

Social Avoidance, Cultural Dissonance, Shared Humanity

There is a difference between racism and social avoidance, because social avoidance can be a response to abuse. There is also a difference between racism and cultural dissonance, because one may be avoiding a culture that has been abusive toward them.

Microaggressions, in isolation, may not seem significant; however, when a large group participates in microaggressions, they become a macro-aggression. This can be experienced by people of all races.

Acknowledging microaggressions and abuse is critically important because it requires us to hold ourselves accountable. For example, if a White woman opens a door for a Black woman, this is not an invitation to dominate her, to walk through without acknowledgment, or to exploit that moment of vulnerability to cause harm. This is a very common interaction that I experienced as a White woman. As a veteran, I always did my best to remain honorable and to extend courtesy to others, yet I was often left vulnerable in interactions with people who saw an opportunity to hurt me.

Though these were microaggressions, they could have been opportunities for connection, for friendship, a handshake, or a shared moment of mutual respect. Instead, the moment fell away, and my heart fell with it. I was left brokenhearted too many times for this experience to be ignored. This pattern occurred throughout my life. I was never given the ability to have a voice, nor did I feel that I should have one. This is a form of suppression and subjugation of Whites, the constant gesture of kindness offered, met instead with pain, domination tactics, or ritualized hostility. This is not acceptable.

As I grow and learn, I think of the younger generations who may experience the same abuses. Does that not break your heart? That loving, gentle, kind, and nurturing people will experience vulnerability like this and be repeatedly let down? Those who preserve their innocence and gentility often refuse to let the world harden them, and so they may spend their lives being abused by aggressors who lack a broader sense of humanity. Still, they remain kind.

I want to offer a voice for those who have had these experiences. My hope is that we can recognize abuse for what it is, whether we label it abuse between races or simply acknowledge the lack of humanity within it. Because at its core, that is what this is, a lack of humanity.