Racial Microaggressions: Empirical Research that Documents Targets' Experiences

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Racism is mostly associated with overt and intended harm. But it also features subtle racist interactions that affect targets' mental health, internal experiences, and social as well as professional lives. These subtle forms of racism often remain invisible or are dismissed as trivial. We employ the concept of *racial microaggressions* to analytically conceptualize the impact of everyday racial acts – whether they are frequent or cumulative, verbal or nonverbal indignities, intentional or unintentional – within a conceptual framework in psychological and educational research.

In this chapter, we define the term racial microaggressions and offer four superordinate categories of the concept that we use to organize themes from prior qualitative research (Houshmand, Spanierman, & De Stefano 2017; Sue & Spanierman 2020). Next, we describe various instruments researchers have developed to measure experiences with racial microaggressions (i.e., frequency and distress levels). We then describe a growing body of research that provides evidence of the harmful effects of racial microaggressions on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPoC), primarily in the United States and Canada. We conclude by discussing the theory's application in Germany.

Defining Racial Microaggressions

The term »microaggressions« originated in the work of Harvard University Professor of Psychiatry and Education Chester Middlebrook Pierce. In a series of studies conducted in the 1970s, Pierce introduced the concept of »offensive mechanisms« to explain the conscious or unconscious »subtle blows [that] are delivered incessantly« by White offenders during interactions with Black individuals (1970: 266). He called these subtle blows »microaggressions,« which he linked to higher disease and mortality rates in Black compared to White communities (Pierce 1970: 266). Adopting Pierce's terminology, Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso (2000: 60) described racial microaggressions as »subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously.«

In 2007, Derald Wing Sue and colleagues introduced microaggressions to a broad audience of psychology researchers and practitioners in a groundbreaking and widely cited *American Psychologist* article. They shared a framework that categorized three types of interpersonal microaggressions. *Microinsults* refer to insensitive and demeaning communications, such as assuming someone is intellectually inferior because of their race. *Microinvalidations* denote verbal and nonverbal communications that negate or diminish targets' experiences, such as denying someone's experiences of racism. Because *microassaults* are most similar to expressions of blatant racism (e.g., using a racial slur), most research has focused on the other two categories. Sue, Capodilupo and colleagues' (2007) original theory also included environmental microaggressions; however, Sue and Spanierman (2020) later revised the term and instead introduced environmental *macro*aggressions to distinguish subtle forms of interpersonal racial bias from organizational, institutional, and societal policies and practices. In this paper, we focus on subtle, interpersonal racial microaggressions.

Racial microaggressions are »micro« because they arise during interpersonal (i.e., micro-level) interactions between a perpetrator and target. The term »micro« should in no way be understood as a measurement of harm; it is instead akin to the »everyday« in Essed's (1991) everyday racism, or what she refers to as microinjustices, in the macro context of White supremacy. Essed's everyday racism theory »defies the view that racism is either an individual problem or an institutional problem« and »is never a singular act in itself, but a multidimensional experience [that] triggers memories of other, similar incidents, of the beliefs surrounding the event, of behavioral coping and cognitive responses« (1991: 207). As such, racial microaggressions and everyday racism should be understood as different disciplinary attempts, one that is generally applied to clinical settings and the other in social anthropological studies, to understand how BIPoC targets experience covert racism through routinized practices in everyday interactions in the larger context of White supremacy.

Because racial microaggressions often constitute unintentional communications by the perpetrator, critics have argued that they are not truly a form of aggression. Yet Williams (2020a) has demonstrated empirically that racial microaggressions are indeed aggressive because targets experience them as such even when intent cannot be established. Psychological studies have found that indirect, relational, and social aggression (e.g., spreading rumors or excluding people from a group) can be as harmful and damaging to targets as some types of physical aggression (e.g., Archer & Coyne 2005; Coyne, Archer, & Elsea 2006). Racial microaggressions are thus a form of manipulative aggression that reinforces White supremacy in interpersonal interactions between a White perpetrator and a BIPoC target. White people may not intend to insult or invalidate, but nevertheless often do so.

The racial microaggressions theory operates from the targets' perspective, since perpetrators are often unaware that they have insulted or invalidated the target (Sue 2017; Sue & Spanierman 2020; Williams 2020b). While we do not argue that the target is always right, we agree with Williams's (2020b: 40) assertion: »The default response should be belief of a person's experience, just as we would believe them if they said that we had accidentally slammed the door in their face, left something in the hall that they later tripped over, or mispronounced their last name.«

Thus, we define racial microaggressions as subtle and familiar communications that BIPoC targets experience during interpersonal interactions when White perpetrators imply that targets are inferior or discount their identities, experiences, or knowledge. These micro-level, interpersonal communications exist in the macro context of a racialized social system that deems White people superior. White people cannot be targets of *racial* microaggressions, although they can be targets of gender, sexual orientation, or other forms of microaggressions (Clark & Spanierman 2018).

Racial Microaggressions Taxonomies

Drawing on empirical research that has employed qualitative methods, we detail four superordinate categories of racial microaggressions (see also Houshmand et al. 2017; Sue & Spanierman 2020). Most qualitative findings that document targets' experiences with racial microaggressions can be classified into these categories, which sometimes overlap: (a) pathologizing differences, (b) excluding or rendering invisible, (c) perpetuating color-blind racial attitudes, and (d) denigrating and pigeonholing. The rest of this section describes the four categories (named for the perpetrators' acts) and underlying themes (named for the targets' perspectives) from the literature.

Pathologizing Differences

Pathologizing differences refer to conscious or unconscious attempts by White people to disparage a target's cultural styles, values, or practices. This category aligns with Sue, Capodilupo et al.'s (2007) microinsults (i.e., insensitive and demeaning communications). This type of microaggression targets members of BIPoC communities as inferior, abnormal, or deviant. Qualitative themes have highlighted both the assumed superiority of White cultural values and the assumed inferiority of BIPoC group members. Several studies have identified »assumptions of superiority of White cultural values and communication styles« that target Black Americans (Henfield 2011; Lewis et al. 2016) and Indigenous Peoples (Clark et al. 2011). In Lewis et al.'s (2016) study of Black women, participants reported being targeted for their

expressive and loud communication styles, which were inconsistent with White norms. We refer to this theme as tolerating assumptions of White superiority.

Qualitative research also has documented racial microaggressions that deem BIPoC as inherently inferior to White people. Researchers have found support for the theme »assumption of inferior status« among Black Americans (Hall & Fields 2015; Sue, Nadal et al. 2008). To privilege targets' voices, we refer to this theme as facing assumptions of inferior status. For example, Black participants in managerial roles were assumed to be delivery persons and were sent through the service door of office buildings (Sue, Nadal et al. 2008).

We also identified themes in the research that referred to »pathologizing cultural values/communication styles« among Asian Americans (Sue, Bucceri et al. 2007) and Latinx Americans (Rivera, Forquer, & Rangel 2010). One Vietnamese American study participant recounted being ridiculed for eating with chopsticks (Sue, Bucceri et al. 2007). We refer to this theme as encountering assumptions of substandard cultural values and styles.

»Second-class citizenship« emerged in the literature as a theme that encompasses both pathologizing targets as inferior and excluding them from various settings; the latter overlaps with the next category. Black American (Sue et al. 2008; Torres et al. 2010), Latinx American (Minikel-Lacocque 2013; Rivera et al. 2010), and Asian American (Sue, Bucceri et al. 2007) targets all have reported being treated as »second-class citizens« – i.e., as substandard human beings. In one example, a young Black woman participant reported, »I put money in someone's hand and they won't put the money back in my hand. They'll make sure that they put the money on the counter as if I'm toxic« (Sue, Nadal et al. 2008: 333). We refer to this theme as contending with treatment as a second-class citizen.

There seems to be some confusion in the literature about this category, as one racial microaggression instrument pairs »second-class citizenship« with »assumptions of criminality.« We argue that the notion of assuming second-class citizenship better describes White people who exclude members of BIPoC communities from full citizenship, participation, and humanity in US society. Williams et al.'s (2020) recent findings pair second-class citizenship (i.e., less preferential treatment and disrespect) with experiencing invisibility. More research is needed to clarify.

Excluding or Rendering Invisible

Excluding or rendering invisible involves White perpetrators conveying sentiments such as »you don't belong« or »I don't see you« to targets. This category of racial microaggression is consistent with Sue and colleagues' concept of microinvalidations: it includes communications that negate or nullify targets' experiences. Holder, Jackson, and Ponterotto (2015) named a racial microaggression theme »exclusion,«

which refers to prohibiting Black corporate women from attending social gatherings or seeking career opportunities.

A common theme in the literature that connotes exclusion is the sensation that an individual is an »alien in their own land.« This theme, which we refer to as contending with treatment as an alien in one's own land, most often targets Latinx Americans (McCabe 2009; Minikel-Lacocque 2013; Rivera et al. 2010) and Asian Americans (Kohli & Solórzano 2012; Sue, Bucceri et al. 2007; Sue et al. 2009). Participants described experiences such as being targeted with remarks such as »Where are you from?« or »Where were you born?« that treated them as outsiders regardless of how many generations their families had lived in the United States. A related theme emerged among South Asian Canadians, enduring perceptions as fresh off the boat, which implies an uneducated and new immigrant status (Poolokasingham et al. 2014). Exclusion and invisibility manifested among Indigenous People in Canada as living with day-to-day cultural and social isolation (Canel-Çınarbaş & Yohani 2019; Clark et al. 2014).

Targets in several studies reported feeling ignored, dismissed, and invisible. Researchers identified the microaggressive theme of invisibility that targeted Black Americans (Allen 2010; Constantine et al. 2008; Hall & Fields 2015; Holder et al. 2015; Lewis et al. 2016), Asian Americans (Sue, Bucceri et al. 2007), and South Asian Canadians (Poolokasingham et al. 2014). In one study, Black participants recounted being ignored by store clerks and overlooked or made to »feel small« at work (Hall & Fields 2015: 6). We refer to this theme as experiencing invisibility and exclusion. Among Indigenous students in Canada, participants reported experiencing curricular elimination or misrepresentation that rendered their histories and contemporary lives invisible or inaccurately portrayed in textbooks, lectures, and class discussions (Canel-Çınarbaş & Yohani 2019; Clark et al. 2014).

Homogenizing stereotypes that target members of BIPoC communities represent another form of invisibility. For example, researchers observed »invalidation of interethnic differences« among Asian Americans (Sue, Bucceri et al. 2007) and South Asian Canadians (Poolokasingham et al. 2014) as well as »assumed universality of experiences« among Black Americans (Hall & Fields 2015; Henfield 2011; Holder et al. 2015; Williams et al. 2020). In one study, Black professional women reported that their colleagues assumed »Black people were a monolithic racial group who had the same experiences, opinions, and interests« (Holder et al. 2015: 170). These themes, which we refer to as encountering assumptions of homogeneity, make suppositions about targets based on group stereotypes, assume they are all the same, and thus invalidate their unique lived experiences and full humanity.

Perpetuating Color-blind Racial Attitudes

This category refers to White perpetrators who deny, distort, or minimize race and racism in their interactions with members of BIPoC communities (e.g., Neville et al. 2013). These sorts of racial microaggressions tend to dismiss the power of racism in producing White superiority and disavow targets' affirmation of their individual humanity and the collective worth of their communities. This category is also consistent with Sue, Capodilupo et al.'s (2007) microinvalidations. We identified themes in this category of denial of racial reality and invalidation of racial experience among Latinx Americans (Rivera et al. 2010; Yosso et al. 2009) and Asian Americans (Sue, Bucceri et al. 2007). For example, in one study, a Latino participant described how a White peer »disparaged his participation in what [the White peer] considered superfluous and nonrigorous ethnic studies classes« (Yosso et al. 2009: 678). We refer to this theme as enduring denials of one's racial reality.

We also observed »denial of racism« that targets Black Americans (Constantine 2007; Hall & Fields 2015) and »denying racism and historical trauma« that targets Indigenous Peoples (Clark et al. 2011; Johnston-Goodstar & Roholt 2017). This theme reflects White denials of the existence of racism in society – and their perpetration of racism. In one study, a participant described a White psychotherapist claiming not to be prejudiced because some of her best friends are Black (Constantine 2007). We refer to these themes as tolerating denials of racism and tolerating denials of historical trauma, respectively.

Finally, Constantine (2007) found evidence of »accused hypersensitivity regarding racial or cultural issues« among Black Americans, which refers to assumptions that Black people are overly sensitive and thin-skinned during discussions that involve race. To privilege targets' perspectives, we retitled this theme withstanding allegations of hypersensitivity.

Denigrating and Pigeonholing

This category refers to White perpetrators who assert the power to undermine, confine, or romanticize a target's mental capacity, behavior, or appearance. Similar to pathologizing differences, denigrating and pigeonholing also reflect microinsults (i.e., insensitive and demeaning communications based on stereotypes). Past studies have identified denigrating and pigeonholing racial microaggressions that involve stereotypes about intelligence. A prominent theme is »ascription of intellectual inferiority« among Black Americans (Hall & Fields 2015; Holder et al. 2015; Smith et al. 2016; Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder 2008; Torres, Driscoll, & Burrow 2010), Latinx Americans (Yosso et al. 2009; Rivera et al. 2010), and Indigenous Peoples (Canel-Çınarbaş & Yohani 2019). We refer to this as *encountering expectations of intellectual infe-*

riority. Unique to findings among Indigenous Peoples in Canada, researchers identified a related theme, *encountering expectations of primitiveness*; participants had been asked if they lived in teepees (Clark et al. 2014). While this theme does not directly address targets' intelligence, the focus on primeval culture and lack of technological sophistication is comparable.

Notably, intelligence-related racial microaggressions that target Asian Americans and South Asian Canadians tend to pigeonhole into stereotypical domains rather than denigrate (Palmer & Maramba 2015; Poolokasingham et al. 2014; Sue, Bucceri et al. 2007; Sue et al. 2009). These microaggressions tend to ascribe intelligence, rather than unintelligence. In Poolokasingham et al.'s (2014) study, South Asian Canadian participants described encountering expectations of being skilled in science, technology, and engineering, but not literature. We refer to this theme as *encountering expectations of intelligence in stereotypical domains*.

Another prevalent theme in this category involves stereotypes about criminality and terrorism. Among Black Americans (Hall & Fields 2015; McCabe 2009; Smith et al. 2016; Sue, Capodilupo et al. 2008; Torres et al. 2010), Latinx Americans (Minikel-Lacocque 2013; Rivera et al. 2010), and Indigenous Peoples (Canel-Çınarbaş & Yohani 2019), participants reported *facing assumptions of criminality.* In a related theme among South Asian Canadians (Poolokasingham et al. 2014) and British Asian professional cricket players (Burdsey 2011), researchers identified the microaggressive theme »assumptions of ties to terrorism,« which we refer to as *facing assumptions of ties to terrorism*.

At times, denigrating and pigeonholing referred to exoticizing or romanticizing members of BIPoC communities. Although statements or observations of this sort may seem like compliments, racial microaggressions that exoticize are othering and dehumanizing and tend to express the notion that something is foreign and, perhaps, sexually exciting. Researchers found evidence of »exoticism« or »exoticization« that targets Black Americans (Hall & Fields 2015; Lewis et al. 2016; Williams et al. 2020), Latinx (McCabe 2009) and Asian Americans (Sue, Bucceri et al. 2007). We refer to this theme as *enduring exoticization*. Akin to exoticizing, but in ways that romanticize and wax nostalgic, researchers also documented *experiencing false adoration and honor* among Indigenous Peoples (Cappiccie et al. 2012; Clark et al. 2011), which included White people who preferred characters in animated films and athletic mascots over actual Indigenous persons.

Measuring Racial Microaggressions

Several instruments that measure racial microaggressions have drawn from the qualitative findings that illuminate targets' experiences with racial microaggres-

sions. Most scales measure targets' self-reported frequency of experiences with racial microaggressions and/or their associated level of distress.

The first instrument that was designed to measure racial microaggressions was the Racial Microaggressions in Counseling Scale (Constantine 2007), a 10-item unidimensional scale that measures experience with racial microaggressions in counseling and their perceived impact. The items, which were derived from focus group data involving 24 African American students, are scored on a 3-point scale (0 = this never happened; 1 = this happened but it did not bother me; 2 = this happened and I was bothered by it). Sample items include: »My counselor sometimes was insensitive about my cultural group when trying to understand or treat my concerns or issues« and »My counselor avoided discussing or addressing cultural issues in our session(s).« Psychometric evaluation is limited.

The Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale (REMS) is the most widely used instrument to assess experiences with racial microaggressions (Nadal 2011). Initial validation studies involving approximately 660 participants and subsequent empirical research across a wide range of samples have yielded adequate psychometric support. The REMS comprises 45 items derived from original racial microaggressions taxonomy research and expert content review. It contains six subscales: assumptions of inferiority (e.g., »Someone assumed that I would not be intelligent because of my race«), second-class citizen and assumptions of criminality (e.g., »Someone avoided walking near me on the street because of my race«), microinvalidations (e.g., »Someone told me that they do not see race«), exoticization/assumptions of similarity (e.g., »Someone assumed that I spoke a language other than English«), environmental microaggressions (e.g., »I observed people of my race portrayed positively on television«), workplace and school microaggressions (e.g., »An employer or co-worker was unfriendly or unwelcoming toward me because of my race«). Items were initially scored on a 6-point scale from 0 (I did not experience this event in the past 6 months) to 5 (I experienced this event five or more times in the past 6 months). Due to the limited variability of scores, the creators changed to dichotomous scoring: 0 (I did not experience this event in the past 6 months) or 1 (I experienced this event at least once in the past 6 months). Principal component analysis and confirmatory factor analysis provide support for the factor structure, and both scoring formats demonstrated internal consistency.

In 2015, Forrest-Bank, Jenson, & Trecartin (2015) introduced the Revised 28-Item Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale based on Nadal's REMS. The revised scale consists of 28 items from the original REMS and comprises five subscales (i.e., second-class citizen and assumptions of criminality, assumptions of inferiority, assumptions of similarity, microinvalidations, and media microaggressions). Items are scored on a 6-point scale regarding respondents' experiences during the past 6 months (0 = none; 1 = one time; 2 = two times; 3 = three times; 4 = four times; 5 = five or more times). Using a racially diverse sample of 286 individuals aged 18–35,

the researchers conducted a series of exploratory factor analyses by racial group and identified group-specific factor structures.

The Inventory of Microaggressions against Black Individuals is a 14-item unidimensional scale that assesses microinsults and microinvalidations that specifically target Black people (Mercer et al. 2011). The authors generated items from Sue, Capodilupo et al.'s (2007) taxonomy and prior qualitative research. Items are scored on a 5-point scale (0 = this has never happened to me; 1 = this event happened but I was not upset; 2 = this event happened and I was slightly upset; 3 = this event happened and I was moderately upset; 4 = this event happened and I was extremely upset). Exploratory factor analysis, item response theory analysis, and confirmatory factor analysis provide psychometric support for this scale.

The Ethnic Microaggressions Scale consists of 12 items derived from qualitative research relevant to Latinx American and Asian American late adolescents (Huynh 2012). This scale comprises three subscales that measure the frequency of and reactivity to racial and ethnic microaggressions: emphasis on differences (e.g., »You are asked ›Where are you really from?‹«), denial of racial reality (e.g., »Someone tells you that racism does not exist anymore«), and negative treatment (e.g., »You are ignored at a store counter as attention is given to a customer [of a different ethnic group from you] behind you«). Frequency items are scored on a 6-point scale (0 = never; 1 = once a year; 2 = 3–4 times per year; 3 = once a month; 4 = once a week; 5 = almost every day) and reactivity items on a 5-point scale (1 = made me feel good; 2 = did not bother me; 3 = bothered me slightly; 4 = upset me; 5 = upset me extremely). Using confirmatory factor analysis, Huynh (2012) found support for the three-factor model for both Latinx American and Asian American adolescents.

Torres-Harding and colleagues developed two measures to assess the frequency of racial microaggressions and resultant distress, respectively. The Racial Microaggressions Scale (RMAS) comprises 32 items derived from prior qualitative research (Torres-Harding, Andrade, & Romero Diaz 2012). The items measure the frequency of experiencing particular racial microaggressions and are scored on a 4-point scale (0 = never; 1 = a little/rarely; 2 = sometimes/a moderate amount; 3 = often/frequently). Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses supported six subscales: invisibility (e.g., »I feel invisible because of my race«), criminality (e.g., »I am singled out by police or security people because of my race«), low achieving/undesirable culture (e.g., »Others suggest that my racial heritage is dysfunctional or undesirable«), sexualization (e.g., »Other people view me in an overly sexual way because of my race«), foreigner (e.g., »Because of my race, people suggest that I am not a ›true‹ American«), and environmental invalidations (e.g., »Sometimes I am the only person of my racial background in my class or workplace«).

Torres-Harding et al.'s second, related, measure is the Scale of Racial Microaggressions Distress (RMAS-Distress); it comprises the same 32 items and six subscales as the RMAS (Torres-Harding & Turner 2015). The distress scale employs

a stem that assesses respondents' perceived anguish upon experiencing particular racial microaggressions (i.e., »If this does happen to you, how stressful, upsetting, or bothersome is this for you?«). Items are scored on a 4-point scale (0 = not at all; 1 = a little; 2 = moderate level; 3 = high level). The subscales demonstrated acceptable internal consistency and convergent validity.

Lewis and Neville (2015) developed the Gendered Racial Microaggressions Scale for Black Women (GRMS) to assess subtle verbal, behavioral, and environmental microaggressions targeted at Black women that may differ from those directed at Black men. It consists of 23 frequency items and 25 stress appraisal items derived from the literature, focus group participants, content experts, and a pilot study. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis supported four subscales: assumptions of beauty and sexual objectification (e.g., »Negative comment about skin tone«), silenced and marginalized (e.g., »My comments have been ignored«), strong Black woman stereotype (e.g., »I have been told I am too assertive«), and angry Black woman stereotype (e.g., »Someone has told me to calm down«). Items are scored on a 6-point scale for frequency (ranging from 0 = never to 5 = once a week or more) and stress appraisal (ranging from 0 = not at all stressful to 5 = extremely stressful).

Also taking an intersectional approach, Keum et al. (2018) developed the Gendered Racial Microaggressions Scale for Asian American Women. The authors generated 22 items from a literature review, focus group discussions, and a content expert review. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses supported four subscales: assumption of submissiveness (e.g., »Others take my silence as a sign of compliance«), assumption of universal appearance (e.g., »Others have suggested that all Asian American women look alike«), Asian fetishism (e.g., »Others take interest in Asian American women to fulfill their fantasy«), media invalidation (e.g., »I rarely see Asian American women playing the lead role in the media«). Identical to the GRMS for Black women, items are scored on a 6-point response format for frequency and stress appraisal.

To our knowledge, only one instrument assesses general perspectives of racial microaggressions. The Acceptability of Racial Microaggressions Scale (Mekawi & Todd 2018) is a 34-item scale that measures how (un)acceptable it is for White people to say certain racial microaggressions. Items were derived from the literature, and then reviewed by focus group participants and content experts. The measure comprises four subscales: victim blaming (e.g., »African Americans would get more jobs if they dressed more professionally«), color evasion (e.g., »I don't see your race, I see you as a person«), power evasion (e.g., »Everyone is treated the same by the legal system«), exoticizing (e.g., »Your skin color is so exotic«). Items are scored from 1 (totally unacceptable) to 6 (perfectly acceptable). Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses provide support for the four-factor solution; the authors also provided estimates of reliability and construct validity.

Documenting the Harmful Effects of Racial Microaggressions

Since its inception, microaggressions theory has been expanded to consider the psychological and physiological effects on BIPoC targets. Researchers have used the scales discussed in the previous section in quantitative research designs with larger samples to understand the frequency and impact of particular kinds of microaggressions, most often on mental health outcomes. The findings from both qualitative and quantitative studies strongly suggest that racial microaggressions are linked to psychological impacts such as decreased self-esteem (e.g., Nadal, Griffin et al. 2014; Thai et al. 2017), stress and trauma (e.g., Hall & Fields 2015; Nadal, Erazo, & King 2019; Torres & Taknint 2015), anxiety (e.g., Blume et al. 2012; Liao, Weng, & West 2016), depression (e.g., Gattis & Larson 2017; Nadal, Griffin et al. 2014; Torres et al. 2010), and suicidal ideation (Hollingsworth et al. 2017; O'Keefe et al. 2015). Prior research has also provided evidence of the physiological effects of racial microaggressions (e.g., Hall & Fields 2015; Huynh 2012; Ong et al. 2017). In a meta-analysis and narrative review, Lui and Quezada (2019) found that racial microaggressions were associated with psychological outcomes using 72 independent samples from published and unpublished studies. Furthermore, their findings showed stronger associations between microaggressions and internalizing (e.g., anxiety and depression) than either externalizing problems (e.g., smoking and alcohol use) or physical symptoms (e.g., cortisol levels).

Several studies have focused on potential mediating and moderating factors that influence the link between racial microaggressions and psychological health. For instance, using a sample of 308 Latinx and Asian American college students, Sanchez et al. (2018) found that racial microaggressions directly associated with psychological distress and engagement coping strategies (e.g., seeking social support), but not disengagement (e.g., avoiding the problem), partially mediated the relationship between microaggressions and distress. Similarly, in two studies Kim and colleagues examined the link between racial microaggressions and mental health (Kim 2017; Kim, Kendall, & Cheon 2017). In a sample of 144 Christian BIPoC students from a private religious university, Kim (2017) found that racial microaggressions indirectly predicted psychological well-being through religious congregational support. In other words, racial microaggressions were negatively related to congregational support, which in turn was positively related to psychological well-being. Kim et al. (2017) also found support for the link between racial microaggressions and lower levels of psychological well-being. In this study, cultural mistrust mediated the association, suggesting that greater cultural mistrust was a mechanism through which microaggressions negatively affected well-being. Thus, there is mounting evidence of a link between racial microaggressions and mental health, as well as exploration of processes and protective factors that help explain this link.

Application to Germany

Because they are interpersonal and located in macrosocial contexts, future research on racialized communities should explore how racial and ethnic groups in and across countries experience racial microaggressions. With notable exceptions (e.g., Burdsey 2011), most research in this field has been conducted in the United States and Canada, and much could be learned from exploring racial microaggressions in other White-dominated nations in Western Europe, Australia, and Aotearoa/New Zealand. Does power privilege and marginalize in similar or different ways in Germany compared to what we know from the United States and Canada? Do the four categories we identify here and their underlying themes take similar or different forms in the German context? To learn from targets' experiences directly, we recommend conducting qualitative research using focus groups and individual interviews of people who represent racially and ethnically marginalized groups in Germany (e.g., Afro-Germans and Turkish Germans) – people who do not match the visual cues of the default »German.« Psychometric scales could also be developed to investigate whether racially and ethnically marginalized groups in Germany experience similar psychological and physiological consequences from racial microaggressions as those in the United States and Canada.

The protests that erupted in Germany during the summer of 2020 in the wake of the widely circulated video of US police officers murdering George Floyd highlighted racial discrimination there as well. These protests provided an opportunity for Afro-Germans and their allies in solidarity with Black Lives Matter in the United States to draw attention to the case of Oury Jalloh, a Sierra Leonean asylum seeker who burnt to death in a cell in police custody in the eastern German city of Dessau in 2005, to structural racism (e.g., Elger 2020), and to everyday experiences of racial and ethnic discrimination (e.g., European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2018). The heightened awareness also helped Afro-Germans obtain support from the Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency to conduct the Afrozensus, an online survey of African and Afro-diasporic people on their experiences of racial and intersectional discrimination (Aikins et al. 2021).

Turkish-Germans have also drawn attention to everyday racism in Germany. In 2018 the Berlin-based Turkish artist and Universität der Künste Berlin faculty member Işıl Eğrikavuk exhibited her photo-performance series *But You Don't* in which she posed in photographs holding a sign that read »But You Don't Look Turkish.« She explained her series in an interview with *Artfridge* magazine as follows: »It is very interesting to be Turkish in Germany due to the long-existing Gastarbeiter community here and due to the strong stereotypes in peoples' minds« (Kaplangi 2018). On her website, Eğrikavuk extended the scope of her message:

Having started to live in Germany, I started to hear this comment ›But you don't look Turkish‹ often. What does a Turkish person look like? What is a Turkish woman

supposed to look like? What are the stereotypes people attribute to others based on their kinships, passport and nationalities? *But You Don't* is a photography work, where I wanted to reflect back this comment to its owners.

The British journalist Bim Adewunmi (2013) similarly recounted her experience of racial microaggressions that target her appearance during her first week in Berlin:

»I felt a tug on my hair from behind. My first thought was: ›Oh my God – is this how I die? Alone in a foreign city?‹ Then I turned around and there was a stranger with his hand in my hair. He met my gaze and said loudly, ›Kunta!‹ and ›fufu.‹ Then he laughed, and with his other hand, poked his friend in the ribs and pointed at me, so he could laugh too. They laughed together and called me those names all the way up the escalator and out on to the street, and then carried on their way.«

Adewunmi concluded that »Kunta« was a reference to Kunta Kinte, the enslaved African man and protagonist of Alex Haley's *Roots*. »Fufu,« she explained, is the name of a staple starchy food eaten across the African continent. »As welcomes to a new city go,« she mused, »it needed a bit of work.« As these two examples suggest, racial microaggressions theory offers a relevant lens for making sense of the subtle and everyday discrimination targeting members of marginalized racial, ethnic, and migrant communities in Germany. There is an urgent need for systemic, empirical research on racial microaggressions and their psychological, social, and physiological impact on BIPoC in the German context.

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