

Racial Microaggressions

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DESCRIPTION OF RACIAL MICROAGGRESSIONS

Definition

Sue et al. (2007) described racial microaggressions as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults towards people of color” (p. 273). Additionally, Sue and colleagues developed several categories of racial microaggressions: *Microassaults*, *Microinsults*, and *Microinvalidations*. Microassaults, thought to be intentional and conscious, are hostile behaviors that aimed to harm racial/ethnic minority individuals through verbal attacks, avoidance, or discrimination (e.g., referring to someone as ‘colored’ or displaying a *swastika*; p. 274). Microinsults, often unconscious, represent indirect insults that degrade a person’s racial heritage (e.g., A store owner following a customer around the store; p. 276). Similarly, unconscious, microinvalidations are communications that render invisible or negate racial/ethnic minority peoples’ experiences, cognitions, and emotions related to their race/ethnicity (e.g., When I look at you, I don’t see color; p. 276). Sue et al. (2007) also noted that all three forms of microaggressions can occur at systemic levels and term these incidents environmental microaggressions.

In addition to environmental microaggressions, eight microaggression themes have been identified (Sue et al., 2007). These include (a) ascribing intelligence based on race [

African American/Black individuals reported experiencing racial discrimination over their lifetimes (e.g., Krieger, Kosheleva, Waterman, Chen, & Koenen, 2011). For example, with a subsample of 2,444 racial/ethnic minority people, Burgess et al. (2008) found that approximately 46% of African American, 40% American Indian, 47% Southeast Asian, and 45% Latina/o individuals reported experiencing racial discrimination at least once monthly or yearly.

Resource:

INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

General Considerations

There is a paucity of empirical research investigating specific intervention strategies to address the racial microaggression experiences of racial/ethnic minority clients. However, several recommendations have been made in the literature (e.g., Topol et al., 2011; Topol & Topol, 2011). These recommendations are grouped into three categories: (a) recognizing that racial microaggressions should be recognized and addressed (Hall, 2001). At the foundation of all recommendations is the ethnographic research of Topol (1995). Topol's research is the foundation of all recommendations.

Lastly, it is important to collaborate with clients to develop ways of coping with racial microaggressions. In a qualitative study with racial/ethnic minority mental health professionals, Hernandez, Carranza, and Almeida (2010) identified self-care, connecting with one's spirituality, confronting the aggressor, and seeking mentoring as adaptive responses to microaggressions. Because racial/ethnic minority clients utilize subtle cues to gauge their counselor's multicultural attitudes, displaying racial/ethnic minority art and reading materials can be a relatively simple, but persuasive, way to communicate cultural sensitivity (Thompson, Baile, & Akbar, 2004).

Resource:

Psychological Treatment of Ethnic Minority Populations

<http://www.apa.org/pi/oema/resources/brochures/treatment-minority.pdf>

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