

# Multiracial Microaggression Taxonomy

Subjects: [Sociology](#)

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Substantial scholarship elucidates the prevalence of racial microaggressions in everyday interactions. Racial microaggressions are defined as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color” . Other scholars highlight how racial microaggressions interact with identity characteristics beyond race. For example, they can be “layered assaults, based on race and its intersections with gender, class, sexuality, language, immigration status, phenotype, accent or surname” . Furthermore, microaggressions are chronic stressors that affect the holistic health of people of color with the potential to trigger the development of psychological and physiological health issues. The literature available on multiracial microaggressions and examines how Black-Asian groups in particular are impacted in detail.

[microaggressions](#)

[multiracial](#)

[Reddit](#)

## 1. The Multiracial Microaggression Taxonomy

[Johnston and Nadal \(2010, p. 132\)](#) proposed a theoretical taxonomy to report “microaggressions based on multiracial status, which send hostile, derogatory, or negative messages toward multiracial persons.” The authors captured five multiracial microaggressions which are “experienced by multiracial persons of any racial makeup or phenotype” ([Johnston and Nadal 2010, p. 132](#)). These five microaggressions are highlighted by multiracial respondents and consist of (1) exclusion or isolation; (2) exotification and objectification; (3) assumption of monoracial or mistaken identity; (4) denial of multiraciality; and (5) pathologizing of identity and experiences ([Johnston and Nadal 2010](#)). Utilizing survey data from 262 multiracial respondents, [Nadal et al. \(2011\)](#) expanded the taxonomy to include (6) microaggressions based on racial stereotypes. Below, the six multiracial microaggression categories was discussed in detail.

One of the most dominant microaggressions [Johnston and Nadal \(2010\)](#) identified among multiracial respondents was *exclusion or isolation* from monoracial groups. Scholars (see [Root 1998](#); [Nadal et al. 2013](#)) found that multiracial participants report exclusion and harassment consistently from monoracial family members simply for being a non-monoracial person. In fact, [Nadal et al. \(2013\)](#) argue that a unique element of multiracial microaggressions is the pervasive experiences of racism within a multiracial person’s family. Some multiracial respondents even identify favoritism within their families based on lighter skin tone ([Nadal et al. 2013](#)).

Multiracial folks also report dehumanization processes through racial *exotification and objectification* ([Johnston and Nadal 2010](#)). As [Nadal et al. \(2013\)](#) state, mixed-race respondents consistently report that their race(s) is on

display in casual interactions. Questions such as “What mix are you?” or “What are you?” demonstrate that multiracial groups are forced to reflect upon themselves as racialized objects ([Nadal et al. 2013, p. 192](#)).

*Assumption of monoracial or mistaken identity* originally emerged to account for monoracial populations who “speak to them in different languages (particularly languages that were not related to their heritage)” or “make racist or stereotypical jokes, not knowing that they were multiracial and identified with the targeted race or heritage” ([Nadal et al. 2013, p. 192](#)). However, multiracial folks experience external pressures to ascribe to one race—particularly among family members. For instance, [Nadal et al. \(2013, p. 197\)](#) discovered that monoracial family members engage in “recruitment”, where multiracial participants are asked to “to favor or engage in the cultural practices of one race over the other.”

*Denial of multiraciality* is the fourth identified multiracial microaggression. Research consistently finds that monoracial people deny multiracial identities ([Gillem and Thompson 2004](#); [Nadal et al. 2013](#); [Rockquemore and Laszloffy 2003](#); [Rockquemore and Brunsma 2004](#); [Shih and Sanchez 2005](#)). This theme explains monoracial denial of multiracial discrimination. For example, multiracial respondents report that they were often told to “get over” experiences of racism ([Johnston and Nadal 2010](#)).

The fifth identified multiracial microaggression is *pathologizing of identity and experiences*, where monoracial people act in condescending or patronizing ways towards discussions of multiraciality ([Johnston and Nadal 2010](#)). Within this microaggression, monoracial folks do *acknowledge* multiraciality, but with negative judgment. For example, multiracial respondents explained that monoracial peers would call them “crazy”, when they explained their culture or heritage.

The final microaggression that emerged is *microaggressions based on racial stereotypes* ([Nadal et al. 2011](#)). Within their study, multiracial people reported prejudice based on racial stereotypes. For example, a mixed-race person of Asian heritage explained that people often assumed they were smart in math and science. Compared with monoracial people of color, multiracial people who hold compounded racially minoritized identities are exposed to racist stereotypes for both/all of their racial groups. Then how these five multiracial microaggressions impact Black-Asians within the United States was discussed.

## 2. Multiracial Microaggressions in Black-Asian Literature

### 2.1. Exclusion or Isolation

As double-minoritized people, scholarship exhibits that Black-Asians internally question their place in the communities that represent their heritage when members of those same communities do not accept or acknowledge their multiracial identity. For instance, [Talbot \(2008\)](#) assessed self-labeling in ten multiracial individuals with two racial minority parents including five mixed Asian and Black/African Americans. Many of the study participants revealed not feeling Black or Asian “enough” leading to feelings of isolation and alienation. In *Blackapina*, ([Stickmon et al. 2017](#)), a woman of African-American and Filipinx-American descent describes being a

mixed-race individual as existing at the intersections of life or at a crossroads. This is a divergent racial experience from those who ascribe to monoraciality. [Stickmon et al. \(2017, p. 34\)](#) argues that multiracial persons should be able to “walk multiple paths at the same time” and that this may incorporate “defying the conventional, the orthodox, the hegemonic.” These examples reveal how this group struggles to feel integrated, accepted or “enough” within United States’ society where monoraciality has been normalized and reified.

## 2.2. Exoticization and Objectification

Mixed-race research often highlights the existence of microaggressions or indirect dehumanizing behavior rooted in prejudice, bias, or discrimination against marginalized groups ([Sue et al. 2016](#); [Sue et al. 2008](#)). Studies and the literature that explore Black-Asian experiences reveal the same issue. In the book *Blasian Invasion*, [Washington \(2017b\)](#) assesses how popular culture disseminates hypersexualized depictions of Black and Asian (Blasian) women; thus, visually and symbolically demonstrating this microaggression. These representations of Blasian women in the media utilize gendered racism to project the notion that Blasian women are desirable objects due to their “exotic” looks and hyper-sexualized sexuality. Similarly, in [Castillo et al.'s \(2020\)](#) study, researchers evaluated how internalized oppression impacts Black-Asian identity development. A common theme amongst the shared experiences of the Black-Asian participants encompassed their identity, attracting special attention from individuals who fetishize their “exoticism” or racial heritage, making the participants feel as though they are rare objects of investigation. It is important to note that the dehumanization of Black-Asian individuals due to their mixed-race heritage damages the social standing of this group, consequently aiding the superiority of White monoraciality.

## 2.3. Assumption of Monoracial or Mistaken Identity

[Omi and Winant \(2015, p. viii\)](#) contend that “Race is ‘ocular’ in an irreducible way. Human bodies are visually read, understood and narrated.” The ambiguity of multiracial people’s appearance often disrupts hegemonic understandings of race; thus, sometimes initiating microaggressions related to monoracism. During an interview in [Aracena’s \(2017, p. 44\)](#) research of Blasian youth’s racialized experiences, a participant shared that he would be asked questions such as: “Oh why you look like that? Why is your skin so dark? You have a Japanese parent but why do you look so different?” Likewise, in [Castillo et al.'s \(2020, p. 240\)](#) study on how internalized oppression impacts Black-Asian identity development, a participant named David expressed “it’s not quite clear that I’m mixed with Asian so for that reason, my experiences are largely going to be that of someone who is a Black guy. That’s just how people perceive me.” Overall, external incomprehensibility and a lack of racial intelligibility concerning physical appearance results in many mixed-race persons feeling othered or questioned. Monoracial perceptions of multiracial individuals inadvertently reject all parts of their racial/ethnic background; thus, demonstrating the omnipresence of white ideologies that preserve white dominance.

## 2.4. Denial of Multiracial Reality

In a monoracially ordered society, the idea of a multiracial reality impedes the solidity of the standard monoracial stratification cultivated by Whites to uphold their racial superiority. Frequently, microaggressions render Black-Asian mixed-persons dissimilar from the confines of the hegemonic racial structure. Drawing on personal experiences as

a Black-Asian woman, [Houston \(2017, p. 23\)](#) argues that a more comprehensive way to delineate multiracial identity is to consider it as the self-identifier of an “individual who embodies and embraces two or more races or ethnicities (with at least one being of color) in a composite identity.” On the contrary, Whites formulated a systemic conceptualization of race in a manner that disregards the “total genealogical ethnic actualities” of multiracial people through the confinement and rigidity of racial categorizations as well as the invalidation of composite racial heritage ([Houston 2017, p. 24](#)). Another example of society denying Black-Asians’ reality lies within [Fellezs’ \(2012\)](#) article about the media reception of Jero, Japan’s first Black-Asian enka artist who phenotypically does not align with “normative” ideas of Japanese identity. While Jero embraces both sides of his lineage, the media often questions whether he is Black or Japanese “enough” to be recognized by each of the respected communities ([Fellezs 2012](#)). In doing so, the media and wider public reject his multiracial identity and hinder his capacity to navigate a positionality amongst two races. This experience aligns with Naomi Osaka’s—a multiracial Afro-Haitian and Japanese athlete—treatment and discussion of her racial identities/heritages within the media. For example, in a recent Netflix documentary, Naomi Osaka discusses mainstream confusion between race and nationality that renders Black-Asian individuals both invisible and hyper-visible ([Bradley 2021](#)). When multiracial realities of Black-Asian persons are challenged, the existence of multiraciality is invalidated. This process works to erase and invisibilize multiraciality while reinforcing white supremacy within the broader monoracial paradigm of race.

## 2.5. Pathologizing of Identity and Experiences

Mixed-race individuals receive messages from society that suggest they are perplexed about their identity or that their existence is deviant, as they do not fit the standard monoracial schema. Relatedly, the Black-Asian literature also exhibits the pathologizing of identity and experiences. In [Castillo et al.’s \(2020, p. 238\)](#) article, Black-Asian participants reported that they were told “Black people do not do that kind of stuff,” or asked, “Are you proud to be Black?” In *My So-Called Identity*, Mitzi Uehara [Carter \(1999\)](#), the daughter of an Okinawan (Japanese origin) mother and African American father, discusses her experience as an individual of mixed-Asian descent. Mitzi recounts “half-hidden looks of disgust” from other Japanese women towards her mother due to their disapproval of interracial marriage and the by-product of multiracial children ([Carter 1999, p. 202](#)). When reflecting on the realities of belonging to the multiracial Asian community, [Carter \(1999, p. 202\)](#) asserts “[their] bodies, [their] presence, [their] reality are a nuisance to some because [they] defy a definite and demarcated set of boundaries.” Both experiences mentioned displays of how wider society internalizes normative white supremacist ideas of race as static, “pure”, and monoracial. In turn, there is a disdain for deviation from monoracial norms which is conveyed through microaggressions towards Black-Asian individuals. Research has yet to explore the multiracial microaggressions that Black-Asian individuals experience in the United States. This speaks to how race is often essentialized within race scholarship as well as the absence of interrogating multiraciality in microaggression literature.

## 2.6. Microaggressions as Racial Stereotypes

[Nadal et al. \(2011\)](#) found that mixed-race populations experience racial stereotyping at similar rates to monoracial minority groups. Unfortunately, there is little empirical investigation into how Black-Asian individuals self-report

racial stereotypes; thus, most of the research on Black-Asian stereotypes draws from representation in the media ([Herold et al. 2020](#); <sup>[1]</sup> [2017a](#); [Feng 2018](#)). For instance, [Herold et al. \(2020\)](#) analyzed the identity construction of Vietnamese and African-American actress, Karrueche Tran, in the television show *Claws* ([Laurence 2018](#)). Their findings suggest that popular culture stereotypes Black-Asian womanhood as hyper-sexual, parallel to the “jezebel” controlling image stereotype of monoracial Black women ([Hill Collins 2000](#)) or the purity stereotype of monoracial Asian women ([Chou 2012](#); [Herold et al. 2020](#)). For illustration, [Herold et al. \(2020\)](#) find that multiracial Black-Asian women are depicted as simply “displaying” sexuality, whereas monoracial Black women are shown to “deploy” theirs. Furthermore, in a review of media coverage on Tiger Woods, [Washington \(2015\)](#) found that the professional golf player navigates both Black racial stereotypes, such as “hyper-sexuality”, “hyper-aggression”, and “criminality”, and Asian stereotypes such as “bad-driver”, and “femininity”. Thus, as a double minoritized group, Black-Asian individuals are vulnerable to racial stereotypes from all sides of their identity, particularly in the form of racialized and/or gendered sexualization.

### 3. Critical Race Theory and MultiCrit Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) is a framework that elucidates the connection between race, racism, and power as well as the ways in which they manifest within society and culture in the United States ([Crenshaw et al. 1995](#); [Delgado 1993](#); [Taylor 1998](#)). Although the inception of CRT began within legal studies, CRT can be applied and utilized within multiple disciplines, including within Sociology. Critical race theorists do not approach all social problems in the same way, however, central tenets guide and ground the theory across disciplines. These key tenets include (a) the centrality and ordinary nature of race, racism, and their intersections with other forms of oppression; (b) the challenge to dominant ideology; (c) a commitment to racial and social justice; (d) the importance of experiential knowledge, narratives, and counter-storytelling; and (e) trans- and inter-disciplinary perspectives and approaches ([Harris 2017](#); [Solórzano et al. 2000](#)).

Although critical race theorists recognize the limitations of binary thinking in relation to social reality, including the utilization of the Black–White binary in relation to race and racism ([Delgado and Stefancic 2017](#)), a monoracial paradigm of race remains largely persistent within CRT. CRT developed in conjunction with civil rights efforts spearheaded by African Americans ([Brayboy 2005](#); [Harris 2016](#)), which influenced this school of thought to focus on race relations in alignment with the Black/White binary. Consequently, scholars that focus on other racialized groups expanded CRT to account for individuals who exist outside of the Black/White binary such as Latinx CRT (LatCrit), tribal CRT (TribalCrit), and Asian CRT (AsianCrit). The emergence of LatCrit, TribalCrit, and AsianCrit provides space for racialized experiences and social problems to be centered, such as dispossession of land, citizenship, migration, xenophobia, and linguistic discrimination ([Brayboy 2005](#); [Ochoa 2013](#)). In a similar way, critical multiracial theory (MultiCrit) adds to CRT by highlighting the ways in which race is not only socially constructed but also that race is explicitly constructed in a way that adheres to monoracial understandings of race and racism (<sup>[2]</sup> [2017](#)). [Harris \(2016\)](#) specifically adapts four key tenets of CRT to formulate a comprehensive MultiCrit. These include (a) racism as endemic expanded to racism, monoracism, and colorism; (b) structural determinism and Black/White binary adapted to the monoracial paradigm of race; (c) differential racialization

expanded to differential micro-racialization; and (d) intersectionality adapted to the intersections of multiple racial identities. MultiCrit is guided by CRT but allows for a focus on multiracial complexities, colorism, monoracism, and histories of anti-miscegenation as they relate to a monoracial social order ([Harris 2017](#)).

## 4. The Monoracial Paradigm of Race and Monoracism

MultiCrit encourages moving beyond a critique of binary thinking in relation to race; instead, it highlights a particular monoracial paradigm of race which does not allow space or language for multiracial individuals ([Harris 2017](#)). This monoracial paradigm of race has been co-constructed through white supremacy in the United States. Racial categories are not only socially constructed, as highlighted by CRT, but are also constructed through a rigid monoracial schema ([Guillermo-Wann and Johnston 2012](#); [Harris 2016](#)). The monoracial paradigm of race relies on monoracism, which can be defined as “a social system of psychological inequality where individuals who do not fit monoracial categories may be oppressed on systemic and interpersonal levels because of underlying assumptions and beliefs in singular, discrete racial categories” ([Johnston and Nadal 2010, p. 125](#)). Monoracism is inextricably linked with racism, given that there are numerous types of racism ([Guillermo-Wann and Johnston 2012](#)), and serves as a tool to maintain a monoracial-only paradigm of race, thereby erasing, excluding, and invisibilizing multiracial people ([Harris 2017](#)).

The monoracial paradigm of race operates at the individual, interactional, and institutional levels, whereby monoracial identities are imposed onto multiracial individuals through forced self-identification, interpersonal relations, and institutional organization. Monoracism can be perpetuated by all racial groups, however, monoracism is most often “horizontally perpetuated by communities of color, vertically perpetuated by white communities, and may also be internalized and maintained by multiracial individuals” ([Harris 2016, p. 806](#)). As the social construction of race and the monoracial paradigm of race were implemented through colonialism and racialized social control, the monoracial paradigm of race should be understood as forced upon monoracial Black and Asian individuals through socialization in the United States, rather than willingly adopted. Regardless of the racial background of the enacter, monoracism does have the potential to invoke negative mental, emotional, and psychological impacts for multiracial people, however, the directional differentiations (horizontal vs. vertical) help to demarcate differences in institutional power and privilege when these microaggressions occur. Particularly, the ways in which monoracism and the monoracial paradigm of race reinforce and uphold white supremacy, while subjugating other monoracial groups, *only* benefits white communities.

Given that the multiracial microaggression taxonomy is the most popularized model surrounding multiracial microaggressions, the researchers utilize this framework within the analysis of Black-Asian Reddit users. The researchers test, focus, and critique the multiracial microaggression taxonomy by exploring microaggression narratives of Black-Asian Reddit users. As biracial/multiracial populations with White heritage are overrepresented in mixed-race research ([Charmaraman et al. 2014](#)), the researchers explore how current microaggression categories compare with a multiracial population that holds two or more racially minoritized identities. In doing so, the researchers explicate how these incursions, derivative of white supremacist notions, maintain multiracial subordination as well as bolster monoracial and *monoracist* paradigms of race.

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