Racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color. Perpetrators of microaggressions are often unaware that they engage in such communications when they interact with racial/ethnic minorities. A taxonomy of racial microaggressions in everyday life was created through a review of the social psychological literature on aversive racism, from formulations regarding the manifestation and impact of everyday racism, and from reading numerous personal narratives of counselors (both White and those of color) on their racial/cultural awakening. Microaggressions seem to appear in three forms: microassault, microinsult, and microinvalidation. Almost all interracial encounters are prone to microaggressions; this article uses the White counselor – client of color counseling dyad to illustrate how they impair the development of a therapeutic alliance. Suggestions regarding education and training and research in the helping professions are discussed.

Keywords: microaggression, microassault, microinsult, microinvalidation, attributional ambiguity

Although the civil rights movement had a significant effect on changing racial interactions in this society, racism continues to plague the United States (Thompson & Neville, 1999). President Clinton’s Race Advisory Board concluded that (a) racism is one of the most divisive forces in our society, (b) racial legacies of the past continue to haunt current policies and practices that create unfair disparities between minority and majority groups, (c) racial inequities are so deeply ingrained in American society that they are nearly invisible, and (d) most White Americans are unaware of the advantages they enjoy in this society and of how their attitudes and actions unintentionally discriminate against persons of color (Advisory Board to the President’s Initiative on Race, 1998). This last conclusion is especially problematic in the mental health professions because most graduates continue to be White and trained primarily in Western European models of service delivery (D. W. Sue & Sue, 2003). For that reason, this article focuses primarily on White therapist – client of color interactions.

Because White therapists are members of the larger society and not immune from inheriting the racial biases of their forebears (Burkard & Knox, 2004; D. W. Sue, 2005), they may become victims of a cultural conditioning process that imbues within them biases and prejudices (Abelson, Dasgupta, Park, & Banaji, 1998; Banaji, Hardin, & Rothman, 1993) that discriminate against clients of color. Over the past 20 years, calls for cultural competence in the helping professions (American Psychological Association, 2003; D. W. Sue, Arredondo, & McDaniel, 1992) have stressed the importance of two therapist characteristics associated with effective service delivery to racial/ethnic minority clients: (a) awareness of oneself as a racial/cultural being and of the biases, stereotypes, and assumptions that influence worldviews and (b) awareness of the worldviews of culturally diverse clients. Achieving these two goals is blocked, however, when White clinicians fail to understand how issues of race influence the therapy process and how racism potentially infects the delivery of services to clients of color (Richardson & Molinaro, 1996). Therapists who are unaware of their biases and prejudices may unintentionally create impasses for clients of color, which may partially explain well-documented patterns of therapy underutilization and premature termination of therapy among such clients (Burkard & Knox, 2004; Kearney, Draper, & Baron, 2005). In this article, we describe and analyze how racism in the form of racial microaggressions is particularly problematic for therapists to identify; propose a taxonomy of racial microaggressions with potential implications for practice, education and training, and research; and use the counseling/therapy process to illustrate how racial microaggressions can impair the therapeutic alliance. To date, no conceptual or theoretical model of

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racial microaggressions has been proposed to explain their impact on the therapeutic process.

The Changing Face of Racism

In recent history, racism in North America has undergone a transformation, especially after the post–civil rights era when the conscious democratic belief in equality for groups of color directly clashed with the long history of racism in the society (Jones, 1997; Thompson & Neville, 1999). The more subtle forms of racism have been labeled modern racism (McConahay, 1986), symbolic racism (Sears, 1988), and aversive racism (Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakami, & Hodson, 2002). All three explanations of contemporary racism share commonalities. They emphasize that racism (a) is more likely than ever to be disguised and covert and (b) has evolved from the “old fashioned” form, in which overt racial hatred and bigotry is consciously and publicly displayed, to a more ambiguous and nebulous form that is more difficult to identify and acknowledge.

It appears that modern and symbolic racism are most closely associated with political conservatives, who disclaim personal bigotry by strong and rigid adherence to traditional American values (individualism, self-reliance, hard work, etc.), whereas aversive racism is more characteristic of White liberals (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1996, 2000). Aversive racists, according to these researchers, are strongly motivated by egalitarian values as well as antiminority feelings. Their egalitarian values operate on a conscious level, while their antiminority feelings are less conscious and generally covert (DeVos & Banaji, 2005). In some respects, these three forms of racism can be ordered along a continuum; aversive racists are the least consciously negative, followed by modern and symbolic racists, who are somewhat more prejudiced, and finally by old-fashioned biological racists (Nelson, 2006).

Although much has been written about contemporary forms of racism, many studies in health care (Smedley & Smedley, 2005), education (Gordon & Johnson, 2003), employment (Hinton, 2004), mental health (Burkard & Knox, 2004), and other social settings (Sellers & Shelton, 2003) indicate the difficulty of describing and defining racial discrimination that occurs via “aversive racism” or “implicit bias”; these types of racism are difficult to identify, quantify, and rectify because of their subtle, nebulous, and unnamed nature. Without an adequate classification or understanding of the dynamics of subtle racism, it will remain invisible and potentially harmful to the well-being, self-esteem, and standard of living of people of color (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). Ironically, it has been proposed that the daily common experiences of racial aggression that characterize aversive racism may have significantly more influence on racial anger, frustration, and self-esteem than traditional overt forms of racism (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Furthermore, the invisible nature of acts of aversive racism prevents perpetrators from realizing and confronting (a) their own complicity in creating psychological dilemmas for minorities and (b) their role in creating disparities in employment, health care, and education.

The Manifestation of Racial Microaggressions

In reviewing the literature on subtle and contemporary forms of racism, we have found the term “racial microaggressions” to best describe the phenomenon in its everyday occurrence. First coined by Pierce in 1970, the term refers to “subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal ex-
changes which are ‘put downs’” (Pierce, Carew, Pierce- González, & Willis, 1978, p. 66). Racial microaggressions have also been described as “subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously” (Solerzano et al., 2000). Simply stated, microaggressions are brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to people of color because they belong to a racial minority group. In the world of business, the term “microinequities” is used to describe the pattern of being overlooked, underrespected, and devalued because of one’s race or gender. Microaggressions are often unconsciously delivered in the form of subtle snubs or dismissive looks, gestures, and tones. These exchanges are so pervasive and automatic in daily conversations and interactions that they are often dismissed and glossed over as being innocent and innocuous. Yet, as indicated previously, microaggressions are detrimental to persons of color because they impair performance in a multitude of settings by sapping the psychic and spiritual energy of recipients and by creating inequities (Franklin, 2004; D. W. Sue, 2004).

There is an urgent need to bring greater awareness and understanding of how microaggressions operate, their numerous manifestations in society, the type of impact they have on people of color, the dynamic interaction between perpetrator and target, and the educational strategies needed to eliminate them. Our attempt to define and propose a taxonomy of microaggressions is grounded in several lines of empirical and experiential evidence in the professional literature and in personal narratives.

First, the work by psychologists on aversive racism (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1996; Dovidio et al., 2002), studies suggesting the widespread existence of dissociation between implicit and explicit social stereotyping (Abelson et al., 1998; Banaji et al., 1993; DeVos & Banaji, 2005), the attributional ambiguity of everyday racial discrimination (Crocker & Major, 1989), the daily manifestations of racism in many arenas of life (Plant & Peruche, 2005; Sellers & Shelton, 2003; Vanman, Saltz, Nathan, & Warren, 2004), and multiple similarities between microaggressive incidents and items that comprise measures of race-related stress/perceived discrimination toward Black Americans (Brondolo et al., 2005; Klonoff & Landrine, 1999; Utsey & Ponterotto, 1996) and Asian Americans (Liang, Li, & Kim, 2004) all seem to lend empirical support to the concept of racial microaggressions. Second, numerous personal narratives and brief life stories on race written by White psychologists and psychologists of color provide experiential evidence for the existence of racial microaggressions in everyday life (American Counseling Association, 1999; Conyne & Bemak, 2005; Ponterotto, Casas, Suzuki, & Alexander, 2001). Our analysis of the life experiences of these individuals and the research literature in social and counseling psychology led us to several conclusions: (a) The personal narratives were rich with examples and incidents of racial microaggressions, (b) the formulation of microaggressions was consistent with the research literature, and (c) racial microaggressions seemed to manifest themselves in three distinct forms.

### Forms of Racial Microaggressions

Racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, denigrating, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group. They are not limited to human encounters alone but may also be environmental in nature, as when a person of color is exposed to an office setting that unin-
tentionally assails his or her racial identity (Gordon & Johnson, 2003; D. W. Sue, 2003). For example, one’s racial identity can be minimized or made insignificant through the sheer exclusion of decorations or literature that represents various racial groups. Three forms of microaggressions can be identified: microassault, microinsult, and microinvalidation.

**Microassault**
A microassault is an explicit racial derogation characterized primarily by a verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions. Referring to someone as “colored” or “Oriental,” using racial epithets, discouraging interracial interactions, deliberately serving a White patron before someone of color, and displaying a swastika are examples. Microassaults are most similar to what has been called “old fashioned” racism conducted on an individual level. They are most likely to be conscious and deliberate, although they are generally expressed in limited “private” situations (micro) that allow the perpetrator some degree of anonymity. In other words, people are likely to hold notions of minority inferiority privately and will only display them publicly when they (a) lose control or (b) feel relatively safe to engage in a microassault. Because we have chosen to analyze the unintentional and unconscious manifestations of microaggressions, microassaults are not the focus of our article. It is important to note, however, that individuals can also vary in the degree of conscious awareness they show in the use of the following two forms of microaggressions.

**Microinsult**
A microinsult is characterized by communications that convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person’s racial heritage or identity. Microinsults represent subtle snubs, frequently unknown to the perpetrator, but clearly convey a hidden insulting message to the recipient of color. When a White employer tells a prospective candidate of color “I believe the most qualified person should get the job, regardless of race” or when an employee of color is asked “How did you get your job?” the underlying message from the perspective of the recipient may be twofold: (a) People of color are not qualified, and (b) as a minority group member, you must have obtained the position through some affirmative action or quota program and not because of ability. Such statements are not necessarily aggressions, but context is important. Hearing these statements frequently when used against affirmative action makes the recipient likely to experience them as aggressions. Microinsults can also occur nonverbally, as when a White teacher fails to acknowledge students of color in the classroom or when a White supervisor seems distracted during a conversation with a Black employee by avoiding eye contact or turning away (Hinton, 2004). In this case, the message conveyed to persons of color is that their contributions are unimportant.

**Microinvalidation**
Microinvalidations are characterized by communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color. When Asian Americans (born and raised in the United States) are complimented for speaking good English or are repeatedly asked where they were born, the effect is to negate their U.S. American heritage and to convey that they are perpetual foreigners. When Blacks are told that “I don’t see color” or “We are all human beings,” the effect is to negate their experiences as racial/cultural beings (Helms, 1992).
When a Latino couple is given poor service at a restaurant and shares their experience with White friends, only to be told “Don’t be so oversensitive” or “Don’t be so petty,” the racial experience of the couple is being nullified and its importance is being diminished.

We have been able to identify nine categories of microaggressions with distinct themes: alien in one’s own land, ascription of intelligence, color blindness, criminality/assumption of criminal status, denial of individual racism, myth of meritocracy, pathologizing cultural values/communication styles, second-class status, and environmental invalidation. Table 1 provides samples of comments or situations that may potentially be classified as racial microaggressions and their accompanying hidden assumptions and messages. Figure 1 visually presents the three large classes of microaggressions, the classification of the themes under each category, and their relationship to one another.

The experience of a racial microaggression has major implications for both the perpetrator and the target person. It creates psychological dilemmas that unless adequately resolved lead to increased levels of racial anger, mistrust, and loss of self-esteem for persons of color; prevent White people from perceiving a different racial reality; and create impediments to harmonious race-relations (Spanierman & Heppner, 2004; Thompson & Neville, 1999).

The Invisibility and Dynamics of Racial Microaggressions

The following real-life incident illustrates the issues of invisibility and the disguised problematic dynamics of racial microaggressions.

I [Derald Wing Sue, the senior author, an Asian American] recently traveled with an African American colleague on a plane flying from New York to Boston. The plane was a small “hopper” with a single row of seats on one side and double seats on the other. As the plane was only sparsely populated, we were told by the flight attendant (White) that we could sit anywhere, so we sat at the front, across the aisle from one another. This made it easy for us to converse and provided a larger comfortable space on a small plane for both of us. As the attendant was about to close the hatch, three White men in suits entered the plane, were informed they could sit anywhere, and promptly seated themselves in front of us. Just before take-off, the attendant proceeded to close all overhead compartments and seemed to scan the plane with her eyes. At that point she approached us, leaned over, interrupted our conversation, and asked if we would mind moving to the back of the plane. She indicated that she needed to distribute weight on the plane evenly.

Both of us (passengers of color) had similar negative reactions. First, balancing the weight on the plane seemed reasonable, but why were we being singled out? After all, we had boarded first and the three White men were the last passengers to arrive. Why were they not being asked to move? Were we being singled out because of our race? Was this just a random event with no racial overtones? Were we being oversensitive and petty?

Although we complied by moving to the back of the plane, both of us felt resentment, irritation, and anger. In light of our everyday racial experiences, we both came to the same conclusion: The flight attendant had treated us like second-class citizens because of our race. But this incident did not end there. While I kept telling myself to drop the matter, I could feel my blood pressure rising, heart beating faster, and face flush with anger. When the attendant walked back to make sure our seat belts were fastened, I could not contain my anger any longer. Struggling to control myself, I said to her in a forced calm voice: “Did you know that you asked two passengers of color to step to the rear of the ‘bus’?” For a few seconds she said nothing but looked at me with a horrified expression. Then she said in a righteously indignant tone, “Well, I have never been accused of that! How dare you? I don’t see color! I only asked you to move to balance the plane. Anyway, I was only trying to give you more space and greater privacy.”

Attempts to explain my perceptions and feelings only generated greater defensiveness from her. For every allegation I made, she seemed to have a rational reason for her actions. Finally, she broke off the conversation and refused to talk about the incident any longer. Were it not for my colleague who validated my experience, I would have left that encounter wondering whether I was correct or incorrect in my perceptions. Nevertheless, for the rest of the flight, I stewed over the incident and it left a sour taste in my mouth.

The power of racial microaggressions lies in their invisibility to the perpetrator and, oftentimes, the recipient (D. W. Sue, 2005). Most White Americans experience themselves as good, moral, and decent human beings who believe in equality and democracy. Thus, they find it difficult to believe that they possess biased racial attitudes and may engage in behaviors that are discriminatory (D. W. Sue, 2004). Microaggressive acts can usually be explained away by seemingly nonbiased and valid reasons. For the recipient of a microaggression, however, there is always the nagging question of whether it really happened (Crocker & Major, 1989). It is difficult to identify a microaggression, especially when other explanations seem plausible. Many people of color describe a vague feeling...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Microaggression</th>
<th>Message</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alien in own land</td>
<td>“Where are you from?” “Where were you born?” “You speak good English.” A person asking an Asian American to teach them words in their native language</td>
<td>You are not American.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ascription of intelligence</td>
<td>“You are a credit to your race.” “You are so articulate.” Asking an Asian person to help with a math or science problem</td>
<td>People of color are generally not as intelligent as Whites. It is unusual for someone of your race to be intelligent. All Asians are intelligent and good in math/sciences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Color blindness</td>
<td>“When I look at you, I don’t see color.” “America is a melting pot.” “There is only one race, the human race.”</td>
<td>Denying a person of color’s racial/ethnic experiences. Assimilate/acculturate to the dominant culture. Denying the individual as a racial/cultural being.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminality/assumption of criminal status</td>
<td>A White man or woman clutching their purse or checking their wallet as a Black or Latino approaches or passes A store owner following a customer of color around the store A White person waits to ride the next elevator when a person of color is on it</td>
<td>You are a criminal. You are going to steal/ You are poor/ You do not belong. You are dangerous.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denial of individual racism</td>
<td>“I’m not racist. I have several Black friends.” “As a woman, I know what you go through as a racial minority.”</td>
<td>I am immune to racism because I have friends of color. Your racial oppression is no different than my gender oppression. I can’t be a racist. I’m like you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myth of meritocracy</td>
<td>“I believe the most qualified person should get the job.” “Everyone can succeed in this society, if they work hard enough.”</td>
<td>People of color are given extra unfair benefits because of their race. People of color are lazy and/or incompetent and need to work harder.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pathologizing cultural values/communication styles</td>
<td>Asking a Black person: “Why do you have to be so loud/animated? Just calm down.” To an Asian or Latino person: “Why are you so quiet? We want to know what you think. Be more verbal.” “Speak up more.” Dismissing an individual who brings up race/culture in work/school setting</td>
<td>Assimilate to dominant culture. Leave your cultural baggage outside.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second-class citizen</td>
<td>Person of color mistaken for a service worker Having a taxi cab pass a person of color and pick up a White passenger</td>
<td>People of color are servants to Whites. They couldn’t possibly occupy high-status positions. You are likely to cause trouble and/or travel to a dangerous neighborhood.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
that they have been attacked, that they have been disrespected, or that something is not right (Franklin, 2004; Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003). In some respects, people of color may find an overt and obvious racist act easier to handle than microaggressions that seem vague or disguised (Solórzano et al., 2000). The above incident reveals how microaggressions operate to create psychological dilemmas for both the White perpetrator and the person of color. Four such dilemmas are particularly noteworthy for everyone to understand.

**Dilemma 1: Clash of Racial Realities**

The question we pose is this: Did the flight attendant engage in a microaggression or did the senior author and his colleague simply misinterpret the action? Studies indicate that the racial perceptions of people of color differ markedly from those of Whites (Jones, 1997; Harris Poll commissioned by the National Conference of Christians and Jews, 1992). In most cases, White Americans tend to believe that minorities are doing better in life, that discrimination is on the decline, that racism is no longer a significant factor in the lives of people of color, and that equality has been achieved. More important, the majority of Whites do not view themselves as racist or capable of racist behavior.

Minorities, on the other hand, perceive Whites as (a) racially insensitive, (b) unwilling to share their position and wealth, (c) believing they are superior, (d) needing to control everything, and (e) treating them poorly because of their race. People of color believe these attributes are reenacted everyday in their interpersonal interactions with Whites, oftentimes in the form of microaggressions (Solórzano et al., 2000). For example, it was found that 96% of African Americans reported experiencing racial discrimination in a one-year period (Klonoff & Landrine, 1999), and many incidents involved being mistaken for a service worker, being ignored, given poor service, treated rudely, or experiencing strangers acting fearful or intimidated when around them (Sellers & Shelton, 2003).

**Dilemma 2: The Invisibility of Unintentional Expressions of Bias**

The interaction between the senior author and the flight attendant convinced him that she was sincere in her belief that she had acted in good faith without racial bias. Her actions and their meaning were invisible to her. It was clear that she was stunned that anyone would accuse her of such despicable actions. After all, in her mind, she acted with only the best of intentions: to distribute the weight evenly on the plane for safety reasons and to give two passengers greater privacy and space. She felt betrayed that her good intentions were being questioned. Yet considerable empirical evidence exists showing that racial microaggressions become automatic because of cultural conditioning and that they may become connected neurologically with the processing of emotions that surround prejudice (Abelson et al., 1998). Several investigators have found, for example, that law enforcement officers in laboratory experiments will fire their guns more often at Black criminal suspects than White ones (Plant & Peruche, 2005), and Afrocentric features tend to result in longer prison terms (Blair, Judd, & Chapleau, 2004). In all cases, these law enforcement officials had no conscious awareness that they responded differently on the basis of race.

Herein lies a major dilemma. How does one prove that a microaggression has occurred? What makes our belief that the flight attendant acted in a biased manner any more plausible than her conscious belief that it was generated for another reason? If she did act out of hidden and unconscious bias, how do we make her aware of it? Social psychological research tends to confirm the existence of unconscious racial biases in well-intentioned Whites, that

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**Table 1 (continued)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Microaggression</th>
<th>Message</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Second-class citizen (continued)</td>
<td>Being ignored at a store counter as attention is given to the White customer behind you “You people . . .”</td>
<td>Whites are more valued customers than people of color. You don’t belong. You are a lesser being.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental microaggressions</td>
<td>A college or university with buildings that are all named after White heterosexual upper class males Television shows and movies that feature predominantly White people, without representation of people of color Overcrowding of public schools in communities of color Overabundance of liquor stores in communities of color</td>
<td>You don’t belong/You won’t succeed here. There is only so far you can go. You are an outsider/You don’t exist. People of color don’t/shouldn’t value education. People of color are deviant.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
nearly everyone born and raised in the United States inherits the racial biases of the society, and that the most accurate assessment about whether racist acts have occurred in a particular situation is most likely to be made by those most disempowered rather than by those who enjoy the privileges of power (Jones, 1997; Keltner & Robinson, 1996). According to these findings, microaggressions (a) tend to be subtle, indirect, and unintentional, (b) are most likely to emerge not when a behavior would look prejudicial, but when other rationales can be offered for prejudicial behavior, and (c) occur when Whites pretend not to notice differences, thereby justifying that “color” was not involved in the actions taken. Color blindness is a major form of microinvalidation because it denies the racial and experiential reality of people of color and provides an excuse to White people to claim that they are not prejudiced (Helms, 1992; Neville, Lilly, Duran, Lee, & Browne, 2000). The flight attendant, for example, did not realize that her “not seeing color” invalidated both passengers’ racial identity and experiential reality.

### Dilemma 3: Perceived Minimal Harm of Racial Microaggressions

In most cases, when individuals are confronted with their microaggressive acts (as in the case of the flight attendant), the perpetrator usually believes that the victim has overreacted and is being overly sensitive and/or petty. After all, even if it was an innocent racial blunder, microaggressions are believed to have minimal negative impact. People of color are told not to overreact and to simply “let it go.” Usually, Whites consider microaggressive incidents to be

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**Figure 1**

*Categories of and Relationships Among Racial Microaggressions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racial Microaggressions</th>
<th>Microinsult (Often Unconscious)</th>
<th>Microassault (Often Conscious)</th>
<th>Microinvalidation (Often Unconscious)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Behavioral/verbal remarks or comments that convey rudeness, insensitivity and demean a person’s racial heritage or identity.</td>
<td>Explicit racial derogations characterized primarily by a violent verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior or purposeful discriminatory actions.</td>
<td>Verbal comments or behaviors that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Microaggressions (Macro-level)</td>
<td>Racial assaults, insults and invalidations which are manifested on systemic and environmental levels.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alien in Own Land</th>
<th>Assumption of Criminal status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belief that visible racial-ethnic minority citizens are foreigners.</td>
<td>Presumed to be a criminal, dangerous, or deviant based on race.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Color Blindness</th>
<th>Myth of Meritocracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denial or pretense that a White person does not see color or race.</td>
<td>Statements which assert that race plays a minor role in life success.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denial of Individual Racism</th>
<th>Ascription of Intelligence</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denial of personal racism or one’s role in its perpetuation.</td>
<td>Assigning a degree of intelligence to a person of color based on their race.</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assigning a degree of intelligence to a person of color based on their race.</th>
<th>Treated as a lesser person or group.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Notion that the values and communication styles of people of color are abnormal.</td>
<td>Presumed to be a criminal, dangerous, or deviant based on race.</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Microinvalidation (Often Unconscious)</th>
<th>Environmental Microaggressions (Macro-level)</th>
</tr>
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<td>Verbal comments or behaviors that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color.</td>
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<td>Behavioral/verbal remarks or comments that convey rudeness, insensitivity and demean a person’s racial heritage or identity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
minor, and people of color are encouraged (oftentimes by people of color as well) to not waste time or effort on them.

It is clear that old-fashioned racism unfairly disadvantages people of color and that it contributes to stress, depression, shame, and anger in its victims (Jones, 1997). But evidence also supports the detrimental impact of more subtle forms of racism (Chakraborty & McKenzie, 2002; Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999). For example, in a survey of studies examining racism and mental health, researchers found a positive association between happiness and life satisfaction, self-esteem, mastery of control, hypertension, and discrimination (Williams, Neighbors, & Jackson, 2003). Many of the types of everyday racism identified by Williams and colleagues (Williams & Collins, 1995; Williams, Lavizzo-Mourey, & Warren, 1994) provide strong support for the idea that racial microaggressions are not minimally harmful. One study specifically examined microaggressions in the experiences of African Americans and found that the cumulative effects can be quite devastating (Solórzano et al., 2000). The researchers reported that experience with microaggressions resulted in a negative racial climate and emotions of self-doubt, frustration, and isolation on the part of victims. As indicated in the incident above, the senior author experienced considerable emotional turmoil that lasted for the entire flight. When one considers that people of color are exposed continually to microaggressions and that their effects are cumulative, it becomes easier to understand the psychological toll they may take on recipients’ well-being.

We submit that covert racism in the form of microaggressions also has a dramatic and detrimental impact on people of color. Although microaggressions may be seemingly innocuous and insignificant, their effects can be quite dramatic (Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002). D. W. Sue believes that “this contemporary form of racism is many times over more problematic, damaging, and injurious to persons of color than overt racist acts” (D. W. Sue, 2003, p. 48). It has been noted that the cumulative effects of racial microaggressions may theoretically result in “diminished mortality, augmented morbidity and flattened confidence” (Pierce, 1995, p. 281). It is important to study and acknowledge this form of racism in society because without documentation and analysis to better understand microaggressions, the threats that they pose and the assaults that they justify can be easily ignored or downplayed (Solórzano et al., 2000). D. W. Sue (2005) has referred to this phenomenon as “a conspiracy of silence.”

**Dilemma 4: The Catch-22 of Responding to Microaggressions**

When a microaggression occurs, the victim is usually placed in a catch-22. The immediate reaction might be a series of questions: Did what I think happened, really occur? If I bring the topic up, how do I prove it? Is it really worth the effort? Should I just drop the matter? These questions in one form or another have been a common, if not a universal, reaction of persons of color who experience an attributional ambiguity (Crocker & Major, 1989).

First, the person must determine whether a microaggression has occurred. In that respect, people of color rely heavily on experiential reality that is contextual in nature and involves life experiences from a variety of situations. When the flight attendant asked the senior author and his colleague to move, it was not the first time that similar requests and situations had occurred for both. In their experience, these incidents were nonrandom events (Ridley, 2005), and their perception was that the only similarity “connecting the dots” to each and every one of these incidents was the color of their skin. In other words, the situation on the plane was only one of many similar incidents with identical outcomes. Yet the flight attendant and most White Americans do not share these multiple experiences, and they evaluate their own behaviors in the moment through a singular event (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000). Thus, they fail to see a pattern of bias, are defended by a belief in their own morality, and can in good conscience deny that they discriminated (D. W. Sue, 2005).

Second, how one reacts to a microaggression may have differential effects, not only on the perpetrator but on the person of color as well. Deciding to do nothing by sitting on one’s anger is one response that occurs frequently in people of color. This response occurs because persons of color may be (a) unable to determine whether a microaggression has occurred, (b) at a loss for how to respond, (c) fearful of the consequences, (d) rationalizing that “it won’t do any good anyway,” or (e) engaging in self-deception through denial (“It didn’t happen.”). Although these explanations for nonresponse may hold some validity for the person of color, we submit that not doing anything has the potential to result in psychological harm. It may mean a denial of one’s experiential reality, dealing with a loss of integrity, or experiencing pent-up anger and frustration likely to take psychological and physical tolls.

Third, responding with anger and striking back (perhaps a normal and healthy reaction) is likely to engender negative consequences for persons of color as well. They are likely to be accused of being racially oversensitive or paranoid or told that their emotional outbursts confirm stereotypes about minorities. In the case of Black males, for example, protesting may lend credence to the belief that they are hostile, angry, impulsive, and prone to violence (Jones, 1997). In this case, the person of color might feel better after venting, but the outcome results in greater hostility by Whites toward minorities. Further, while the person of color may feel better in the immediate moment by relievingpent-up emotions, the reality is that the general situation has not been changed. In essence, the catch-22 means you are “damned if you do, and damned if you don’t.” What is lacking is research that points to adaptive ways of handling microaggressions by people of color and suggestions of how to increase the awareness and sensitivity of Whites to microaggressions so that they accept responsibility for their behaviors and for changing them (Solórzano et al., 2000).
Racial Microaggressions as a Barrier to Clinical Practice

In a broad sense, counseling and psychotherapy can be characterized as the formation of a deeply personal relationship between a helping professional and a client that involves appropriate and accurate interpersonal interactions and communications. For effective therapy to occur, some form of positive coalition must develop between the parties involved (D. W. Sue & Sue, 2003). Many have referred to this as the “working relationship,” the “therapeutic alliance,” or the “establishment of rapport” (D. W. Sue & Sue, 2003). A strong therapeutic relationship is often enhanced when clients perceive therapists as credible (trustworthy and expert) and themselves as understood and positively regarded by their therapists (Strong & Schmidt, 1970). Helping professionals are trained to listen, to show empathic concern, to be objective, to value the client’s integrity, to communicate understanding, and to use their professional knowledge and skills to aid clients to solve problems (Grencavage & Norcross, 1990).

As a therapeutic team, therapist and client are better prepared to venture into problematic areas that the client might hesitate to face alone. Research suggests that the therapeutic alliance is one of the major common factors of any helping relationship and is correlated with successful outcome (Lui & Pope-Davis, 2005; Martin, Garske, & Davis, 2000). More important, however, are findings that a client’s perception of an accepting and positive relationship is a better predictor of successful outcome than is a similar perception by the counselor (Horvath & Symonds, 1991). Thus, when clients do not perceive their therapists as trustworthy and when they feel misunderstood and undervalued, therapeutic success is less likely to occur. Often times, the telltale signs of a failed therapeutic relationship may result in clients being less likely to self-disclose, terminating prematurely, or failing to return for scheduled visits (Burkard & Knox, 2004; Kearney, Draper, & Baron, 2005).

Although the task of establishing an effective therapeutic relationship applies to the entire helping spectrum, working with clients who differ from the therapist in race, ethnicity, culture, and sexual orientation poses special challenges. White therapists who are products of their cultural conditioning may be prone to engage in racial microaggressions (Locke & Kiselica, 1999). Thus, the therapeutic alliance is likely to be weakened or terminated when clients of color perceive White therapists as biased, prejudiced, or unlikely to understand them as racial/cultural beings. That racism can potentially infect the therapeutic process when working with clients of color has been a common concern voiced by the President’s Commission on Mental Health (1978) and the Surgeon General’s Report on Mental Health: Culture, Race and Ethnicity (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). It has been postulated that therapist bias might partially account for the low utilization of mental health services and premature termination of therapy sessions by African American, Native American, Asian American, and Latino/Hispanic American clients (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001).

Yet research also reveals that most people in our nation believe in democracy, fairness, and strong humanistic values that condemn racism and the inequities that it engenders (Dovidio et al., 2002). Such a statement is arguably truer for mental health professionals, whose goals are to help rather than hinder or hurt clients of color. Both the American Psychological Association and the American Counseling Association have attempted to confront the biases of the profession by passing multicultural guidelines or standards that denounce prejudice and discrimination in the delivery of mental health services to clients of color (American Psychological Association, 2003; D. W. Sue et al., 1992). Like most people in society, counselors and therapists experience themselves as fair and decent individuals who would never consciously and deliberately engage in racist acts toward clients of color. Sadly, it is often pointed out that when clinician and client differ from one another along racial lines, however, the relationship may serve as a microcosm for the troubled race relations in the United States. While many would like to believe that racism is no longer a major problem and that the good intentions of the helping profession have built safeguards against prejudice and discrimination, the reality is that they continue to be manifested through the therapeutic process (Utsey, Gernat, & Hammar, 2005). This is not to suggest, however, that positive changes in race relations have not occurred. Yet, as in many other interactions, microaggressions are equally likely to occur in therapeutic transactions (Ridley, 2005).

The Manifestation of Racial Microaggressions in Counseling/Therapy

Microaggressions become meaningful in the context of clinical practice, as relational dynamics and the human condition are central aspects of this field. The often unintentional and unconscious nature of microaggressions (Dilemma 2: Invisibility) poses the biggest challenge to the majority of White mental health professionals, who believe that they are just, unbiased, and nonracist. Further, mental health professionals are in a position of power, which renders them less likely to accurately assess (Dilemma 1: Conflict of Racial Realities) whether racist acts have occurred in their sessions. Thus, the harm they perpetrate against their clients of color is either unknown or minimized (Dilemma 3: Minimal Harm). Microaggressions not only oppress and harm, but they place clients of color in the unenviable position of a catch-22 (Dilemma 4).

In clinical practice, microaggressions are likely to go unrecognized by White clinicians who are unintentionally and unconsciously expressing bias. As a result, therapists must make a concerted effort to identify and monitor microaggressions within the therapeutic context. This process is reminiscent of the importance of becoming aware of potential transference and countertransference issues between therapist and client and how they may unintention-
ally interfere with effective therapy (Woodhouse, Schlosser, Crook, Ligiero, & Gelso, 2003). The inherent power dy-
amic in the therapeutic relationship further complicates
this issue, as therapists are in a position of power to make
diagnoses and influence the course of treatment. The power
dynamic between therapist and client also affects the

catch-22 of responding to microaggressions because clients
may be less likely to confront their therapists and more
likely to question their own perceptions in the event of a
microaggression.

Table 2 provides a few examples of microaggressions
in counseling practice under each of the nine categories
identified earlier. Under Color Blindness, for example, a
client of color stresses the importance of racial experiences
only to have the therapist reply, “We are all unique. We are
all individuals.” or “We are all human beings or the same
under the skin.” These colorblind statements, which were
intended to be supportive, to be sympathetic, and to convey
under this category, we provide the following anecdote: A
client of color expresses hesitancy in discussing racial
issues with his White female therapist. She replies, “I
understand. As a woman, I face discrimination too.” The
message is that the therapist believes her gender oppression
is no different from the client’s experiences of racial/ethnic
oppression. This response is problematic because such at-
ttempts by the therapist to explain how he or she can
understand a person of color’s experience with racism may
be perceived by the client as an attempt to minimize the
importance of his or her racial identity, to avoid acknowl-
edging the therapist’s racial biases, or to communicate a
discomfort with discussing racial issues. Furthermore, the
therapist excuses himself or herself from any blame or fault
in perpetuating racism and the power of racism. This fail-
ure to acknowledge the significance of racism within and
outside of the therapy session contributes to the breakdown
of the alliance between therapist and client. A therapist’s
willingness to discuss racial matters is of central impor-
tance in creating a therapeutic alliance with clients of color
(Cardemil & Battle, 2003).

Under the category “Alien in Own Land,” many Asian
Americans and Latino/Hispanic Americans report that they
are commonly seen as perpetual foreigners. For example, a
female Asian American client arrives for her first therapy
session. Her therapist asks her where she is from, and when
told “Philadelphia,” the therapist further probes by asking
where she was born. In this case, the therapist has assumed
that the Asian American client is not from the United States
and has imposed through the use of the second question the
idea that she must be a foreigner. Immediately, a barrier is
created in the helping relationship because the client feels
invalidated by the therapist (she is perceived as a foreigner,
not a U.S. citizen). Unfortunately, the Asian American
client is unlikely to question her therapist or point out the
bias because of the power dynamic, which causes her to
harbor resentment and ill feelings toward the therapist.

We contend that clients of color are at increased risk
of not continuing in the counseling/therapy session when
such microaggressions occur. Worse yet, they will not
receive the help they need and may leave the session
feeling worse than when they first sought counseling. Be-
cause it is unlikely that clinicians intentionally create hos-
tile and unwelcoming environments for their ethnic minor-
ity clients, it can be assumed that these biases are being
expressed through microaggressions. Therapists can con-
voy their bias to their ethnic minority clients in myriad
ways, such as by minimizing symptoms for Asian Ameri-
cans on the basis of a false belief in the “model” minority
(D. W. Sue & Sue, 2003) or by placing greater emphasis on
symptoms such as paranoid delusions and substance abuse
in Native Americans and African Americans, who are
believed to suffer from these afflictions (U.S. Department
of Health and Human Services, 2001).

Last, White counselors and therapists can impose and
value their own cultural worldview while devaluing and
pathologizing the cultural values of their ethnic minority
clients. Previous research has shown that pathologizing
clients’ cultural values has been a major determinant of
clients of color discontinuing psychotherapy (S. Sue, Fu-
jino, Hu, & Takeuchi, 1991). Many clients of color may
feel misunderstood by their therapists because of a lack of
cultural understanding. Asian American or Latino Ameri-
can clients who enter therapy to discuss family issues such
as feeling obligated, stressed, or overwhelmed with excess
family responsibilities may be encouraged by therapists to
speak out against their families or to make decisions re-
gardless of family support or expectations. Therapists may
be unaware that they may be directly invalidating cultural
respect for authority and imposing an individualistic view
over a collectivist one.

Future Directions in the
Understanding of Racial
Microaggressions

With respect to racism, D. W. Sue (2004, p. 762) has stated
that the greatest challenge society and the mental health
professions face is “making the ‘invisible’ visible.” That
can only be accomplished when people are willing to
openly and honestly engage in a dialogue about race and
racism. In that respect, the education and training of mental
health professionals must incorporate issues of race and
culture. One would ordinarily expect that mental health
professionals would be more willing than most to dialogue
on this topic, but studies suggest that White clinicians
receive minimal or no practicum or supervision experi-
ences that address race and are uncomfortable broaching
the topic (Knox, Burkard, Johnson, Suzuki, & Ponterotto,
2003). Many White trainees in therapy dyads experience
anxiety in the form of poor articulation, faltering and/or

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Microaggression</th>
<th>Message</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alien in own land</td>
<td>A White client does not want to work with an Asian American therapist because “she will not understand my problem.”</td>
<td>You are not American.</td>
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<tr>
<td>When Asian Americans and Latino Americans are assumed to be foreign-born</td>
<td>A White therapist tells an American-born Latino client that he/she should seek a Spanish-speaking therapist.</td>
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<td>Ascription of intelligence</td>
<td>A school counselor reacts with surprise when an Asian American student had trouble on the math portion of a standardized test.</td>
<td>All Asians are smart and good at math.</td>
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<td>Assigning a degree of</td>
<td>A career counselor asking a Black or Latino student, “Do you think you’re ready for college?”</td>
<td>It is unusual for people of color to succeed.</td>
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<td>intelligence to a person of color on the basis of their race</td>
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<td>Color blindness</td>
<td>A therapist says “I think you are being too paranoid. We should emphasize similarities, not people’s differences” when a client of color attempts to discuss her feelings about being the only person of color at her job and feeling alienated and dismissed by her co-workers.</td>
<td>Race and culture are not important variables that affect people’s lives.</td>
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<td>Statements which indicate that a White person does not want to acknowledge race</td>
<td>A client of color expresses concern in discussing racial issues with her therapist. Her therapist replies with, “When I see you, I don’t see color.”</td>
<td>Your racial experiences are not valid.</td>
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<td>Criminality/assumption of</td>
<td>When a Black client shares that she was accused of stealing from work, the therapist encourages the client to explore how she might have contributed to her employer’s mistrust of her.</td>
<td>You are a criminal.</td>
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<td>criminal status</td>
<td>A therapist takes great care to ask all substance abuse questions in an intake with a Native American client, and is suspicious of the client’s nonexistent history with substances.</td>
<td>You are deviant.</td>
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<td>A person of color is presumed</td>
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<td>to be dangerous, criminal,</td>
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<td>or deviant on the basis of</td>
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<td>their race</td>
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<td>Denial of individual racism</td>
<td>A client of color asks his or her therapist about how race affects their working relationship. The therapist replies, “Race does not affect the way I treat you.”</td>
<td>Your racial/ethnic experience is not important.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A statement made when Whites renounce their racial biases</td>
<td>A client of color expresses hesitancy in discussing racial issues with his White female therapist. She replies “I understand. As a woman, I face discrimination also.”</td>
<td>Your racial oppression is no different than my gender oppression.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Myth of meritocracy</td>
<td>A school counselor tells a Black student that “if you work hard, you can succeed like everyone else.”</td>
<td>People of color are lazy and/or incompetent and need to work harder. If you don’t succeed, you have only yourself to blame (blaming the victim).</td>
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<td>Statements which assert that</td>
<td>A career counselor is working with a client of color who is concerned about not being promoted at work despite being qualified. The counselor suggests, “Maybe if you work harder you can succeed like your peers.”</td>
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<td>race does not play a role in</td>
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<td>succeeding in career</td>
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<td>advancement or education.</td>
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<td>Pathologizing cultural values/</td>
<td>A Black client is loud, emotional, and confrontational in a counseling session. The therapist diagnoses her with borderline personality disorder.</td>
<td>Assimilate to dominant culture.</td>
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<td>communication styles</td>
<td>A client of Asian or Native American descent has trouble maintaining eye contact with his therapist. The therapist diagnoses him with a social anxiety disorder.</td>
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<td>The notion that the values and</td>
<td>Advising a client, “Do you really think your problem stems from racism?”</td>
<td>Leave your cultural baggage outside.</td>
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<td>communication styles of the</td>
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<td>dominant/White culture are</td>
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trembling voices, and mispronunciation of words when directly engaged in discussions about race (Utsey et al., 2005). It is interesting that such nonverbal behaviors also serve as a form of racial microaggression. When helping professionals have difficulty addressing race issues, they cut off an avenue for clients of color to explore matters of bias, discrimination, and prejudice.

**Education and Training and Racial Microaggressions**

It is clear that mental health training programs must support trainees in overcoming their fears and their resistance to talking about race by fostering safe and productive learning environments (Sanchez-Hucles & Jones, 2005). It is important that training programs be structured and facilitated in a manner that promotes inquiry and allows trainees to experience discomfort and vulnerability (Young & Davis-Russell, 2002). Trainees need to be challenged to explore their own racial identities and their feelings about other racial groups. The prerequisite for cultural competence has always been racial self-awareness. This is equally true for understanding how microaggressions, especially those of the therapist, influence the therapeutic process. This level of self-awareness brings to the surface possible prejudices and biases that inform racial microaggressions. A first step for therapists who want to integrate an understanding of racism’s mental health effects into the conceptualization of psychological functioning is to undergo a process of learning and critical self-examination of racism and its impact on one’s life and the lives of others (Thompson & Neville, 1999). For White clinicians, it means addressing the question “What does it mean to be White?” and being fully cognizant of their own White racial identity development and how it may intrude on people of color (Helms, 1992, 1995). In addition, it has been suggested that articulating a personal theory of reality and of therapeutic change in the context of an environment of racism is one way to begin integrating knowledge of racism with the practice of psychotherapy (Thompson & Neville, 1999). Education and training must aid White clinicians to achieve the following: (a) increase their ability to identify racial microaggressions in general and in themselves in particular; (b) understand how racial microaggressions, including their own, detrimentally impact clients of color; and (c) accept responsibility for taking corrective actions to overcome racial biases.

**Research on Racial Microaggressions**

A major obstacle to understanding racial microaggressions is that research is in a nascent state. Researchers continue to omit subtle racism and microaggressions from their research agendas, and this absence conveys the notion that covert forms of racism are not as valid or as important as racist events that can be quantified and “proven.” In fact, omitting microaggressions from studies on racism on the basis of a belief that they are less harmful encourages the profession to “look the other way.” Moreover, the fact that psychological research has continued to inadequately address race and ethnicity (Delgado-Romero, Rowland, & Galvin, 2005) is in itself a microaggression. Pursuing a line of research examining how cross-racial dyadic compositions impact the process and outcome of counselor/client interactions would be a tremendous contribution to the field of counseling and clinical psychology. Helms and Cook (1999) noted that racial consciousness is a critical consideration in determining White therapists’ ability to operate effectively in cross-racial dyads.

For mental health purposes, it would be useful to explore the coping mechanisms used by people of color to stave off the negative effects of microaggressions. The fact that people of color have had to face daily microaggressions and have continued to maintain their dignity in the face of such hostility is a testament to their resiliency (D. W. Sue, 2003). What coping strategies have been found to serve them well? A greater understanding of responses to microaggressions, both in the long term and the short term, and of the coping strategies employed would be beneficial in arming children of color for the life they will face. Such research is necessary because without documentation and analysis to help better understand microaggressions, the threats that they pose and the assaults that they justify can be easily ignored or downplayed (Solorzano et al., 2000).

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**Table 2 (continued)**

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<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Microaggression</th>
<th>Message</th>
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<tr>
<td>Second-class citizen Occurs when a White person is given preferential treatment as a consumer over a person of color</td>
<td>A counselor limits the amount of long-term therapy to provide at a college counseling center; she chooses all White clients over clients of color. Clients of color are not welcomed or acknowledged by receptionists.</td>
<td>Whites are more valued than people of color.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Environmental microaggressions Macro-level microaggressions, which are more apparent on a systemic level</td>
<td>A waiting room office has pictures of American presidents. Every counselor at a mental health clinic is White.</td>
<td>You don’t belong/Only white people can succeed. You are an outsider/You don’t exist.</td>
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</table>
Studying the long-term impact that microaggressions have on mental health functioning, self-esteem, self-concept, and racial identity development appears crucial to documenting the harm microaggressions inflict on people of color. The taxonomy of microaggressions proposed here may make it easier to explore other social psychological questions as well.

First, it is highly probable that microaggressions vary in their severity and impact. As indicated, a microassault does not evoke a guessing game because the intent of the perpetrator is clear. However, the racist intent of microinsults and microinvalidations is less clear and presents different dilemmas for people of color. Some questions to ponder include the following: (a) Are the three forms of racial microaggressions equal in impact? Are some themes and their hidden messages more problematic than others? Although all expressions may take a psychological toll, some are obviously experienced as more harmful and severe than others. (b) Is there a relationship between forms of racial microaggressions and racial identity development? Recent research and formulations on White racial identity development and the psychosocial costs of racism to Whites (Helms, 1995; Spanierman, Armstrong, Poteat, & Beer, 2006) imply that forms of racial microaggressions may be associated with certain statuses or trait clusters. (c) Finally, is it possible that different racial/ethnic groups are more likely to encounter certain forms of racial microaggressions than others? A preliminary study suggests that Asian Americans are prone to be victims of microinvalidations with themes that revolve around “alien in one’s own land” (D. W. Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, & Torino, 2007) rather than microinsults with themes of “criminality.” Is it possible that Blacks are more likely to be subjected to the latter than to the former? What about Latinos and American Indians?

Second, the challenge in conducting research aimed at understanding microaggressions involves measurement. Adequate assessment tools need to be created to effectively explore the new and burgeoning field of microaggression research. Although there are several promising race-related stress and discrimination measures, such as the Perceived Ethnic Discrimination Questionnaire (PEDQ; Brondolo et al., 2005), the Color-Blind Racial Attitude Scale (COBRAS; Neville et al., 2000), the Index of Race Related Stress (IRRS; Utsey & Ponterotto, 1996), and the Schedule of Racist Events (SRE; Klonoff & Landrine, 1999), none of them is directly aimed at distinguishing between categories of racial microaggressions or their intentional or unintentional nature. The PEDQ uses four subcales that broadly measure stigmatization, harassment, workplace discrimination, and social exclusion; the COBRAS is specific to a person’s minimization of race and racism; the IRRS uses Jones’s (1997) framework to measure individual, institutional, and societal racism; and the SRE is aimed at measuring frequency of racist incidents. All contain examples of racial microaggressions that support our taxonomy, but none makes conceptual distinctions that allow for categorical measurements of this phenomenon. It seems imperative that specific instruments be developed to aid in understanding the causes, consequences, manifestations, and elimination of racial microaggressions.

Conclusion

Nearly all interracial encounters are prone to the manifestation of racial microaggressions. We have chosen mainly to address the therapeutic relationship, but racial microaggressions are potentially present whenever human interactions involve participants who differ in race and culture (teaching, supervising, training, administering, evaluating, etc.). We have purposely chosen to concentrate on racial microaggressions, but it is important to acknowledge other types of microaggressions as well. Gender, sexual orientation, and disability microaggressions may have equally powerful and potentially detrimental effects on women, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals, and disability groups. Further, racial microaggressions are not limited to White–Black, White–Latino, or White–Person of Color interactions. Interethnic racial microaggressions occur between people of color as well. In the area of counseling and therapy, for example, research may also prove beneficial in understanding cross-racial dyads in which the therapist is a person of color and the client is White or in which both therapist and client are persons of color. Investigating these combinations of cross-racial dyads would be useful, because it is clear that no racial/ethnic group is immune from inheriting the racial biases of the society (D. W. Sue, 2003). We encourage future research in these two areas because all forms of microaggressions have detrimental consequences.

REFERENCES


Glossary of Social Justice Terminology*

Ableism: Prejudiced thoughts and discriminatory actions based on differences in physical, mental, and/or emotional ability; usually that of able-bodied / minded persons against people with illness, disabilities, or less developed skills / talents.

Accessibility: The extent to which a facility is readily approachable and usable by individuals with disabilities, particularly such areas as the personnel office, worksite and public areas.

Adultism: Prejudiced thoughts and discriminatory actions against young people, in favor of older person(s).

Advocate: Someone who speaks up for her/himself and members of his/her identity group; e.g., a woman who lobbies for equal pay for women.

Agent: The perpetrator or perpetuator of oppression and/or discrimination; usually a member of the dominant, non-target identity group.

Ageism: Prejudiced thoughts and discriminatory actions based on differences in age; usually that of younger persons against older.

Ally: A person of one social identity group who stands up in support of members of another group; typically member of dominant group standing beside member(s) of targeted group; e.g., a male arguing for equal pay for women.

Anti-Semitism: The fear or hatred of Jews, Judaism, and related symbols.

Bias: Prejudice; an inclination or preference, especially one that interferes with impartial judgment.

Bigotry: Intolerance toward those who hold different opinions from oneself.

Bi-racial: A person who identifies coming from two races. A person who’s biological parents are of two different races.

Categorization: The natural cognitive process of grouping and labeling people, things, etc. based on their similarities. Categorization becomes problematic when the groupings become oversimplified and rigid (e.g., stereotypes).

Civil Rights: A class of rights that protect individuals' freedom from infringement by governments, social organizations and private individuals, and which ensure one’s ability to participate in the civil and political life of the society and state without discrimination or repression.

Classism: Prejudiced thoughts and discriminatory actions based on difference in socio-economic status, income, class; usually by upper classes against lower.

Coalition: A collection of different people or groups, working toward a common goal.

Collusion: Willing participation in the discrimination against and/or oppression of one’s own group (e.g., a woman who enforces dominant body ideals through her comments and actions).

Color Blind: the belief in treating everyone “equally” by treating everyone the same; based in the presumption that differences are by definition bad or problematic, and therefore best ignored (i.e., “I don’t see race, gender, etc.”).

Community: A unified body of individuals; a group of people who have the same interests, religion, race, etc.

Community Building: A field of practices directed toward the creation or enhancement of community among individuals within a regional area (such as a neighborhood) or with a common interest. It is sometimes encompassed under the field of community development.

Adapted from University of Massachusetts Lowell Office of Multicultural Affairs
https://www.uml.edu/docs/Glossary_tcm18-55041.pdf
**Community Organizing:** the coordination of cooperative efforts and campaigning carried out by local residents to promote the interests of their community.

**Dialogue:** "Communication that creates and recreates multiple understandings" (Wink, 1997); it is bidirectional, not zero-sum and may or may not end in agreement; it can be emotional and uncomfortable, but is safe, respectful and has greater understanding as its goal.

**Discrimination:** Actions, based on conscious or unconscious prejudice, which favor one group over others in the provision of goods, services, or opportunities.

**Diversity:** The wide variety of shared and different personal and group characteristics among human beings.

**Dominant Culture:** The cultural values, beliefs, and practices that are assumed to be the most common and influential within a given society.

**Ethnic Minority:** a group that has different national or cultural traditions from the main population.

**First Nations People:** Individuals who identify as those who were the first people to live on the Western Hemisphere continent. People also identified as Native Americans.

**Fundamental Attribution Error:** A common cognitive action in which one attributes his/her own success and positive actions to his/her own innate characteristics ("I'm a good person") and failure to external influences ("I lost it in the sun"), while attributing others success to external influences ("he had help, was lucky") and failure to others' innate characteristics ("they're bad people"). This operates on the group levels as well, with the ingroup giving itself favorable attributions, while giving the outgroup unfavorable attributions, as way of maintaining a feeling of superiority. A “double standard.”

**Hapa:** a Hawaiian language term used to describe a person of mixed Asian or Pacific Islander racial or ethnic heritage.

**Ideology:** a system of ideas and ideals, especially one that forms the basis of economic or political theory and policy.

**Indigenous People:** groups especially protected in international or national legislation as having a set of specific rights based on their historical ties to a particular territory, and their cultural or historical distinctiveness from other populations. The legislation is based on the conclusion that certain indigenous people are vulnerable to exploitation, marginalization and oppression by nation states formed from colonizing populations or by politically dominant, different ethnic groups.

**In-group Bias** (favoritism): the tendency for groups to “favor” themselves by rewarding group members economically, socially, psychologically, and emotionally in order to uplift one group over another.

**Intergroup Conflict:** Tension and conflict which exists between social groups. And which may be enacted by individual members of these groups.

**Intersectionality:** the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.

**-Ism:** A social phenomenon and psychological state where prejudice is accompanied by the power to systemically enact it. Examples include but are not limited to: ageism, sexism, racism, etc.

**Justice:** the quality of being just; righteousness, equitableness, or moral rightness.

Adapted from University of Massachusetts Lowell Office of Multicultural Affairs
[https://www.uml.edu/docs/Glossary_tcm18-55041.pdf](https://www.uml.edu/docs/Glossary_tcm18-55041.pdf)
Marginalized: Excluded, ignored, or relegated to the outer edge of a group/society/community.
Model Minority: Refers to a minority ethnic, racial, or religious group whose members achieve a higher degree of success than the population average. This success is typically measured in income, education, and related factors such as low crime rate and high family stability.
Multiplicity: The quality of having multiple, simultaneous social identities (e.g., being male and Buddhist and working class).
Multiracial: An individual that comes from more than one race. An individual who's parent's are born from more than one race.
Multiethnic: An individual that comes from more than one ethnicity. An individual whose parents are born from more than one ethnicity.
Naming: When we articulate a thought that traditionally has not been discussed.
National Origin: The political state from which an individual hails; may or may not be the same as that the person's current location or citizenship.
Oppression: Results from the use of institutional power and privilege where one person or group benefits at the expense of another. Oppression is the use of power and the effects of domination.
People of Color: A collective term for men and women of Asian, African, Latin and Native American backgrounds; as opposed to the collective "White" for those of European ancestry.
Personal Identity: Our identities as individuals—including our personal characteristics, history, personality, name, and other characteristics that make us unique and different from other individuals.
Prejudice: A preconceived judgment about a person or group of people; usually indicating negative bias.
Privilege: a right, license, or exemption from duty or liability granted as a special benefit, advantage, or favor.
Power: ability to do or act; capability of doing or accomplishing something.
Race: is a group of people who share similar and distinct physical characteristics. There is no biological basis for the concept of race, it is a social construction. However, race and racism have real and enduring consequences for people of color.
Racism: Prejudiced thoughts and discriminatory beliefs, actions, laws and policies embedded in societal structures and institutions based on ascribed differences in race/ethnicity.
Re-fencing (exception-making): A cognitive process for protecting stereotypes by explaining any evidence/example to the contrary as an isolated exception.
Religion: A system of beliefs, usually spiritual in nature, and often in terms of a formal, organized denomination.
Safe Space: Refers to an environment in which everyone feels comfortable in expressing themselves and participating fully, without fear of attack, ridicule or denial of experience.
Saliency: The quality of a group identity of which an individual is more conscious and which plays a larger role in that individual's day-to-day life; for example, a man’s awareness of his "maleness" in an elevator with only women.
Sex: biological classification of male or female (based on genetic or physiological features); as opposed to gender.
Sexism: Prejudiced thoughts and discriminatory actions based on difference in sex/gender; usually by men against women.

Adapted from University of Massachusetts Lowell Office of Multicultural Affairs
https://www.uml.edu/docs/Glossary_tcm18-55041.pdf
**Sexual Orientation:** one's natural preference in sexual partners; predilection for homosexuality, heterosexuality, or bisexuality.

**Silencing:** The conscious or unconscious processes by which the voice or participation of particular social identities is exclude or inhibited.

**Social Identity:** It involves the ways in which one characterizes oneself, the affinities one has with other people, the ways one has learned to behave in stereotyped social settings, the things one values in oneself and in the world, and the norms that one recognizes or accepts governing everyday behavior.

**Social Identity Development:** The stages or phases that a person's group identity follows as it matures or develops.

**Social Justice:** A broad term for action intended to create genuine equality, fairness and respect among peoples.

**Social Oppression:** "Exists when one social group, whether knowingly or unconsciously, exploits another group for its own benefit" (Hardiman and Jackson, 1997)

**Social Self-Esteem:** The degree of positive-negative evaluation an individual holds about his/her particular situation in regards to his/her social identities.

**Social Self-View:** An individual's perception of to which social identity groups he/she belongs.

**Spotlighting:** The practice of inequitably calling attention to particular social groups in language, while leaving others as the invisible, de facto norm. For example: "black male suspect" (versus "male suspect," presumed white); "WNBA" (as opposed to "NBA," presumed male).

**Stereotype:** Blanket beliefs and expectations about members of certain groups that present an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude, or uncritical judgment. They go beyond necessary and useful categorizations and generalizations in that they are typically negative, are based on little information, and are highly generalized.

**System of Oppression:** Conscious and unconscious, non-random, and organized harassment, discrimination, exploitation, discrimination, prejudice and other forms of unequal treatment that impact different groups.

**Tolerance** (n): Acceptance and open-mindedness to different practices, attitudes, and cultures; does not necessarily mean agreement with the differences.

**Traditional Medicine:** the sum total of the knowledge, skills, and practices based on the theories, beliefs, and experiences indigenous to different cultures, whether explicable or not, used in the maintenance of health as well as in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement or treatment of physical and mental illness.

**Veteran Status:** Whether or not an individual has served in a nation's armed forces (or other uniformed service).

**Worldview:** The perspective though which individuals view the world; comprised of their history, experiences, culture, family history, and other influences.

*This resource was adapted from University of Massachusetts - Lowell, Diversity and Social Justice: A glossary of working definitions: https://www.uml.edu/docs/Glossary_tcm18-55041.pdf*
RESPONDING TO EVERYDAY BIGOTRY

SPEAK UP!
SPEAK UP!

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Cody Downs, 30, has Down syndrome. He cannot read or write, but he lives on his own, enjoys music and worked as a disc jockey for many years.

Cody and his mother, Kay Parks, were in the checkout line at the grocery store. A woman in line behind them stared at Cody with a disgusted look on her face.

Cody turned to his mother and asked, “Why is that woman looking weird at me?” Kay looked at the woman, then looked back to Cody.

Stymied for an answer and wanting to provide Cody information he would understand, Kay said to her son, “Well, Cody, I guess she’s looking at you that way because she thinks you’re weird.”

Cody considered that for a moment.

Then he turned to the woman behind him and said, “I’m not weird. I’m a really nice guy.”

RESPONDING TO EVERYDAY BIGOTRY

Your brother routinely makes anti-Semitic comments. Your neighbor uses the N-word in casual conversation. Your co-worker ribs you about your Italian surname, asking if you’re in the mafia. Your classmate insults something by saying, “That’s so gay.”

And you stand there, in silence, thinking, “What can I say in response to that?” Or you laugh along, uncomfortably. Or, frustrated or angry, you walk away without saying anything, thinking later, “I should have said something.”

No agency or organization counts or tracks these moments. They don’t qualify as hate crimes, and they rarely make news. That’s part of their insidious nature; they happen so often we simply accept them as part of life. Left unchecked, like litter or weeds, they blight the landscape.

In the making of this book, the Southern Poverty Law Center gathered hundreds of stories of everyday bigotry from people across the United States. They told their stories through email, personal interviews and at roundtable discussions in four cities: Baltimore, Md.; Columbia, S.C.; Phoenix, Ariz.; and Vancouver, Wash.

People spoke about encounters in stores and restaurants, on streets and in schools. They spoke about family, friends, classmates and co-workers. They told us what they did or didn’t say — and what they wished they did or didn’t say.

We present the stories here anecdotally, organized by the following categories: among family; among friends and neighbors; at work; at school; and in public. Yet no matter the location or relationship, the stories echo each other.

When a Native American man at one roundtable discussion spoke of feeling ostracized at work, a Jewish woman nodded in support. When an African American woman told of daily indignities of racism at school, a white man leaned forward and asked what he could do to help. When an elderly lesbian spoke of finally feeling brave enough to wear a rainbow pin in public, those around the table applauded her courage.
‘I HAD A FLIGHT RESPONSE’

Leann Johnson, a multiethnic mother of two, made a Kwanzaa presentation at a public holiday gathering. Afterward, while Johnson was taking down the display, a white woman came up and said, “When I first saw you, I didn’t know you were black. You’re so smart and pretty.”

“I had a flight response,” Johnson said. “I thought, ‘Something bad has happened; just leave.’”

So Johnson stepped away.

Then, she said, “Something boiled up from deep inside, years of stuff, of hearing those kinds of remarks. Plus I have two small children, two little girls, my babies, and I have a responsibility to them.”

So Johnson turned, went back to the woman and said, “I don’t know if you know how that sounded, but the way it sounded to me is that you think black people cannot be smart or pretty.”

The woman stammered, started to rationalize her comment, then stopped. Tears welled in her eyes as she said, “Thank you so much. I have really learned something today. I had no idea how that came out, and what you say makes me understand it better.”

Johnson said such moments are rare, but vital.

“It is so important to have at least one win once in a while, one thank you. It makes it that much easier to step out next time, to take a risk and say something.”

Speak up! calls on everyone to take a stand against everyday bigotry.

A NOTE TO THE READER

All stories presented in Speak Up! are real; due to personal preference and privacy concerns, we present them anonymously. In situations where people shared similar stories, we developed an amalgam, drawing from more than one person. Quoted material is drawn from personal interviews, roundtable discussions, email, letters and some news accounts. Racial, ethnic and other descriptors are those used by the people telling their own stories.
WHAT CAN I DO AMONG FAMILY?
Among participants in our roundtable discussions, family moments represented some of the greatest difficulties: How to speak up to the people closest to you, those you love the most, whether in response to a single instance or an ongoing pattern.

Power and history — spanning generations — come into play in such moments, affecting how comfortable or unsettling it feels to speak up. Who holds power in the family? Who sets the tone for family interaction? What roles do elders and children play, and how might their words carry more weight or impact? Would your uncle hear a complaint against his bigoted “jokes” more deeply if it came from his 7-year-old niece? Or would Grandpa’s quiet grace be the stronger voice against bigotry?

And other questions take shape: Was bigotry a part of daily life in the home you grew up in? Do you continue to accept that as the norm? Do you forgive bigotry in some family members more than others? Do the “rules” about what gets said — and what doesn’t — change from one home to another? Who shares your views opposing such bigotry? Working together, will you find greater success in speaking out?

Many people spoke of setting limits in their own homes, not allowing racist “jokes” or comments, even if they can’t control such moments in other relatives’ homes.

Appealing to shared values can be a way to begin discussions at home or with relatives. Try saying, “Our family is too important to let bigotry tear it apart.” Or, “Our family always has stood for fairness, and the comments you’re making are terribly unfair.” Or, simply, “Is this what our family stands for?”

“I feel like an outsider. I feel confused. Is this my family?”
WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT SIBLING SLURS?

‘IS THIS MY FAMILY?’

A woman is vacationing with her mother and two brothers. One morning, her brother says he wants to give his car “a Jewish car wash,” which he describes as “taking soap out when it’s raining to wash your car, so you don’t waste money on water.” He says he learned the phrase from their stepfather. She asks, “Why is that funny?” He laughs and says, “Don’t you get it? It’s the whole Jewish-cheap thing.” She responds, “Well, I don’t think it’s funny.” He says, “What do you care? You’re not Jewish.”

That evening, over dinner, her other brother makes similar remarks.

“It pains me and embarrasses me that this is a pervasive culture in my own family, that they consider this part of their ‘humor,’” she says. “I feel like an outsider. I feel confused. Where have I been? Is this my family?”

SPEAKING UP

Sibling relationships involve long-established habits, shared experiences and expectations. In crafting a response to bias from a brother or sister, consider your history together. Was bigoted language and “humor” allowed or even encouraged in your childhood home? Or, is this behavior something new? Does you sibling see him- or herself as the sibling leader? Or does another sibling hold that role? The following suggestions might help frame your response:

Honor the past. If such behavior wasn’t accepted in your growing-up years, remind your sibling of your shared past: “I remember when we were kids, Mom went out of her way to make sure we embraced differences. I’m not sure when or why that changed for you, but it hasn’t changed for me.”

Change the present. If bigoted behavior was accepted in your childhood home, explain to your siblings that you’ve changed: “I know when we were growing up that we all used to tell ‘jokes’ about Jews. As an adult, though, I advocate respect for others.”

Appeal to family ties. “I value our relationship so much, and we’ve always been so close. Those anti-Semitic remarks are putting a lot of distance between us, and I don’t want to feel distanced from you.”

Reach out. Feedback about bias is sometimes hard to hear. Who is your sibling most likely to listen to? A spouse? A parent? A child? Seek out other relatives who can help deliver the message.

WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT JOKING IN-LAWS?

‘NOT ... IN MY OWN HOME’

A woman’s father-in-law routinely tells racist “jokes” at family gatherings. “It made me very uncomfortable,” she writes, “though at first I didn’t say anything to him about it.” After having children, however, she felt compelled to speak up.

Arriving for her next visit, she said to her father-in-law, “I know I can’t control what you do in your own house. Your racist ‘jokes’ are offensive to me, and I will not allow my children to be subjected to them. If you choose to continue with them, I will take the children and leave. And I’m informing you that racist ‘jokes’ or comments will not be allowed in my own home.”

SPEAKING UP

For many adults engaged in long-term partnerships there is no relationship fraught with more anxiety than that with the in-laws. When two families
join together, creating common ground across familial cultures can be challenging. When dealing with in-laws, keep the following in mind:

**Describe your family’s values.** Your spouse’s family may well embrace bigoted “humor” as part of familial culture. Explain why that isn’t the case in your home; explain that principles like tolerance and respect for others guide your immediate family’s interactions and attitudes.

**Set limits.** Although you may not be able to change your in-laws’ attitudes, you can set limits on their behavior in your own home: “I will not allow bigoted ‘jokes’ to be told in my home.”

**Follow through.** In this case, during her next visit, the woman and her children left when the father-in-law began to tell such a “joke.” She did that two more times, at later family gatherings, before her father-in-law finally refrained.

### WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT IMPRESSIONABLE CHILDREN?

**‘HOW WOULD HE FEEL?’**

- A woman’s young son tells a racist “joke” at dinner that he had heard on the playground earlier that day. “I immediately discussed with him how inappropriate it was. I asked him to put himself in the place of the person in the ‘joke.’ How would he feel? I discussed with him the feeling of empathy.”

- A New Jersey woman writes: “My young daughter wrapped a towel around her head and said she wanted to be a terrorist for Halloween — ‘like that man down the street.’” The man is a Sikh who wears a turban for religious reasons. The woman asks, “What do I tell my daughter?”

### SPEAKING UP

Children soak up stereotypes and bigotry from media, from family members, at school and on the playground. As a parent concerned about your child’s cultural sensitivities, consider the following:

**Focus on empathy.** When a child says or does something that reflects biases or embraces stereotypes, point it out: “What makes that ‘joke’ funny?” Guide the conversation toward empathy and respect: “How do you think our neighbor would feel if he heard you call him a terrorist?”

**Expand horizons.** Look critically at how your child defines “normal.” Help to expand the definition: “Our neighbor is a Sikh, not a terrorist. Let’s learn about his religion.” Create opportunities for children to spend time with
and learn about people who are different from themselves.

**Prepare for the predictable.** Every year, Halloween becomes a magnet for stereotypes. Children and adults dress as “psychos” or “bums,” perpetuating biased representations of people with mental illness or people who are homeless. Others wear masks steeped in stereotypical features or misrepresentations. Seek costumes that don’t embrace stereotypes. Have fun on the holiday without turning it into an exercise in bigotry and bias.

**Be a role model.** If parents treat people unfairly based on differences, children likely will repeat what they see. Be conscious of your own dealings with others.

**WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT PARENTAL ATTITUDES?**

‘**WHAT TO SAY**’

- A woman writes: “My mother uses racial and ethnic terminology — the Mexican checkout clerk, the black saleslady — in casual stories in which race and ethnicity are not factors. Of course, if the person is white, she never bothers to mention it.”

- A man continually refers to the largest nuts in cans of mixed nuts as “nigger toes.” His grown children speak up whenever they hear him use the term, but he persists.

- A man writes, “My father says he has nothing against homosexuals, but they shouldn’t allow them to lead in a church. I didn’t know what to say.”

**SPEAKING UP**

Learning how to have adult-to-adult dialogue is part of the maturation process for any child-parent relationship. As we grow older, we sometimes develop different views than those of our parents, guardians or childhood caregivers. Navigating such conflicts often is complicated by a common cultural norm: respect your elders. How, then, can we cross these divides?

**Speak up without “talking back.”** Repeat information, removing unnecessary racial or ethnic descriptions: “What did the checkout clerk do next, Mom?” Or, “Yes, I like these mixed nuts, too.” Subtly model bias-free language.

**Appeal to parental values.** Call upon the principles that guided your childhood home. “Dad, when I was growing up, you taught me to treat others the way I wanted to be treated. And I just don’t think that term is very nice.”

**Discuss actively.** Ask clarifying questions: “Why do you feel that way?” “Are you saying everyone should feel this way?” Articulate your view: “You know, Dad, I see this differently. Here’s why.” Strive for common ground: “What can we agree on here?”

**Anticipate and rehearse.** When you know bias is likely to arise, practice possible responses in front of a mirror beforehand. Figure out what works best for you, what feels the most comfortable. Become confident in your responses, and use them.

**WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT STUBBORN RELATIVES?**

‘**IT WAS LIKE A GAME TO HIM**’

- A young Arizona woman says her father and uncle know how much she opposes racist or homophobic “jokes.” “I’ve told them that all the time, and
Describe how you are feeling. “I love you so much, and I know you love me, too. I wonder why you choose to keep hurting me with your comments and ‘jokes.’”

Appeal to family ties. “Your ‘jokes’ are putting unnecessary distance between us; I worry they’ll end up doing irreparable harm. I want to make sure those ‘jokes’ don’t damage our relationship.”

State values, set limits. “You know that respect and tolerance are important values in my life, and, while I understand that you have a right to say what you want, I’m asking you to show a little more respect for me by not telling these ‘jokes’ when I’m around.”

Ask for a response. “I don’t want this rift to get worse, and I want us to have a good relationship. What should we do?”

Broaden the discussion. Consider including sympathetic family members and not-so-sympathetic family members in the discussion so everyone can work to help the family find common ground.

Put it in writing. If spoken words and actions don’t have an effect, consider writing a note, letter or email. Often, people “hear” things more clearly that way.

WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT MY OWN BIAS?

‘I THOUGHT I WAS COOL’

An African American woman is raising her teenage niece. The niece joined the basketball team, came home and said, “Auntie, there are 12 girls on the team, and six are lesbians.”

The woman recalls the moment:

“I thought I wasn’t homophobic, but, boy, I had to sleep on that one. I was thinking, you know, they’re going to recruit her. And here I thought I was cool. It used to be my fear — and I hate to say this, but it’s true — it used to be my fear that she would come home with a white man. Now I’m asking myself, ‘Would I be more upset if she came home with a white man or a black woman?’”

SPEAKING UP

Confronting our own biases is a good thing; that’s one of the ways we grow. This is not a comfortable process, but the practice of examining one’s own...
prejudices is the first step toward diminishing or eliminating them. Here are some steps to consider:

**Seek feedback and advice.** Ask family members to help you work through your biases. Families that work through these difficult emotions in healthy ways often are stronger for it.

**State your goals out loud.** Say, “You know, I’ve really got some work to do here, to understand why I feel and think the way I do.” Such admissions can be powerful in modeling behavior for others.

**Commit to learn more.** Education, exposure and awareness are key factors in moving from prejudice to understanding and acceptance. Create such opportunities for yourself.

**Follow through.** Select a date — a couple of weeks or months away — and mark it on a calendar. When the date arrives, reflect on what you’ve learned, how your behavior has changed and what’s left to do. Reach out again for feedback on your behavior.
WHAT CAN I DO AMONG FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS?
WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT SOUR SOCIAL EVENTS?

‘THAT CAN’T BE GOOD MANNERS’

× From a California man:

“I grew up fairly poor, but I attended a college that drew students from some very rich families. A wealthy classmate invited me out to dinner one night when her family was visiting, and we went to the fanciest restaurant I’d ever been to.

“During the salad course, the waiter brought a cloth-covered platter with what I found out later were chilled forks. I reached to take the platter out of his hands so I could pass it around the table to the others. Apparently, judging from the laughter from my classmate’s sister and parents, this was a major faux pas. I was supposed to just take my fork and let the waiter move to the next person with the tray.

“I felt ashamed for the rest of the meal and excused myself from joining them for some sightseeing afterward. Heading back to my dorm room, I just kept thinking about them laughing at me. That can’t be good manners.”

× Others spoke of similar social-event moments, including being in groups where phrases such as “redneck” and “white trash” are used in “joking” but uncomfortable ways.

SPEAKING UP

Social events provide us with opportunities to mix and mingle with people who are different from us. They also are common environments for cultural misunderstandings and biased “humor.”

Address the speaker. A simple comment — “I’m sorry; what’s so funny?” — can jar someone from their rudeness. Or be more exact: “I’m sorry. I’m not sure I know what you mean by ‘white trash.’ Could you explain that term?” When faced with crafting an answer, the speaker may begin to understand the inappropriateness of the remark.

Appeal to the host. Party hosts have brought people together and often are the closest to each of the guests. Ask the host to rein in offensive “jokes” and culturally biased statements. In the above case, the man may have discussed the moment later, with his classmate, who then could have raised the issue with her family.

WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT CASUAL COMMENTS?

‘WHAT DO CHINESE PEOPLE THINK?’

× A white man plans to marry a South American woman; his friends make incorrect assumptions about her race, religion and family background.

“The question we never stop getting is, ‘Do Carrie’s parents mind?’ When we question the question, we are told that ‘Indian families’ like their daughters to marry their ‘own kind.’ How can we respond?”

Look for body language. Did you see anyone else flinch when the comment was made? If so, approach the person and assess whether they know the speaker well. If so, consider asking that person to approach the speaker privately.
A Chicago woman who is adopted, still grieving the death of her mother, is told, “Oh, so that wasn’t your real mother who died?” The woman writes, “I was so hurt by this I didn’t know what to say.”

A Chinese American woman often finds herself asked by friends, “What do Chinese people think about that?”

**SPEAKING UP**

Friends are our comfort zones, where we let down our guards and can simply be ourselves. Casual conversation is the mainstay of these relationships. But when bias is interjected into everyday moments with friends, relationships can feel markedly uncomfortable. How then can you reconnect?

**Approach friends as allies.** When a friend makes a hurtful comment or poses an offensive question, it’s easy to shut down, put up walls or disengage. Remember that you’re friends with this person for a reason; something special brought you together. Drawing on that bond, explain how the comment offended you.

**Respond with silence.** When a friend poses a question that feels hurtful, let protracted silence do the work for you. Say nothing and wait for the speaker to respond with an open-ended question: “What’s up?” Then describe the comment from your point of view.

**Talk about differences.** When we have friendships across group lines, it’s natural to focus on what we have in common, rather than our differences. Yet our differences matter. Strive to open up the conversation: “We’ve been friends for years, and I value our friendship very much. One thing we’ve never really talked about is my experiences with racism. I’d like to do that now.”

**WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT OFFENDED GUESTS?**

‘WHAT ARE YOU?’

A friend stays overnight with a married couple. All three had been part of a beer-drinking crowd in college but when offered a beer that evening, the guest politely declines.

In the morning, the husband offers the guest a cup of coffee. Again, the guest declines. Attempting humor, the husband asks, “What are you, Mormon or something?”

The guest explains that, yes, he has married since college, to a Mormon woman, and has converted.

The wife describes it this way: “Ever the nice guy, (the guest) handled it with grace and wit, letting (my husband) off gently.”

**SPEAKING UP**

When we open up our homes to people outside our families, we provide more than meals and guest rooms. We surround them with our habits, our beliefs and our traditions. Broaden your hospitality by understanding and respecting the cultural needs and norms of your guest.

**Be proactive.** Before houseguests arrive, ask if they have any special dietary restrictions or other needs. Also, share any household traditions or practices you have that may affect them.

**Pay attention.** When we miss or ignore social cues and clues, we can stumble into awkward moments. Pay attention to subtleties of communication, a hesitancy from a guest before beginning a meal might indicate a need for a moment of silent prayer, for example.

**Focus on behavior, not beliefs.** If you feel the need to ask questions,
center it on behavior rather than beliefs. “John, you used to drink in college. Have you stopped?” This may open, rather than close, a conversation.

**Accept information at face value.** If someone declines one thing, offer another without judgment or inference. “Would you like a soft drink instead?” Or, “We also have milk or juice; would that work?” Be gracious. Aim to please, not judge.

**Take responsibility.** If you do stumble, don’t let someone else’s graciousness take you off the hook. Make amends as quickly and sincerely as possible: “What an insensitive thing for me to say. I’m sorry.”

**WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT REAL-ESTATE RACISM?**

‘**WE DON’T SHARE YOUR VIEWS?**’

- A New York couple meet their new neighbor shortly after he moves in. The new neighbor opens the conversation with, “You’re probably relieved that no one black moved in.”

- An Oregon man’s neighbor informs him he has finally sold his house describing, in a disapproving voice, the buyer as “a Chinese or Japanese woman married to a white man.”

- A South Carolina couple in an all-white neighborhood sell their home to an African American family. A neighbor confronts them angrily and asks why they sold the house to black people.

**SPEAKING UP**

Whether friends or not, neighbors are people we interact with often — as we take out the trash, bump into each other in the apartment complex hallway or walk by on the way to the bus stop. Sometimes casual conversations with our neighbors reveal biases. What can you do to interrupt bias — and keep the peace at the same time? Try this:

**Assert neighborly values.** “We know you’re new to the neighborhood. Around here, we welcome all kinds of people. And we all look out for each other.”

**Appeal to basic humanity.** When confronted with a bigoted, “Why did you
sell your house to those people?" a simple reply is, “Because they’re people. They want to buy our house, they can buy our house.”

**Appeal to allies or the neighborhood association.** If you’re the target of bigoted conduct and fear for your well-being or safety, let sympathetic neighbors know; ask them to keep an eye (and ear) out for you. Or contact the neighborhood association, which may have policies in place to assist you.

**Model neighborly behavior.** Extend a hearty welcome to new neighbors, and honor old neighbors. Help to create a neighborhood that values connectedness, rather than exclusion and bias.

**WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT UNWANTED EMAIL?**

**‘REPLY ALL’ TO BIGOTRY**

Many of us receive unwanted “joke” emails forwarded by friends or colleagues.

Lesbians and gays, Muslims, Catholics, Jews, people with disabilities, Republicans, Democrats, people of all races and ethnicities, blondes and people who are overweight: The targets of such “joke” emails are innumerable.

“It’s horrible,” writes one man, who says he has changed his email address at least once and not given the new address to those friends who frequently forward such emails.

**SPEAKING UP**

People often forward emails without critical thought about its content, or the people receiving it. And email provides a broad reach — with a click of a button, an email can be sent to hundreds of people. Emailed bigotry can come from people you know, or people you don’t. How can you respond? Try this:

**Forward no more.** Stop emailed bigotry at your computer. Don’t forward it; instead, delete it. A simple deletion isn’t the same as speaking up, of course — it does nothing to bring attention to the offense — but it’s a solid first step in breaking the chain.

**Reply to sender.** Explain that the email offended you and ask to be removed from any future emailings. Be sure to explain why — that you find bigoted language offensive, that so-called “jokes” are unfunny and that stereotypes are unfair, bigoted and harmful.

**Reply to all.** Do the same thing, but hit “reply all,” sharing your thoughts with everyone on the email list. Others then may follow your example. Imagine the powerful statement that would be made if all recipients responded in this way.

**WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT MY OWN BIAS?**

**‘I LOST PERSPECTIVE’**

A 45-year-old man writes:

“I was young, but that’s not really an excuse. I was hanging out with a mostly male beer-drinking crowd, and raunchy, sexist ‘jokes’ were one of the conversational norms. Not that it’s right to tell those kind of ‘jokes’ anywhere, but I just got used to it in that crowd, and I guess I lost perspective of how inappropriate they were.

“So I find myself at a dinner party, not fancy, but fancier than the beer crowd I’d been used to. As an icebreaker, I tell one of those ‘jokes,’ a brutally sexist
one that got big laughs from the boys earlier that week. And this huge silence follows. A nervous chuckle or two among the half-dozen dinner guests, but otherwise just a big, booming silence. I felt like an idiot and didn’t even have the good sense to apologize, though I was at least smart enough to stop telling ‘jokes.’

“A new job and other life changes took me away from the beer-drinking buddies, and I’d never tell those kinds of ‘jokes’ anymore — in any company. But it’s almost 20 years later, and I still feel a sense of shame for the awful judgment and taste I showed.”

**SPEAKING UP**

Owning up to our own biased behavior among friends can be uncomfortable. Don’t let anxiety, embarrassment or guilt stop you from making amends — or from changing your behavior. Friends are among the people most likely to forgive missteps and help you move forward.

**Apologize immediately.** Save yourself the guilt by apologizing in the moment: “I don’t know what I was thinking. I could make some excuses, but none would make up for telling such a sexist, tasteless ‘joke.’ I apologize and hope I haven’t ruined this wonderful dinner.”

**Write a letter.** Candor can be difficult to muster in such moments. If words don’t come at the gathering, try handwritten notes to the host and other guests afterward: “I went home from the dinner party feeling ashamed and embarrassed, too embarrassed even to say anything to anyone. I’m sorry for the sexist, tasteless and totally inappropriate ‘joke’ I told. Please accept my humble, and belated, apologies.”

**Offer to make amends.** “Is there is anything I can or should do to make this up to you? Our relationship is important to me.”

**Learn the lesson.** Don’t do it again, even if you’re back with a crowd that finds such “jokes” humorous. Choose jokes that are funny without being sexist, racist or otherwise offensive.
WHAT CAN I DO AT WORK?
The workplace is, for some, the only place they experience diversity. For those who live in segregated neighborhoods, attend segregated houses of worship or take part in segregated hobbies or activities, work becomes the only place they interact with people of varied and diverse backgrounds. It often is, for these people, a testing ground.

The workplace often offers built-in grievance procedures, tied to policies or laws, which can be used to respond to some forms of everyday bigotry. You need not file a lawsuit to have such a policy be effective; many roundtable participants spoke of invoking such policies when speaking up, saying the mere mention carries weight.

Power, too, comes into play at the workplace. The dynamic of an employee speaking to a supervisor is very different than a supervisor speaking to an employee. Likewise, an executive’s tacit acceptance of bigoted remarks can create an atmosphere where bias thrives — just as one powerfully placed comment from that executive can curb everyday bigotry in significant ways. Who sets the tone at your office? And what leverage do you have with that person? If you lack leverage, who has it? And might that person be an ally?

“One day (the supervisor) took me aside to deliver what he must have thought was a compliment. He told me, ‘You’re a good worker. You’re not like the other Mexicans.’ I just nodded and went back to work because I wanted to keep my job.”
WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT CASUAL COMMENTS?

‘HAVE YOU HAD DICTION LESSONS’

× An African American businesswoman in the South writes: “I was speaking with a white co-worker when, midway through the conversation, she smiled and said, ‘You speak so clearly. Have you had diction lessons?’ — like for an African American to speak clearly, we’d have to have diction lessons.”

× A manager writes: “One of my employees constantly makes ‘jokes’ about people being ‘bipolar’ or ‘going postal’ or being ‘off their meds.’ I happen to know that one of our other employees — within earshot of these comments — is on medication for depression. How can I stop the bad behavior without revealing proprietary information?”

× One co-worker asks another if she wants to go out for lunch. “We’re going to get Ping-Pong chicken,” she says, faking a vaguely Asian accent.

× An Italian American woman’s co-worker makes daily comments about her heritage. “Are you in the mafia?” “Are you related to the Godfather?” There are only six colleagues in the office, and the Italian American woman doesn’t know how — or if — to respond.

SPEAKING UP

Core-value statements and other policies sitting on dusty shelves don’t establish an office’s culture; casual interactions do. Whether you’re a staffer, a manager or an executive, there’s a role for you to play in setting a respectful and unbiased tone in the office. Consider these actions:

Interrupt early. Workplace culture largely is determined by what is or isn’t allowed to occur. If people are lax in responding to bigotry, then bigotry prevails. Speak up early and often in order to build a more inclusive environment.

Use — or establish — policies. Call upon existing — too often forgotten or ignored — policies to address bigoted language or behavior. Work with your personnel director or human resources department to create new policies and procedures, as needed. Also ask your company to provide anti-bias training.

Go up the ladder. If behavior persists, take your complaints up the management ladder. Find allies in upper management, and call on them to help create and maintain an office environment free of bias and bigotry.

Band together. Like-minded colleagues also may form an alliance and then ask the colleague or supervisor to change his or her tone or behavior.

WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT WORKPLACE HUMOR?

‘PLEASE DON’T TELL IT’

A man mentions to a colleague that he is originally from West Virginia. The colleague laughs and says she knows some “jokes” about people from West Virginia.

She begins to tell one, and it’s clear that the “joke” will have an offensive punch line.

The man holds up his hand and says, “Don’t tell it. Please don’t tell it.”

She laughs, perhaps thinking he’s joking himself, and tells not one but three “jokes,” each with an increasingly bigoted punch line.
The man, at a loss for words, simply sits down when she is done.

**SPEAKING UP**

Humor can enliven the workplace, provide relief from routine tasks and help foster team spirit. When humor goes sour, however, the work culture suffers, and collegiality can be harmed or damaged. When faced with bigoted “jokes” in the office, try this:

**Don’t laugh.** Meet a bigoted “joke” with silence, and maybe a raised eyebrow. Use body language to communicate your distaste for bigoted “humor.”

**Interrupt the laughter.** “Why does everyone think that’s funny?” Tell your co-workers why the “joke” offends you, that it feels demeaning and prejudicial. And don’t hesitate to interrupt a “joke” with as many additional “no” messages as needed.

**Set a “not in my workspace” rule.** Prohibit bigotry in your cubicle, your office or whatever other boundaries define your workspace. Be firm, and get others to join in. Allies can be invaluable in helping to curb bigoted remarks and behavior at the workplace.

**Provide alternate humor.** Learn and share jokes that don’t rely on bias, bigotry or stereotypes as the root of their humor.

**WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT SEXIST REMARKS?**

### ‘BUSINESS AS USUAL’

- A female manager routinely is referred to as the “office mom.” No male manager is ever referred to as the office “dad,” and male managers expect the female manager to handle office birthdays and other non-job-related tasks. “That kind of sexism happens all the time,” she says.

- A female employee reports, “One of my male coworkers always comments on the physical appearance of our female colleagues. ‘She’s such a pretty girl,’ or ‘She’s a lovely woman.’ I find these comments inappropriate and have commented to him about them, but his behavior doesn’t change.”

- A male employee bakes cookies and brings them to the office. A female employee, arriving later, asks who brought them. She thanks the man, then asks, “Did your wife bake them?” Another man wrote of a co-worker telling him his knowledge of gardening makes him seem “like a woman.”

**SPEAKING UP**

In our professional lives, we hope to be judged and perceived based on the quality of our contributions. Sometimes, however, traditional gender roles distort the ways in which colleagues perceive us. When faced with sexist assumptions or comments, consider the following approaches:

**Be direct.** Respond to the speaker in a way that makes sexist assumptions clear: “I’m not the office mom; I’m the office manager.” Or, “No, I’m the baker in our household, not my wife.”

**Identify the pattern.** Tell your supervisor, “In our weekly manager meetings, I’ve noticed that people expect me to take notes. I’m wondering if we could rotate that responsibility, so it’s evenly distributed between male and female managers.”

**Start a brown-bag discussion group.** If sexism is a persistent problem in your workplace, start an informal dialogue group to discuss the issue during your lunch breaks. Provide support for one another, and create an action plan.

**Use incidents to teach tolerance.** Advocate for staff training about sexism in the office; provide trainers with real-life examples from your office.
WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT MEETING MISSTEPS?

‘STEREOTYPING IS STEREOTYPING’

× Two co-workers, one of whom is deaf, are asked to meet with an executive from another firm. They go to the other man’s office, and a sign-language interpreter accompanies them. The executive chooses to face the interpreter, speaking to him, not looking at or acknowledging the employee who is deaf.

× An African American woman, in a staff meeting about budget issues, hears a white co-worker suggest cost-cutting measures for landscaping: “Why don’t we just get the Mexicans to do it?”

× A woman writes, “A good-hearted liberal co-worker makes comments at staff meetings like, ‘All Republicans are stupid,’ or ‘All Republicans are this,’ or ‘All Republicans are that.’ I’m a Democrat who agrees with her politics, but I think those comments are as offensive as someone saying ‘All immigrants are lazy’ or ‘All Irish people are drunks.’ Stereotyping is stereotyping. Short of saying, ‘Some of my best friends are Republicans,’ what can I do?”

SPEAKING UP

Meetings often involve people from different parts of a company or with different roles within a company. When those differences dissolve into bigoted exchanges, both the work and workplace relations suffer. Try these responses:

Seize the moment. With the interpreter, the colleague said, “I hate to interrupt, but just as a matter of practice, you should look at the person you’re talking to, not the interpreter.” In the meeting, an observer might say, “What do you mean by that? What are you saying about Mexicans?”

Address the issue privately. Take the coworker aside and gently explain what you find offensive: “You know, you’re giving Democrats a bad name when you make sweeping generalizations about Republicans.”

Check in with the meeting leader. If you are uncomfortable dealing with the speaker directly, consider speaking with the person who called the meeting. Set expectations or ground rules prior to the next meeting.
WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT THE BOSS BIAS?

‘YOU’RE NOT LIKE THE OTHER MEXICANS’

- From an Arizona man: “I’m a Mexican American, and I worked for a time, a long time ago, in construction. One day (the supervisor) took me aside to deliver what he must have thought was a compliment. He told me, ‘You’re a good worker. You’re not like the other Mexicans.’ I just nodded and went back to work because I wanted to keep my job. But I wish I would have said something to him, set him straight that stuff like that isn’t a compliment.”

- A woman works at a company where a male co-worker comes in one day with a newly pierced ear. Their manager sees the earring and laughingly calls him a “faggot.”

SPEAKING UP

When bias comes from the boss, it’s easy to assume nothing can be done. The boss has all the power, right? Regardless of a company’s size, nothing gets done without the workers; your power rests in this simple fact. Try these response techniques:

Focus on the company’s people. “A lot of different kinds of people work for you, and for this company. We come to work every day and give you our best. What you just said, does it really honor me and the other people here?”

Tie tolerance to the bottom line. Remind your supervisor that when people feel valued and respected, a healthy and productive work environment emerges. “Is ‘faggot’ really a word we should be throwing around? We don’t know who’s gay and who’s straight, who has gay relatives and who doesn’t. I think that comment could really upset some people — and distract them from their work.”

Go up the ladder. Consider your options, based on your supervisor’s temperament and the office environment. If you’re uncomfortable confronting the boss directly, consult your company’s human resources department to find out what harassment policies are in place and whether they apply.

WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT MY OWN BIAS?

‘I SAID NOTHING’

A Southern white woman is an event coordinator working with an African American minister. They end up talking about a mutual acquaintance who is known to be persistent and driven.

“Without thinking,” the woman writes, “I uttered a phrase I grew up hearing — ‘Yeah, he’s a real slave driver.’ As soon as it was out of my mouth, I realized for the first time the source and meaning of the word. I was ashamed and bewildered and wanted to apologize.”

But before she can say anything, the minister, looking her in the eye, quickly replies, “Yes, he’s a real taskmaster.”

She agrees and later thanks him for “his kindness and subtle but important education.”

The result: “I haven’t used the term ‘slave driver’ since.”
**SPEAKING UP**

When a colleague tells you that you’ve said or done something that offends or hurts them, try not to be defensive, even if the statement’s impact was unintentional. Consider these approaches:

**Be open to feedback.** Ask clarifying questions, if need be. “Please help me understand. How have I offended you?” Be gracious, and consider the moment a learning opportunity. Thank the person for pointing it out, and ask for continued feedback.

**Focus on the work relationship.** Strive to reconnect and ensure that the moment doesn’t sidetrack your ongoing ability to work together. “I know this has been awkward for both of us. Is there anything I should do, or that we should do, as a next step? I really want us to keep working well together.”

**Change your behavior.** Don’t wait for someone to be offended by what you say. Listen closely to the phrases and terms you use; are some of them “acceptable” only because the targeted group is not present? Bigotry is bigotry no matter who hears it; strive to model respect and tolerance wherever you are.
WHAT CAN I DO IN PUBLIC?
FOR SOME PEOPLE, SPEAKING UP IN PUBLIC FEELS MORE DIFFICULT THAN any other setting. For others, speaking up in public — to strangers who have no power or ties to one’s home or work life — feels easier. Gauge your own comfort level in these situations, and always consider personal safety when choosing to speak up in public.

Allies can be vital in such settings, as can understanding the price of silence. If you don’t speak up to that store clerk, that flight attendant or that security guard, who else will? When two — or three or four or more — people come together, as strangers, to speak in concert against everyday bigotry, pressure for change emerges.

Whether the encounter is with a waiter, a police officer or a cab driver, consider two things: power and policy. Who holds power over the offending person? And are there policies in place that might support your complaint? If so, be vigilant about moving your complaint through proper channels. If not, ask why such policies don’t exist — and keep asking, all the way up the ladder.

“How do you confront a stranger in public? Or do you? I’ll never forget the shock and anger I felt.”
WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT BIASED CUSTOMER SERVICE?

‘I JUST STOOD NEXT TO HIM’

- In Washington state, a white woman is in a doctor’s waiting room when she notices a Russian-speaking immigrant being treated poorly by the receptionist at the front counter. The woman stands up and joins the man at the counter: “I just stood next to him and wouldn’t leave until the receptionist finally helped him.”

- An African American man in the grocery store notices a cashier treating a non-English-speaking woman badly. After checking to see if the woman wants help, the man confronts the manager: “These people live in our community, this person spends money in your store, and your store has a responsibility to be part of this community.”

- A Colorado woman uses a wheelchair. She is boarding a plane with her husband when the flight attendant says, to the husband, “Will she need help being seated?”

SPEAKING UP

It’s all too common: front-line employees who are ill-trained to deal with diverse clientele. Most of us don’t relish the thought of causing a scene, but interrupting biased customer service can send a clear message to the employees — and to other customers. When bias affects customer service, consider the following:

**Speak for yourself.** If you’re the target of rude customer service, let the person know: “I deserve to be treated with respect in an establishment where I spend money.” Or, “Please ask me, not my husband, what I need.”

**Make eye contact.** Look at other people witnessing this exchange. Use body language to appeal for their assistance and support.

**Step up.** Don’t allow someone to be mistreated when you have the power to help. Don’t stick solely to “your” issues. Speak up against bigotry wherever it happens, whoever is involved. As the man in the grocery store said, “Your problem is my problem. We’re in this together.”

WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT BIGOTED CORPORATE POLICY?

‘I DON’T WANT TO GET IN TROUBLE’

A Latino family stops at a fast-food restaurant where a Latina employee greets them at the counter. The husband orders, “Dos del numero uno y dos del numero cuatro, por favor.”

The clerk responds, “Can you repeat that in English, please?”

The husband repeats the order in English, then adds, “But you speak Spanish; you have an accent just like mine.”

The clerk looks over her shoulder and says, “Yes, I do, but I’m not supposed to speak Spanish here; I could get in trouble with my supervisor.”

On the drive home, the man’s 4-year-old daughter is crying.

They pull over to see what’s wrong, and the little girl whispers in her mother’s ear, in Spanish, “I don’t know how to speak a lot of English, and I don’t want to get in trouble.”
SPEAKING UP

When companies support or create policies that are exclusionary, customers (and employees) often feel marginalized. Because managers or corporate headquarters—not the company representative you’re talking to—often put such biased policies in place, it can be hard to know what to do, in the moment. Consider these steps:

Discuss, don’t blame. Discuss the policy with front-line employees, asking for more information about what lies behind the policy. “What’s the problem if we want to speak Spanish? We don’t harm anyone. Do you know why they have this rule? What is behind it?”

Move up the ladder. Ask to speak to the on-site manager, then ask that person to explain the policy further and describe why it exists. Request contact information for the owner or corporate headquarters. Also ask what the formal complaint procedure is, then use it.

Get it in writing. Ask to see written store policy, either from the on-site manager or from the owner or corporate headquarters. Ask who ultimately determines the policy, then pursue changes through that person.

Appeal to the media. When companies are unresponsive to your inquiries, take the issue to your local paper or to the national press. Seek out journalists who write about race relations or community diversity. Explain what has happened, and provide documentation.

WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT A STRANGER’S REMARKS?

‘I WAS SHOCKED’

* A gay man in Oregon writes about walking down a street the day after a local Gay Pride event. On the sidewalk, he passes a man who tells a female companion, loudly, “There were fags all over the place. I felt like killing them.”

* A lesbian who at the time was dating a transgender woman shares a similar story of being called “dykes” by someone from across the street. A gay man tells of routinely being called “faggot” while walking down city streets.

* A California woman is apartment-hunting with her mother. They are in a restaurant, making friendly conversation with people at another table. Her mother asks which neighborhoods are good for students. The man at the
other table says, “Pretty much all of the neighborhoods in town are fine; we try to keep the niggers and Mexicans out of the city limits.”

She says, “I was shocked and didn’t know what to do. How do you confront a stranger in a restaurant? Or do you? I’ll never forget the shock and anger I felt at that moment.”

**SPEAKING UP**

When people we don’t know dish out bigotry, it can leave us at a loss for words — and challenge our sense of safety. Try taking these steps:

**Assess your surroundings.** A heated exchange with a stranger can escalate into physical violence; assess the situation before you respond. Is the speaker with a group of people? Is the space deserted? Are you alone? Are children present? Consider such things before responding.

**Say nothing.** A questioning glance may be an effective and non-confrontational response in a situation in which you feel unsafe speaking directly. Keep moving.

**Say something.** If you choose to raise the issue, state your beliefs clearly:

“I find that language very bigoted. It offends me.” Or, “I think it’s wrong to stereotype people.”

**Speak to the proprietor.** If the incident happens in a business, leave. But before you walk out, let the managers know why you’re leaving. “The man at the table next to mine kept using the N-word. It made me lose my appetite. Perhaps you should speak to him so you don’t lose more business.”

**Report the incident to an advocacy group.** Local advocacy groups, like gay and lesbian centers and local minority alliances, often keep check on the pulse of a community. Call them; let them know what you heard, when and where. They may see patterns you don’t and can work with local government to address ongoing concerns.

**WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT RETAIL RACISM?**

‘I THOUGHT THOSE DECADES WERE GONE’

▷ An 18-year-old Hispanic woman goes to a Florida craft store to spend her birthday money. A manager follows her and asks repeatedly what she is looking for. Other customers, all white, are browsing without being asked such questions. When she protests, she is asked to leave. “I thought those decades were gone, when they could throw you out of a store just because you’re Hispanic.”

▷ A white woman in Indiana notices store clerks shadowing two African American shoppers, taking items out of the shoppers’ hands and replacing them on the racks, then standing by the dressing room door when one of the women tries on a garment.

▷ A Latina woman is shopping in a major department store in Iowa. A young sales clerk follows her closely but doesn’t speak to her. When she moves, he moves; when she stands still, he stands still. The woman considers confronting him but notices him returning to speak to his manager, an older man.

**SPEAKING UP**

When you shop, you may get something besides the items you were looking for: retail racism, in the form of racial or ethnic profiling; teens and
other young people also often are targeted. When store security or other personnel shadow your every move, or when you see them tailing another customer, interrupt the behavior. Try this:

**Find the source.** The clerk may simply be following store policy. Ask why the clerk or security officer is following you (or someone else). Ask to see the written policies on discrimination. Share your experience and observations with company officials.

**Stage a personal public protest.** Go to the customer service desk or checkout counter. Cancel your store credit card on the spot, and say why you’re doing so — loud enough for others to hear. Ask for the manager and tell that person the store has lost your business.

**Tell others.** Let friends and family know what you observed or experienced. Encourage them to refrain from shopping at a store that practices racial profiling or to contact the store to ask about such policies and practices.

**WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT RACIAL PROFILING?**

‘DRIVING WHILE BLACK’

✗ An African American government employee is stopped four times in a single month while driving home. One of the stops involves at least four police cars. His “infraction”? An alleged illegal lane change. He asks, “Would a white man in my same position accept this as normal? Why should I have to accept it as normal?”

✗ An African American night security guard, the frequent target of such traffic stops, says, “I live a simple life. I go to work, and I come home. I don’t drink or do drugs or sell drugs. I don’t like being harassed. I didn’t do anything wrong. What really is the problem? This is happening for no other reason than the color of my skin.”

✗ An African American minister is pulled over while driving home from Sunday service, in full view of many of his parishioners. He is forced to complete a field sobriety test. When he asks why he has been pulled over, he is told simply, “You swerved.”

SPEAKING UP
It’s so common it has a well-known nickname: driving while black. But, that term is too limiting: Latinos, Arab Americans and others also shared similar stories, tales of racial and ethnic profiling tied to overzealous traffic stops for relatively minor “infractions.”

**Confront the bias, later.** Police officers hold a lot of power, and arguing with them in the moment generally won’t serve you well. While anger and frustration are normal and reasonable responses to racial profiling, strive for calmness.

**Inquire and document.** Ask why you’ve been stopped. Ask for the officer’s badge number. Note the identification numbers on the police car. Write down every detail you can immediately after the incident.

**Lodge a formal complaint.** Each time an unnecessary stop occurs, use official procedures to file a grievance. Community relations divisions inside police departments often are the best place to start.

**Create an alliance.** Reach out to friends and family who also experience racial profiling. Ask them to commit to filing complaints at each offense, too. Keep records of everyone’s experiences. Also seek help from supportive community groups.

**Raise awareness.** Contact the media and ask for coverage of the issue.
Provide names and contact information of people willing to talk about their experiences.

WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT MY OWN BIAS?

‘I FOUND MYSELF MAKING CHOICES’

A woman is in a crowded movie theater. Unable to find enough side-by-side seats for her entire group, she finds herself looking for a seat alone:

“I found myself making choices of rejecting a seat based on who might be on either side of me — choices made about skin color, ethnicity, age, gender and so on. At some point, I realized what I was doing and made a conscious decision to choose my seat based on its distance from and orientation to the screen rather than on who I might be sitting next to.”

SPEAKING UP

As you watch for moments of everyday bigotry, don’t overlook yourself. Try these steps:

Be self-critical. Save someone else the trouble of confronting you. Pay attention to your everyday actions; be conscious of how bias is affecting what you do — and what you don’t do.

Change your behavior. When you catch yourself in a biased action, change course immediately, and learn the lesson for good.

Share your experiences. Be open with others about biased behavior. Let others hear what you’ve learned.
Whatever situation you're in, remember these six steps to help you speak up against everyday bigotry. In any situation, however, assess your safety, both physical and emotional. There is a risk, and that must be acknowledged as you make your own choice to Speak Up!

**BE READY**

You know another moment like this will happen, so prepare yourself for it. Think of yourself as the one who will speak up. Promise yourself not to remain silent.

“Summon your courage, whatever it takes to get that courage, wherever that source of courage is for you,” said Dr. Marsha Houston, chair of the Communication Studies Department at the University of Alabama.

To bolster that courage, have something to say in mind before an incident...
happens. Open-ended questions often are a good response. “Why do you say that?” “How did you develop that belief?”

**IDENTIFY THE BEHAVIOR**

Sometimes, pointing out the behavior candidly helps someone hear what they’re really saying: “Janice, what I hear you saying is that all Mexicans are lazy” (or whatever the slur happens to be). Or, “Janice, you’re classifying an entire ethnicity in a derogatory way. Is that what I hear you saying?”

When identifying behavior, however, avoid labeling, name-calling or the use of loaded terms. Describe the behavior; don’t label the person.

“If your goal is to communicate, loaded terms get you nowhere,” said Dr. K.E. Supriya, associate professor of communications at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, and an expert in the role of gender and cultural identity in communication. “If you simply call someone a racist, a wall goes up.”

**APPEAL TO PRINCIPLES**

If the speaker is someone you have a relationship with — a sister, friend or co-worker, for example — call on their higher principles: “Bob, I’ve always thought of you as a fair-minded person, so it shocks me when I hear you say something that sounds so bigoted.”

“Appeal to their better instincts,” Houston said. “Remember that people are complex. What they say in one moment is not necessarily an indication of everything they think.”

**SET LIMITS**

You cannot control another person, but you can say, “Don’t tell racist jokes in my presence anymore. If you do, I will leave.” Or, “My workspace is not a place I allow bigoted remarks to be made. I can’t control what you say outside of this space, but here I ask that you respect my wishes.” Then follow through.

“The point is to draw a line, to say, ‘I don’t want you to use that language when I’m around,’” Bob Carolla, spokesman for the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill. “Even if attitudes don’t change, by shutting off bad behavior, you are limiting its contagion. Fewer people hear it or experience it.”

**FIND AN ALLY/BE AN ALLY**

When frustrated in your own campaign against everyday bigotry, seek out like-minded people and ask them to support you in whatever ways they can. And don’t forget to return the favor: If you aren’t the first voice to speak up against everyday bigotry, be the next voice.

“Always speak up, and never be silenced out of fear,” said Shane Windmeyer, founder and coordinator of Campus PrideNet and the Lambda 10 Project. “To be an ally, we must lead by example and inspire others to do the same.”

**BE VIGILANT**

Remember: Change happens slowly. People make small steps, typically, not large ones. Stay prepared, and keep speaking up. Don’t risk silence.

“There’s a sense of personal disappointment in having not said something when you felt you should have,” said Ron Schlittler, acting executive director of the national office of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays.

Carolla put it this way: “If you don’t speak up, you’re surrendering part of yourself. You’re letting bigotry win.”

**WITH THAT IN MIND, CONSIDER TAKING THE SPEAK UP! PLEDGE ...**
THE SPEAK UP! PLEDGE
Commit to respond to everyday bias and bigotry. Sign and place this pledge card in your wallet, book bag or desk drawer, or post it on your wall. Also use these pledge cards as a part of a campaign in your workplace or school, making as many photocopies as you need. Post the pledge in public places, encouraging others to join.

Because what we say matters.

I PLEDGE TO SPEAK UP!

In pledging to respond to everyday bigotry, I will:

× Speak up when I hear or see bigotry;
× Question and identify bias when I see it;
× Be mindful of my own behaviors;
× Promote and appeal to higher principles;
× Set limits on what is said or done around me;
× Seek help and help others to work against bigotry; and
× Remain vigilant and persistent.

Name

Date

Signature
Although this guidebook is designed for individuals who want to challenge everyday bigotry, Speak Up! also can be used to launch collective campaigns aimed at curbing bias.

**HOW TO LAUNCH A CAMPAIGN**

**Organize.** Create a planning committee. Recruit volunteers from all levels of the organization; aim for diversity of perspective, skills and experience. State the overarching goal of the committee: “We want to deter the use of biased language in our organization,” for example.

**Learn more.** Conduct a survey or convene informal focus groups to understand how people in your organization experience everyday bigotry. What are the most common problems? How do people currently respond, if at all? What reasons do people give for remaining silent in the face of biased behavior?

**Get creative.** Based on what you learned about the nature and scope of problems in your organization, create campaign materials. Use “Speak Up!,” or another organizationally appropriate slogan, and build from it. Develop promotional materials (posters and fliers) and program resources (fact sheets, for example). Ask people outside the planning committee for feedback on the materials, and revise them as necessary.

**Reveal.** Launch the campaign at an organization-wide event, such as an assembly, rally or all-staff meeting. Make it fun, perhaps providing food and music. Give attendees free campaign take-aways, like buttons or magnets, for workspaces or lockers as ongoing reminders. For free, downloadable Speak Up! stickers, visit www.tolerance.org/speakup.

**Assess.** Periodically assess the campaign’s impact. What’s working well? What’s not working as well? Revise campaign materials as needed.

**Renew.** Keep the campaign fresh — and on people’s minds. Promote it on your website or in the organization’s newspaper; put the campaign slogan on pay stubs or report cards. Hold events, with food and fun, to update people on the campaign’s impact and success.

**WHY CREATE A CAMPAIGN TO DETER EVERYDAY BIGOTRY?**

**At Work:** Offensive speech in workplaces hinders employee productivity, can create a legally hostile work environment, undermines employee safety and damages customer experiences.

**At School:** The language that students hear and see in school affects their ability to learn. Student exposure to biased speech is among 19 indicators the federal government uses to assess school safety.
APPENDIX TWO

SPEAK UP! AS A TRAINING TOOL

Trained facilitators can use Speak Up! as part of workshops to help individuals learn ways to respond to everyday bigotry. A sample workshop design appears below.

OBJECTIVES

» Participants will understand the impact of everyday bigotry
» Participants will explore barriers to responding to everyday bigotry
» Participants will develop and practice ways to respond to everyday bigotry

MATERIALS

Index cards (4” x 6”)
Pens/pencils
10 sheets of paper, numbered 1 to 10, taped the wall in sequential order
Copies of the Six Steps for Speaking Up Against Everyday Bigotry (pages 76-79)
Copies of the Speak Up! Pledge (page 81)
Space for working in small groups and pairs
Postcard stamps (optional)

FAST FACTS

» Thirty percent of workers say they’ve heard colleagues use racial or ethnic slurs in the last 12 months. The same number report hearing sexist comments.
» Twenty-one percent of workers say they’ve overheard age-related ridicule, and 20% of workers report hearing jabs aimed at sexual orientation.
» One in 10 students say that someone at school has called them a derogatory word related to race, religion, ethnicity, disability, gender or sexual orientation in the past six months.
STEP ONE: INTRODUCTION (5 MINUTES)
Tell a story about everyday bigotry — from your own life, or using one of the many stories included in Speak Up. Explain the scope of the problem. (See Fast Facts sidebar.) Review the objectives of the workshop with participants. Invite and answer any questions.

STEP TWO: THE IMPACT OF EVERYDAY BIGOTRY (15 MINUTES)
Ask participants to write down on an index card an experience they’ve had with everyday bigotry. Collect the cards and shuffle them up. (If time is a concern, facilitators can use pre-selected examples from the Speak Up! guidebook instead of participant examples.) Break into small groups, and give each small group one of the gathered index cards.

In their small groups, ask participants to discuss:
- How might this incident affect the people directly involved — the target, the perpetrator and any witnesses?
- How might this incident affect the health of the community (business, school, family, etc) where it happened?
- What are the emotional, social, physical and financial costs of incidents like these?

Come back to the whole group, and ask each group to share key points from its discussion.

STEP THREE: BARRIERS TO INTERRUPTING EVERYDAY BIGOTRY (10 MINUTES)
Point out the numbered pieces of paper taped to the wall. Tell participants that 1 means “extremely uncomfortable responding” and 10 means “extremely comfortable responding.” Read two or three examples from the gathered index cards. As you read them, ask participants to move in front of the number that represents their comfort level in responding to each incident. Ask volunteers to share why the selected their “comfort number,” identifying the external and internal factors they considered.

Close this portion by saying: “Our comfort levels in responding to bias incidents often vary by location and by the people involved. Next, we’re going to learn some tools to help us be more comfortable in more settings.”

STEP FOUR: RESPONDING TO EVERYDAY BIGOTRY (15 MINUTES)
Pass out copies of Six Steps for Speaking Up Against Everyday Bigotry. Review the document with participants. Show participants how to apply the steps, using one of the examples the group explored in Step Three. Break the group into pairs, and provide each pair with two of the gathered index cards. Working as a team, each pair should apply the Six Steps to the provided examples, rehearsing language (verbal or body) they might use in each situation and brainstorming a list of potential allies.

STEP FIVE: CLOSING ACTIVITY (5 MINUTES)
To close the workshop, invite participants to sign the Speak Up! Pledge. Participants should take their signed pledge cards home with them, as a reminder to apply what they’ve learned.

An optional step: Ask participants to write their names and home addresses on one side of an index card, with one thing they will do in the next four weeks to respond to everyday bigotry on the other side. Collect these cards and mail them to participants three weeks after the workshop.