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3. [MICROAGGRESSIONS IS THE NEW RACISM ON CAMPUS](#)
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1 - Unmasking 'racial micro aggressions'

Some racism is so subtle that neither victim nor perpetrator may entirely understand what is going on—which may be especially toxic for people of color.

By Tori DeAngelis 2009, Vol 40, No. 2 APA Print version: page 42

Two colleagues—one Asian-American, the other African-American—board a small plane. A flight attendant tells them they can sit anywhere, so they choose seats near the front of the plane and across the aisle from each another so they can talk.

At the last minute, three white men enter the plane and take the seats in front of them. Just before takeoff, the flight attendant, who is white, asks the two colleagues if they would mind moving to the back of the plane to better balance the plane's load. Both react with anger, sharing the same sense that they are being singled out to symbolically "sit at the back of the bus." When they express these feelings to the attendant, she indignantly denies the charge, saying she was merely trying to ensure the flight's safety and give the two some privacy.

Were the colleagues being overly sensitive, or was the flight attendant being racist?

For Teachers College, Columbia University psychologist Derald Wing Sue, PhD—the Asian-American colleague on the plane, incidentally—the onus falls on the flight attendant. In his view, she was guilty of a "racial microaggression"—one of the "everyday insults, indignities and demeaning messages sent to people of color by well-intentioned white people who are unaware of the hidden messages being sent to them," in Sue's definition.

In other words, she was acting with bias—she just didn't know it, he says.

Sue and his team are developing a theory and classification system to describe and measure the phenomenon to help people of color understand what is going on and perhaps to educate white people as well, Sue says.

"It's a monumental task to get white people to realize that they are delivering microaggressions, because it's scary to them," he contends. "It assails their self-image of being good, moral, decent human beings to realize that maybe at an unconscious level they have biased thoughts, attitudes and feelings that harm people of color."

To better understand the type and range of these incidents, Sue and other researchers are also exploring the concept among specific groups and documenting how a regular dose of these psychological slings and arrows may erode people's mental health, job performance and the quality of social experience.

Aversive racism

The term racial microaggressions was first proposed by psychiatrist Chester M. Pierce, MD, in the 1970s, but psychologists have significantly amplified the concept in recent years.

In his landmark work on stereotype threat, for instance, Stanford University psychology professor Claude Steele, PhD, has shown that African-Americans and women perform worse on academic tests when primed with stereotypes about race or gender. Women who were primed

with stereotypes about women's poor math performance do worse on math tests. Blacks' intelligence test scores plunge when they're primed with stereotypes about blacks' inferior intelligence.

Meanwhile, social psychologists Jack Dovidio, PhD, of Yale University, and Samuel L. Gaertner, PhD, of the University of Delaware, have demonstrated across several studies that many well-intentioned whites who consciously believe in and profess equality unconsciously act in a racist manner, particularly in ambiguous circumstances. In experimental job interviews, for example, whites tend not to discriminate against black candidates when their qualifications are as strong or as weak as whites'. But when candidates' qualifications are similarly ambiguous, whites tend to favor white over black candidates, the team has found. The team calls this pattern "aversive racism," referring in part to whites' aversion to being seen as prejudiced, given their conscious adherence to egalitarian principles.

Sue adds to these findings by naming, detailing and classifying the actual manifestations of aversive racism. His work illuminates the internal experiences of people affected by microaggressions—a new direction, since past research on prejudice and discrimination has focused on whites' attitudes and behaviors, notes Dovidio.

"The study of microaggressions looks at the impact of these subtle racial expressions from the perspective of the people being victimized, so it adds to our psychological understanding of the whole process of stigmatization and bias," Dovidio says.

Research shows that uncertainty is very distressing to people, Dovidio adds. "It's the uncertainty of microaggressions that can have such a tremendous impact on people of color," including on the job, in academic performance and even in therapy, he and others find.

Creating a vocabulary

Sue first proposed a classification of racial microaggressions in a 2007 article on how they manifest in clinical practice in the *American Psychologist* (Vol. 2, No. 4). There, he notes three types of current racial transgressions:

Microassaults: Conscious and intentional actions or slurs, such as using racial epithets, displaying swastikas or deliberately serving a white person before a person of color in a restaurant.

Microinsults: Verbal and nonverbal communications that subtly convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person's racial heritage or identity. An example is an employee who asks a colleague of color how she got her job, implying she may have landed it through an affirmative action or quota system.

Microinvalidations: Communications that subtly exclude, negate or nullify the thoughts, feelings or experiential reality of a person of color. For instance, white people often ask Asian-Americans where they were born, conveying the message that they are perpetual foreigners in their own land.

Sue focuses on microinsults and microinvalidations because of their less obvious nature, which puts people of color in a psychological bind, he asserts: While the person may feel insulted, she

is not sure exactly why, and the perpetrator doesn't acknowledge that anything has happened because he is not aware he has been offensive.

"The person of color is caught in a Catch-22: If she confronts the perpetrator, the perpetrator will deny it," Sue says.

In turn, that leaves the person of color to question what actually happened. The result is confusion, anger and an overall sapping of energy, he says.

Refining the concept

While Sue's 2007 *American Psychologist* article mainly laid out his theory and an initial taxonomy of microaggressions, his team is now examining how these subtle communications vary among different populations. In a qualitative study in the June *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice* (Vol. 39, No. 3), Sue and his colleagues conducted focus groups with 13 African-Americans who discussed their perceptions of, reactions to and interpretations of microaggressions, as well as the emotional toll they take. Participants, age 22 to 32, all lived in the New York metropolitan area and were either graduate students or worked in higher education.

Respondents agreed that these backhanded communications can make them feel as if they don't belong, that they are abnormal or that they are untrustworthy. Some described the terrible feeling of being watched suspiciously in stores as if they were about to steal something, for instance. Some reported anticipating the impact of their race by acting preemptively: One man noted how he deliberately relaxes his body while in close quarters with white women so he doesn't frighten them.

Others cited the pressure to represent their group in a positive way. One woman said she was constantly vigilant about her work performance because she was worried that any slipups would negatively affect every black person who came after her.

A similar study in the January 2007 *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* (Vol. 13, No. 1) found that many Asian-Americans cited the experience of people asking them where they were born or telling them they "spoke good English," which gave them the message that they are "aliens." Others described classroom experiences where teachers or students assumed they were great in math, which led to feelings of being trapped in a stereotype that wasn't necessarily true. Female participants complained that white men interested in dating them assumed they would be subservient sexual partners who would take care of their every need.

"These incidents may appear small, banal and trivial, but we're beginning to find they assail the mental health of recipients," Sue says.

Other researchers are showing the harm of racial microaggressions in a variety of arenas, though research in the area is still sparse, Sue acknowledges. For instance, in a 2007 article in *American Behavioral Scientist* (Vol. 51, No. 4), University of Utah social psychologist William A. Smith, PhD, and colleagues conducted focus groups with 36 black male students on five elite campuses, including Harvard and the University of Michigan.

Participants reported experiencing racial microaggressions in academic, social and public settings. For instance, some participants reported that when they went to their school's

computer lab to do schoolwork, white students would call security to make sure they weren't there to cause trouble. When security arrived, they would check the students' IDs, sometimes asking them to provide a second one to prove the first was valid.

In another case, fraternity students who had gathered for practice found themselves surrounded by police vehicles, the result of someone calling in a concern about gang activity, Smith notes.

Meanwhile, in therapy, the more likely black people are to perceive their therapist using racial microaggressions, the weaker the therapeutic bond and the lower their reported satisfaction, finds a 2007 study in the *Journal of Counseling Psychology* (Vol. 54, No. 1). Sue and other researchers are beginning to study the impact of racial microaggressions on other groups as well, including people of various ethnic groups, people with disabilities, and gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered individuals.

Mountain or mole hill?

Not everyone agrees that microaggressions are as rampant or destructive as Sue says they are. In rebuttal letters to the 2007 *American Psychologist* article, respondents accuse Sue of blowing the phenomenon out of proportion and advancing an unnecessarily negative agenda.

"Implementing his theory would restrict rather than promote candid interaction between members of different racial groups," maintains Kenneth R. Thomas, PhD, of the University of Wisconsin–Madison, one of the critics. In the therapy relationship, for example, having to watch every word "potentially discourages therapist genuineness and spontaneity," says Thomas, who is white.

Likewise, aspects of Sue's theory enforce a victim mentality by creating problems where none exist, Thomas asserts. "The theory, in general, characterizes people of color as weak and vulnerable, and reinforces a culture of victimization instead of a culture of opportunity," he says.

Kenneth Sole, PhD, whose consulting firm Sole & Associates Inc., trains employees on team communication, agrees with Sue that microaggressions are pervasive and potentially damaging. Indeed, clients talk about them all of the time, he says. But instead of encouraging their anger, he works with them on ways to frame the incidents so they feel empowered rather than victimized, he notes.

"My own view is that we don't serve ourselves well in the hundreds of ambiguous situations we experience by latching onto the definition of the experience that gives us the greatest pain"—particularly in one-time encounters where one can't take more systemic action, he says.

For instance, if a white person makes a potentially offensive remark to a person of color, the person could choose either to get angry and see the person as a bigot or to perceive the person as ignorant and move on, he says.

For Sue's part, he believes it's important to keep shining a light on the harm these encounters can inflict, no matter how the person of color decides to handle a given encounter.

"My hope is to make the invisible visible," he says. "Microaggressions hold their power because they are invisible, and therefore they don't allow us to see that our actions and attitudes may be discriminatory."

2 - Racial Micro-aggressions in Everyday Life: Is Subtle Bias Harmless?

By Derald Wing Sue Ph.D.

Not too long ago, I (Asian American) boarded a small plane with an African American colleague in the early hours of the morning. As there were few passengers, the flight attendant told us to sit anywhere, so we choose seats near the front of the plane and across the aisle from one another.

At the last minute, three White men entered the plane and took seats in front of us. Just before takeoff, the flight attendant, who is White, asked if we would mind moving to the back of the aircraft to better balance the plane's weight. We grudgingly complied but felt singled out as passengers of color in being told to "move to the back of the bus." When we expressed these feelings to the attendant, she indignantly denied the charge, became defensive, stated that her intent was to ensure the flight's safety, and wanted to give us some privacy.

Since we had entered the plane first, I asked why she did not ask the White men to move instead of us. She became indignant, stated that we had misunderstood her intentions, claimed she did not see "color," suggested that we were being "oversensitive," and refused to talk about the matter any further.

Were we being overly sensitive, or was the flight attendant being racist? That is a question that people of color are constantly faced with in their day-to-day interactions with well-intentioned White folks who experience themselves as good, moral and decent human beings.

The Common Experience of Racial Microaggressions

Such incidents have become a common-place experience for many people of color because they seem to occur constantly in our daily lives.

- When a White couple (man and women) passes a Black man on the sidewalk, the woman automatically clutches her purse more tightly, while the White man checks for his wallet in the back pocket. (Hidden Message: Blacks are prone to crime and up to no good.)
- A third generation Asian American is complimented by a taxi cab driver for speaking such good English. (Hidden Message: Asian Americans are perceived as perpetual aliens in their own country and not "real Americans.")
- Police stop a Latino male driver for no apparent reason but to subtly check his driver's license to determine immigration status. (Hidden message: Latinas/os are illegal aliens.)
- American Indian students at the University of Illinois see Native American symbols and mascots - exemplified by Chief Illiniwek dancing and whooping fiercely during football games. (Hidden Message: American Indians are savages, blood-thirsty and their culture and traditions are demeaned.)

In our 8-year research at Teachers College, Columbia University, we have found that these racial microaggressions may on the surface, appear like a compliment or seem quite innocent and harmless, but nevertheless, they contain what we call demeaning meta-communications or hidden messages.

What Are Racial Microaggressions?

The term racial microaggressions, was first coined by psychiatrist Chester Pierce, MD, in the 1970s. But the concept is also rooted in the work of Jack Dovidio, Ph.D. (Yale University) and Samuel Gaertner, Ph.D. (University of Delaware) in their formulation of aversive racism - many well-intentioned Whites consciously believe in and profess equality, but unconsciously act in a racist manner, particularly in ambiguous situations.

Racial microaggressions are the brief and everyday slights, insults, indignities and denigrating messages sent to people of color by well-intentioned White people who are unaware of the hidden messages being communicated. These messages may be sent verbally ("You speak good English."), nonverbally (clutching one's purse more tightly) or environmentally (symbols like the confederate flag or using American Indian mascots). Such communications are usually outside the level of conscious awareness of perpetrators. In the case of the flight attendant, I am sure that she believed she was acting with the best of intentions and probably felt aghast that someone would accuse her of such a horrendous act.

Our research and those of many social psychologists suggest that most people like the flight attendant, harbor unconscious biases and prejudices that leak out in many interpersonal situations and decision points. In other words, the attendant was acting with bias-she just didn't know it. Getting perpetrators to realize that they are acting in a biased manner is a monumental task because (a) on a conscious level they see themselves as fair minded individuals who would never consciously discriminate, (b) they are genuinely not aware of their biases, and (c) their self image of being "a good moral human being" is assailed if they realize and acknowledge that they possess biased thoughts, attitudes and feelings that harm people of color.

To better understand the type and range of these incidents, my research team and other researchers are exploring the manifestation, dynamics and impact of microaggressions. We have begun documenting how African Americans, Asian Americans, American Indians and Latina(o) Americans who receive these everyday psychological slings and arrows experience an erosion of their mental health, job performance, classroom learning, the quality of social experience, and ultimately their standard of living.

Classifying Microaggressions

In my book, *Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender and Sexual Orientation* (John Wiley & Sons, 2010), I summarize research conducted at Teachers College, Columbia University which led us to propose a classification of racial microaggressions. Three types of current racial transgressions were described:

- **Microassaults:** Conscious and intentional discriminatory actions: using racial epithets, displaying White supremacist symbols - swastikas, or preventing one's son or daughter from dating outside of their race.
- **Microinsults:** Verbal, nonverbal, and environmental communications that subtly convey rudeness and insensitivity that demean a person's racial heritage or identity. An example is an employee who asks a co-worker of color how he/she got his/her job, implying he/she may have landed it through an affirmative action or quota system.

- **Microinvalidations:** Communications that subtly exclude, negate or nullify the thoughts, feelings or experiential reality of a person of color. For instance, White people often ask Latinos where they were born, conveying the message that they are perpetual foreigners in their own land.

Our research suggests that microinsults and microinvalidations are potentially more harmful because of their invisibility, which puts people of color in a psychological bind: While people of color may feel insulted, they are often uncertain why, and perpetrators are unaware that anything has happened and are not aware they have been offensive. For people of color, they are caught in a Catch-22. If they question the perpetrator, as in the case of the flight attendant, denials are likely to follow. Indeed, they may be labeled "oversensitive" or even "paranoid." If they choose not to confront perpetrators, the turmoil stew and percolates in the psyche of the person taking a huge emotional toll. In other words, they are damned if they do and damned if they don't.

Note that the denials by perpetrators are usually not conscious attempts to deceive; they honestly believe they have done no wrong. Microaggressions hold their power because they are invisible, and therefore they don't allow Whites to see that their actions and attitudes may be discriminatory. Therein lies the dilemma. The person of color is left to question what actually happened. The result is confusion, anger and an overall draining of energy.

Ironically, some research and testimony from people of color indicate they are better able to handle overt, conscious and deliberate acts of racism than the unconscious, subtle and less obvious forms. That is because there is no guesswork involved in overt forms of racism.

Harmful Impact

Many racial microaggressions are so subtle that neither target nor perpetrator may entirely understand what is happening. The invisibility of racial microaggressions may be more harmful to people of color than hate crimes or the overt and deliberate acts of White supremacists such as the Klan and Skinheads. Studies support the fact that people of color frequently experience microaggressions, that it is a continuing reality in their day-to-day interactions with friends, neighbors, co-workers, teachers, and employers in academic, social and public settings.

They are often made to feel excluded, untrustworthy, second-class citizens, and abnormal. People of color often describe the terrible feeling of being watched suspiciously in stores, that any slipup they make would negatively impact every person of color, that they felt pressured to represent the group in positive ways, and that they feel trapped in a stereotype. The burden of constant vigilance drains and saps psychological and spiritual energies of targets and contributes to chronic fatigue and a feeling of racial frustration and anger.

Space does not allow me to elaborate the harmful impact of racial microaggressions, but I summarize what the research literature reveals. Although they may appear like insignificant slights, or banal and trivial in nature, studies reveal that racial microaggressions have powerful detrimental consequences to people of color. They have been found to: (a) assail the mental health of recipients, (b) create a hostile and invalidating work or campus climate, (c) perpetuate stereotype threat, (d) create physical health problems, (e) saturate the broader society with cues that signal devaluation of social group identities, (f) lower work productivity and problem solving abilities, and (g) be partially responsible for creating inequities in education, employment and health care.

Future Blogs

I realize that I have left many questions unanswered with this posting, but my research team and I plan to continue updating our findings for readers to consider. For readers who desire a more thorough understanding of microaggressions, I recommend two major sources on the topic published this year (2010): *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation* and *Microaggressions and Marginality: Manifestation, Dynamics and Impact*. Both can be accessed through the John Wiley & Sons, publisher's website.

Future blogs will deal with questions such as: How do people of color cope with the daily onslaught of racial microaggressions? Are some coping strategies better than others? How do we help perpetrators to become aware of microaggressions? What are the best ways to prevent them at an individual, institutional and societal level? Do other socially marginalized groups like women, LGBTs, those with disabilities, and religious minorities experience microaggressions? In what ways are they similar or different? Is it possible for any of us to be born and raised in the United States without inheriting the racial, gender and sexual orientation biases of our ancestors? Are you personally a racist, sexist, or heterosexist? What is the best way for the average U.S. citizen to overcome these biases?

The first step in eliminating microaggressions is to make the "invisible" visible. I realize how controversial topics of race and racism, gender and sexism and sexual orientation and heterosexism push emotional hot buttons in all of us. I am hopeful that our blogs will stimulate discussion, debate, self-reflection, and helpful dialogue directed at increasing mutual respect and understanding of the multiple social identities we all possess.

3 - Microaggression is the New Racism on Campus

John McWhorter March 21, 2014 *Time Magazine*

There's a new word on the street that the old-style social racism is still with us, 24/7 — you're about to start hearing it everywhere.

Think everyday, interpersonal racism is a thing of the past? In progressive politics, most of the action has moved on from the Civil Rights struggles of the past to a focus on societal or “structural” racism. But, wait, not so fast — there's a new word on the street that the old-style social racism is still with us, 24/7. That word is: microaggression. And you're about to start hearing it everywhere.

A student at McGill University recently had to apologize publicly for the “microaggression” of “emailing a doctored video of President Obama kicking open a door” as part of a joke about midterms. Campus newspapers have begun denouncing the evils of such small, apparent slights.

The idea is that whites should now watch out for being micro-aggressors, in the same way that they learned long ago not to be racist in more overt ways. Here's what they are: The concept of microaggression has leapt from the shadows of academic writing into the bright light of general conversation, especially in the wake of widely consulted work by professors Derald Wing Sue and Madonna Constantine over the last seven or so years. Microaggressions, as these academics describe them, are quiet, often unintended slights — racist or sexist — that make a person feel underestimated on the basis of their color or gender.

The idea is that whites should now watch out for being microaggressors, in the same way that they learned long ago not to be racist in more overt ways. Importantly, the microaggressor is quite often a “goodly” person, of the kind we assume is too enlightened to pop off with racist or sexist insults.

The black journalist Toure has recounted, for example, being in a writer's program and being asked by a prominent literary critic “So why are *you* here?” The critic didn't ask in a hostile way, but the question itself carried an implication that there was some reason that his presence was unusual, and it was obvious what the factor was. The critic likely had no idea how that came off, and of course Toure went on to have a fine life. But this was, nevertheless, a microaggression.

As was when a middle school teacher praised a feminist friend of mine for having made the highest math score of any *girl* in the class. Or when I once asked a linguist a question about their presentation, only for him to repeatedly give me an answer I wasn't seeking. The problem was that he spontaneously assumed I wasn't familiar with the basic grammatical topic he was covering, when I, as familiar with it as any linguist of 25 years' standing, was interested in a more specific matter. This man was not a “racist” by any stretch of the imagination, but he was spontaneously assuming that a black linguist must only be interested in societal issues rather than the wonky mechanics of grammar.

Of course, I've been just fine since, too. In fact, some might see this whole microaggression concept as just a way to keep grievance going in an America where it gets ever harder to call people on naked bigotry. “Life is tough for everybody,” you might think. “When does all of this ‘poor me’ stuff stop?” One need not be a racist or sexist to have that sentiment, especially given

that the nature of microaggressions — subtle, unintended, occurring in the hustle and bustle of social interaction — is such that they will never cease to exist entirely.

Perhaps there is value in fostering an awareness of such things, in the name of our society becoming ever more enlightened. It's comforting that the term is at least *microaggression*. It acknowledges that change has occurred, that we are dealing with something smaller and less starkly egregious than name-calling and formal exclusion. That's better than just calling all of it, from cross-burning to asking a black person if you can touch their hair, "racism" (which has always been sloppy and counterproductive).

However, there is something equally counterproductive about the microaggression concept, at least as it is currently being put forth. The scholars promoting this concept claim that it is a microaggression even when someone says "I don't see you as black," or claims to be colorblind, or purports not to be a sexist, or in general doesn't "acknowledge" one's race membership or gender.

But let's face it — it's considered racist for whites to treat any trait as "black." If we accept that, then we can't turn around and say they're racists to look at black people as just people. That particular aspect of the microaggression notion seems fixed so that whites can't do anything right.

One can't help sensing a notion that this would be perhaps "payback" for whites and the nasty society they stuck us with. But all it does is create endless conflict, under an idea that basically being white is, in itself, a microaggression.

That, however, is neither profound nor complex — it's just bullying disguised as progressive thought. Let's call it microaggression when people belittle us on the basis of stereotypes. Creating change requires at least making sense.

4 - How Does Oppression (Microaggression) Affect Perpetrators?

Derald Wing Sue Ph.D. Feb. 27, 2011 Psychology Today

The cognitive, affective, behavioral, and spiritual cost of oppression.

"All the white people I know deplore racism. We feel helpless about racial injustice in society, and we don't know what to do about the racism we sense in our own groups and lives. Persons of other races avoid our groups when they accurately sense the racism we don't see (just as gays spot heterosexism in straight groups, and women see chauvinism among men). Few white people socialize or work politically with people of other races, even when our goals are the same. We don't want to be racist - so much of the time we go around trying not to be, by pretending we're not. Yet, white supremacy is basic in American social and economic history, and this racist heritage has been internalized by American white people of all classes. We have all absorbed white racism; pretence and mystification only compound the problem."

Spoken by Sara Winter, a White female psychologist, nothing could be more straightforward about what she and many other well-intentioned people experience as they confront racism, sexism and heterosexism: (a) a realization of the pervasiveness of oppression and injustice toward marginalized groups; (b) burgeoning awareness of their own role and complicity in the oppression of others; (c) pretending that they are free of biases and prejudices; (d) avoiding marginalized groups so they are not reminded about the racism, sexism and heterosexism that lies inside and outside of them; (e) feeling impotent about changing social injustices in our society; (f) realizing that White, male and heterosexual "supremacy" is a basic and integral part of U. S. society; and (g) awareness that no one is free from inheriting the racial, gender and sexual orientation biases of this society.

Winter's quote is directed toward well-intentioned Whites who are only marginally aware of their biases and their roles in the oppression of persons of color. The internal struggle she describes is manifested cognitively (awareness vs. denial, mystification, and pretense) and behaviorally (isolation and avoidance of marginalized groups). The internal struggle, however, brings about strong, intense and powerful emotional feelings as well:

"When someone pushes racism into my awareness, I feel guilty (that I could be doing so much more); angry (I don't like to feel like I'm wrong); defensive (I already have two Black friends...I worry more about racism than most whites do - isn't that enough): turned off (I have other priorities in my life with guilt about that thought): helpless (the problem is so big - what can I do?). I HATE TO FEEL THIS WAY. That is why I minimize race issues and let them fade from my awareness whenever possible."

On cognitive, emotional, behavioral and spiritual levels, research in psychology indicate that when microaggressive perpetrators become increasingly aware of their biases, they often experience debilitating emotional turmoil (guilt, fear, defensiveness), cognitive distortion and constriction - false sense of reality, and behavioral avoidance or inauthentic actions that impair relationships with marginalized individuals and/or groups. In my previous two blogs, I concentrated the discussion and analysis of racial, gender and sexual orientation microaggressions on the recipients; especially with respect to their harmful impact upon people of color, women and LGBTs.

For a moment I'd like to turn my attention to describing the social and psychological consequences to microaggressive perpetrators. What are the psychosocial costs to perpetrators of racism, sexism and heterosexism? Increasing interest and scholarly works on the psychosocial costs of racism have spawned renewed interest in looking at the detrimental impact to those who oppress.

Cognitive Costs of Oppression

Many scholars and humanists have argued that being an oppressor requires a dimming of perceptual awareness and accuracy that is associated with self-deception. They note that few oppressors are completely unaware of their roles in the oppression and degradation of others. To continue in their oppressive ways means they must engage in denial and live a false reality that allows them to function in good conscience. Second, the oppressors' empowered status over marginalized groups may have a corrupting influence in the ability to attune to the plight of marginalized groups. The oft-quoted saying that "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely" has been attributed to Lord Acton in 1887. In essence, an imbalance of power acutely affects perceptual accuracy and diminishes reality testing. In the corporate world, women must attune to the feelings and actions of their male colleagues in order to survive in a male culture. People of color must be constantly vigilant to read the minds of their oppressors lest they incur their wrath. Oppressors, however, do not need to understand the thoughts, beliefs or feelings of various marginalized groups to survive. Their actions are not accountable to those without power and they need not understand them to function effectively.

Affective Costs of Oppression

As we have seen, when racism, sexism or heterosexism is pushed into the consciousness of oppressors, they are likely to experience a mix of strong and powerful disruptive emotions. These intense feelings represent emotional roadblocks to self-exploration and must be deconstructed if oppressors are to continue in their journey to self-reckoning.

1. *Fear, anxiety and apprehension* are common and powerful feelings that arise when race, gender or sexual orientation related situations present themselves. The fear may be directed at members of marginalized groups; that they are dangerous, will do harm, are prone to violence, or contaminate the person (catching AIDS). Thus, avoidance of certain group members and restricting interactions with them may be chosen.
2. *Guilt* is also another strong and powerful emotion that many Whites experience when racism is brought to their awareness. As we have indicated, an attempt to escape guilt and remorse means dulling and diminishing one's own perception. Knowledge about race-based advantages, the continued mistreatment of large groups of people, the realization that people have personally been responsible for the pain and suffering of others, elicits strong feelings of guilt. Guilt creates defensiveness and outbursts of anger in an attempt to deny, diminish and avoid such a disturbing self-revelation.
3. *Low empathy* and sensitivity towards the oppressed is another outcome of oppression for the perpetrator. The harm, damage, and acts of cruelty visited upon marginalized groups can only continue if the person's humanity is diminished; they lose sensitivity to those that are hurt; they become hard, cold and unfeeling to the plight of the oppressed; and they turn off their compassion and empathy for others. To continue being oblivious to one's own complicity in such acts, means objectifying and dehumanizing people of color, women, and LGBTs. In many

respects it means separating oneself from others, seeing them as lesser beings, and in many cases treating them like subhuman aliens.

Behavioral Costs of Oppression

Behaviorally, the psychosocial costs of racism include fearful avoidance of diverse groups and/or diversity activities/experiences in our society, impaired interpersonal relationships, pretense and inauthenticity in dealing with racial, gender or sexual orientation topics, and acting in a callous and cold manner toward fellow human beings

Fearful avoidance deprives oppressors the richness of possible friendships and an expansion of educational experiences that open up life horizons and possibilities. If we use racism as an example, there is great loss in depriving oneself of interracial friendships, forming new alliances, and learning about differences related to diversity. Self-segregation because of fear of certain groups in our society and depriving oneself of multicultural/diversity experiences constrict one's life possibilities and results in a narrow view of the world.

Spiritual and Moral Cost of Oppression

In essence, oppression inevitably means losing one's humanity for the power, wealth and status attained from the subjugation of others. It means losing the spiritual connectedness with fellow human beings. It means a refusal to recognize the polarities of the democratic principles of equality and the inhuman and unequal treatment of the oppressed. It means turning a blind eye to treating marginalized groups like second-class citizens, imprisoning groups on reservations, concentration camps, inferior schools, segregated neighborhoods, prisons and life-long poverty. To allow the continued degradation, harm and cruelty to the oppressed mean diminishing one's humanity, and lessening compassion toward others. People who oppress must, at some level, become callous, cold, hard and unfeeling toward the plight of the oppressed.

In conclusion, racial, gender and sexual orientation microaggressions are manifestations of oppression. They remain invisible because of a cultural conditioning process that allows perpetrators to discriminate without knowledge of their complicity in the inequities visited upon people of color, women, LGBTs and other marginalized groups. The costs of inaction for perpetrators can be calculated in the cognitive, emotional, behavioral and spiritual toll to oppressors. But, what can we do about it? That is the topic of the next blog, but I end this column with the following quote attributed to Albert Einstein: "The world is too dangerous to live in - not because of the people who do evil, but because of the people who sit and let it happen."

5 - Students See Many Slights as Microaggressions by Tanzina Vega New York Times
March 21, 2014

A student gave a monologue this month during a performance in Cambridge, Mass., of the play “I, Too, Am Harvard,” in which he described being mistaken for a waiter at a formal university function. Credit Gretchen Ertl for The New York Times

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. — A tone-deaf inquiry into an Asian-American’s ethnic origin. Cringe-inducing praise for how articulate a black student is. An unwanted conversation about a Latino’s ability to speak English without an accent.

This is not exactly the language of traditional racism, but in an avalanche of blogs, student discourse, campus theater and academic papers, they all reflect the murky terrain of the social justice word du jour — microaggressions — used to describe the subtle ways that racial, ethnic, gender and other stereotypes can play out painfully in an increasingly diverse culture.

On a Facebook page called “Brown University Micro/Aggressions” a “dark-skinned black person” describes feeling alienated from conversations about racism on campus. A digital photo project run by a Fordham University student about “racial microaggressions” features minority students holding up signs with comments like “You’re really pretty ... for a dark-skin girl.” The “St. Olaf Microaggressions” blog includes a letter asking David R. Anderson, the college’s president, to address “all of the incidents and microaggressions that go unreported on a daily basis.”

What is less clear is how much is truly aggressive and how much is pretty micro — whether the issues raised are a useful way of bringing to light often elusive slights in a world where overt prejudice is seldom tolerated, or a new form of divisive hypersensitivity, in which casual remarks are blown out of proportion.

The word itself is not new — it was first used by Dr. Chester M. Pierce, a professor of education and psychiatry at Harvard University, in the 1970s. Until recently it was considered academic talk for race theorists and sociologists.

The recent surge in popularity for the term can be attributed, in part, to an academic article Derald W. Sue, a psychology professor at Columbia University, published in 2007 in which he broke down microaggressions into microassaults, microinsults and microinvalidations. Dr. Sue, who has literally written the book on the subject, called “Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation,” attributed the increased use of the term to the rapidly changing demographics in which minorities are expected to outnumber whites in the United States by 2042. “As more and more of us are around, we talk to each other and we know we’re not crazy,” Dr. Sue said. Once, he said, minorities kept silent about perceived slights. “I feel like people of color are less inclined to do that now,” he said.

Some say challenges to affirmative action in recent years have worked to stir racial tensions and resentments on college campuses. At least in part as a result of a blog started by two Columbia University students four years ago called The Microaggressions Project, the word made the leap from the academic world to the free-for-all on the web. Vivian Lu, the co-creator of the site, said she has received more than 15,000 submissions since she began the project.

To date, the site has had 2.5 million page views from 40 countries. Ms. Lu attributed the growing popularity of the term to its value in helping to give people a way to name something that may not be so obvious. “It gives people the vocabulary to talk about these everyday incidents that are quite difficult to put your finger on,” she said.

To Serena Rabie, 22, a paralegal who graduated from the University of Michigan in 2013, “This is racism 2.0.” She added: “It comes with undertones, it comes with preconceived notions. You hire the Asian computer programmer because you think he’s going to be a good programmer because he’s Asian.” Drawing attention to microaggressions, whether they are intentional or not, is part of eliminating such stereotypes, Ms. Rabie said.

On the other hand, John McWhorter, a linguistics professor at Columbia University, said many of his students casually use the word when they talk about race, but he cautioned against lumping all types of off-key language together. Assuming a black student was accepted to an elite university purely because of affirmative action? “That’s abuse,” Dr. McWhorter said. “That’s a slur.” Being offended when a white person claims to be colorblind — a claim often derided by minorities who say it willfully ignores the reality of race? Not so fast.

“I think that’s taking it too far,” he said. Whites do not have the same freedom to talk about race that nonwhites do, Dr. McWhorter said. If it is socially unacceptable for whites to consider blacks as “different in any way” then it is unfair to force whites to acknowledge racial differences, he said.

Even when young people do not use the term overtly, examples of perceived microaggressions abound.

When students at Harvard performed a play this month based on a multimedia project, “I, Too, Am Harvard,” that grew out of interviews with minority students, an entire segment highlighted microaggressions.

In one scene, students recite phrases they have been told, presumably by nonblack students, including “You only got in because you’re black” and “The government feels bad for you.” In another scene, a black student dressed in a tuxedo and a red bow tie describes being at a formal university function and being confused for a waiter.

Tsega Tamene, 20, a history and science major, and a producer for the play, said microaggressions were an everyday part of student life. “It’s almost scary the way that this disguised racism can affect you, hindering your success and the very psyche of going to class,” she said.

Outside of college campuses, microaggressions have been picked apart in popular Web videos including a two-part video poking fun at things white girls say to black girls (“It’s almost like you’re not black”) and another video called “What Kind of Asian Are You?” (“Where are you from? Your English is perfect”).

But the trend has its critics. A skeptical article in the conservative National Review carried the arch headline “You Could Be a Racist and Not Even Know It.”

Harry Stein, a contributing editor to City Journal, said in an email that while most people feel unjustly treated at times, “most such supposed insults are slight or inadvertent, and even most of those that aren’t might be readily shrugged off.” Mr. Stein took issue with the term “microaggressions,” saying that its use “suggests a more serious problem: the impulse to exaggerate the meaning of such encounters in the interest of perpetually seeing oneself as a victim.”

The comments on recent articles about microaggressions have been a mix of empathetic and critical. One commenter on a BuzzFeed article on the “I, Too, Am Harvard” project wrote: “Make up your mind, do you want to be seen the same as everyone because you’re a human being, or do you want to be seen as a ‘colored’ girl, since not being seen as a ‘colored’ person is obviously offensive?” Another wrote, “I don’t get bent out of shape if a white person asks me are you, like, Hindu or something? I just correct them.”

Henry Louis Gates Jr., the Harvard professor and author, said the public airing of racial microaggressions should not be limited to minorities, but should be open to whites as well. “That’s the only way that you can produce a multicultural, ethnically diverse environment,” he said.

“We’re talking about people in close contact who are experiencing the painful intersections of intimacy,” he said. “The next part of that is communication, and this is a new form of communication.”

A version of this article appears in print on March 22, 2014, on page A1 of the New York edition with the headline: Everyday Slightings Tied to Race Add Up to Big Campus Topic.

7 - Never heard of it? You may be guilty of it?

Alec Torres, Feb. 13, 2014 National Review

As a group of students begins studying for a calculus exam, a white student turns to an Asian peer and says, “Hey, would you mind helping me solve this problem? It’s really difficult, but you can probably do it.” The Asian student agrees to help, but for some reason feels uncomfortable with the way the question was asked.

Is the Asian student being oversensitive? Was the white student subtly and subconsciously displaying racial prejudice against Asians? Could both be true?

According to Dr. Derald Sue, a professor of psychology at Columbia University, the Asian student may have been the victim of a microaggression — an “everyday slight, putdown, indignity, or invalidation unintentionally directed toward a marginalized group.”

Sue has been researching microaggression since 2007 and has written two books on the subject. According to him, the person delivering the microaggression often does not know he’s doing it and might even think he is complimenting the other individual.

“When you try to bring the issue of microaggressions to the attention of people who are completely unaware that they have delivered a microaggression, they get defensive and deny it and tend to say that you’re being paranoid or you’re being oversensitive,” Sue tells me. “Many microaggressions are so subtle that neither target nor perpetrator may entirely understand what is going on.”

According to Sue, there are many types of microaggressions, based on race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or any other factor that can make a group “socially marginalized.” These microaggressions can be expressed verbally (as with the white and Asian students), nonverbally (as with a woman clutching her purse when a black man walks by), and environmentally (as with an educational curriculum containing few books by female authors).

Originally coined in the 1970s by Chester Pierce, an African-American psychiatrist at Harvard, the term “microaggression” has made a comeback in recent years. “It has become one of the most researched areas in the professional literature of psychology,” Sue says. “It’s now going into popular literature as well.”

Racial minorities in particular have taken to the concept of microaggression because, Sue says, the taxonomy of his research “provided a language for how people of color could describe the experiences that they’ve had with well-intentioned white people unaware that they were delivering insulting putdowns.”

The term has become particularly popular on America’s college campuses. In November at UCLA, a group of minority students claimed that their professor committed a microaggression when he corrected a student’s grammar in a research paper by repeatedly changing the word “indigenous” from upper- to lower-case. At the University of Michigan, a member of the Black Student Union said that the group’s Martin Luther King Day protest last month was in part an effort to “combat microaggressions” on campus.

Fordham has a web page devoted to training educators in what microaggressions are and how to avoid them, and Fordham students have taken photos with signs on which they have inscribed the microaggressions they believe have been inflicted on them.

“My MCAT instructor keeps referring to the writer of our passages with male pronouns when they do not list an author by name,” one woman writes, citing this as a gender microaggression.

When a gay man’s sibling said, “You won’t have a normal family,” the man argued that saying a gay family isn’t normal is a sexual-orientation microaggression.

According to another respondent, saying, “You can’t be a woman if you can’t reproduce,” is a gender microaggression.

However, microaggressions are inherently ambiguous, Sue says, and therefore hard to identify. “There are things on the popular websites that I would not classify as racial or gender or sexual-orientation microaggressions,” Sue tells me. “I think that some people are misinterpreting what microaggressions are.”

When I asked Sue if he could provide me with an instance of a borderline racial microaggression, he disagreed with the premise of the question. “[Racial] microaggressions represent a clash of racial realities, and the question you’re raising is whose reality is the correct reality,” he says. “It’s an issue of power, the power to define racial reality.”

Generally speaking, when identifying microaggressions Sue considers it best to believe the one who perceives the bias. “Almost all of the studies indicate that the people who are most disempowered have the most accurate perception of a situation of bias because people who have power don’t need to understand the situation in order to do well,” he says.

So, for example, a woman employee has to understand the male mind in order to do well in the company, Sue says, whereas a man has no need to understand the female mind to do well. So the woman is a much better judge of the gender bias in her office.

Because these microaggressions go largely unnoticed by the alleged perpetrators, Sue thinks we must use education to end microaggression. For people with established biases, Sue recommends “remediation”: “You need to get people to begin to explore themselves as racial-cultural beings and to tap into the unconscious biases they have.” Showing people that they have these biases and that these biases hurt people is the first step, he says.

More fundamentally, Sue argues for preventive education: “If we had a pre-K–through–twelve educational system that was truly multicultural, that would nip these unconscious biases in the bud before they develop.”

So, without a “multicultural” education for the young and a thorough reeducation for the rest, all in the “empowered” class may be interminably consigned to unknowingly making racist remarks or unintentionally engaging in sexist and homophobic behaviors. For all they know, they already are.

— Alec Torres is a William F. Buckley Fellow at the National Review Institute.

10 - Microaggressions: Be Careful What You Say NPR

April 3, 2014 11:51 AM ET Heard on Tell Me More

Psychology professor Derald Sue says some casual, everyday questions and comments can reveal people's unconscious biases, such as "Where are you really from?" and "You don't dress like a gay person."

MICHEL MARTIN, HOST:

So where are you from? No, where are you really from? To some people, that might sound like a harmless question. But to a person of color, it might sound like a micro-aggression - a question, a comment, even an intended compliment, sometimes, that nevertheless suggests something demeaning.

Now, that term has been in the news recently because of the I, Too, Am Harvard campaign. That was a play and later an online campaign by African-American students at Harvard, to highlight the casual forms of bias that they encounter on campus. We wanted to talk more about this, so we have called Derald Sue. He is a professor of psychology and education at Columbia University Teachers College. And he's done extensive research on this topic, and he's with us now. Welcome. Thanks so much for joining us.

DERALD SUE: Well, thank you, Michel, for having me.

MARTIN: So you've defined racial micro-aggressions as, quote, commonplace daily indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate racial slights and insults toward people of color. Could you just briefly just give us an example of what you're thinking about here?

SUE: Well, the example you gave about asking me - and it's happened to me many times - where I was born, and answering them by saying that I was born in Portland, Ore.; and having the person persist in saying, no, where were you really born? The underlying message here is that I am a perpetual alien in my own country. And what - that's one of the themes of micro-aggressions, that they have a hidden disparaging, denigrating, invalidating message.

MARTIN: In fact, you know, we asked our listeners for their experiences with this. And it probably won't surprise you, Professor, that we received hundreds of responses on Facebook in a very short period of time. This is one from Calila (ph) in New Haven, Conn.

CALILA: After presenting to a crowd of about 300 people, a woman came up to me and said, you're so articulate. You speak so well. I wanted to say, lady, I have a Ph.D. I've been teaching for over 10 years, and I used to teach at an Ivy League university. Of course I speak well. But I really wanted to ask, do you mean I speak well for a black person?

MARTIN: Well, you know, this is classic, right? This is one of those things that actually - even was something that was discussed during the first - Barack Obama's first presidential campaign.

SUE: That's right.

MARTIN: So how do you - a lot of people still feel like, what's your problem? I mean, this is a compliment. Why are you mad? What's the issue?

SUE: Well, indeed, what's the issue? And this is what makes micro-aggression so difficult to comprehend. On the surface, there is a different message. I'm complimenting you. I want to know where you're coming from. But underneath, there is what we in the field call the meta-communication that undermines this.

And the meta-communication is, this black woman is saying that the person complimenting them is surprised that they can be bright, intelligent because that's not the way black Americans are, and that you're an exception. And it allows a person to hold onto the stereotype that African-Americans are unintelligent, inarticulate - and all the negatives that go with it. But they are not aware of this. And this is the thing that makes micro-aggression so difficult to deal with. It's invisible to the person delivering it.

MARTIN: Why do you think it matters for the person who is receiving it?

SUE: Well, all of our studies on the impact of micro-aggressions suggest that they assail the mental health of the recipient. There's greater degrees of loneliness, anger, depression, anxiety; lower sense of psychological well-being.

We have also found that micro-aggressions tend to affect problem-solving ability of the individuals in classrooms; work productivity goes down. And earlier, you were talking about health differences - that people who are recipients of greater amounts of micro-aggressions tend to have poorer physical health. They are likely to have high blood pressure, extreme vigilance that they have to deal with in terms of their autonomic nervous system.

MARTIN: I want to share another story from a listener named Sarah (ph) in Washington, D.C. Here's what she had to say.

SARAH: I've often been told I don't look like a lesbian. There's an assumption that I'm supposed to look like the stereotypical lesbian, and I'm doing something wrong by keeping my hair the way I do, or dressing the way I do.

MARTIN: I have to tell you, Professor, we heard a whole array of stories about - from women who were told that they were too pretty to be gay, or too pretty to be disabled or overweight. And I just wanted to ask you about that.

SUE: Well, this is - you know, one of the things that we discovered is that - my original work and research dealt with racial micro-aggressions. As we got into it and the concept of micro-aggressions caught on, we discovered that almost any marginalized group in our society can be the object of micro-aggressions - whether it be gender micro-aggressions, sexual orientation micro-aggressions or disability micro-aggressions.

Micro-aggressions have similar psychological dynamics but they - that they differ, in terms of the themes that are going. For example, women are more likely to get themes of sexual objectification; LGBTQ individuals are likely to experience themes of sinfulness. And these are underlying messages that tear at the heart of the racial, cultural, gender, sexual orientation identity of the person.

MARTIN: We had a number of comments from Asian-Americans, or people who - saying things like - well, here's one from a woman named Maria Wong(ph), who recently moved from Ohio to Boston, Mass. And one of the startling things was that - I often get, oh, it's because you're Asian.

And this was attributed to things like - for her weight, or her thinness or her good grades. And she says, you know, it feels to her like a downplay of actual achievements that she's worked for. And then, of course, as you mentioned, the ever-popular "where are you from?" And a number of our Asian-American correspondents mentioned that. So let's wheel around on the time that we have left - is, what do you do? I mean, what do you do about this...

SUE: Well...

MARTIN: ...Because, as you know, a lot of times if you call it out, people think you're being oversensitive.

SUE: That's precisely...

MARTIN: How do you recommend people - yeah...

SUE: That's precisely the problem because people are good, moral - experience themselves as good, moral, decent individuals, they find it very difficult to accept the fact that they have been engaged in a discriminatory action, or may harbor racial biases that they have. And it violates, in some sense, their sense of being a good person.

It is creating an environment where people can honestly dialogue about these racial issues that really gets at the heart of dealing with it. The other thing is a preventative approach rather than remedial. If we had a school system, a pre-K-12 school system that was truly multicultural in its focus, then a lot of these micro-aggressions would disappear.

MARTIN: Well, the other point that you made is that you found that some people are already doing this - already. You find that students of color make eye contact with each other, for example, when they hear these kinds of comments being made. And one of the things that you're seeing is - yes, it did happen, and you're not misreading what's going on here.

SUE: That's right.

MARTIN: Another way of saying that would be, you're not crazy.

SUE: Yes.

(LAUGHTER)

MARTIN: So Derald Sue is a professor of psychology - I know, technical term, you're not crazy. Derald Sue is a professor of psychology and education at Columbia University Teachers College. He was kind enough to join us from our bureau in New York. Professor Sue, thank you for speaking with us.

SUE: Thank you.

MARTIN: We received many powerful stories about micro-aggressions from our listeners. We would still like to hear from you if you would like to share. Email your thoughts to us at TELLMEMORE@NPR.org.

13 - Fact Sheet: Health Disparities and Stress: APA

Stress is the physiological demand placed on the body when one must adapt, cope or adjust (Nevid & Rathus, 2003). It can be healthful and essential in keeping an individual alert; however, intense or prolonged stress can be overwhelming on the body. Two of the major forms of stress are acute and chronic stress.

Types of Stress

- Acute stress, the most common form of stress, is short-term and stems from the demands and pressures of the recent past and anticipated demands and pressures of the near future (APA, 2011).
- Chronic stress, a long term form of stress, derives from unending feelings of despair/hopelessness, as a result of factors such as poverty, family dysfunction, feelings of helplessness and/or traumatic early childhood experience (APA, 2011). Chronic stressors associated with health disparities include perceived discrimination, neighborhood stress, daily stress, family stress, acculturative stress, environmental stress and maternal stress (Djuric et al, 2010; NIH, 2011).

Stress Affects Health

When an individual experiences stress, certain hormones are released, such as catecholamines and cortisol, the primary stress hormone (NIH, 2011).

- Long-term activation of the stress-response system can disrupt almost all of the body's processes and increase the risk for numerous health problems (Mayo Clinic Organization, 2011; NIH, 2011).
- Allostatic load is the cumulative biological burden exacted on the body through daily adaptation to physical and emotional stress. It is considered to be a risk factor for several diseases — coronary vascular disease, obesity, diabetes, depression, cognitive impairment and both inflammatory and autoimmune disorders (Djuric et al, 2010).
- Stress may prematurely age the immune system and could enhance the risk of illness as well as age-related diseases (Djuric et al, 2010; Geronimus et al, 2010).

The Role of Chronic Stressors in Health Disparities Among Racial/Ethnic Groups

- Racial and ethnic minorities have health that is worse overall than the health of White Americans. Health disparities may stem from economic determinants, education, geography and neighborhood, environment, lower-quality care, inadequate access to care, inability to navigate the system, provider ignorance/bias and/or stress (Bahls, 2011).

- Studies examining the role of social and biological stress on health suggests a link between socioeconomic status and ethnic disparities in stress and health (Warnecke et al, 2008). Some ethnic/racial groups are more economically disadvantaged and may be more susceptible to SES-related stress.

Perceived Discrimination

- Perceived discrimination (i.e. work place, gender-, race/ethnicity-, and sexual orientation-based), has been found to be a key factor in chronic stress-related health disparities among ethnic/racial and other minority groups (de Castro, Gee, & Takeuchi, 2008; Williams & Mohammed, 2009; Meyer et al, 2008; Gyll et al, 2001).
- African Americans, Native Hawaiians and Latin Americans have been impacted greatly by hypertension and diabetes due to chronic stress resulting from discrimination (Williams & Neighbors, 2001; Kaholokula et al, 2010; McClure et al, 2010).
- Stress due to experiences of racism can contribute to adverse birth outcomes, when combined with the effects of general and maternal stress (Nuru-Jeter et al, 2009; Dominguez et al, 2008; Canady et al, 2008).
- Perceived discrimination/racism has been shown to play a role in unhealthy behaviors such cigarette smoking, alcohol/substance use, improper nutrition and refusal to seek medical services (Lee, Ayers, & Kronenfeld, 2009; Peek et al, 2011).
- Perceived discrimination has been shown to contribute to mental health disorders among racial/ethnic groups such as Asian Americans and African Americans (Jang et al, 2010; Mezuk et al, 2010)
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered (LGBT) individuals are at an increased risk for psychiatric morbidity compared to heterosexuals due to stigma resulting from perceived discrimination; which also contributes to LGBT youth having higher rates of externalizing behaviors, such as alcohol, tobacco and poly-substance use (McCabe et al, 2010; Lehavot & Simoni, 2011).

Environmental Stress and Neighborhood Stressors

- Socioeconomic status and environmental stress has been found to contribute to many health disparities among ethnic/racial groups (Kendzor et al, 2009).
- Health disparities found to be associated with environmental stress include childhood asthma, hypertension, substance abuse, diabetes, obesity and depressive symptoms (Quinn et al, 2010; Russell et al, 2010; Nandi et al, 2010; Lee, Harris, & Gordon-Larsen, 2009; Braveman, 2009; Latkin et al, 2007).

Acculturative Stress

- Acculturative stress refers to the feeling of tension and anxiety that accompany efforts to adapt to the orientation and values of dominant culture (Rathus & Nevid, 2003). It can

have an influence on physical and mental health disparities such as hypertension and depression (Kaholokula et al, 2010; Jang & Chiriboga, 2010).

- Acculturation stress was found to be significantly associated with substance dependence and anxiety disorders (Ehlers et al, 2009).
- Empirical studies on immigrant adolescents and the children of immigrants found that acculturative stress increased depressive symptoms (Kim et al, 2011).
- Regardless of age at immigration, foreign-born women experience more depressive symptoms than native-born women during early adulthood (Tillman & Weiss, 2009).

Socioeconomic, Daily and Family Stress

- Daily stress, associated with lower social position and poor family functioning, can lead to adverse health outcomes (Kasper et al, 2008; Miech et al, 2007).
- In a longitudinal study with African American women, long-term poverty and family stress were strongly associated with less physical mobility and cognitive functioning at older ages (Kasper et al, 2008).
- The Soujourner syndrome and the Superwoman Schema (SWS) concepts are used to explain the phenomenon of early onset of morbidity among African American women in response to persistent chronic stress and active coping associated with meeting day-to-day demands and having multiple caregiver roles (Lekan, 2009; Woods-Giscombe & Black, 2010; Slopen et al, 2010)