

RACELIGHTING ***in the Normal*** ***Realities of Black,*** ***Indigenous, and*** ***People of Color***

A SCHOLARLY BRIEF

WOOD & HARRIS III



An understanding of contemporary challenges facing Black, Indigenous and People of Color involves an understanding of systemic oppression as well as how racism manifests at the interpersonal level. In this brief, we offer racelighting as a framework for understanding the process by which interpersonal racism leads BIPOC to question their own realities and sanity.

Racelighting in the Normal Realities of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

Authors

J. Luke Wood, Ph.D.
Distinguished Professor of Education
Vice President for Student Affairs and
Campus Diversity
San Diego State University

Frank Harris II, Ed.D.
Professor of Postsecondary Education
Co-Director of the Community College
Equity Assessment Lab (CCEAL)
San Diego State University

Reviewers

Eric Bishop, Ed.D.
Superintendent/President
Ohlone Community College District

Keith Curry, Ed.D.
President/CEO, Compton College

Idara R. Essien, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Child and Family
Development, San Diego State University

Angélica M. González, Ed.D.
Project Director, Title V Stem
Orange Coast College

Cedric. D. Hackett, Ed.D.
Associate Professor, Director, DuBois-
Hamer Institute for Academic
Achievement
California State University, Northridge

Ashanti Hands, Ed.D.
Vice President for Student Services
San Diego Mesa College

Ivan L. Harrell II, Ph.D.
President, Tacoma Community College

Adriel A. Hilton, Ph.D.
Dean of Students, Seton Hill

Rebecca A. Neal, Ph.D.
Gordon B. Sanders Chair and Associate
Professor of Education, Hamline
University

Carlos Nevarez, Ph.D.
Chair and Professor, Graduate and
Professional Studies in Education
California State University, Sacramento

Christopher B. Newman, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Higher Education,
Azusa Pacific University

Clyde Wilson Pickett, EdD
Vice Chancellor and Chief Diversity
Officer, University of Pittsburgh

B.J. Snowden, Ed.D.
Interim Vice President of Enrollment
Services and Student Success
Los Rios Community College District

Molly Springer, Ed.D.
Associate Vice President, Student
Success and Educational Equity,
California State University, San
Bernardino

Scott W. Thayer, Ed.D.
Vice President for Student Services
San Bernardino Valley College

Jacob Alvarado Waipuk
Chair of Tribal Relations, Tribal Liaison
& Assistant Professor, American Indian
Studies, San Diego State University

Lawanda Wesley, Ed.D.
Director of Quality Enhancement
and Professional Development, Early
Learning, Oakland Unified School District

Soua Xiong, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Counselor
Education and Rehabilitation, Fresno
State University

In the wake of George Floyd, millions of people have expressed a desire to build a more harmonious nation. This racial reckoning should involve efforts to come to terms with the historical ills of our nation as well as the continued oppression faced by minoritized communities. An understanding of contemporary challenges facing Black, Indigenous and People of Color involves an understanding of systemic oppression as well as how racism manifests at the interpersonal level. In this scholarly brief, the authors offer racelighting as one mechanism among many (e.g., explicit bias, implicit bias, microaggressions, Racial Battle Fatigue) that must be understood to fully account for and address how racism manifests in the daily, lived experiences of BIPOC. The interpersonal experiences of BIPOC are shaped by this widely understood, yet underdefined aspect of interpersonal racism. In this brief, we offer racelighting as a framework for understanding the process by which interpersonal racism leads BIPOC to

question their realities and sanity. To provide context to this conversation, we first explore the term gaslighting.

The concept of gaslighting originates from a 1938 play Patrick Hamilton wrote called *Gas Light*. The play features an affluent couple named Jack and Bella Manningham who move into a new home in an upscale neighborhood. Throughout the play, Jack mistreats and psychologically torments Bella. He purposefully engages in actions to make Bella feel she is losing her sanity. Jack brazenly flirts with their housekeeper in front of Bella. When Bella raises concerns about his flirting, he denies he has done anything inappropriate. Jack hides objects around the house, including pictures, silverware, and penchants. Throughout the play, he accuses Bella of stealing the items he has hidden. The term gaslight, as derived from the title of the play, comes from scenes where Jack is using light in a different part of their building. Given the lights are powered by gas, the lights in the part of the building near Bella become dimmer.

Bella is made to believe she is imagining this, too. Bella questions what she sees, feels, experiences, and hears. The veracity and convincing nature of Jack's assertions makes Bella begin to believe Jack may indeed be right. This is further bolstered by his appearance as a devout Christian who leads prayer time and reads the Bible. Moreover, given Bella's own mother suffered from mental illness, Jack's assertions are seemingly probable. However, to those watching the play, it is clear Jack is a habitual liar and is intent on making Bella believe she is going insane. This play has been turned into several film adaptations, including *Angel Street*, and has served to influence how popular society views the use of tactics resulting in individuals questioning their reality.

Drawing from this, the term *gaslighting* refers to a form of psychological abuse where a “perpetrator distorts information and confuses a victim, triggering the victim to doubt their memory and sanity” (Tormoen, 2019, p. 2). Although the play depicts Jack

as intentionally distorting Bella's reality, the common use of the term gaslighting does not carry this connotation. Gaslighting, therefore, can be done consciously or unconsciously with no intended end or purpose (Abramson, 2014). The term gaslighting is believed to have first originated from a 1969 paper by Barton and Whitehead, where the term was used in an analysis of patients who were abused by being involuntarily hospitalized. The term was used sparingly by psychotherapists in the 1970s and 1980s and re-popularized in the mid-2000s (see Sweet, 2019). Most notably, the term returned to wider use after the publication of *The Gaslight Effect*, a pop psychotherapy book written by Stern (2007), co-founder and associate director of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence and an associate research scientist at the Child Study Center at Yale.

The term gaslight has been traditionally conceptualized as occurring in heterosexual relationships between a man (the perpetrator) and a woman (Brandt & Rudden, 2020; Calef

& Weinshel, 1981; Gass & Nichols, 1988). The term gaslight is not necessarily associated with racism or other forms of marginality; however, this has shifted in recent years. In the past decade, the term has been applied more broadly across identity groups. For instance, Wozolek (2018) applied gaslighting to the experiences of queer students in school, where they receive messages that privilege heteronormative people and actions. With a focus on transgender children, Riggs and Bartholomaeus (2018) reflected on parent-child relationships from clinical counseling. They noted parents gaslight their children by deferring to act on their gender identity, intentionally forgetting information such as hormone therapies, and placing the emotional burden of transitioning on the child, especially in the context of negotiating and navigating how extended family would respond.

In a racial context, Roberts and Andrews (2013) used the term gaslighting to discuss the experiences of African American teachers. They proposed that Black educators

have been historically gaslighted through narratives suggesting they are incompetent and undesirable. They noted these narratives mirror those about Black students and are reinforced by law and policy that positions Black educators as unqualified. They pointed to the rationales used for the nonrenewal of Black educators after *Brown v. Board of Education*, noting many Black educators were "let go" as they were perceived to be less desirable. Although the court ruling was blamed, the underlying reason was the desire not to have Black teachers educating White students.

Davis and Ernst (2017) also focused on gaslighting within a racial context, which they termed racial gaslighting. They defined racial gaslighting as "the political, social, economic and cultural process that perpetuates and normalizes a white supremacist reality through pathologizing those who resist" (Davis & Ernst, 2017, p. 3). They argued racial gaslighting relies on racial spectacles, narratives that serve to disguise the role of White supremacy within a state power structure. To articulate

this power structure, Davis and Ernst employed policy and case law examples to demonstrate how racial gaslighting plays out in case law. One example highlighted how anti-Asian discrimination manifested in *Korematsu v. United States*. Korematsu was a Japanese American who refused to report for internment, arguing it was racial discrimination in concentration camps. The U.S. government defended its actions by alleging that racial prejudice was not a motivating factor but rather that internment was a public safety measure to protect Americans from the Japanese Empire. The Supreme Court affirmed this stance and also argued that the use of the word concentration camps framed “relocation centers” in a negative light. Thus, in this case, the racial spectacle was used to cover the true intentions of state-sanctioned actions meant to criminalize a specific racial group. The government did not issue a formal apology and reparations for the surviving victims until 1988, when the Civil Liberties Act was signed (Hatamiya, 1994).

Tobias and Joseph (2020) used gaslighting as a conceptual lens to examine racial profiling against Canadians of African descent. They focused on the practice of “carding,” where a police officer stops a person to ask for information without any actions that warranted the stop. This information is written on small cards (hence the name carding) and is retained in a police database. They noted the use of carding has been disproportionately used in larger initiatives designed to target low-income communities and is acutely used against people who are Black, Indigenous, and low income. In their analysis of articles from 27 media outlets, they found framing from the police that indicated macro-level gaslighting. Specifically, the police failed to correct media statements that used terms like “street checks” and “carding” separately, despite being the same practice. Moreover, after not correcting this misunderstanding, police representatives actively stated their officers do not engage in carding, suggesting street checks were a distinct practice (despite being the same).

The focus in the media transitioned from disproportionate use against Black people and illegality of the carding practice overall to emphasizing the need for discussion on defining each practice and associated expectations. Narratives put forth by law enforcement officials further obfuscated the practice by suggesting people had the right to decline the stop—in practice, this was not the case.

Recently, Rodrigues, Mendenhall & Clancy (2021) used gaslighting as a framework to discuss the experience of Women of Color scientists. Moving away from a policy and case law focus exemplified in prior works, their research demonstrated gaslighting should be understood through the intersectional identities of Women of Color at the interpersonal level. Although most scholars have articulated gaslighting against People of Color as an interpersonal and macro-level phenomenon, Rodrigues et al. have a more intentional focus on the interpersonal level.

In their focus groups with 15 Women of Color scientists, they identified common experiences with uncivil discourse and harassing behaviors. Incivility refers to rude or derogatory actions and messages that can serve to exclude Women of Color (Rodrigues et al., 2021). For instance, this could include someone refusing to shake the hand of a Woman of Color scientist or refusing to look her in the eyes. They also noted gender harassment and racial harassment can occur. A range of examples was offered, including male colleagues kissing female colleagues on the cheek, negative remarks and jokes about People of Color and/or women, or questions and statements denying the existence of race and racism. Rodrigues et al. also noted gaslighting against Women of Color could be further intensified by White allies who fail to disrupt negative remarks and actions that were clearly negative, thereby demonstrating surface-level allyship instead.

Although the original form of gaslighting was more abrasive and upfront, the approach to how it is applied in a racial context is arguably more sinister. This is due to the fact that race-based gaslighting affects individuals interpersonally but is also institutionalized in the social fabric of the masses which holds the power and influence in society. Next, we explore the interpersonal nature of race-based gaslighting.

***...Gaslighting
against Women
of Color could
be further
intensified by
White allies who
fail to disrupt
negative remarks
and actions that
were clearly
negative.***



DEFINING RACELIGHTING

More closely aligned with the interpersonal aspects of gaslighting Rodriguez et al. (2021) offered, we conceptualized “racelighting” as a form of gaslighting affecting the daily, normalized experiences and realities of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). Therefore, we defined racelighting as “the process whereby People of Color question their own thoughts and actions due to systematically delivered racialized messages that make them second guess their own lived experiences [and realities] with racism” (Wood & Harris III, 2021, para. 4). Racial microaggressions are used as a means to racelight People of Color (a relationship further explicated in the next section). The most common messages reinforce assumptions that BIPOC are criminals, lesser than, and academically and/or cognitively inferior. When experiencing racelighting, People of Color may be led to second guess their

experiences, feelings, capabilities, knowledge, decision-making, recollections, and basic humanity. When racelit, People of Color begin questioning their own realities and whether they are indeed unintelligent, prone to maladaptive behaviors, of lesser worth, overly sensitive, or less capable than their peers. In addition, it should be noted that People of Color can also racelight one another. This is especially true when internalized messages about racism are accepted tacitly or even explicitly.

Following Stern’s (2007) use of the terms “gaslighter” to refer to the perpetrator and “gaslightee” to refer to the victim, we employ “racelighter” to refer to the perpetrator and “racelightee” for the victim. That said, unlike gaslighting, racelighting is not typically experienced in the context of a relationship

between only two people. A racelighTEE can experience multiple racelighTERS with similar messages—even when those messages are not coordinated—in a given social context, situation, or organization. For instance, racelighting could involve a Black student in a gifted and talented program starting to question whether they are indeed high performing. RacelighTERS conveying messages that lead the student to doubt their ability could include the student’s teacher, counselor, and other students in the program. A teacher may repeatedly engage in actions that force the student to prove their intelligence when others are not questioned with such intensity. Although this may be an ongoing phenomenon the student experiences, microaggressive messages are repeatedly reinforced when they meet with their counselor about college plans. The counselor may recommend they explore a less selective institution, one that will “best fit their needs” and can “support them in succeeding.” The subtlety of this message could be intensified by other students in the program who avoid

working with the student on group projects, assignments, and demonstrations. Although the student may perceive the teacher as the primary racelighTER, other microaggressive messages further reinforce the belief that the student is *not* really that smart and does not belong. Thus, the persistence and veracity of the messages rendered from a racelighTER or racelighTERS to a racelighTEE convey a reality that makes the messages (no matter how erroneous) more believable, realistic, and plausible. These messages are further reinforced by the fact that racelighting tactics (e.g., microaggressions) are conveyed by numerous perpetrators and even tacitly by well-meaning allies. This is due to the fact that the messages are normalized and occur in the daily experiences of BIPOC.

Racelighting can be more intensely experienced when People of Color question their experiences with racism and its intersections with other forms of marginality (e.g., sexism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, classism, and religious

discrimination). When this occurs, similar to the play *Gas Light*, their experiential realities can be questioned. The veracity and passion of a racelighter's assertions of innocence or claims of misinterpretation connote a reality that is believable and seemingly credible. As Dovidio and Gaetner (2000) noted, this may be due to perpetrators rarely evaluating their own perceptions, behaviors, and actions. Given this, some may believe a distorted reality where their actions are defended in good conscience (Sue, 2005). Others may be deliberately untruthful to protect themselves from accusations of racism and other forms of discrimination. Regardless, the authentic presentation of these misleading narratives can lead People of Color to feel they have possibly misunderstood, did not understand the full context, or were being too sensitive. Even when this does not occur, the veracity of the claims of innocence can lead the

racelighter to feel disoriented due to the disconnection between the racelighers assertions and reality.

Overall, when racelighting occurs, it can lead BIPOC to doubt themselves and their abilities. For example, a Black administrator who receives a negative performance evaluation despite being high performing may begin to question whether they are as effective as they thought they were. This can be further intensified if the negative evaluation has feedback that has not previously been shared with the administrator or has concerns that seem disproportionately heightened. A Latinx scholar who publishes in journals on social justice and cultural issues may be questioned on the quality of their scholarship and credibility of the journals they publish. The scholar may begin to doubt their own reputability and contributions to the academy. A Native student who raises concern about a campus building being named after

someone who committed genocide against their people—and who then receives harsh backlash in response—may question whether they were being overly sensitive, especially if the building is named after someone who is viewed as key to the institution’s history and school spirit. They may be led to believe, even slightly, that it is not worth raising concern or that they are being unnecessarily difficult. A Southeast Asian high school student who hopes to attend a college or university may be led to doubt their academic capabilities, especially if their successes are ignored, played down, or refuted by classroom teachers. They may begin to believe school is not for them. Overwhelmingly, these messages connote stereotypical assumptions about BIPOC, particularly that they are criminal or defiant, academically inferior, of lesser worth, or overly sensitive. These microaggressive messages can sow doubt and can affect their actions, dispositions, and beliefs, even when consciously rejected by the racelightedee. They can also sow seeds of affirmation

and confirmation to those observing the racelighting who tend to believe the microaggressive messages.

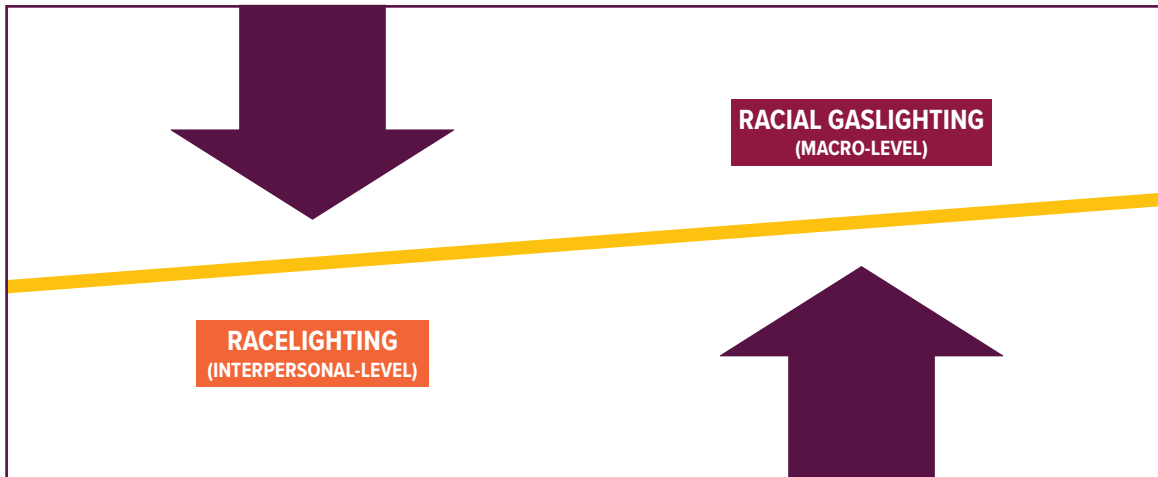
RACIAL GASLIGHTING AND RACELIGHTING

Although racelighting is focused specifically on the interpersonal level, prior scholars have more intently examined gaslighting at the macro level. In many ways, the relationship between the two levels is akin to the relationship between macroaggressions and microaggressions, whereby messages conveyed at the macro level serve to intensify messages at the interpersonal level, the difference being gaslighting in a racial context focuses on the role macroaggressions and microaggressions have in disorienting people and color. Prior examinations of gaslighting in a racial context focus most clearly on the macro level with a particular focus on policy and case law (e.g., Roberts & Andrews, 2013; Tobias & Joseph, 2020). Davis and Ernst’s (2017) explication of racial gaslighting

can serve as a model framework for this perspective. Although their work is framed in a legal context and addresses racial narratives (called racial spectacles) that advance White supremacist power structures by the state, their work is directly applicable to how gaslighting in a racial context occurs at a macro level in all arenas (e.g., legal, cultural, and historical). Thus, in this terminology, racial gaslighting occurs at the macro level, though it recognizes the role these messages have on individuals and how racelighting

is felt interpersonally. An understanding of racelighting is essential because when un-countered at the interpersonal level, racelighting serves (and has served) as the precursor to bringing systemic racism and oppression to scale (see Figure 1). Moreover, racial gaslighting fuels narratives at the macro level that affect individuals at the interpersonal level.

FIGURE 1. *Bi-Directional Relationship between Racial Gaslighting and Racelighting*



Informed by this perspective, there are numerous examples of racial gaslighting. For example, enslaved Africans were taught using heavily redacted versions of the Bible. These versions emphasized language on slavery and deleted whole sections focused on freedom (Frühwirth, 2020; Zehavi, 2019). More specifically, the Slave Bible omitted verses in the Bible books of Exodus and Jeremiah that condemned the stealing of people to sell into slavery and requiring the labor of others without compensation (Shepherd, 2019). This reality was reinforced by popular interpretations suggesting that enslaved Africans were the descendants of Ham. In the Bible book of Genesis, a controversy emerges after Noah and his family (including his three sons Ham, Japeth, and Shem) exit the ark after the flood. After a long day of tilling the land, Noah drinks from his vineyard and falls asleep drunk and naked in his tent. Ham finds Noah asleep in his tent, and, rather than cover him, he instead tells Shem and Japeth. Upon waking up, Noah curses Ham, telling him he and his descendants would be “slaves unto his brothers.” This is one of many verses used to

justify slavery to the enslaved. In this context, enslaved Africans were the descendants of Ham and therefore their enslavement was reasonable, appropriate, and just (see Goldenberg, 2009). In total, enslaved Africans were led to believe any desire for freedom was not part of the natural order or God’s will.

Another example of racial gaslighting is the genocide committed against Native American peoples, resulting in the loss of millions of Native lives. This included Native American men, women, and children who were intentionally targeted in widespread massacres (Madley, 2015). This was followed by the brutal practices of the boarding school era, where Native American children were taken from their families and brought to “schools” where they were intentionally stripped of their linkages to their families and cultures. They were physically beaten, underfed, and purposefully taught to view their families and communities as lesser than. Even to this day, narratives around these events are either justified, downplayed, or examined without context to the extreme impact on

Native peoples. Too often, when these issues are raised, the response is to “accuse Natives as being too sensitive or too politically correct when we point out historical errors and oversights and are told to ‘get over it’” (Nez, 2016, p. 2). These messages are adjoined with notions that these events occurred in the distant past and that Native Americans may “have it good” because of financial operations (e.g., hotels and casinos) on their land.

Contemporarily, the longstanding NFL protest in support of racial injustices led by Colin Kaepernick serves as another example of racelighting. This occurred when Kaepernick was condemned for kneeling during the national anthem in protest of racial injustice. Kaepernick’s actions were meant to draw attention to issues, such as the police-involved murders of Black people, but instead his actions were framed as being “unpatriotic,” “anti-American,” and dishonoring fallen soldiers, the military at large, and the American flag (Schad, 2020). The consternation reached a pinnacle when former President Trump told

“owners to get any ‘son of a bitch’ who didn’t stand for the anthem off the field” (Boren, 2020, para. 12). He then went on to encourage owners to “fire” athletes who kneeled during the anthem (“Trump Wishes NFL Owners,” 2017). Both political leaders and the media reframed the intention of the silent protest by deliberately asserting misleading narratives about Kaepernick and those who supported his protest. As a result, the pervasiveness of the narratives of being anti-American, antipatriotic, and antimilitary even led some individuals in the Black community to question whether or not these accusations were true. This was especially true at the height of the protest before public opinion on this issue began to sway. Ultimately, the shifted narrative served to disorient those who held similar concerns about issues of police brutality and racial injustice.

Another contemporary example of racial gaslighting is Standing Rock, the protest against the Dakota Access Pipeline. The protest began in 2016, after LaDonna Brave

Bull Allard, a Lakota elder, established the Sacred Stone Camp. The camp was meant to protest the approval of the construction of the Energy Transfer Partners' pipeline through the northern United States. The pipeline was seen as a threat to the region's water quality and ancient burial grounds. The camp swelled in numbers with thousands of Indigenous and non-Indigenous water protectors. The water protectors were beaten, pepper-sprayed, shot using rubber bullets, sprayed with water cannons, and bitten by dogs (Levin, 2017; Tromblay, 2020). Despite this, news agencies shifted the focus away from the original concern about water rights and protecting the integrity of ancient burial grounds. Instead, Walker and Walter (2018) reported some news agencies engaged "negative portrayals of Standing Rock protesters as violent criminals trespassing on private property" (p. 411). In these articles, the water protectors were portrayed as deviants and troublemakers, and law enforcement officers were portrayed as heroes. Other narratives in the media also redirected the focus of Standing Rock to wider

issues of environmental and social justice. The preponderance of the shifting narratives, particularly those around criminality, may have led some supporters to tacitly and internally doubt their approaches and intentions. This is especially true in the context of hundreds of years of colonizing practices that advanced cultural lenses based on western values—values that reduce injustices (i.e., infrastructure projects) to obscure counts of displacement and economic impact without an understanding of the damage these efforts have on people and their communities (Devault, 2016).

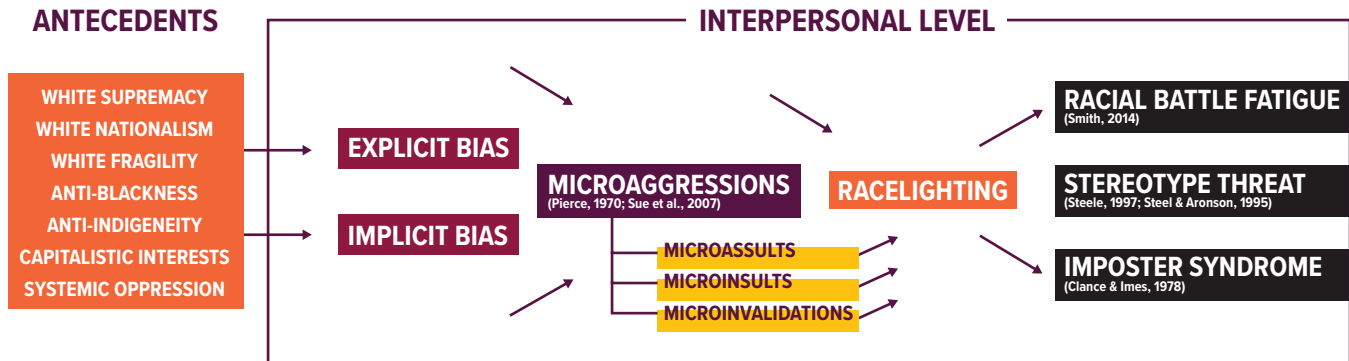
Again, although these racial gaslighting incidents occur at the macro level, they are also experienced at the individual level. This differs from racelighting that is experienced interpersonally through similar narratives and messages that lead to individuals questioning their own experiences, perceptions, and memories due to messages delivered to them directly.

RACELIGHTING PROCESS

Racelighting is an outgrowth of an American capitalistic society that has its historical roots in White supremacy. White supremacy here refers to the beliefs embodied within White culture that deem other races and people as less dignified and/or worthy. More simply, it occurs when the White race sees itself as superior to others (Bonilla-Silva, 2001). As Davis and Ernst (2017) noted, in the United States, racial spectacles occur when narratives about society are meant to cover up the White supremacist power structure.

In addition to White supremacy, other antecedents to the interpersonal racelighting process and racelighting experience include White nationalism (i.e., the linkage of White supremacy values with those of a nation-state; Amaya, 2018) and White fragility (i.e., when racial conflict triggers defensive mechanisms from White people; DiAngelo, 2011) (see Figure 2).

FIGURE 2. *Racelighting Process*



Although White supremacy, nationalism, and fragility affect all People of Color, there are also unique relationships between Whites and Black and Native American communities. For instance, anti-Blackness manifests as a unique form of racism against Black people due to the permanent association of Black people with Chattel slavery and subsequent views that they are lesser than (Wilderson, 2010, 2018). Given the enslavement of Black peoples, segregation, and the prison industrial complex, there is a unique historical relationship leading to anti-Blackness. Similarly, the unique relationship between Whites and Native peoples is grounded in generations of genocide. Prior to contact with Europeans, there were an estimated five million Native Americans in the United States, a number that fell below a quarter-million by 1900 (Madley, 2015). This genocide also coincided with boarding schools, involuntary relocation (i.e., the Trail of Tears), and destabilization of Native sovereignty by the federal government. As a result, anti-Indigenous actions continue the exploitation and oppression from settler colonialism (Grenier, 2020). Both anti-Blackness and

anti-Indigeneity can also reside in non-White communities adhering to or subtly supporting a White racial normative. Anti-Asian and Anti-Latinx discrimination has also risen to increase awareness in recent years, especially with the assaults on elders in the Asian community. All of the aforementioned antecedents have some relationship with capitalistic interests, where rife economic conditions for People of Color serve to benefit White communities. These interests are advanced through systemic oppression, whereby laws and policies are used to advance the power of dominant groups and to further the subordination of non-dominant groups. There are innumerable examples of this, including Jim Crow, housing discrimination, and court minimalization of injustices against People of Color.

These antecedents to racelighting inform implicit and explicit biases held against BIPOC. Explicit biases are overt and intentional beliefs that negatively view, characterize, and engage others. Often, these biases are self-reported as being consciously held by individuals (Hehman et al., 2019; Leitner et al., 2016).

In contrast, implicit bias refers to “the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner” (Staats et al., 2015, p. 62). Implicit biases are more likely to be conveyed when individuals process information automatically and unconsciously and with lower effort. This tends to occur when individuals are in heightened emotional states, have incomplete information, are experiencing time constraints, or have their cognitive control compromised (i.e., due to stress or loss of sleep; Bertrand et al., 2005; Staats, 2016). When this occurs, their minds employ traces of past experiences, informed by the racelighting antecedents, to convey negative messages to People of Color. This results in racial battle fatigue, stereotype threat, and imposter syndrome.

A clear outgrowth of implicit and explicit bias is racial microaggressions. The term *microaggressions* was coined by Pierce in the 1970s as part of an attempt to articulate the ways subtle discrimination manifests in the everyday lives of Black people and communities (Pierce, 1970; Pierce & Allen, 1975). Sue’s work

has advanced the concept of microaggressions considerably. Sue et al. (2017) defined *racial microaggressions* 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” (p. 271). Sue et al. (2017) identified three types of microaggressions: microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations. Microassaults are like old-fashioned racism and include explicit messages of racism (verbal or nonverbal) that intend to hurt or discriminate against People of Color. This can include the use of racial epithets; displaying swastikas; or purposefully avoidant, discouraging, or debasing actions. Microassaults are most closely aligned with explicit racism. Unlike microassaults, both microinsults and microinvalidations are often unconsciously rendered from the perpetrator to the victim and thus are associated with implicit biases. Microinsults are messages that insult, demean, or convey a lack of respect toward People of Color. For example, these messages can convey that People of Color are criminals, unintelligent,

and lesser than. Common examples of this could be a racelighter saying with a sense of surprise, “Wow, you are so articulate” or “I didn’t expect you to know that!” They could also include a teacher assuming that a student who performs well on an exam or paper has cheated because they are a student of color. Moreover, assumptions that BIPOC come from communities that do not care about school, are lazy, and have unengaged parents are common statements rendered by racelighters. Wood et al. (2017) referred to these assumptions of criminality, ascriptions of intelligence, and second-class treatment as distrust, disdain, and disregard. Wood (2019) suggested distrust, disdain, and disregard are the three most recurrent examples of microaggressions facing Black children and youth in education. Lastly, Sue et al. (2007) described microinvalidations as acts serving to reduce the experiences, realities, and thoughts of People of Color. Microinvalidations often deny People of Color their individual experiences with racism, and convey that they do not belong nor perform well because they do not work hard enough.

We assert microaggressions are racelighting tactics used toward People of Color, though microinsults and microinvalidations are more common racelighting strategies than microassaults. As noted previously, racelighting is the process by which BIPOC begin to question their own sanity, realities, experiences, knowledge, and memories due to systemically delivered messages. So, although microaggressions are the means by which someone experiences racelighting, the process through which these messages serve to accumulate and distort the realities of People of Color is racelighting. Ultimately, experiences with racelighting may lead to imposter syndrome, an affective response where individuals begin to doubt their abilities to the point that they have concern others will deem them a fraud (Clance & Imes, 1978). Another outgrowth of racelighting is stereotype threat. According to Steele (1997), stereotype threat occurs when learners are concerned about reifying negative stereotypes about their abilities. This concept is based on the notion that People of Color are often perceived to be academically inferior and therefore may

have concerns about justifying this stereotype. Students who take exams and tests in environments where there are stereotypes about their academic inferiority are less likely to perform well than they are in environments where these stereotypes are actively dispelled (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Even more, racelighting is hypothesized to lead to racial battle fatigue, a term named by Smith (2004), who presented a framework that can be used to make sense of the effect of racism (explicit and implicit) on individuals. Smith et al. (2007) argued racism can serve to affect one's cognition, psychology, and physiology. This can lead to a host of physiological outcomes, such as tension headaches, an elevated heartbeat, fatigue, loss of appetite, or jaw clenching. Psychological symptoms can include a range of feelings, such as hopelessness, loss of confidence, social withdrawal, and frustration. As Smith et al. (2006) noted, these symptoms can lead People of Color to question their life's work and worth.

Psychological symptoms can include a range of feelings, including hopelessness, loss of confidence, social withdrawal, and frustration.



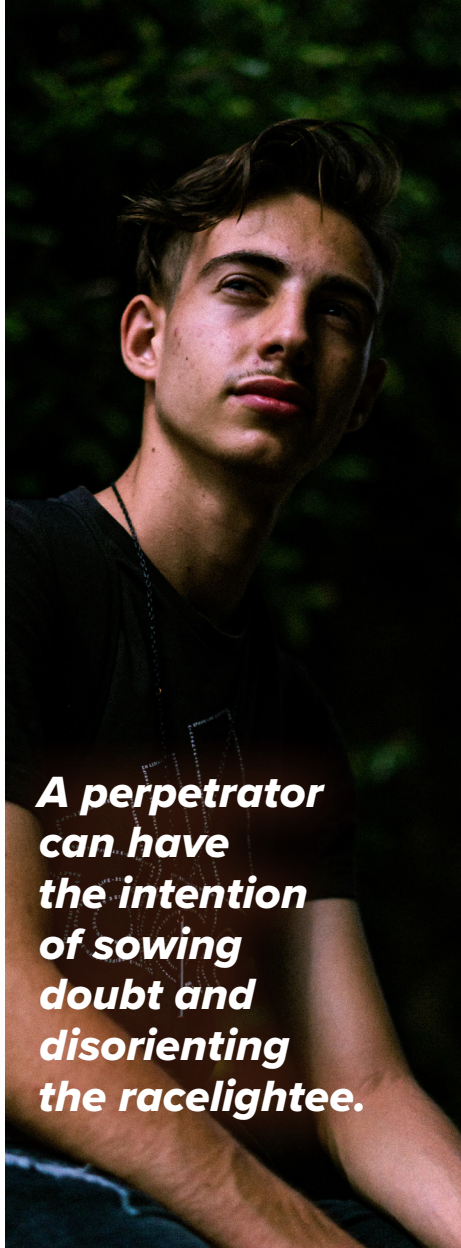
THREE COMMON TYPES OF RACELIGHTING MESSAGES

ACTIVE RACELIGHTING

PASSIVE RACELIGHTING

DEFENSIVE RACELIGHTING

As noted, racelighting occurs as a function of microaggressions. Specifically, research has shown microaggressions can foster an attribution ambiguity, where the intent of the message to the recipient is unclear (Sue, 2010). This can lead the racelightee to feel a sense of doubt and disorientation. However, there are at least three distinctive ways microaggressions can lead to racelighting. First, someone can experience racelighting through microaggressions of all kinds (e.g., microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations) where there is no intent from the racelighter to intentionally sow doubt and disorientation. We refer to this as "passive racelighting." Second, someone can experience racelighting as part of a response to being microaggressed. For example, let's assume someone has been told with a sense of surprise that they are "very smart." The recipient may bring this microaggression to the attention of the person (or perpetrator) who made the statement. In response, the perpetrator defends their words and actions by sowing doubt and disorientation in the mind of the recipient. This can occur intentionally or unintentionally. We refer to this as "defensive racelighting." Third, racelighting can occur with the intention of doing so. Thus, a perpetrator can have the intention of sowing doubt and disorienting the racelightee. This type of racelighting is most closely akin to the form of gaslighting depicted in the original play. We refer to intentional efforts to racelight individuals as "active racelighting."



***A perpetrator
can have
the intention
of sowing
doubt and
disorienting
the racelightee.***

AMPLIFICATION FACTORS

The intensity of the interpersonal messages which cause one to question their sanity can, in part, be attributed to amplification factors. For example, as previously articulated, racial gaslighting at the societal level can intensify messages at the interpersonal level. For example, a young Black boy may experience racelighting as a result of an assumption of criminality, when People of Color are assumed to be dangerous and have malintent (Sue et al., 2007). In his school, he may be labeled by teachers as “aggressive,” “hyperactive,” and a “troublemaker” (Essien-Wood & Wood, 2020). As a result, he may be more closely monitored for wrongdoing, singled out for punishment, and subjected to harsher and more prolonged punishments (Wood, 2019). These continuous actions of teachers toward this child may lead him to question whether or not he is actually “bad.” This message is amplified at the societal level because of similar messages that depict Black people, particularly Black men, as dangerous.

These messages are reinforced in the popular media through coverage of police-involved murders, such as the murders of Michael Brown, Jr., Tamir Rice, Alfred Olango, and George Floyd. This is especially true given coverage of police-involved murders often blames the victims for their loss of life (Dukes & Gaither, 2017). Thus, the veracity and persistence of these macroaggressions at the societal level can intensify the degree to which similar interpersonal messages seem plausible. Although these messages are reinforced by macroaggressions, the disproportionate representation of Black people in the prison industrial complex also serves as a societal factor that can intensify the seemingly legitimate nature of illegitimate messages directed toward the child in question. With this in mind, societal-level amplification factors can include, but are not limited to, macroaggressions, the prison industrial complex, widespread economic disparities, and lack of positive representation in the media.

TABLE 1. Amplification Factors

LEVEL OF AMPLIFICATION	KEY AMPLIFICATION FACTORS		
Macro-Level	Macroaggressions Prison Industrial Complex	Economic Disparities Lack of Positive Media Representation	Racial Gaslighting
Interpersonal-Level	Accumulation of Messages	Authority or Credibility of Messenger	Intersectional Identities

Note: *This listing is demonstrative and not exhaustive.*

At a societal level, racial gaslighting also serves as a direct amplification factor. As Davis and Ernst (2017) noted, racial gaslighting is embodied through racial spectacles that seek to distort narratives in ways that advantage a White supremacist state power structure. This is evident in case law and policy when court rulings obfuscate the true rationale for state-sponsored mistreatment of Communities of Color. One example includes the case of the *Commonwealth of Kentucky v. Braden* in 1955. In this case, Andrew and Charlotte Wade were aided in purchasing a home in Kentucky by White activists Carl and

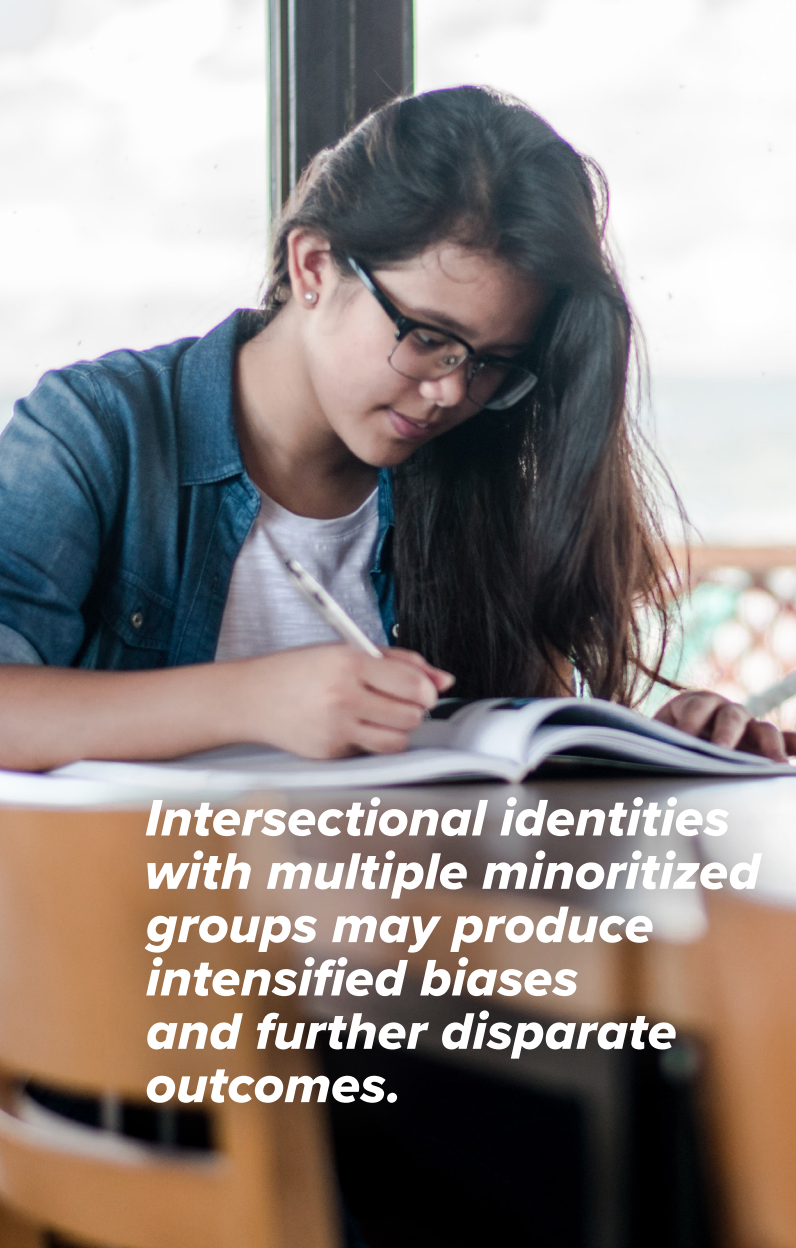
Anne Braden. After increasing tensions about a Black family purchasing a home in an all-White suburb, their home was firebombed, with the bomb placed beneath their child’s bed. It is believed the bomb was placed by an ex-police officer. Ultimately, Carl Braden was unjustly charged with the bombings, and his reputation was debased by assertions that he was a communist. Calling civil rights leaders communists was a common tactic employed during miscegenation and segregation. In this case, this argument distorted what really occurred to the Wade family. Thus, legal cases that deprioritize the

experiences and realities of People of Color and their allies also serve as amplification factors.

Other amplification factors can occur at the interpersonal level. As noted previously, the number of individuals communicating a seemingly coherent microaggressive message can reinforce the credibility of messages received. Moreover, an accumulation of messages must also be considered. A message that has been conveyed infrequently to the racelightee throughout their life or in a specific social context (e.g., school, work, community) is less likely to be believed than messages the racelightee has heard repeatedly throughout their lives or within that social context. For instance, a Latino who has been exposed to stereotypes assuming Latinos are job stealers who take away employment from “deserving Americans” may dismiss these stereotypes early on in his life. However, if he hears this message over and over again from others (e.g., friends, acquaintances, and teachers), and even

jokingly from family members, he may begin to believe there is *some* truth to this point. If he is hired at a new job where he hears accusations that he was only hired due to affirmative action policies, he may start to believe the stereotype of job stealing is accurate. This may be further intensified by statements from coworkers who routinely emphasize how deserving other new hires are and deemphasize his contributions.

Interpersonal power dynamics can also amplify racelighting. As such, a person who is largely respected and/or in a position of authority can convey messages viewed as being more credible. For example, if a renowned faculty member questions the writing ability of a Black female student, this message may be viewed as more believable. Possibly this student has excelled at writing throughout her life, despite wider stereotypes that assume she lacks the capability to do so. Thus, positional power can further amplify the credibility of a message, even when the student has ample evidence that the assumption is erroneous.



Intersectional identities with multiple minoritized groups may produce intensified biases and further disparate outcomes.

Another key example of an interpersonal amplification factor is intersectional identities. As Crenshaw (1995) noted, intersectionality refers to identities as complex and not myopic; therefore, all of one's identities can serve to shape one's experience with biases in specific ways. As such, a person with a confluence of minoritized identities will have a different reality than a person bearing only one of those identities. For example, a Native American employee working in a nonprofit organization may face stereotypes about their academic aptitude. However, this aptitude is further questioned if the person has a disability and is a woman. This is due to converging stereotypes that assert similar or related messages of academic inferiority. Therefore, intersectional identities with multiple minoritized groups may produce intensified biases and further disparate outcomes.

CASE EXAMPLES OF RACELIGHTING

To provide a more transparent picture of racelighting and its impact on the experiences, well-being, and success of BIPOC professionals, we offer four composite narratives of situations in this section involving implicit and explicit bias and racial microaggressions that result in imposter syndrome and racial battle fatigue. These narratives are based upon insights we have gathered over the past several years through focus groups with educators who shared critical moments and traumatic experiences in their professional journeys. Although the narratives are focused on one individual, each narrative is based on a collection of shared experiences from several individuals.

“The Promotion”

Tawny is a Mexican American woman who has worked in advertising for the past ten years and has been with her current agency for the past six years. She was initially hired as an advertising specialist and was promoted to advertising coordinator after one year. After being in this position for three years, she was promoted to advertising manager. Each year, her performance evaluations have been consistently “excellent,” and she has been praised for her work in several key areas, including attracting new business, excelling in client relations, and leading the team members who report to her. Twice, she has won the agency’s Employee of the Year award. Yet, despite these successes, there have been occasional issues that have impacted her overall satisfaction by the agency. She is one of five Women of Color at the agency, which has more than 50 employees, and one of two at the mid-management level. She also has faced difficulty from one of her male colleagues who has a hard time taking

guidance and direction from women. Further, there was one instance in which another colleague made a racially insensitive joke to Tawny at the agency's holiday party. This interaction sparked a conflict that impacted their working relationship and required her and Tawny to participate in a mediation session recommended by the agency. Tawny's experience has typified that of BIPOC women working in Corporate America, especially in advertising.

When Tawny's supervisor left the agency to take a position elsewhere, the agency launched a search for his position as creative director. This position was the next logical step in Tawny's career and would position her to achieve a goal she has been working toward her entire career—to start her own agency. Tawny was highly qualified for the position, and hiring her made perfect sense for the agency to maintain continuity in its creative operations, as Tawny worked very closely with her supervisor during their time together. In fact, everyone at the agency assumed

Tawny would be promoted into the position. About a month after receiving applications, the agency sent out an announcement to share that Brad, one of the team members who had been reporting to Tawny for the past two years, was promoted to the creative director position. Tawny was immediately triggered upon reading the announcement because she had hired and trained Brad. She was largely responsible for teaching him most of what he knew about the creative side of the business and had invested heavily in Brad's professional development by sending him to conferences and putting him on high-profile advertising projects at the agency. Tawny was never interviewed for the creative director position. In a follow-up meeting with the agency's assistant to the CEO, Tawny was told she was never considered for the position. When she inquired as to why she was not considered, the CEO shared some concerns about her capacity to “manage her emotions” and referenced Tawny's mediation with the colleague who made the racially insensitive joke. He also made reference to

Tawny’s “poor working relationship” with the male colleague who struggles to take direction from women. Specifically, he said that Tawny should have “been the bigger person” in these circumstances and that the way she addressed both situations “caused further division and negatively impacted the work environment.” Devastated and confused, Tawny began to question her professionalism and wondered if she was as effective in her role as she once thought. She also experienced overwhelming guilt for the ways she handled the situations

involving the two colleagues, feeling she should have remained silent rather than advocating for herself. When discussing the concerns with a friend, she shared:

I never should have said anything about the incident at the holiday party. I was trying to stand up for myself and make sure she didn't say to others what she said to me. But it just made them see me as an angry, emotional Mexican woman. Maybe they are right. You can't be emotional in corporate America. Perhaps I'd be better off doing non-profit work or something like that. Now I am questioning all of my relationships and the agency and wondering what folks are thinking when they see me. I feel like everyone sees me as a problem now.

“The Token Black Candidate”

Teri is a Black woman who works as a senior associate athletics director at a university in one of the NCAA’s Power 5 conferences. During her college years, Teri was a former standout basketball student-athlete. After not being drafted into the WNBA, Teri played professionally in Europe, Asia, and Latin America for five years. Once she retired from professional basketball, Teri returned to her alma mater for graduate school and completed a master’s degree in sports psychology. While in graduate school, Teri was hired by the athletics department to assist in fundraising and donor relations. After one year, she was promoted to associate athletics director/director of development. While working as an associate athletics director, Teri earned a PhD in organizational leadership with the goal of building her capacity to lead an athletics department.

After about five years of success as an associate athletics director, a search firm invited Teri to interview for the director of athletics position at a university in a mid-major conference. Teri prepared diligently and had a stellar interview with the search committee. Not surprisingly, she was named one of three finalists for the position. Again, Teri had a great second-round interview, which was with the university president, the faculty-athletics representative, and the head of the search firm. She also participated in a public forum with the university community and local media where she had the opportunity to share her vision for how she would lead the department. By all indications, Teri was the leading candidate and was expected to get the position. In fact, her interviews and presentations were so good that local media reported Teri would likely be the school’s next director of athletics and the first woman and person of color to hold the position. However, another candidate, a White male, was

ultimately chosen for the position—much to the surprise of Teri, the search committee, the university community, and the local media.

Teri and the other finalist who was not selected had the opportunity to debrief with the search firm that led the process. This was Teri's first time working with a search firm as a candidate. She was informed (privately) that although she was the university's top choice, she was not the search firm's choice candidate primarily because she was "new to the scene," had not been "vetted" by the firm, and the candidate who was chosen was "next in line" to be promoted. Teri was also told she needed to spend the next couple of years ingratiating herself with the search firm so they could become more familiar with her. It became immediately clear to Teri, she was the token Black candidate in this process. Regardless of how well she did in the search process, she had no chance of getting this job. Teri also received feedback that was jarring, to say the least—that she presents as "standoff-ish" and "bossy."

Of course, being a former athlete, this was not the first time Teri had been branded with these racist stereotypes, but she was surprised to see them manifest in what was supposed to be a transparent search process. Teri was left wondering what she could do with this feedback. On one hand, she really wanted to be a director of athletics, as this had long been a professional goal of hers; on the other hand, she was not comfortable with having to ingratiate herself to a search firm—led by a group of influential White people—to have an opportunity to be placed nor was she comfortable having to negotiate her identity in response to racial stereotypes. Teri also began to question her credentials and wondered if she should have gotten a law degree or an MBA like most of the other athletics directors in the country. She also began to question whether she was indeed "standoff-ish" and "bossy." She seriously considered this feedback, even though it had nothing to do with her actions, performance, or qualifications.

“On Occupied Indigenous Land”

Naomi is an assistant professor in the anthropology department at a research university that serves more than 20,000 students and has nearly 2,000 employees. She is one of 10 faculty members who identify as Indigenous at the institution. The university has never had an Indigenous professor promoted to associate professor or full professor in its 100-year history. The university is situated in the Rocky Mountain region of the United States and sits on occupied Indigenous land.

Naomi is in her third year as an untenured assistant professor at the university. Her experience thus far has been very challenging as she has found it difficult to build rapport with colleagues in her department and outside of the university. During her very first faculty meeting, one of her male colleagues introduced her as the department’s “affirmative action hire.” Needless to say, Naomi was embarrassed and immediately wondered if she had made the right decision in

choosing to work at this institution, especially considering she had turned down two very competitive offers at other institutions. Another incident directly targeted Naomi. She decided to include a land acknowledgment in all of her course syllabi and began every class session by reciting it out loud. On the first day of class each semester, Naomi explained what the land acknowledgment meant and shared why it was important for students to recognize that they are learning on occupied Indigenous land. Most students accepted this practice, but, every semester, at least one student would write disparaging comments on Naomi’s teaching evaluations—usually accusing her of forcing them to engage in practices that were “weird” or “against their religion,” specifically citing the land acknowledgment as the primary example. One student went so far as to file a complaint with the department chair about the land acknowledgment. To make matters worse, the department chair harshly reprimanded Naomi and asked her

to discontinue the land acknowledgment because it “was making some students uncomfortable.”


Naomi’s experience in the community was especially hostile. She lived within a short walk to campus, which meant many of her neighbors were students who attended the university. One Halloween, a group of students who lived in her apartment complex decided to throw an Indigenous-themed party. More than 50 students attended the party dressed in costumes and body paint that portrayed racist and dehumanizing images of Indigenous people. Despite being incredibly hurt, Naomi approached this as a learning opportunity for the students. She visited them the next day to explain why the party was racist and in direct conflict with the university’s espoused values of diversity, equity, and inclusion. The students were disrespectful and immediately accused Naomi of being “way too sensitive” and “playing the race card.” When Naomi rebutted, the conversation became more intense and

ended with the students slamming the door in Naomi’s face while yelling profanity at her. Naomi was shocked and hurt but didn’t know what to do.

She began to second-guess her own thoughts around these issues. She wondered if she was indeed being too sensitive or making a bigger deal out of these incidents than she should be. However, she remembers words from her elders that encourage her to remember the plight of her people. So, she pressed forward and addressed the matter with the Office of Student Conduct. Upon addressing the matter with the Office of Student Conduct, she was told nothing could be done because the incident took place off campus and the students did not violate any codes of conduct. She considered whether she was wrong—questioning her own memories, knowledge, and instincts. She constantly reminds herself that she is not at fault, but gets to a point where she considers whether she has a true place in an institution that will not support her. As a result of this

incident and the university's response, Naomi chose to leave the institution and concluded that an academic career is not what is best for her safety and well-being. In discussing the decision with her mentor, she shared:

I haven't had a good night's sleep in almost 3 years. Every time I head to campus, I feel anxiety. My heart starts racing and I sweat profusely. Sometimes I stay in my office for hours with my door closed so I won't have to interact with anyone. I went to see a therapist and all they did was refer me to a psychiatrist to get some medication. This job is going to literally kill me. I have to get out before it does.

A young Black man with short, curly hair is shown in profile, looking out a large window. He is wearing a dark blue t-shirt. The background is bright and out of focus, suggesting an outdoor setting with trees. The lighting is natural, coming from the window.

The messaging of racial gaslighting and racelighting are so powerful that even those that are oppressed, and underserved can succumb to deleterious ideations if efforts to gain a higher consciousness are not present.

"When They Teach Us"

John and Tracy Williams' family lives in Southern California with their two children, Blaine, a sixth-grade boy, and Maya, a fourth-grade girl. The Williams are a multiracial family. John is African American. Tracy is multiracial. Her father is White and her mother is Latina. Both of the Williams kids attend a local elementary school that has a reputation for being excellent academically and well resourced, offering lots of enrichment activities, and having experienced teachers. Families from across the city desire to have their kids attend the school. It is also a choice school for many of the city's teachers and administrators. John and Tracy learned about the school long before they decided to have kids. Thus, when they were ready to purchase a home, they intentionally found one in the school's service area so their kids would be able to attend.

Both of the Williams kids have attended the school since kindergarten. Maya's experience at the school has been seamless

and easy. She performs extremely well academically. She listens attentively and stays on task during class time. All of her teachers have found her to be a delight to have in class. However, Blaine's experience has not been as smooth as his younger sister's. Blaine is extremely intelligent, but he is also very active and has lots of energy—especially during the afternoon hours. Although Blaine always manages to get his work completed, he sometimes finds it hard to stay on task. He is also a very social kid and has lots of friends, so it is not uncommon for him to socialize at times during class. Teachers have described Blaine as “difficult” and “hard to manage.” On several occasions, he was referred to the principal's office for being “defiant” and has been suspended twice during enrollment at the school. Both suspensions were for being disruptive and refusing to follow directions. This has been a concern for John and Tracy, as they have always felt Blaine was being unfairly targeted by his teachers. There have certainly been occasions when they

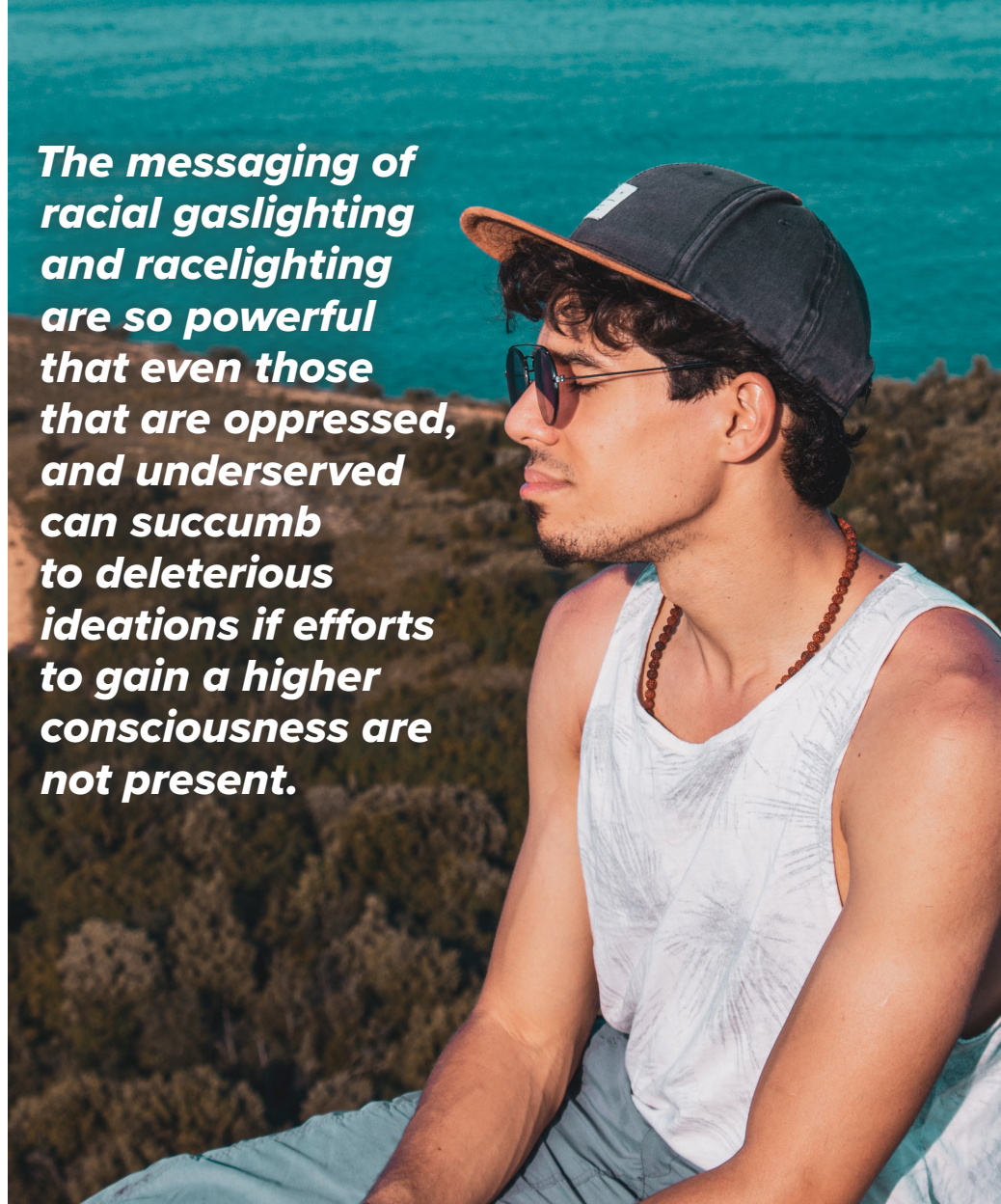
have been embarrassed and frustrated with Blaine for “not being able to comply and fit in.” There are only 20 Black families at the school, and Blaine is the only Black boy in the sixth grade. Despite their concerns, the Williams have decided it was best to keep Blaine at the school because of its resources, academic rigor, and reputation; however, they often question if they made the right decision. Admittedly, when incidents involving Blaine occur, they wonder if they are good parents and, at times, have even questioned if Blaine is a good kid.

One day John received a phone call from the school nurse to inform him Blaine had been injured. According to the nurse, he and another kid had run into each other on the playground, but Blaine was the only one who had been injured. When John arrived to pick Blaine up from school, he immediately noticed he had a badly swollen eye, which was very inconsistent with the injury the nurse had described on the telephone. When John asked Blaine what happened to his eye, he shared that another kid intentionally punched

him because he had gotten upset during a basketball game. When John brought this to the nurse’s attention, she referred him to the principal to discuss it. The principal informed John he had “fully investigated” the situation and determined Blaine was the aggressor. This entire investigation was based solely on word-of-mouth accounts from the kids. No adult was able to corroborate what they had shared. Blaine insisted that he was not the aggressor and that the other kid threw the first and only punch in the situation. When John asked if the other kid would be held accountable for this, the principal said it was against the school’s policy to share how other kids would be disciplined, but he did note the kid who struck Blaine “is a nice kid who never gets into trouble.” He further added that because Blaine “has a history of misbehavior,” he found it hard to believe Blaine “did not do something to provoke the punch.” John was immediately triggered by this, passionately shared how upset he was, and insisted to be connected with the school district so he could file a complaint. Minutes later, there was a knock on the principal’s office door. School

security had been called by the receptionist who became concerned when she heard John “yelling at the principal.” John was escorted off campus by school security. Both he and Blaine were upset. Blaine cried uncontrollably the entire ride home. Frustrated and dismayed by what had occurred, John and Tracy are feeling immense guilt and remorse for keeping Blaine in this environment and doubting him. Even with such clear evidence of mistreatment, John wonders if he approached the situation right. Was he not effective as a father? Was Blaine a “bad” kid? Would these issues occur at the new school? Was John a bad parent? Ultimately, John began to doubt himself.

The messaging of racial gaslighting and racelighting are so powerful that even those that are oppressed, and underserved can succumb to deleterious ideations if efforts to gain a higher consciousness are not present.



CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Racelighting is an outgrowth of microaggressions (e.g., microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations), where BIPOC begin to question their own sanity. Given the prevalence of messages communicated in the normal, daily experiences of People of Color (see Sue et al., 2007), all People of Color experience racial gaslighting and racelighting. The messaging of racial gaslighting and racelighting are so powerful that even those that are oppressed and underserved can succumb to deleterious ideations if efforts to gain a higher consciousness are not present. In doing so, these values perpetuate the racist ideologies that can be passed on from one generation to another. Given this, the authors conclude with recommendations on how those affected by racelighting can counter the negative effects of this phenomenon.

First, those who experience chronic racelighting should actively engage in practicing self-care. Self-care should involve efforts to care for oneself physically, mentally, and spiritually. This is essential due to the toll microaggressions and racelighting have on the body and mind. This relationship was well articulated by Smith (2004) who described the physiological and psychological effects of racial battle fatigue. Thus, individuals can care for themselves by exercising, meditating, praying, being part of a religious community, and practicing healthy eating patterns. Moreover, targets of racelighting can benefit from seeking out personal or group healing (e.g., lodge, church, healing circle) and/or counseling to help process the events and experiences. This should occur within a counseling context that has an understanding of the role of race and racism (and other forms of marginality), particularly in multicultural

counseling settings. Moreover, individuals can practice positive affirmations of self and community.

Second, those who experience racelighting should be intentional about learning about the factors involved in the racelighting process. This includes an in-depth understanding of explicit and implicit bias as well as racial microaggressions and all the associated categories (e.g., microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations) and subtypes (e.g., assumptions of criminality, ascriptions of intelligence, and second-class citizenship). In addition, those who experience racelighting should actively seek out resources on racial gaslighting (offered throughout this brief) and on racial battle fatigue, stereotype threat, and imposter syndrome. All of the associated works are important to gain a sense of understanding over processes that affect the normal, daily experiences of People of Color. These works can provide a sense of control and a language to discuss the issues BIPOC face in their lives.

Third, targets of racelighting should intentionally identify personal and professional communities inside and outside of the domain(s) where racelighting occurs. For instance, a Black faculty member experiencing racelighting in their department may want to engage in community with other Black faculty outside of their department or college (e.g., an employee resource group, ongoing discussion circle, or professional learning community). These communities can be formal or informal, as long as they provide space to make meaningful connections and to share experiences that help to dispel the notion that these issues only affect them. They will find that these experiences are common for all BIPOC, which can serve to dispel the seeming legitimacy of microaggressive messages. Another example could be joining an organization or community outside of one's work. For example, a Latinx employee at a major company who also identifies as transgender may find a healthier sense of community and solidarity outside of their company. They may engage in a local club or

organization or a community-based support program that actively creates safe spaces for transgender People of Color. For the greatest benefit, the spaces those who experience racelighting engage in should be supportive of their “whole” identities. For example, a space that is welcoming for a Latinx person but not for those who identify as transgender is less desirable for providing the appropriate counterbalance to work than a space that is intentionally antiracist and antitransphobic.

Fourth, if individuals who experience racelighting find themselves in a particularly damaging environment, they should make plans to transition to more welcoming spaces as soon as they can. For example, this could be transitioning from one department to another, one school to another, or one nonprofit organization to another. This is true even if the newer environment is seen as “less prestigious,” as the long-term effects of racelighting can be damaging to People of Color. Either way, long-term exposure to

microaggressive messages must be avoided when there are the conditions and agency to do so.

Lastly, we recommend that racelightees document their experiences with microaggressions, racelighting, racial battle fatigue, and all other related concepts discussed in this brief. This can be done by journaling or keeping a diary of one’s life experiences with and reflections on racism. This will allow the racelightee to gain a perspective on their condition and to more meaningfully make sense of their experiences. This can serve as a tool for understanding the microaggressive messages they receive and empower them to have control over these messages. Ultimately, this may serve to provide a sense of security against the effect of racelighting that tends to make them feel less sure of their knowledge, memories, experiences, and judgments.

REFERENCES

- Abramson, K. (2014). Turning up the lights on gaslighting. *Philosophical Perspectives*, 28, 1–30. <https://doi.org/10.1111/phpe.12046>
- Amaya, H. (2018). White nationalism and publicness in the United States. *Javnost – The Public*, 25(4), 365–378. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2018.1463348>
- Barton, R., & Whitehead, J. A. (1969). The gas-light phenomenon. *Lancet*, 1(7608), 1258–1260. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736\(69\)92133-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736(69)92133-3)
- Bertrand, M., Chugh, D., & Mullainathan, S. (2005). Implicit discrimination. *American Economic Review*, 95(2), 94–98. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4132797>
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2001). *White supremacy and racism in the post-Civil Rights Era*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Boren, C. (2020, August 26). A timeline of Colin Kaepernick's protest against police brutality, four years after they began. *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/2020/06/01/colin-kaepernick-kneeling-history/>
- Brandt, S., & Rudden, M. (2020). A psychoanalytic perspective on victims of domestic violence and coercive control. *International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies*, 17(3), 215–231. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aps.1671>
- Calef, V., & Weinschel, E. M. (1981). Some clinical consequences of introjection: Gaslighting. *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 50(1), 44–66. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21674086.1981.11926942>
- Clance, P., & Imes, S. (1978). The impostor phenomenon among high achieving women: Dynamics and therapeutic intervention. *Psychotherapy Theory, Research and Practice*, 15(3), 241–247. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0086006>
- Crenshaw, K. W. (1995). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. In K. W. Crenshaw, N. Gotanda, G. Peller, & K. Thomas (Eds.), *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement* (pp. 357–383). New Press.

Davis, A. M., & Ernst, R. (2017). Racial gaslighting. *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, 7(4), 761–774. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2017.1403934>

Devault, K. (2016, November 22). Four ways to look at Standing Rock: An Indigenous perspective. *Yes! Magazine*. <https://www.yesmagazine.org/environment/2016/11/22/four-ways-to-look-at-standing-rock-an-indigenous-perspective/>

DiAngelo, R. (2011). White fragility. *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*, 3(3), 54–70.

Dovidio, J. F., & Gaertner, S. L. (2000). Aversive racism and selective decisions: 1989 –1999. *Psychological Science*, 11(4), 315–319. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9280.00262>

Dukes, K. N., & Gaither, S. E. (2017). Black racial stereotypes and victim blaming: Implications for media coverage and criminal proceedings in cases of police violence against racial and ethnic minorities. *Journal of Social Issues*, 73(4), 789–807. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12248>

Essien-Wood, I. R., & Wood, J. L. (2020). Content validation of the D-Three Effect Inventory (DTEI): Examining the experiences of Black children in early childhood education. *Journal of African American Studies*, 24(4), 644–653. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12111-020-09495-2>

Frühwirth, D. (2020). “Ethiopia, thou land of our fathers!”: From Ethiopianism to pan-Africanism. *Vienna Journal of African Studies*, 38, 33–54.

Gass, G. Z., & Nichols, W. C. (1988). Gaslighting: A marital syndrome. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 10(1), 3–16. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00922429>

Goldenberg, D. M. (2009). *The curse of Ham: Race and slavery in early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Vol. 33). University Press.

Grenier, M. L. (2020). Cultural competency and the reproduction of White supremacy in occupational therapy education. *Health Education Journal*, 79(6), 633–644. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2F0017896920902515>

Hatamiya, L. (1994). *Righting a wrong: Japanese Americans and the passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988*. Stanford University Press.

Hehman, E., Calanchini, J., Flake, J. K., & Leitner, J. B. (2019). Establishing construct validity evidence for regional measures of explicit and implicit racial bias. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 148(6), 1022–1040. <https://doi.org/10.1037/xge0000623>

Leitner, J. B., Hehman, E., Ayduk, O., & Mendoza-Denton, R. (2016). Blacks' death rate due to circulatory diseases is positively related to Whites' explicit racial bias: A nationwide investigation using project implicit. *Psychological Science*, 27(10), 1299–1311. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797616658450>

Levin, S. M. (2017, February 13). Standing Rock chairman looks to history as divisions emerge among activists. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/feb/13/dakota-access-pipeline-protest-standing-rock-dave-archambault>

Madley, B. (2015). Reexamining the American genocide debate: Meaning, historiography, and new methods. *The American Historical Review*, 120(1), 98–139. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/120.1.98>

Nez, C. C. (2016). Without reservation: The commodification of Native Americans. *Academy of Management Proceedings*, 2016(1), Article 17578. <https://doi.org/10.5465/ambpp.2016.318>

Phelan, S. M., Dovidio, J. F., Puhl, R. M., Burgess, D. J., Nelson, D. B., Yeazel, M. W., Hardeman, R., Perry, S., & van Ryn, M. (2014). Implicit and explicit weight bias in a national sample of 4,732 medical students: The medical student CHANGES study. *Obesity*, 22(4), 1201–1208. <https://doi.org/10.1002/oby.20687>

Pierce, C. M. (1970). Black psychiatry one year after Miami. *Journal of the National Medical Association*, 62(6), 471–473. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2611929/pdf/jnma00514-0103.pdf>

Pierce, C. M., & Allen, G. B. (1975). Childism. *Psychiatric Annals*, 5(7), 15–24. <https://doi.org/10.3928/0048-5713-19750701-04>

Riggs, D. W., & Bartholomaeus, C. (2018). Gaslighting in the context of clinical interactions with parents of transgender children. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy, 33*(4), 382–394. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681994.2018.1444274>

Roberts, T., & Andrews, D. J. C. (2013). A critical race analysis of the gaslighting of African American teachers: Considerations for recruitment and retention. In D. J. C. Andrews & F. Tuitt (Eds.), *Contesting the myth of a post racial era: The continued significance of race in US education* (pp. 69–94). Peter Lang.

Rodrigues, M. A., Mendenhall, R., & Clancy, K. B. (2021). There's realizing, and then there's realizing: How social support can counter gaslighting of women of color scientists. *Journal of Women and Minorities in Science and Engineering, 27*(2), 1-23.

Schad, T. (2020, June 12). Nearly four years after Colin Kaepernick first took a knee, NFL tides are turning on protests during the national anthem. *USA Today*. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nfl/2020/06/12/nfl-protest-kneeling-national-anthem-colin-kaepernick-social-justice/5341565002/>

Shepherd, D. (2019). Teaching about American slavery and its connections to Christianity and the Bible. *Social Studies Research and Practice, 14*(2), 225–237. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SSRP-04-2019-0021>

Smith, W. A. (2004). Black faculty coping with racial battle fatigue: The campus racial climate in a post-Civil Rights Era. In D. Cleveland (Ed.), *A long way to go: Conversations about race by African American faculty and graduate students* (pp. 171–190). Peter Lang.

Smith, W. A., Allen, W. R., & Danley, L. L. (2007). “Assume the position . . . you fit the description”: Psychosocial experiences and racial battle fatigue among African American male college students. *American Behavioral Scientist, 51*(4), 551–578. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2F0002764207307742>

Smith, W. A., Yosso, T. J., & Solórzano, D. G. (2006). Challenging racial battle fatigue on historically White campuses: A critical race examination of race-related stress. In C. A. Stanley (Ed.), *Faculty of color: Teaching in predominantly White colleges and universities* (pp. 299–327). Anker.

Staats, C. (2016). Understanding implicit bias: What educators should know. *American Educator*, 39(4), 29–43. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1086492.pdf>

Staats, C., Capatosto, K., Wright, R. A., & Contractor, D. (2015). *Implicit bias*. Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity. <http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/implicit-bias-training/resources/2015-implicit-bias-review.pdf>

Steele, C. M. (1997). A threat in the air: How stereotypes shape intellectual identity and performance. *American Psychologist*, 52(6), 613–629. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0003-066x.52.6.613>

Steele, C. M., & Aronson, J. (1995). Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69(5), 797–811. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-3514.69.5.797>

Stern, R. (2007). *The gaslight effect: How to spot and survive the hidden manipulation others use to control your life*. Harmony.

Sue, D. W. (2005). Racism and the conspiracy of silence. *Counseling Psychologist*, 33(1), 100–114. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2F0011000004270686>

Sue, D. W. (2010). *Microaggressions and marginality: Manifestation, dynamics, and impact*. Wiley & Sons.

Sue, D. W., Capodilupo, C. M., Torino, G. C., Bucceri, J. M., Holder, A. M. B., Nadal, K. L., & Esquilin, M. (2007). Racial microaggressions in everyday life: Implications for clinical practice. *American Psychologist*, 62(4), 271–286. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066x.62.4.271>

Sweet, P. L. (2019). The sociology of gaslighting. *American Sociological Review*, 84(5), 851–875. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2F0003122419874843>

Tobias, H., & Joseph, A. (2020). Sustaining systemic racism through psychological gaslighting: Denials of racial profiling and justifications of carding by police utilizing local news media. *Race and Justice*, 10(4), 424–455. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2F2153368718760969>

Tormoen, M. (2019). Gaslighting: How pathological labels can harm psychotherapy clients. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022167819864258>

Tromblay, S. (2020, July 20). Standing Rock wins legal victory against Dakota Access Pipeline. *Workers World*. <https://www.workers.org/2020/07/50103/>

Trump wishes NFL owners would tell anthem protesters “get that son of a bitch off the field right now.” (2017, September 22). *Washington Examiner*. <https://twitter.com/dcexaminer/status/911391761070731264>

Walker, J., & Walter, P. (2018). Learning about social movements through news media: Deconstructing *New York Times* and *Fox News* representations of Standing Rock. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 37(4), 401–418. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2018.1485184>

Wilderson, F. B., III. (2010). *Red, white & black: Cinema and the structure of US antagonisms*. Duke University Press.

Wilderson, F. B., III. (2018). “We’re trying to destroy the world”: Anti-Blackness and police violence after Ferguson. In M. Gržinić & A. Stojnić (Eds.), *Shifting corporealities in contemporary performance* (pp. 45–59). Palgrave Macmillan.

Wood, J. L. (2019). *Black minds matter: Realizing the brilliance, dignity, and morality of Black males in education*. Montezuma Publishing.

Wood, J. L., Essien, I., & Blevins, D. (2017). Black males in kindergarten: The effect of social skills on close and conflictual relationships with teachers. *Journal of African American Males in Education*, 8(2), 30–50. <https://jaamejournal.scholasticahq.com/article/18490-black-males-in-kindergarten-the-effect-of-social-skills-on-close-and-conflictual-relationships-with-teachers>

Wozolek, B. (2018). Gaslighting queerness: Schooling as a place of violent assemblages. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 15(4), 319–338. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19361653.2018.1484839>

Zehavi, B. (2019, March 29). 19th century slave Bible that removed Exodus to repress hope goes on display. *Times of Israel*. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/19th-cent-slave-bible-that-removed-exodus-story-to-repress-hope-goes-on-display>



**Community College Equity
Assessment Lab (CCEAL)**
5500 Campanile Drive, EBA 210
San Diego, CA 92182

Website: www.cceal.org

Email: cceal@sdsu.edu

The most common messages reinforce assumptions that BIPOC are criminals, lesser than, and academically and/or cognitively inferior. When experiencing racelighting, People of Color may be led to second guess their experiences, feelings, capabilities, knowledge, decision making, recollections, and basic humanity.