color presumed to be dangerous, criminal, or deviant based on their race.</i>	Students of color waiting to be picked up after a basketball game notice that as they walk by cars with white drivers, the car doors are locked as they come near.	<i>Because of your race/ethnicity you are dangerous and obviously engaged in criminal activity. Whites need to protect themselves from you.</i>
DENIAL OF PERSONAL PREJUDICE & RACISM: <i>white people's claim of "innocence by association". They equate personal interactions with a person of color as a shield that magically overrides any racist conditioning or patterns of oppression.</i>	White male teacher questions why the school is continuing to do equity training. "I'm not racist. I have traveled the world, taught overseas and my wife is a different race than me. I'm one of the good guys!"	<i>Failure to recognize conscious and unconscious bias, prejudice, discrimination and oppression. Assuming both personal and professional immunity due to limited prior experiences as a white person.</i>
MYTH OF MERITOCRACY: <i>rejection of the impact of white privilege; refusal to believe that there is not a level playing field but instead differing access and opportunities where race plays a major part in life's successes.</i>	Site Council member is worried about budget cuts. She complains that people of color are given extra, unfair benefits.	<i>Denial of the lasting impact of oppression and dominant culture privilege. Based on inaccurate assumptions about equality and failing to embrace the notion of equitable support systems.</i>
PATHOLOGIZING CULTURAL VALUES / COMMUNICATION STYLES: <i>putting down cultural aspects of others; considering values, experiences and communications styles of the dominant/white culture as normal, ideal and desirable for all.</i>	Parents avoid a new Asian mother because she just seems so stand-offish and not interested in getting involved. "She's very unfriendly. She won't even make eye contact and only sticks with her own kind."	<i>Lack of multi-cultural awareness and acceptance. Only the dominant culture's white ways, are accepted; others are unacceptable; not normal so therefore "abnormal".</i>
SECOND CLASS CITIZEN: <i>manifestation of white privilege, when a white person is given preferential treatment over a person of color. Biased assumptions of status based on perpetuation of white supremacy thinking.</i>	Community member walks into the school office and asks the Latina principal if she knows where the principal is...because he assumed the Latina was the secretary not the principal.	<i>Assuming that People of Color are subservient to higher status Whites who are the leaders and managers in control.</i>
INVISIBILITY: <i>marginalizing, overlooking, disregarding and/or ignoring of people of color.</i>	Staff member of color makes a comment in a meeting only to be ignored. Later the same idea declared "profound" when shared by white, dominant culture staff.	<i>You are not worthy of consideration. You have nothing to contribute. Your input is considered inferior.</i>
HYPER-VISIBILITY: <i>being overly visible means being watched but not really seen - type of scrutiny based on perceived difference, usually interpreted as deviance.</i>	On a field trip, the one student of color was asked repeatedly if he needed help in the museum bookstore and followed throughout his time there by one of the cashiers obviously checking to see if he was shoplifting.	<i>You are constantly watched, noticed and under surveillance. You stand out because you don't belong here! You can't be trusted. You are up to no-good!</i>
ISOLATION and EXCLUSION: <i>perpetuation of de facto segregation and preference for "in-group" behavior that keeps those who are different outside the dominant culture's interactions.</i>	On the bus, no one will sit with a student of color. Students exclaim that: "He talks weird, brings gross stuff in his lunch and isn't one of our friends."	<i>You are rejected because you're not a viable group member. You are only a "friend" if you are like the members of the dominant white culture-- an "honorary White." You can't be yourself and be accepted.</i>
ENVIRONMENTAL: <i>systemic influences within daily settings and locations that value and celebrate white/dominant culture and negate or ignore the contributions and/or perspectives of People of Color.</i>	At Thomas Jefferson School all of the bulletin boards have pictures of White people; no other races. Posters state: "There is only one race; the human race." Colorful cartoon jelly beans on another poster proclaim: "We are all Human Beans."	<i>If you are not white you don't belong. You are an outsider if you are not a member of the dominant white culture. Race doesn't matter, so long as you are white or act white....but in fact if you are not white you don't really have a place here.</i>

RACIAL MICRO-AGGRESSIONS

*Common verbal or behavior indignities,
whether intentional or unintentional,
which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative
racial slights and insults.*

INSULTS

(Often Unconscious)

*Behavioral/verbal remarks or
comments that convey rudeness,
insensitivity and demean a person's
racial heritage or identity.*

Ascription of Intelligence
Assumption of Criminality
Pathologizing Values/Communication Styles
Second Class Citizen
Hyper-Visibility

ASSAULTS

(Often Conscious)

*Explicit racial derogations
characterized primarily by a violent
verbal or non-verbal attack meant to
hurt the intended victim through
name-calling, avoidant behavior or
purposeful discriminatory actions*

Isolation & Exclusion
Racial Slurs
Degrading "Jokes"
Mocking Accents or Appearance
Questioning Birth Certificates /Citizenship

INVALIDATIONS

(Often Unconscious)

*Verbal comments or behaviors
that exclude, negate, or nullify
the psychological thoughts, feelings,
or experiential reality of a
Person of Color.*

Alien in Own Land
Color Blindness
Denial of Personal Prejudice & Racism
Myth of Meritocracy
Invisibility

ENVIRONMENTAL

(Often Unclear whether Conscious or Unconscious)

Racial assaults, insults and invalidations
which are manifested on systemic and
environmental levels.

e.g. through mass media, religious doctrine,
historical perspective, curricular exclusions,
missing/marginalized voices of People of Color.

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