

Microaggressions in Everyday Life

SECOND EDITION

Derald Wing Sue
Lisa Beth Spanierman



WILEY

MICROAGGRESSIONS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

MICROAGGRESSIONS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Second Edition

DERALD WING SUE, PhD

LISA BETH SPANIERMAN, PhD

WILEY

This edition first published 2020
© 2020 John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Edition History

1e, 2010, John Wiley and Sons, Inc

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, except as permitted by law. Advice on how to obtain permission to reuse material from this title is available at <http://www.wiley.com/go/permissions>.

The right of Derald Wing Sue and Lisa Beth Spanierman to be identified as the authors of this work has been asserted in accordance with law.

Registered Office

John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030, USA

Editorial Office

111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030, USA

For details of our global editorial offices, customer services, and more information about Wiley products visit us at www.wiley.com.

Wiley also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats and by print-on-demand. Some content that appears in standard print versions of this book may not be available in other formats.

Limit of Liability/Disclaimer of Warranty

While the publisher and authors have used their best efforts in preparing this work, they make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this work and specifically disclaim all warranties, including without limitation any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose. No warranty may be created or extended by sales representatives, written sales materials or promotional statements for this work. The fact that an organization, website, or product is referred to in this work as a citation and/or potential source of further information does not mean that the publisher and authors endorse the information or services the organization, website, or product may provide or recommendations it may make. This work is sold with the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering professional services. The advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for your situation. You should consult with a specialist where appropriate. Further, readers should be aware that websites listed in this work may have changed or disappeared between when this work was written and when it is read. Neither the publisher nor authors shall be liable for any loss of profit or any other commercial damages, including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential, or other damages.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Sue, Derald Wing, author. | Spanierman, Lisa, author.

Title: Microaggressions in everyday life / Derald Wing Sue, PhD, Teachers College, Columbia University, Lisa Beth Spanierman, PhD, Arizona State University.

Description: Second Edition. | Hoboken : Wiley, 2020. | Revised edition of Microaggressions in everyday life, c2010. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019027809 (print) | LCCN 2019027810 (ebook) | ISBN 9781119513797 (paperback) | ISBN 9781119513803 (adobe pdf) | ISBN 9781119513810 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Aggressiveness. | Offenses against the person. | Cross-cultural counseling.

Classification: LCC BF575.A3 S88 2020 (print) | LCC BF575.A3 (ebook) | DDC 155.2/32-dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2019027809>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2019027810>

Cover Design: Wiley

Cover Image: © Adrienne Bresnahan/Getty Images

Set in 10/14.5pt Palatino by SPi Global, Pondicherry, India

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

Preface	xi
----------------	-----------

SECTION ONE: PSYCHOLOGICAL MANIFESTATION AND DYNAMICS OF MICROAGGRESSIONS

CHAPTER ONE

Microaggressions as Toxic Rain: Here, There, and Everywhere!	3
What Are Microaggressions?	7
Racial Microaggressions	9
The Invisibility and Nebulous Nature of Everyday Racism	12
Gender Microaggressions	16
Sexual-Orientation Microaggressions	19
Misunderstanding Microaggressions	20
Stop Making Mountains Out of Molehills!	20
Everything's a Microaggression in This Climate of Political Correctness	20
Your Analysis Is Flawed	21
Microaggressions, Marginality, and Harmful Impact	23
The Way Forward: Making the "Invisible" Visible	26

CHAPTER TWO

Taxonomy of Microaggressions	31
Conscious and Deliberate Bigotry versus Unconscious and Unintentional Bias	33

The Changing Face of Racism, Sexism, and Heterosexism	34
Microaggressions	36
Environmental Macroaggressions	37
Forms of Microaggressions	41
Microassaults	41
Microinsults and Microinvalidations: Common Themes	48
Microinsults	49
Microinvalidations	52
The Way Forward: Defining, Recognizing, and Deconstructing Hidden Messages in Microaggressions	55
 CHAPTER THREE	
The Psychological Dilemmas and Dynamics of Microaggressions	59
Clash of Racial Realities: “You Are Just Being Hypersensitive and Misreading the Situation!”	62
Invisibility of Unintentional Biases: “I’m Not a Racist!”	67
Perceived Minimal Harm of Microaggressions: “Don’t Make a Mountain Out of a Molehill!”	70
The Catch-22 of Responding to Microaggressions: “You’re Damned if You Do and Damned if You Don’t!”	73
The Way Forward: Dealing with Psychological Dilemmas	79
 SECTION TWO: MICROAGGRESSIVE IMPACT ON TARGETS AND PERPETRATORS	
 CHAPTER FOUR	
The Microaggression Process Model: The Internal Struggle of Targets	85
Tracing the Impact of Microaggressions	88
Phase One—The Potential Microaggressive Incident or Event	88
Phase Two—Initial Assessment and Questioning of the Incident	96
Phase Three—Reaction Processes	97
Phase Four—Interpretation and Meaning	103
Phase Five—Consequences and Impact	106
The Microaggression Process Model: Recap	110
The Way Forward: Strength through Adversity	112

CHAPTER FIVE

Microaggressive Stress: Impact on Physical and Psychological Well-Being	115
Biological Stressors: A Roadmap to Understanding	
Microaggressive Harm	117
Psychological and Social Stressors	119
Microaggressions and Daily Hassles	120
Impact of Everyday Hassles	121
The Life-Change Model of Stress	122
The Transactional Model of Stress	123
Situating Stress in the Macro-Context of Oppression	124
The Harmful Effects of Microaggressive Stress	127
Physical Health Effects of Microaggressive Stressors	127
Psychological Health Effects of Microaggressive Stressors	129
Strength through Adversity	140
The Way Forward: Responding Strategically and Resisting Microaggressions	140

CHAPTER SIX

Microaggressive Perpetrators: Who, What, When, How, and Why?	145
Who Are Microaggressive Perpetrators?	147
How and Why Do Individuals Perpetrate Microaggressions?	149
Using the Tools: Creating and Maintaining Dominance	149
Power to Impose a Biased Reality	151
What Makes It So Difficult for Perpetrators to Recognize Their Privilege?	153
Layer One—Fear of Appearing Biased	154
Layer Two—Fear of Recognizing One’s Complicity in Oppression	155
Layer Three—Fear of Acknowledging One’s Privilege	156
Layer Four—Fear of Taking Personal Responsibility to End Oppression	158
What Are the Costs of Microaggressions to Perpetrators?	160
Cognitive Costs of Oppression	161
Emotional Costs of Oppression	162
Behavioral Costs of Oppression	164
Spiritual and Moral Costs of Oppression	165
The Way Forward: The Ethical Mandate	166

**SECTION THREE: INTERROGATING MICROAGGRESSIONS:
ON RESEARCH, TEACHING, AND COUNSELING**

CHAPTER SEVEN

Researching Microaggressions: Show Me the Evidence!	171
In Their Own Words: Qualitative Investigation of Microaggressions	173
Purposive Samples	178
Focus Groups	178
Individual Interviews	180
Other Data Sources	180
Trustworthiness	182
Do Findings Generalize? Quantitative Investigation of Microaggressions	182
Measuring Microaggressions	183
Quantitative Research Designs	189
Summary	191
The Way Forward: Future Research Directions	192

CHAPTER EIGHT

Teaching about Microaggressions	199
Faculty Narratives: Facing Challenges in the Classroom	201
Challenges Faculty Members of Color Face	202
Challenges White Faculty Members Face	205
Encountering Microaggressions in the Classroom	207
Navigating Microaggressions: What Can Educators Do?	209
Microaggressions Pedagogy: How to Teach about Microaggressions	213
The Way Forward: General Strategies for Facilitating Difficult Dialogues on Race	216

CHAPTER NINE

Microaggressions in Counseling and Psychotherapy	223
Underutilization of Mental Health Services	225
Premature Termination and Quality of Mental Health Care	226
Multicultural Counseling Competence	227
Manifestations of Racial Microaggressions in Counseling and Psychotherapy	228

Microaggressions Influence Counseling Process and Outcomes	237
Innovative Research Approaches	240
The Way Forward: Microaggressions Implications for Practice and Research	241

**SECTION FOUR: DISARMING MICROAGGRESSIONS
AND MACROAGGRESSIONS**

CHAPTER TEN

Microintervention Strategies for Disarming Microaggressions and Macroaggressions	249
Microaggressions and Macroaggressions	251
The Need to Take Action: Targets, Allies, and Bystanders	252
Targets	253
Allies	254
Bystanders	256
Responding to Microaggressions and Macroaggressions	257
Microinterventions	258
Strategic Goal: Make the “Invisible” Visible	261
Strategic Goal: Disarm the Microaggression	269
Strategic Goal: Educate the Perpetrator	271
Strategic Goal: Seek External Intervention or Support	273
Microinterventions and Macroaggressions	275
Context Matters	277
The Way Forward: Microinterventions and the New Research Frontier	278
References	281
Author Index	321
Subject Index	337

Preface

Microaggressions in Everyday Life, Second Edition is about the damaging consequences of everyday prejudice, bias, and discrimination on the lives of marginalized groups in our society. Building on the highly successful first edition, this completely revised and updated version analyzes the most recent research findings and current scholarly thinking on the manifestation, dynamics, and impact of microaggressions across a broad range of marginalized groups and settings. Microaggressions theory has become integrated into many professional fields including psychology, education, law, medicine, and public policy and has become part of mainstream discourse (e.g., print, television, and talk radio) and social media (e.g., internet blogs and Facebook). The concept of microaggressions, which initially focused on race and communities of color, has been applied to many marginalized groups in society (women, LGBTQ populations, people with disabilities, religious minorities, and persons living in poverty), and in a multitude of settings (classrooms, public spaces, and places of employment). In 2017 the word “microaggression” was formally added to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, thereby making the term a part of the American lexicon.

Those of you familiar with the first edition will note that major changes have occurred in coverage and emphasis due to my collaboration with Dr. Lisa B. Spanierman, an expert scholar and researcher on the psychosocial costs of racism to White Americans, the detrimental impact of microaggressions to targets, and the roles and responsibilities of White racial justice allies. Her expertise in this revised edition offers a fresh contemporary look,

incorporates new and important topical areas, and applies microaggression research to everyday life. Although there are a number of major organizational and topical changes, we have maintained three key features that our readers consistently declare as extremely helpful: (a) using real-life examples or case vignettes at the opening of most chapters to illustrate the upcoming content; (b) employing contemporary interpersonal, social, and political events that anchor the concepts of explicit and implicit bias; and (c) concluding each chapter with a section titled “The Way Forward” that provides concrete future actions/directions to combat microaggressions.

Organizationally, we have eliminated three chapters from the first edition that deal separately with racial microaggressions, gender microaggressions, and sexual-orientation microaggressions. Instead, we have incorporated these group-based microaggressions throughout the chapters and discussed microaggressions in an integrated fashion, pointing out similarities and differences between the targeted groups.

WHAT IS NEW TO THE SECOND EDITION?

According to many psychologists and educators, the taxonomy of microaggressions has revolutionized the way we think about prejudice and discrimination. Since the publication of “Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Implications for Clinical Practice” (Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007) and of *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender and Sexual Orientation* (Sue, 2010), there have been over 20,000 publications on the topic (Google Scholar, October 2018). The journal article and book have generated a multitude of research studies, conceptual/analytical models, case studies, anecdotal reports, and editorial/opinion pieces. This current edition was guided by the most up-to-date research findings on microaggressions, resulting in what we hope will become an equally important and groundbreaking standard for the field. The new features/topics of *Microaggressions in Everyday Life, Second Edition* are discussed next.

The majority of work on microaggressions has focused on how they detrimentally harm target populations. In this new edition, we devote Chapter 6 to how macrolevel systems of dominance and oppression affect the microlevel psyche and behavior of perpetrators or offenders. Interestingly, very little research has focused on understanding those who commit microaggressions. Thus, we address several important questions: Who are microaggressive perpetrators? How and why do individuals perpetrate microaggressions?

What makes it so difficult for perpetrators to recognize their role in the transmission of microaggressions? What are the costs of microaggressions to those who perpetrate them? This last question is unique and important because most discussions of perpetrators emphasize power, privilege, and the advantages that accrue to dominant-group members who engage in oppressive acts. We show, however, that research reveals microaggressors experience a multitude of psychosocial costs (emotional, behavioral, spiritual, and moral) that deplete their humanity.

Second, we also introduce a completely new concept in this edition that we label *microinterventions*. In our work with microaggressions, we have repeatedly asked how people can effectively fight against expressions of bias. In Chapter 10 we review the literature and findings on antibias actions and develop a conceptual framework of strategies (microinterventions)—a repertoire of responses used to directly disarm or counteract the effects of micro- and macroaggressions by challenging perpetrators who deliver interpersonal slights and persons in authority who operate under biased policies or practices. In this chapter we describe the potential antiracist actions of three major groups—*targets*, *allies*, and *bystanders*—in their struggle against racism. We believe these constituents must take a proactive stance against the discriminatory actions of perpetrators. Drawing from research studies, we extract guiding principles and provide suggestions, strategies, and interventions that disrupt, diminish, or terminate prejudice and discrimination at the individual level. We also address the need for scholars and practitioners to develop antiracist microintervention strategies directed at biased institutional programs and practices and toward biased societal social policies as well.

Third, another major addition to the book is Chapter 7, “Researching Microaggressions: Show Me the Evidence,” and our stance that there are multiple ways to ask and answer questions about the human condition, especially in the study of microaggressions. Unlike some scholars who minimize the importance of experiential reality and targets’ perspectives, we believe that methodological diversity is necessary and must involve to some degree people’s lived experiences. We provide a historical look at how the study of microaggressions has evolved over the years; the advantages and disadvantages of specific research strategies; and a description of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies used to portray a more comprehensive picture of the nature, manifestation, expression, and impact of microaggressions and how these aspects vary for different groups in different contexts. Of special relevance to future researchers, we provide

an overview of more than a dozen microaggression scales commonly used to research these forms of bias.

Fourth, throughout the book we distinguish between the usage of the terms “microaggressions” and “macroaggressions.” In our earlier formulation of microaggression theory, we concentrated primarily on microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations. This led to confusion when some in the public began to use the term “macroaggressions” to indicate the immense harm that often resulted from a microaggression. Unlike microaggressions, which are situated in microlevel interpersonal contexts, macroaggressions affect whole groups or classes of people because they are systemic in nature. Further, *microaggressions* reside in the beliefs and attitudes of individuals, while *macroaggressions* reside in the programs, policies, and practices of institutions and society. Disarming or counteracting microaggressions refers to neutralizing bigotry among individuals, whereas combating macroaggressions refers to changing the policies and practices of organizations and institutions that deny equal access and opportunity for all.

Fifth, being both educators and mental health practitioners, we introduce two completely revised chapters: Chapter 8, “Teaching About Microaggressions,” which has implications for educators, and Chapter 9, “Microaggressions in Counseling and Psychotherapy.” As it is nearly impossible to separate the practice of teaching about microaggressions from the dynamics of encountering microaggressions in the classroom, in Chapter 8 we focus on teaching *about* microaggressions as well as *using teachable moments effectively* when microaggressions occur in our classrooms. In Chapter 9 we underscore how clients’ presenting concerns may be related to microaggressive harm in their everyday lives. We also emphasize how well-intentioned helping professionals unknowingly commit harmful microaggressions toward their clients in the therapeutic context, which is especially concerning because clients seek therapy to resolve problems. Culturally insensitive therapeutic practice can lead to secondary trauma, especially among clients who experience multiple microaggressions in their everyday lives. If microaggressions are not addressed in therapy or, worse yet, if a therapist commits microaggressions during a session, clients may never receive the help they need. In this chapter we describe briefly mental health disparities in terms of underutilization, premature termination, and quality of care. We also review cutting-edge counseling process and outcomes research that investigates microaggressions in the therapy context.

Microaggressions in Everyday Life, Second Edition is divided into four major sections.

Section One—Psychological Manifestation and Dynamics of Microaggressions is composed of three chapters that provide the conceptual framework of microaggression theory and explicate, via research, the manifestation, dynamics, and impact of microaggressions across a broad spectrum of marginalized group members.

Chapter 1—Microaggressions as Toxic Rain: Here, There and Everywhere!

- What Are Microaggressions?
- Racial Microaggressions
 - The Invisibility and Nebulous Nature of Everyday Racism
- Gender Microaggressions
- Sexual-Orientation Microaggressions
- Misunderstanding Microaggressions
 - Stop Making Mountains Out of Molehills!
 - Everything's a Microaggression in This Climate of Political Correctness
 - Your Analysis Is Flawed
- Microaggressions, Marginality, and Harmful Impact
- The Way Forward: Making the "Invisible" Visible

Chapter 2—Taxonomy of Microaggressions

- Conscious and Deliberate Bigotry versus Unconscious and Unintentional Bias
 - The Changing Face of Racism, Sexism, and Heterosexism
 - Microaggressions
- Environmental Macroaggressions
- Forms of Microaggressions
 - Microassaults
- Microinsults and Microinvalidations: Common Themes
 - Microinsults
 - Microinvalidations
- The Way Forward: Defining, Recognizing, and Deconstructing Hidden Messages in Microaggressions

Chapter 3—The Psychological Dilemmas and Dynamics of Microaggressions

- Clash of Racial Realities: “You Are Just Being Hypersensitive and Misreading the Situation!”
- Invisibility of Unintentional Biases: “I’m Not a Racist!”
- Perceived Minimal Harm of Microaggressions: “Don’t Make a Mountain Out of a Molehill!”
- The Catch-22 of Responding to Microaggressions: “You’re Damned if You Do and Damned if You Don’t!”
- The Way Forward: Dealing with Psychological Dilemmas

Section Two—Microaggressive Impact on Targets and Perpetrators is composed of three chapters. In this section, we provide a model to understand the internal struggle of microaggression recipients, and the harm it has on their physical and mental well-being. Quite new is our chapter on microaggressive perpetrators and the unique analysis of the impact that microaggressions have upon them.

Chapter 4—The Microaggression Process Model: The Internal Struggle of Targets

- Tracing the Impact of Microaggressions
 - Phase One—The Potential Microaggressive Incident or Event
 - Phase Two—Initial Assessment and Questioning of the Incident
 - Phase Three—Reaction Processes
 - Phase Four—Interpretation and Meaning
 - Phase Five—Consequences and Impact
- The Microaggression Process Model: Recap
- The Way Forward: Strength through Adversity

Chapter 5—Microaggressive Stress: Impact on Physical and Psychological Well-Being

- Biological Stressors: A Roadmap to Understanding Microaggressive Harm
- Psychological and Social Stressors
 - Microaggressions and Daily Hassles
 - Impact of Everyday Hassles

- The Life-Change Model of Stress
- The Transactional Model of Stress
- Situating Stress in the Macro-Context of Oppression
- The Harmful Effects of Microaggressive Stress
 - Physical Health Effects of Microaggressive Stressors
 - Psychological Health Effects of Microaggressive Stressors
- Strength through Adversity
- The Way Forward: Responding Strategically and Resisting Microaggressions

Chapter 6—Microaggressive Perpetrators: Who, What, When, How, and Why?

- Who Are Microaggressive Perpetrators?
- How and Why Do Individuals Perpetrate Microaggressions?
 - Using the Tools: Creating and Maintaining Dominance
 - Power to Impose a Biased Reality
- What Makes It So Difficult for Perpetrators to Recognize Their Privilege?
 - Layer One—Fear of Appearing Biased
 - Layer Two—Fear of Recognizing One’s Complicity in Oppression
 - Layer Three—Fear of Acknowledging One’s Privilege
 - Layer Four—Fear of Taking Personal Responsibility to End Oppression
- What Are the Costs of Microaggressions to Perpetrators?
 - Cognitive Costs of Oppression
 - Emotional Costs of Oppression
 - Behavioral Costs of Oppression
 - Spiritual and Moral Costs of Oppression
- The Way Forward: The Ethical Mandate

Section Three—Interrogating Microaggressions: On Research, Teaching, and Counseling is composed of three chapters. In this section, we discuss microaggressions from three different perspectives: (a) what has microaggression research revealed and how research methodologies can be used to study the phenomena, (b) how educators need to be cognizant of addressing and teaching about microaggressions, and (c) what mental health professionals need to address in their own personal awakening about microaggressions, and in the quality care of services delivered to culturally diverse clients.

Chapter 7—Researching Microaggressions: Show Me the Evidence!

- In Their Own Words: Qualitative Investigation of Microaggressions
 - Purposive Samples
 - Focus Groups
 - Individual Interviews
 - Other Data Sources
 - Trustworthiness
- Do Findings Generalize? Quantitative Investigation of Microaggressions
 - Measuring Microaggressions
 - Quantitative Research Designs
- Summary
- The Way Forward: Future Research Directions

Chapter 8—Teaching About Microaggressions

- Faculty Narratives: Facing Challenges in the Classroom
 - Challenges Faculty Members of Color Face
 - Challenges White Faculty Members Face
- Encountering Microaggressions in the Classroom
- Navigating Microaggressions: What Can Educators Do?
- Microaggressions Pedagogy: How to Teach about Microaggressions
- The Way Forward: General Strategies for Facilitating Difficult Dialogues on Race

Chapter 9—Microaggressions in Counseling and Psychotherapy

- Underutilization of Mental Health Services
- Premature Termination and Quality of Mental Health Care
- Multicultural Counseling Competence
- Manifestation of Racial Microaggressions in Counseling and Psychotherapy
- Microaggressions Influence Counseling Process and Outcomes
 - Innovative Research Approaches
- The Way Forward: Microaggressions Implications for Practice and Research

Section Four—Disarming Microaggressions and Macroaggressions is composed of one chapter. It is a fitting end to the book, because it directly addresses what targets, allies, and bystanders can do to disarm or neutralize microaggressions.

Chapter 10—Microintervention Strategies for Disarming Microaggressions and Macroaggressions

- Microaggressions and Macroaggressions
- The Need to Take Action: Targets, Allies, and Bystanders
 - Targets
 - Allies
 - Bystanders
- Responding to Microaggressions and Macroaggressions
- Microinterventions
 - Strategic Goal: Make the “Invisible” Visible
 - Strategic Goal: Disarm the Microaggression
 - Strategic Goal: Educate the Perpetrator
 - Strategic Goal: Seek External Intervention or Support
- Microinterventions and Macroaggressions
- Context Matters
- The Way Forward: Microinterventions and the New Research Frontier

It is important to note that a major goal of the text is to present research data, theory, and practical suggestions on how to overcome microaggressions that target members of marginalized groups and to make specific suggestions related to how microaggressions can be ameliorated at individual, institutional, and societal levels. To further emphasize remedial and preventive interventions, we updated the special concluding sections in each chapter, “The Way Forward,” to provide guidelines, strategies, and interventions that readers can enact to reduce the frequency and impact of microaggressions in our society. We also devote an entire chapter (Chapter 10) to offer readers a conceptual framework and specific microintervention tactics.

In closing, we would like to personally acknowledge our family and partners for their encouragement, support, and help throughout this project. Derald Wing Sue would like to dedicate this book to his wife, Paulina, his son Derald Paul and wife Claire, granddaughters Caroline and Juliette, his daughter Marissa Catherine and husband Neal, and grandsons Niam and

Kiran. Lisa B. Spanierman would like to dedicate this book to Tony Clark for his unwavering support, her parents, Brenda and Ron, and her sister, Dana. She would also like to thank Jorge Ballesteros, Shelby Messerschmitt-Coen, and Jackson Liguori for their helpful research assistance.

Derald Wing Sue
Lisa Beth Spanierman
July 2019

SECTION ONE

**Psychological
Manifestation and
Dynamics of
Microaggressions**

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