
CHAPTER 6

Multiracial Microaggressions

Exposing Monoracism in Everyday Life and Clinical Practice

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MULTIRACIAL PEOPLE HAVE been part of the history of the United States for centuries, as exemplified by the term *mulatto* first appearing in the 1850 U.S. Census (Morning, 2003). Despite this history, the year 2000 marked the first Census that allowed respondents to check more than one box for their racial identification, yielding 57 possible multiple-race identities based off of 6 main racial categories (Morning). Thus, Census 2000 was a critical state-issued marker for U.S. society's validation and acceptance of the growing multiracial community, as it offered an opportunity for the government, educational systems, and media to become aware of the number of various multiracial demographics in the United States (DaCosta, 2007). In addition to the U.S. Census's inclusion of multiraciality, issues concerning multiracial persons have also been a topic of interest in academia, as exemplified by a multidisciplinary surge in research and theory around multiracial identity, as well as surrounding political and social issues concerning multiracial persons (Shih & Sanchez, 2009). Additionally, the recent election of a biracial, African American-identified president has brought issues surrounding race and politics to the forefront (e.g., Thomas & Jackson, 2008), including issues surrounding multiraciality (e.g., Navarro, 2008) and "postracial" America (e.g., Lee, 2008). However, while the experiences of multiracial individuals seem to have gained much more popularity in academic and social arenas, little attention has been given to multiracial people's experiences with racism or discrimination.

There are reasons that may partially explain why there is a dearth of literature examining multiracial individuals' experiences with racism. First,

perhaps multiracial persons are assumed to only experience racism that is similar to monoracial individuals. For example, a biracial Black/White individual may be perceived only as Black and may experience racism accordingly. Second, the existing literature on multiracial people tends to focus primarily on identity and internal struggles in “choosing” between their multiple racial backgrounds (e.g., Poston, 1990) instead of examining race-related experiences within a monoracially-designed society. Finally, because racism has become more subtle and covert and “old-fashioned racism” (e.g., hate crimes, blatant discrimination, racial slurs) has decreased (Nadal, 2008; Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007), individuals (both multiracial and monoracial) may have a more difficult time in identifying racism and may not recognize when subtle discrimination occurs.

This phenomenon of racism becoming more subtle and covert has been coined as “racial microaggressions” and has become more pervasive in the fields of psychology and education (e.g., Nadal, 2008; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007). Racial microaggressions are defined as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group” (Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007, p. 273). These experiences occur daily, are commonplace, and are often invisible to the perpetrator of the microaggression because of unconscious bias (e.g., Banaji & Greenwald, 1994), an overall lack of awareness of racial issues (Sue, Capodilupo, et al.), or both. Microaggressions may be invisible to the victims (or recipients) as well, as subtle insults or put-downs cannot always be attributed to the victim’s race. As a result, recipients of microaggressions often feel a catch-22 of whether or not to respond to the microaggression. If they do respond and address the enactor of the microaggression, the interaction may lead to psychological stress or potential physical threat. If they choose to not respond, they may perseverate about the incident and feel psychological distress for not voicing their concern (Nadal, in press). Feeling the weight of these cumulative, everyday microaggressions has been shown to have detrimental psychological impacts on people of color (e.g., Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, & Torino, 2007; Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008; Sue, Nadal, et al., 2008).

Sue, Capodilupo, and colleagues (2007) have proposed a taxonomy of racial microaggressions consisting of several categories including micro-assaults (namely, conscious or explicit verbal and behavioral interactions), microinsults (unintentional demeaning actions or remarks about one’s racial heritage), and microinvalidations (actions that invalidate a person’s racial reality). Several types of microaggressions fall within each category. A Latina/o person being angrily told to “go back where you came from”

could be identified as a microassault. Microinsults may include an African American person being told with surprise that she or he is “very articulate” or an Asian American person being assumed to be good at math and science. A person of color being told that “racism doesn’t exist” or that she or he “complains about racism too much” are illustrations of microinvalidations. These few examples of microaggressions have been well documented in counseling practice and everyday life (see Sue, Capodilupo, et al. for a review).

While most of the research on microaggressions has focused on race and racism, others have expanded notions to include microaggressions based on gender (e.g., Nadal, this volume; Capodilupo et al., Chapter 9 in this volume), sexual orientation or transgender status (e.g., Nadal, 2008; Nadal, Rivera, & Corpus, Chapter 10 in this volume), ability (e.g., Keller & Galgay, Chapter 11 in this volume), and religion (Nadal, 2008; Nadal, Issa, Griffin, Hamit, & Lyons, Chapter 13 in this volume). Microaggression taxonomies for all of these oppressed groups are created, following the original taxonomy on microaggressions. This framework on microaggressions presents a compelling way to view the everyday lives of multiracial people, whose experiences have been excluded by previous research on racial microaggressions targeting students of color (Solórzano, Allen, & Carroll, 2002), African Americans (Solórzano et al., 2000; Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008; Sue, Nadal, et al., 2008), Asian Americans (Sue, Bucceri, et al., 2007), and Latina/o Americans (Rivera, Forquer, & Rangel, Chapter 3 in this volume; Solórzano, 1998). Some of these studies (e.g., Sue, Bucceri, et al.) may have included multiracial participants but do not explicitly identify them as multiracial persons, or they focus solely on participants’ general experiences with race and not on their specific race-related experiences as multiracial persons.

The lack of inclusion of multiracial people has been a common thread in discussions on race and racism (Spickard & Daniel, 2004; Wijeyesinghe, 2001). This exclusion may be an example of a microaggression itself, sending an indirect message that multiracial persons’ experiences with racism are minimal when compared to their monoracial counterparts (Root, 1990). Excluding multiracial people from the scholarship on racial microaggressions may stem from a longer history of *monoracism*, or what this article defines as a social system of psychological inequality where individuals who do not fit monoracial categories may be oppressed on systemic and interpersonal levels because of underlying assumptions and beliefs in singular, discrete racial categories. Thus, it is important to recognize that previous studies on microaggressions may not be representative for multiracial people, because their potentially unique experiences have been excluded from such studies.

Furthermore, multiracial people may be targets of “traditional” racial microaggressions (or microaggressions based on perceptions of one’s race or phenotype as a person of color) in addition to multiracial microaggressions, which are daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, enacted by monoracial persons that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights toward multiracial individuals or groups. For example, if a biracial Asian/Latino man is treated as inferior or receives substandard service, it may be because of his general ascribed status as a person of color and not necessarily due to his multiracial heritage. At the same time, this individual may also hear messages from his family that he is “not Asian enough” or “not Latino enough,” which would be considered a microaggression based on his multiracial status. Accordingly, multiracial microaggressions involve individuals’ mixed-heritage status and are experienced by multiracial persons of any racial makeup or phenotype.

This chapter discusses different types of multiracial microaggressions and is divided into three major sections. The first part reviews the literature on the experiences of multiracial people and theorizes how the lens of microaggressions can be applied to multiracial individuals. The second part provides a taxonomy of multiracial microaggressions, citing themes, examples of such themes, and the messages that are conveyed with each. Finally, the third part discusses implications of multiracial microaggressions and provides recommendations for professional practice and future empirical research.

THE CHANGING FACE OF RACE AND RACISM

At the foundation of the concept of multiracial microaggressions is an understanding of the changing face of racism in the United States. Racism has been defined as “a system of advantage based on race and supported by institutional structures, policies, and practices that create and sustain benefits for the dominant white group, and structure discrimination, oppression, and disadvantage for people from targeted racial groups” (Bell, 2007, p. 117). Many scholars have documented and theorized that racism in the United States has transformed from more old-fashioned or blatant forms of racist incidents to more subtle and covert forms (Dovidio, Gaetner, Kawkami, & Hodson, 2002; McConahay, 1986; Nadal, 2008; Sears, 1988; Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007). While documenting and understanding racism in its multiple forms is important for progressing toward equality, there has been less focus on better understanding how the use of rigid racial categories can be considered the “very basis of racism” (Spickard, Fong, & Ewalt, 1995, p. 581). A recent growth of research on the fluid nature of racial categorization

(e.g., Doyle & Kao, 2007; Harris & Sim, 2002; Hitlin, Brown, & Elder, 2006) contends that racial identification is not fixed for both monoracial and multiracial individuals. However, there is still a common belief in the essentialist nature of discrete racial categories, which is related to the aforementioned definition of monoracism. As a result of this systemic understanding of racial categories, multiracial persons may experience subtle forms of discrimination in institutional settings and in their everyday interactions.

In order to better understand monoracism, it may be helpful to look at the theory of genderism, or “an ideology that reinforces the negative evaluation of gender non-conformity or an incongruence between sex and gender” (Hill & Willoughby, 2005, p. 534). Bilodeau (2009) expands genderism further and defines it as “a social system of structural inequality with an underlying assumption that there are two, and only two genders” (p. 54). Bilodeau’s study on transgender students’ experiences in higher education used Queer Theory to understand which variables made college campuses unsafe for transgender students and found the underlying system of the gender categories themselves to be oppressive toward transgender and gender non-conforming persons. These findings on genderism can be translated to the theory of monoracism in that individuals who do not fit monoracial categories may be oppressed on systemic and interpersonal levels. This can be exemplified by previous literature demonstrating that multiracial persons often receive direct or indirect messages to “choose” between their multiple racial identities (e.g., Root, 1990) or feel marginalized (e.g., Stonequist, 1937). The message that is conveyed to multiracial persons is that being monoracial is the norm or ideal and that being multiracial is substandard or different.

THE MULTIRACIAL EXPERIENCE

It is vital to review literature on the multiracial experience as a basis for conceptualizing multiracial individuals’ experiences with microaggressions. The next sections outline research on multiracial identity and experiences, multiracial persons’ experiences with racism and discrimination, and others’ perceptions of multiracial people, which inevitably influence monoracial individuals’ likelihood of enacting multiracial microaggressions.

MULTIRACIAL IDENTITY AND EXPERIENCES WITH RACISM

A large body of research on multiracial persons focuses on identity development through one of four approaches: the problem, equivalent, variant, and ecological approaches (Rockquemore, Brunsma, & Delgado, 2009; Thornton & Wason, 1995). *The problem approach* (e.g., Stonequist, 1937) relied on a foundational belief that being a multiracial person presents a problematic

social position that generally ends in tragedy. Building on stage models of Black racial identity development (e.g., Cross, 1971), *the equivalent approach* treated Black and White multiracial individuals as equivalent to monoracial Black people, due largely to identity politics after the 1960s civil rights and Black power movements (Rockquemore et al.). *The variant approach* conceptualized multiracial people as their own distinct group, worthy of being studied in unique ways (e.g., Poston, 1990). Lastly, *the ecological approach* (e.g., Root, 1996b; Renn, 2004; Rockquemore, 1999) focused scholarly attention to the contextual influences surrounding identity development rather than the particular identity outcomes.

An example of this ecological approach in the practical setting of higher education is Renn's (2004) ecological model for understanding the identity of mixed-race college students through five "identity patterns." These patterns include *monoracial identity* (choosing only one racial category to identify with), *multiple monoracial identities* (choosing to identify with both racial backgrounds), *multiracial identity* (choosing a term that reflects a multiracial identification, such as "biracial" or "mixed"), *extraracial identity* (opting out of racial categorization by refusing to identify according to such categories), and *situational identity* (identifying differently based on the situations the person is placed in). Renn's patterns, which reflect other models posited by researchers (e.g., Kilson, 2001; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Wallace, 2001), are important to consider due to the complex nature of racial identity, which is often influenced by other people's reactions to the multiracial person's identity (e.g., Root, 1990; Wijeyesinghe, 2001). These "reactions," or verbal remarks and behavioral actions, are common outlets in which multiracial microaggressions may occur.

Although many studies have focused on the impact of racism on specific racial/ethnic populations, including African Americans, Native Americans, Latinas/os, and Asian Americans (see Sue & Sue, 2008 for a review), few studies have focused on multiracial individuals' experiences with racism. Root (1990) found racism to have an impact on the identity development of multiracial people, stating, "It is the marginal status imposed by society rather than the objective mixed race of biracial individuals which poses a severe stress to positive identity development" (p. 188). However, this racism primarily dealt with a common understanding of racial discrimination based on monoracial status as a person of color. For instance, when a multiracial person who looks phenotypically Black is called the "N-word," she or he is experiencing racial discrimination that may be due to her or his racial appearance.

Some previous studies have documented the hardships and discrimination faced by multiracial individuals, including a lack of social recognition (Nakashima, 1996), isolation and disapproval from extended family (e.g., Root, 1998), exclusion from neighborhood and community (Kerwin

& Ponterotto, 1995; Kerwin, Ponterotto, Jackson, & Harris, 1993), and social isolation (Brown, 1995; Gaskins, 1999). In a review of empirical studies related to psychological outcomes and multiracial individuals, Shih and Sanchez (2005) revealed that 19 out of 28 qualitative studies found their participants feeling predominately positive about their multiracial identity and a relatively high comfort level in dealing with issues relating to their racial identity. Conversely, they also found 14 studies that revealed negative experiences related to racial identity of multiracial individuals. These negative cases dealt largely with a person's inability to develop and define their racial identity. With respect to peer relations, Shih and Sanchez's review also revealed some changes over time in the patterns relating to social acceptance and rejection, with more of the recent studies (from the mid-1990s) documenting social acceptance, which they suggest may be a reflection of changes in the social attitudes of the larger U.S. society regarding race relations. These societal changes may not just affect how multiracial individuals perceive their experiences and identities but may also influence the focus that researchers take on their studies.

In an exploratory study on the issues and experiences of multiracial college students, Nishimura (1998) documented students' experiences growing up with families that negated race as an issue (e.g., being told "color doesn't matter"), but students felt that was unrealistic, because "race was an ever-present issue" (p. 48). In relation to experiences with racism, one student recalled being called a "zebra" in second grade and described it as his first experience with racism. While the other findings from Nishimura's study relate to multiracial students' struggles with identity and feelings of subtle pressure from peers to choose a racial identity, it cannot be distinguished whether these feelings were self-imposed or were reactions to verbal or behavioral actions by peers. Further examining external pressure, Townsend, Markus, and Bergsicker (2009) used an open-ended survey asking multiracial participants to describe a situation where their biracial identity caused them tension and pressure to identify monoracially. Out of their 59 respondents (representing 16 Black/White, 23 Asian/White, and 20 Latino/a/White students), 16.9 percent provided situations that were coded into the category of "racism, prejudice, racial stereotyping." Many more of their respondents mentioned situations involving appearance (28.8%) and dealing with demographic forms (23.7%) forcing the individual to identify with one race. Although the study reports minimal experiences related directly to racism and racial discrimination, it may be hypothesized that multiracial persons may experience subtle, everyday, and covert forms of discrimination. Such instances may be harder to clearly identify as racism, giving more validity to the theoretical argument for using microaggressions to analyze multiracial individuals' experiences with racism.

In a recent dissertation on the identity development of multiracial people, Jackson (2007) found that all of her participants described experiences with racism and discrimination. These were described as being direct (e.g., being called a racial slur) or indirect (e.g., overhearing a racially denigrating joke). While the majority of direct experiences involved being called a racial slur, most were traditionally monoracial slurs (e.g., being called a “chink” or the “N-word”), while others described specific examples related to their multiracial background (e.g., being called an “Oreo”). Phenotype is hypothesized to play a major role in racial discrimination, as Root (2001) found that multiracial individuals who were of mixed Asian and Black heritage faced more racism than others who were of mixed Asian and White heritage. Conversely, another study by Brackett and colleagues (2006) found that multiracial White/Black students experienced more prejudice compared to their monoracial Black and monoracial White peers. These findings suggest that not fitting into other people’s conceptions of racial categories may lead to experiencing more racial discrimination.

PERCEPTIONS OF MULTIRACIAL PEOPLE

While reviewing multiracial individuals’ self-perceived experiences with discrimination is important, empirical studies on how others view multiracial people provide an understanding of the monoracist biases, attitudes, and stereotypes (both conscious and unconscious) that may lead to multiracial microaggressions. Building upon previous studies that found others held beliefs that biracial children were socially awkward and ostracized in social settings (Jackman, Wagner, & Johnson, 2001) and that biracial children may have problems with social acceptance (Chelsey & Wagner, 2003), Sanchez and Bonam (2009) examined the potential effects of biracial identity disclosure on evaluator perceptions. In their first two studies, Sanchez and Bonam found that biracial (Black/White and Asian/White) applicants were perceived as being less warm and sometimes less competent when compared to monoracial White and minority (Black and Asian, respectively) applicants. The biracial applicants were also viewed as less qualified for minority scholarships than monoracial minorities. Despite the aforementioned examples of phenotype mediating racial discrimination (e.g., Root, 1990, 2001), Sanchez and Bonam’s findings prove discrimination can occur without any phenotypic cues, leading to negative ratings, perceptions, and assumptions of inferiority of multiracial persons. Moreover, the findings suggest that biracial people who disclose their biracial identity (e.g., on application forms) may be more vulnerable to more negative evaluations than monoracial White or minority individuals, providing a new way of viewing multiracial people’s struggle with answering the “race question” on demographic forms.

Examining public representations of multiracial people also offers insight into how they are perceived by others. Thornton (2009) analyzed the question of multiraciality from both predominantly White and Black newspapers and found major differences in views and opinions about mixed-race persons. White newspapers held the new multiracial movement as a symbol of a positive move toward the end of racism and a color-blind society. Conversely, Black newspapers reported the multiracial movement as a threat to the African American community's fight for continued civil rights, largely arguing that mixed Black-White individuals assert a multiracial identity as a way to try to "escape" from Blackness. This threat of potential discrimination or exclusion from a multiracial person's respective communities may lead to some multiracial individuals choosing (whether consciously or unconsciously) to identify with monoracial labels (Shih and Sanchez, 2009). Thus, the large body of research on how multiracial people identify still holds importance in exposing the influences of monoracism on multiracial people.

TOWARD A TAXONOMY OF MULTIRACIAL MICROAGGRESSIONS

Root (2003) provides a list of common issues and experiences of racially mixed people. These "50 experiences" evolved from a questionnaire she developed during a study on biracial siblings from 1996 to 1997. This list provides a comprehensive (though not exhaustive) understanding of commonly (though not unanimously) experienced verbal, behavioral, or environmental actions that often aim to negatively slight multiracial individuals. Because of Root's long history of studying multiraciality from personal, theoretical, and empirical perspectives (see Root, 1990, 1992, 1996a, 1996b, 1998, 2001, 2003), this theoretical chapter uses her list of experiences as a starting point for a taxonomy of multiracial microaggressions.

There are several themes that emerge from Root's (2003) list of 50 experiences. One theme includes being excluded or made to feel isolated. For example, a multiracial person being told "You aren't Black, Latina/o, Asian, Native . . . enough" or being treated differently by relatives because of being multiracial both send the indirect message that she or he is inferior to monoracial people. Other experiences relate to the exoticization of multiracial people, or the idea that a multiracial person's race can be objectified by monoracial people. Examples include being told "You look exotic" or hearing "Mixed-race people are so beautiful or handsome." Other experiences relate to when others deny a person's multiracial reality. For instance, the experience of a biracial Black/White person being accused of "acting or wanting to be White" implies that the person is not allowed to act/be White, even if that is part of his or her heritage. Related to this idea are a group of experiences

that assume a person is monoracial. Examples include people saying things in a multiracial person's presence that they might not say if they knew how that person racially identified or having your mother assumed to be your nanny or babysitter. Another theme that emerged was the pathologizing of a multiracial person's identity or experiences. This occurs when multiracial people are viewed as psychologically abnormal, like the common adage "But what about the children?" in response to common problematic views of the products of interracial marriages (Childs, 2006). The assumption is that multiracial people are confused about their identity or have a harder time figuring it out than others.

Given the well-documented experiences of multiracial individuals, we propose a taxonomy of multiracial microaggressions, or microaggressions based on multiracial status, which send hostile, derogatory, or negative messages toward multiracial persons. Examples of multiracial microaggressions from everyday life (see Table 6.1) and in clinical practice (see Table 6.2) are included. Based on the literature on multiracial persons' feelings of "otherness" (e.g., Root, 1990; Weisman, 1996), being forced to choose (e.g., Buckley & Carter, 2004; Hall, 1992; Herman, 2004; Townsend et al., 2009), and overall experiences with racism (e.g., Jackson, 2007), there were five categories of microaggressions identified: (1) exclusion or isolation, (2) exoticization and objectification, (3) assumption of monoracial or mistaken identity, (4) denial of multiracial reality, and (5) pathologizing of identity and experiences. Re-examining Root's (2003) "Issues and Experiences of Racially Mixed People" and combining with other studies on the experiences of multiracial people, the following section provides further details and examples of the types of microaggressions that multiracial people may face based on their multiracial status or identity.

Category 1, *exclusion or isolation*, occurs when multiracial persons are made to feel excluded or isolated based on their multiracial statuses. Several subthemes might fall within this category, including (1) questioning authenticity, (2) the endorsement of a monoracial society and norms, and (3) the second-class status and treatment of multiracial people. It is common for multiracial people to be *questioned on their authenticity*, which is exemplified by being told "You aren't (insert race here) enough." This is a common experience for many multiracial people and can be viewed as exclusionary; the indirect message sent is that someone is different or substandard because she or he isn't monoracial. Some examples of types of microaggressions that fall under the subtheme of *endorsement of a monoracial society and norms* include demographic forms and applications that ask for a single race. Answering the "race question" on such forms is a common thread of multiracial experiences (Townsend et al., 2009), but it can also be viewed as an environmental microaggression. The institution or individual who is

Table 6.1
Examples of Multiracial Microaggressions in Everyday Life

Theme	Example	Message
Exclusion or isolation: occurs when a multiracial person is made to feel excluded or isolated based on their multiracial status	A multiracial person is told “You have to choose; you can’t be both.”	You are not being authentic, because you don’t fit.
	A multiracial person has difficulty filling out a form that asks for a single race only.	You do not fit monoracial society’s norms.
	A multiracial person is not accepted by grandparent(s) or relatives because of their parents’ interracial relationship.	You have a second-class status because of your multiracial identity.
Exoticization and objectification: occurs when a multiracial person is dehumanized or treated like an object	A multiracial person is asked “What are you?”	You are not normal, and it is okay for me to ask you about it.
	A multiracial person is told “Mixed-race people are so beautiful.”	Your features are exotic and beautiful and can be sexually objectified.
Assumption of monoracial identity (or mistaken identity): occurs when multiracial people are assumed or mistaken to be monoracial (or a member of a group they do not identify with)	A multiracial person is told “We all will be like you someday.”	You are the poster child for a post-racial society or the “racialized ideal.”
	A multiracial person witnesses comments others might not say if they knew how the person identified racially.	Everyone in the group must be monoracial; it’s okay to make comments about other groups.
Denial of multiracial reality: occurs when a multiracial person is not allowed to choose their own racial identity	A multiracial person’s mother is assumed to be a nanny or babysitter, or father is assumed to be an older boyfriend.	You must not be related to either one of your parents because you do not look like them.
	A multiracial person is subjected to competition over “claims” from different racial or ethnic groups.	How you choose to identify does not matter; it’s about who claims you.
Pathologizing of identity and experiences: occurs when multiracial people’s identities or experiences are viewed as psychologically abnormal	A multiracial person is accused of “acting or wanting to be White.”	You’re not allowed to act White, even if that is part of your heritage.
	A multiracial person overhears someone say “All multiracial people have issues.”	If you identify as multiracial, you must be confused about your identity.
	A multiracial person is told “You are a mistake.”	Interracial families are not normal and must be because the mother accidentally got pregnant.

Table 6.2
Examples of Multiracial Microaggressions in Clinical Practice

Theme	Example	Message
Exclusion or isolation: occurs when a multiracial client is made to feel excluded or isolated based on one's multiracial status	A multiracial Asian/Black client is asked "Why are you here?" when attending an Asian American community mental health center.	You do not belong.
Exoticization and objectification: occurs when a multiracial client is dehumanized or treated like an object	When a multiracial client discusses low self-esteem with her physical appearance, a counselor responds, "But your looks are so exotic!"	You are not the norm.
Assumption of monoracial identity (or mistaken identity): occurs when multiracial clients are assumed or mistaken to be monoracial (or members of a group they do not identify with)	A counselor speaks to a multiracial Asian/White client in Spanish.	Your physical appearance doesn't match what it should.
Denial of multiracial reality: occurs when a multiracial client is not allowed to choose one's own racial identity	A monoracial therapist tells a multiracial client that her experiences with race are "probably all in her head."	Your experiences aren't valid.
Pathologizing of identity and experiences: occurs when multiracial clients' identities or experiences are viewed as psychologically abnormal	A counselor constantly brings up racial issues in therapy to a multiracial client, despite not being the presenting problem.	Your confusion about your identity must impact your mental well-being.

gathering this information (e.g., college admissions, research surveys, etc.) is unconsciously endorsing a monoracial society, leaving multiracial people to feel excluded or isolated. Also related to exclusion and isolation are the ways that multiracial people are treated that make them feel isolated based on a perceived *second-class status*. This happens broadly when multiracial people might be well liked by their peers but kept at a distance in intimate relationships (Root, 1990). However, the more common experience in second-class status relates to family relationships. For instance, a multiracial person cut off by grandparent(s) or relatives because of being a product of an interracial relationship (Root). This second-class treatment sends the message to multiracial people that they do not fit in society (or even their family) and are therefore excluded.

Category 2, *exoticization and objectification*, occurs when a multiracial person is dehumanized or treated like an object. The ubiquitous experience of being asked "What are you?" (e.g., Gaskins, 1999) is a prime example of potentially making multiracial persons feel dehumanized and abnormal, with a person's phenotype usually playing a significant role in these types of microaggressions (Wijeyesinghe, 2001). Several subthemes emerged within this category, including microaggressions that (1) put race on display, (2) objectify multiracial people sexually, or (3) use multiracial people as the "poster children" for the future, or in other terms, objectifying multiracial people as the "racialized ideal." The idea of *putting race on display* relates to the fact that a multiracial person's self-disclosure is viewed as a public event (Buckley & Carter, 2004) in which others feel entitled to ask multiracial people questions about their background that would not normally be asked of nonmultiracial people. Another subtheme is when multiracial people are *objectified sexually*. Being told "You look exotic" or "All mixed-race people are so good-looking" are common experiences that denigrate multiracial people (particularly women) and treat them as sexualized objects (Root, 1990). Similarly, a monoracial person may say "I want to marry someone of another race so that I can have beautiful babies," which further exoticizes multiracial persons and values only their physical appearance. Such biases may be the result of another subtheme of *multiracial people as the "racialized ideal."* Being told "You have the best of both worlds" or hearing someone say "Everyone will be multiracial one day" objectifies multiracial people as the poster children of a post-racial society. Moreover, in an era of anti-affirmative action legislature and ballot initiatives, multiracial people have been used in the arguments against "checking race boxes," which have been described as being "demeaning to the growing millions of our citizens who are multiracial or multiethnic" (Fryer & Loury, 2005, p. 150).

Category 3, *assumption of monoracial identity (or mistaken identity)*, occurs when multiracial people are assumed or mistaken to be monoracial (or a member of a group they do not identify with). Related to the previous examples of endorsing a monoracial society and norms, people often make assumptions that everyone around them is monoracial. For instance, a biracial Asian/White person may be with a group of White people and witness comments (e.g., racial jokes, slurs, etc.) that are made about Asian people because the others do not know the biracial person's heritage. The message is that everyone is monoracial and it is okay to make negative comments about other groups. These microaggressions often result when others view a multiracial person with one of their parents and make assumptions about their relationships. For example, a biracial Latino/White child is seen with his Latina mother, and his friends assume the mother is a nanny or babysitter, or a biracial Black/White young woman is seen with her

White father, who is assumed to be an older boyfriend. The message is that they must not be related because monoracial heritage is the norm and family members must be of the same race.

Category 4, *denial of multiracial reality and experiences*, occurs when multiracial persons are not allowed to choose their own racial identities. This category differs from the previous category on assumptions of a monoracial identity in that the enactor of the microaggression is usually aware of the multiracial person's mixed heritage. Despite this awareness, in these microaggressions, multiracial people are still denied the freedom to create their own multiracial reality. This may happen when a multiracial person is subjected to people of different racial groups competing to "claim" the multiracial person for their own group. Comedian Dave Chappelle brought this idea to public attention during his "racial draft" skit on *Chappelle's Show*, where Black and Asian groups competed to claim Tiger Woods for their own groups (Bell-Jordan, 2007). Although in the skit, the fictional Tiger Woods is ecstatic about finally being "part of a race" (Bell-Jordan, p. 82), the real-life implications send a message to multiracial people that it does not matter how they choose to identify but rather that the power comes from the community or family who claims the individual. This is supported by previous literature, which has supported that multiracial people "find themselves continually defined by people other than themselves" (Spickard, 2007, p. 394). Another example of this type of microaggression is a multiracial person who is accused of "acting or wanting to be White." The message to that person is that she or he is not allowed to act or be White, even if that is part of the person's heritage. Allowing multiracial people to identify however they want has been posited as a right (Root, 1996a), and the denial of that chosen identity has been demonstrated to have negative effects on a multiracial person's motivation and self-esteem (Townsend et al., 2009).

Category 5, *pathologizing of identity or experiences*, occurs when multiracial persons' identities or experiences are viewed as psychologically abnormal. This category is similar to Sue, Capodilupo, et al.'s (2007) *pathologizing of cultural values or communication styles* but targets a person's multiracial identity itself (or any experiences related to being multiracial), regardless of one's cultural values or communication styles. This idea relates to the stereotype of the "tragic mulatto" caught between racial groups and destined to fail (see Mafe, 2008; Raimon, 2004) or the "marginal man" theory (see Park, 1928; Stonequist, 1937), which viewed a biracial person as living in-between two distinct peoples (races) but never being fully accepted by either group. The legacies of these archetypes and theories perpetuate conceptions that a multiracial person (usually Black/White) is faced (or will be faced) with so many obstacles in which she or he must live life at the

margins or end in tragedy. There are two subthemes emerging under this category: (1) psychopathology and (2) family pathology. Examples of psychopathology microaggressions include a multiracial person overhearing someone say “All multiracial people have issues” or a counselor or psychologist who constantly brings up racial issues in counseling sessions, despite the multiracial person’s presenting problems not stemming from racial issues. The messages in these examples are that multiracial people are confused about their identity, and that confusion manifests itself in their mental well-being. Examples of family pathology microaggressions include a multiracial person being told “You were a mistake” or asked “How did that happen?” (in response to their heritage). The messages that are sent are that interracial relationships (and multiracial children) are wrong and abnormal. Furthermore, being the product of an interracial union may also be viewed as deviant. For instance, if the person has a White father and an Asian mother, outsiders may assert the father had an “Asian fetish.” These families are viewed as being atypical, sending messages that being multiracial is inferior or unacceptable.

DISCUSSION

The proposed taxonomy of multiracial microaggressions aligns with the previous literature on monoracial microaggressions in a number of ways. First, similar to previous microaggression research, many of these microaggression incidents may be unconscious to the enactor in that she or he may not realize the impact that her or his statements or behaviors may have on the recipient. In fact, many of these statements may be intended to be compliments, and the enactor of such microaggressions may not understand why a multiracial person would be upset or offended. For example, telling a multiracial person that she or he is exotic may be intended to send a message that one is physically attractive. However, when such words are used, multiracial individuals may feel objectified or dehumanized in that they are only being recognized for their physical appearances. These experiences of objectification align with research on Asian Americans (see Sue, Bucceri, et al., 2007), women (see Capodilupo et al., in text), and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) persons (see Nadal et al., this volume), who often report anger, frustration, or resentment when they feel objectified. These unconscious and unintentional biases can be exemplified with many of the other multiracial microaggression categories as well, including denying multiracial identity and experiences or assumption of monoracial identity.

Similarly, the proposed taxonomy on multiracial microaggressions includes the same types of microaggressions that were proposed with racial

microaggressions: (1) microassaults, (2) microinsults, and (3) microinvalidations. When multiracial persons are told by a monoracial person that “all multiracial people have issues” or when a grandparent refuses to interact with her or his multiracial grandchild, the enactors of such microaggressions are likely conscious of their biases and their actions. While their behaviors may not be physically assaultive or threatening, such acts can be viewed as microassaults and may have damaging mental health impacts on their recipients. Microinsults occur when multiracial individuals are indirectly insulted through statements and behaviors (e.g., when a multiracial person’s racial heritage is put on display by consistently being asked “What are you?”). Although these inquiries may seem innocuous, hearing them on a regular basis is something that monoracial persons may not experience, which may result in a unique type of stress for multiracial people. Finally, examples of microinvalidations may include instances when multiracial persons are told that their experiences with race are not as difficult as they are for monoracial people of color; such statements deny the reality of multiracial persons and may also cause psychological distress for the recipients.

Additionally, multiracial microaggressions may be similar to previously identified microaggressions in that the recipients may have difficulty in recognizing microaggressions when they occur. Previous literature has found that monoracial people of color, women, and LGBTQ persons may struggle with recognizing when microaggressions occur (see Nadal, 2008, 2010; Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008; Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007 for a review). Nadal (in press) cites an internal process that recipients of microaggressions may experience in which individuals may ask themselves the following questions after they experience a potential microaggression: (1) Did this microaggression really occur? (2) Should I respond to this microaggression? (3) How should I respond to this microaggression? The first question transpires when an individual first recognizes that a microaggression may have occurred. Some microaggressions may be easier to recognize than others. For example, being told “You are not Black enough” may be easier to label as a microaggression than situations where multiracial persons are treated like a second-class citizen (e.g., feeling that one is being treated differently than monoracial peers). The latter exemplifies incidents where it may be difficult to pinpoint such behavior as being race related, thus making it harder to label as a multiracial microaggression.

Secondly, when experiencing a microaggression, the individual must decide whether she or he should address the microaggression incident. For example, in the aforementioned examples, the individual may wonder if confronting the enactor of the microaggression would lead to defensiveness, an argument, or tension in one’s interpersonal relationship. Accordingly,

one may feel more able to address a microaggression with a loved one than they would with a stranger on the street or an acquaintance (Nadal, in press). Finally, the third question entails the decision of how the person will address an enactor of a microaggression. In some cases, the microaggression recipient may choose to approach the enactor in a calm and collected way in order to prevent a hostile or negative argument; however, in other cases, the recipient may feel the need to be more direct, emotional, or straightforward with her or his response (Nadal).

It is hypothesized that microaggressions experienced by multiracial persons may also influence one's identity development and coping mechanisms. As aforementioned, Renn (2004) outlined five "identity patterns" for multiracial persons, including (1) monoracial identity, (2) multiple monoracial identities, (3) multiracial identity, (4) extraracial identity, and (5) situational identity. Perhaps multiracial individuals may develop these identity patterns or statuses as a way of coping with the microaggressions that they experience on a regular basis. For example, when a multiracial Latino/White man is excluded by individuals of one of his heritages (e.g., Latino peers or family members tell the multiracial individual that he is "not Latino enough"), it is possible that this individual may reject his Latino heritage and develop a monoracial White identity (e.g., "I'm only White") or an extraracial identity (e.g., "I don't identify with any race"). Conversely, another multiracial individual experiencing the same types of microaggressions may assert a monoracial Latino/a identity (e.g., "I'm only Latino/a") in that she or he may try to "act more Latino/a" in order to avoid being rejected or excluded in the future. Multiracial microaggressions may also lead to a situational identity pattern in that individuals may learn to adapt to particular group or cultural norms or "pass" within particular racial groups in order to prevent experiencing microaggressions in the future.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY, RESEARCH, AND CLINICAL PRACTICE

There are several implications that this taxonomy on multiracial microaggressions has on theory, research, and clinical practice. First, including multiracial microaggressions into the literature is necessary in order to understand the ways in which microaggressions impact individuals of all oppressed groups, particularly multiracial persons and other subgroups who are often ignored or overlooked. Multiracial persons are becoming an increasingly larger population in the United States, and it becomes an ethical responsibility to further incorporate this population into the discourse on multicultural and race-related issues. Future research on microaggressions must include multiracial and monoracial persons' experiences, citing the similarities and differences that are faced by individuals of

both groups. Further studies may employ both qualitative and quantitative methods to examine the influences of microaggressions on multiracial persons. It may be beneficial to empirically support how multiracial microaggressions may impact an array of mental health variables, such as self-esteem, identity development, psychological distress, and other psychological disorders.

Furthermore, training programs of psychology and other helping professions must include multiracial issues in multicultural competence models. First, psychologists and other practitioners must become knowledgeable of the experiences of multiracial persons by understanding the psychological stressors that mixed-race people may experience by virtue of belonging to one or more racial groups. Practitioners must be specifically informed about the experiences and psychological outcomes of multiracial microaggressions in order to prevent these from occurring in clinical settings. Second, counselors and clinicians must be aware of multicultural dynamics that may occur in psychotherapy settings, particularly with monoracial-multiracial dyads. When monoracial practitioners interact with their clients, they must be conscious of the ways in which their monoracial identities may influence their biases, assumptions, and attitudes about multiracial persons, while recognizing the privilege that they have as monoracial individuals. By exposing multiracial microaggressions in everyday interpersonal interactions (and particularly in clinical settings), it is anticipated that such monoracism in systems, institutions, and relationships may be minimized, promoting positive mental health of all multiracial persons.

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