In his book *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation*, Derald Wing Sue posits the thesis that daily microaggressions are far more detrimental and harmful to people of color, women, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) people than are highly visible, egregious, and hateful racist, sexist, and homophobic acts. A microaggression is an act that is just beneath visibility or consciousness that is a slight, a put down, an insult, or an invalidation that the perpetrator is mostly unaware of having committed. Sue maintains that a perpetrator can be anyone: a colleague, friend, neighbor, boss, peer, doctor, patient, and so on.
Sue argues that the most damaging microaggressions are committed by those in power against those who are part of a marginalized group. He asserts that microaggressions are detrimental to the “target” and the “perpetrator”; however, most of the harm is exacted upon the target.

Sue’s major goal in writing this book is to end microaggressions, particularly against all marginalized groups, by presenting research, data, and theories that show how such amelioration can be achieved. While Sue focuses on people of color (i.e., African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinas/Latinos, Native Americans), he indicates that the theories, research, and interventions strategies can be extrapolated to any marginalized group.

It is easy to recommend this book, which is divided into four major topical sections: (a) Psychological Manifestations and Dynamics of Microaggressions; (b) Microaggressive Impact on Targets and Perpetrators; (c) Group-Specific Microaggressions: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientations; and (d) Microaggressions in Employment, Education, and Mental Health Practice.

Each section has three chapters that provide extensive research and theories to support the identified topic. For example, in Section 1 of Chapter 1, Sue uses the work of leading researchers and scholars such as Jones (1997); Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, and Willis (1978); and Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakami, and Hodson (2002) to help the reader understand the definition of microaggressions. Sue further clarifies for the reader the very nature of microaggressions by providing short case studies, vignettes, or direct quotes from participants who have been a part of his numerous research studies over the last several years.

Also, in Chapter 4 Sue opens with short stories told from the perspective of targets—an African American man, a White woman, and a lesbian. Each relates his or her story in an authentic voice that allows the reader to witness the invisible nature of the microaggression, the potential for the event to be considered small or trivial by the general public, and the psychological distress to each target. These kinds of true incidents keep the book engaging and insightful.

The one feature that I found most helpful about the organization of the book is that each chapter ends with a section titled The Way Forward. Here, Sue provides compelling insights and interventions to help the reader with ideas regarding what can be done about the issues raised in the chapter.

The Way Forward is consistent with and supportive of Sue’s goal for the book: “to present research, data, theories, and practical suggestions as to how to overcome microaggressions” (p. xix). Without these sections, I believe that readers could finish the book feeling overwhelmed by Sue’s presentation of the almost all-encompassing nature of daily microaggressions.
Contributions to the Literature

Sue describes two formulations created by his research team that help to frame the discussion and guide the reader through an understanding of the impact of a microaggression. Sue and his team have modified the original racial microaggression taxonomy to include gender and sexual orientation.

The taxonomy illustrates that a microaggression can be verbal, nonverbal, or environmental. The chart then shows three categories of microaggressions: microinsults, microassualts, and microinvalidations. Most helpful is the final part of the taxonomy that lists and describes common themes that hold hidden (or invisible) messages that are delivered by the perpetrator and usually perceived by the target.

For example, one theme is the ascription of intelligence, evidenced by remarks that suggest how well an Asian American student will do in math or surprise when an African American man does well in engineering. Examples of other themes include color blindness, evidenced by individuals saying to a person of color that they do not see color; use of heterosexist language such as when a male pronoun is used to refer to a mixed-gender group; or the myth of meritocracy, signaled by an employer defending giving jobs to only men because he has hired the “most qualified individual.”

These themes would fall under the categories of microinsults or microinvalidations. A microassault would be a more blatant and visible act against a target. The reader is likely to have an “ah-hah” moment when he or she reviews these themes.

A similar insight might occur when the reader reviews Sue’s Microaggression Process Model. The model consists of five phases or domains (incident, perception, reaction, interpretation, consequence) that move from the beginning microaggression incident to the consequences for the recipient. The themes described in the taxonomy are located in the first phase.

The next four phases enable the reader to understand why and how microaggressions can be psychologically and physically harmful to the recipient. The model provides a description of the incident and then a look into the cognitive processing that is likely occurring within the target or recipient.

It is by addressing these hidden thoughts and processes that the reader is able to get a picture of why Sue argues that microaggressions are so harmful. Sue convincingly supports his arguments with state-of-the-art quantitative and qualitative research from leading researchers and scholars who have validated concepts such as aversive racism (Dovidio et al., 2002) and help to lay the foundation for the research by Sue and his team.
Potential Reader Reactions

This book is likely to be uplifting for some readers and difficult to digest for others. In an unyielding manner, Sue describes incidents that are often left hidden and unspoken among mixed race/ethnic, gender, and sexual orientation groups. If the incidents, statements, and thoughts are lifted up for discussion, the social or professional forum would likely become uncomfortable for many of the participants.

Yet Sue argues throughout the book that microaggressions must be made visible. He repeats the mantra of microaggressions being invisible so often that the reader will be haunted by thoughts of what might be the next microaggression he or she will encounter or deliver.

White individuals may be especially troubled by the content because much of the book speaks to the power relationship between White individuals and people of color. In the United States, White individuals on the whole are viewed as the power or dominant group; people of color are more marginalized.

Sue asserts that microaggressions are more likely to be delivered by the dominant group to the marginalized group and likely to do more harm to the marginalized person. If White individuals are open to the research presented by Sue, they may feel overwhelmed by the daunting task of changing behaviors suggested by The Way Forward sections. If individuals deny the research, they are likely to retreat to the stance that the entire book “makes a mountain out of a molehill.”

Limitations and Concerns

Although Sue dedicates entire chapters of the book to each group (i.e., people of color, women, and LGBTs), I was left with a sense that the book mainly focuses on Whites as perpetrators of microaggressions. People who are members of marginalized groups and commit microaggressions might miss the point that all groups commit these debilitating acts. Though I suspect that the largest part of the problem will always live with the group in power, every person must work assiduously to eliminate microaggressions from our society if we are to move forward and thrive in an equitable manner.

I was also left wondering how to get the person who either denies the entire microaggression thesis or denies committing personal microaggressions to take the first look at the possibility that microinsults and microinvalidations are real. Perhaps including such a discussion would have been too tangential for this book, yet for me the discussion would have been helpful.
It would also have been useful to provide marginalized individuals with more resources for engaging perpetrators when a microaggression happens. Sue does an excellent job of giving voice to the fears of marginalized targets when they find themselves wondering why they feel badly after an invisible invalidation, slight, or insulting encounter. It is very affirming to realize that the feelings are based in a process that can be articulated.

## Conclusion

Sue builds on the long history of multicultural work by writers including Janet Helms, Paul Pederson, Don Atkinson, Robert Carter, William Cross, John Dovidio, Maria Root, and numerous others. The Way Forward sections in Chapters 11 and 12 are replete with specific examples for educators and mental health practitioners. I found these two sections to be especially strong; if educators and practitioners begin implementing these suggestions, we will make significant strides toward shining a light on, giving voice to, and perhaps ameliorating microaggressions.

*Microaggressions in Everyday Life* is robust with science and practice. The writing is engaging and thought provoking. It is a major contribution to the multicultural field and to the larger society.

## References

