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MICROAGGRESSIONS TRILOGY: Part 2. Microaggressions in the Academic Workplace*

By Ronald A. Berk**

NOTE: This article is the second in a series of three articles about microaggressions. All of the articles are tailored specifically to help enable faculty developers, provosts and directors of diversity and training, faculty, and administrators to address the most critical issues related to this topic in higher education. Specific responses to and strategies for dealing with microaggressions in the workplace are described in this article.

(*VICTIM:* Asian-American female administrator): *"Asian-American women still have to work against the prevalent stereotypes of them as submissive and subservient, which can undermine their authority and prevent them from being considered for leadership positions…I am still taken aback by the level of incivility and disrespect female administrators experience, behavior that male colleagues would not direct at male administrators."* Võ (2012, pp. 107–108).

Introduction

Microaggression was declared the 2015 "Word of the Year" by the *Global Language Monitor* (Brown, 2015). That is nearly 40 years after Professor Chester M. Pierce coined the term to mean every day "subtle, stunning, often automatic, and nonverbal exchanges which are 'put downs' of blacks by offenders" (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Willis, 1978, p. 66). That definition certainly applied to the racial and gender microaggressions in the workplace depicted throughout the 2016 hit movie *Hidden Figures.* That story was a portrayal of three brilliant African-American women mathematicians referred to as "human computers" and their experiences working in the all-White male offices at NASA during the 1960s (Shetterly, 2016).

In the decade since Sue et al. (2007) published their seminal paper in *American Psychologist*, a Google Scholar search reported that more than 10,000 published and unpublished papers included citations of "microaggression" (Google Scholar, 2017). The floodgates have opened on contributions to the scholarly literature about microaggressions, and there has been an increasing incursion of articles and blogs into the popular mainstream. Here is Sue's (2014) latest definition: "Brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights, invalidations, and insults to an individual or group because of their marginalized status in society" (slide 8) (for details, see Berk, 2017).

The present article is a user's manual for practitioners to educate all employees in academic institutions about how to identify, eliminate, and respond to microaggressions. It includes (1) a brief review of research on workplace microaggressions, (2) a list of specific workplace microaggressions, including the *Workplace Microaggression Inventory*, (3) the significance of explicit vs. implicit bias, (4) action steps to increase diversity and decrease microaggressions, (5) guidelines for professional development and training workshops, (6) strategies that people could be taught for responding to

*This trilogy is dedicated to the memory of my wife, Marion Smith-Waison, MD, PhD, a Black Panamanian American, who, as a professor, clinical psychologist, and OB/GYN physician/surgeon, endured the insults and indignities of microaggressions her entire life.

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microaggressions directed at them, (7) strategies that the aggressor could be taught for responding to the victim after the microaggression has occurred, and (8) strategies to encourage employees to emit microaffirmations to reduce the chances they will commit microaggressions.

Research on Workplace Microaggressions

"Self-Report" Qualitative Research Base

There are no large-scale survey studies of microaggressions committed by faculty, administrators, and staff; only small-scale studies that relate to the workplace in general (Sue, 2010; Sue, Lin, & Rivera, 2009) and the academic work environment. Those studies are primarily retrospective in design with small samples based on focus groups or interviews (Duncan, 2014; Fernandez, 2013; Gutiérrez y Muhs, Niemann, González, & Harris, 2012; Irey, 2013; Liang, 2006; Matthew, 2016; Mayock, 2016; Rankine, 2014; Rockquemore, 2016d; Weiss, 2015; Wells, 2013; Young, Anderson, & Stewart, 2015).

Most of these investigations rely exclusively on self-report. Further, the focus groups, in many cases, were contaminated with self-selection bias and the team leaders and participants were predisposed to endorse microaggressions (Lilienfeld, 2017). These design limitations, especially "monosource bias" of only self-report (Barling, Slater, & Kelloway, 2000), prompted a call to move beyond that research approach (Lau & Williams, 2010; Wong et al., 2014). It is preferable instead to use longitudinal studies in naturalistic settings (Lilienfeld, 2017) and time-intensive studies of day-to-day experiences with microaggressions (Ong & Burrow, 2017; Ong et al., 2013).

Presumed Incompetent

Among all of the sources of microaggressions identified above, the most comprehensive reference is the Gutiérrez y Muhs et al. (2012) volume *Presumed Incompetent,* which is a documentation of the quantitative, but mostly narrative, anecdotal, qualitative accounts and reflections of past experiences of more than 40 academic women of color. The "self-reports" in this treatise capture the variety of forms of microaggressions and their psychological and physical effects on the professional and personal lives of these women.

The lists of microaggressions that follow were extracted from the stories in Gutiérrez y Muhs et al's. (2012) compendium and the preceding studies. Also included are microaggressions the author observed over 35 years in academia, including five years as a member of the university-wide diversity committee, and informal interviews with more than a dozen African and Asian Americans, Latinx, women faculty, and other employees over the past decade. These examples involve an aggressor and a target who came from one the underrepresented groups identified previously and academic hierarchy (see Berk, 2017), although the bulk of the evidence and the reported highest frequencies of microaggressions have occurred with men and women of color.

Examples of Workplace Microaggressions

Devaluing the People with Whom You Work

With many employees in most victim groups experiencing microaggressions daily, why do some people continue to inflate their significance artificially by finding new, albeit more subtle, surreptitious ways to insult, demean, belittle, and devalue the people with whom they work? In fact, the stinging shards of competition for research and training grants, teaching awards, and promotion and tenure decisions foster these kinds of put-downs by leading aggressors to target anyone in the path of that competition, whether or not the person is in an underrepresented group.

As you read these descriptions of insults, slights, and insensitive remarks and behavior, consider that the victims are the colleagues, friends, and the people whom the aggressors see and with whom they work every day; they are not strangers, visitors, criminals, enemy combatants, or terrorists invading their safe space. The aggressors spend more time with some of them than with their families.

Microaggression Sampler

A small sampler of a dozen microinsults and microinvalidations from the preceding sources is listed below to acquaint you with some of the common violations. They are grouped according to the venues or events where interactions occur most frequently: (1) *group meetings* (committee, task force, ad hoc, departmental, university-wide,

faculty assembly, academic council, retreat, etc.), (2) *individual office meetings*, (3) *official and social events* (holiday parties, awards ceremonies, professional dinners, convocations, commencement, etc.), (4) *casual encounters* (hallways, elevator, coffee bar, cafeteria, etc.), and (5) *promotion and tenure review*. Most of these examples are intersectional microaggressions involving multiple identities and rankism in the academic hierarchy. (*REMINDER:* The victim(s) in each example could be a member of any underrepresented, marginalized group instead of the ones mentioned.)

1. Group Meetings

- As a White female associate professor is speaking, a White male professor steps on her lines by interrupting her for any reason. Sandberg (2013) called this a "manterruption," but it can be a "womanterruption" as well.
- An African-American female professor was appointed to a committee which doesn't relate to her interest or expertise to provide token representation and the illusion of racial and gender diversity.
- In an admissions committee meeting, White male professors indicated a significant preference for White candidates over all others, regardless of qualifications.

2. Individual Office Meetings

- For assistance with statistical issues on a grant or computer problems, the White female PI professor is referred to an Asian male professor who does not teach in those areas.
- A White male professor tries to avoid meeting with a gay male colleague by canceling and rescheduling the meeting over and over again.

3. Official and Social Events

- At the annual Christmas or "holiday" party, the dean or chair wishes everyone a "Merry Christmas" or "Happy Holidays" to Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, agnostics, and atheists who do not celebrate Christmas or any holiday in December.
- A Latino physician/professor dressed formally while attending a professional dinner at a hotel was repeatedly mistaken for the valet by White physician attendees.
- All of the pictures of former deans in the school are White males. For all other races and females, the "glass ceiling" just became "brick."

4. Casual Encounters

- A White female professor is in an elevator by herself as an Afro-American male colleague is approaching and she does not hold the door open.
- A senior White male chair or associate dean comments: "Why can't that millennial wear a coat and tie like the rest of us?"

5. Promotion and Tenure Review

- A Latina associate professor's bid for tenure is denied multiple times, while the White female associate professors are given tenure the first time.
- Nonwhite, Muslim, and gay assistant professors are told to publish in mainstream journals only. Ethnicity-based journals, as well as those related to sexual orientation and religion (e.g., *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, Journal of Muslim Mental Health, Journal of Homosexuality, Journal of LGBTQ Youth*), will not count in reviews for promotion.

Workplace Microaggression Inventory (WMI)

The next sample of 40 microaggressions is in the form of a self-assessment *Workplace Microaggression Inventory* (*WMI*), organized according to the same five categories above (see Appendix). (*NOTE:* A smaller stratified random sample of 20 items representing the five categories can also be selected for different applications.) Faculty, administrators, and staff should complete this inventory to personalize the microaggressions within each individual's experiences and encounters. On the *WMI*, respondents are asked which ones they committed as the aggressor or experienced as the victim and which ones they observed in their workplace as a bystander or ally.

This inventory is intended to raise awareness and sensitivity about this topic and, maybe, identify

a few implicit, unconscious biases. Results should be kept confidential, but the items can serve as the springboard for opening a dialogue and discussion of the issues in a faculty or staff meeting, workshop, or retreat. Additional instructions for using the results from the *WMI* are given in a subsequent section on workshop guidelines.

How Do You Respond to Microaggressions?

Tackling microaggressions is a nontrivial task. There is a scarcity of controlled studies of specific interventions for teaching people how to respond to microaggressions and to cope with their adverse effects (Bartlett, 2017; Kalinoski et al., 2013; Lilienfeld, 2017). However, the potential negative consequences and risks of inaction justify pursuing specific actions at the institutional and individual levels (Paluck, & Green, 2009): (1) the significance of explicit vs. implicit bias, (2) action steps to increase diversity and decrease microaggressions, (3) guidelines for professional development and training workshops, (4) FOR VICTIMS ONLY: how to respond to microaggressions, (5) FOR AGGRESSORS ONLY: how to respond to the victim who responded, and (6) how to use microaffirmations to block microaggressions.

The Significance of Explicit vs. Implicit Bias

Macroaggressions and hate crimes described in Part 1 of this trilogy (Berk, 2017) are *explicit* expressions of bias and attitudes and blatant acts of prejudice. They have declined over the past 50 years (DeVos & Banaji, 2005). Unfortunately, since the 2016 November election, hate crimes against African Americans, Muslims, Jews, girls and women, immigrants, and LGBTQ individuals and bomb threats and vandalisim of Jewish institutions and cemeteries and mosques have spiked significantly (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2017). This increase in macroaggressions has become a pernicious trend in 2017 with over 900 known hate groups operating in the U.S.

In contrast to this hate crime trend, unconscious, *implicit* biases, which are internalized and embedded in our identity, have remained constant. It is those biases of faculty, administrators, and staff that provide the fuel for microaggressions in the workplace. Although explicit bias has been shown to decrease with age and with multicultural training and workshops, *implicit bias is virtually unchanged* (Baron & Banaji, 2006; Boysen & Vogel, 2008). Therein lies the challenge to find strategies to prevent microaggressions.

Action Steps to Increase Diversity and Decrease Microaggressions

Probably every White-majority institution of higher education has published on paper or computer screen its commitment to multiculturalism, diversity, and inclusiveness in its mission, values, policies, and procedures (Commodore, 2015). However, that commitment is rarely realized in practice. Perfunctory efforts do not succeed.

The commitment must start at the top and involve all stakeholders. If the president makes diversity a priority through the necessary allocation of resources and realistic timelines, the results can become visible at every level, sooner or later (McMurtrie, 2016). It is useful to identify models that have led to successful increases in diversity and to learn from the practices at minority-serving institutions (Gasman & Conrad, 2015) and leaders (Nixon, 2016). Significant changes are essential (Davis, 2010; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2008; Sue & Constantine, 2007; Thompson, 2015; Turner, Gonzalez, & Wood, 2008).

However, as noted previously (Berk, 2017), the commitment to diversity and inclusion must address both recruitment and retention (Misra & Lundquist, 2015; Rockquemore, 2016a). The goal to eliminate microaggressions is an essential component of the latter. Microaggressions can sabotage the professional lives of new underrepresented faculty and staff recruits by creating an unwelcome, alienating, hostile, and chilly campus environment. Who wants to work in a school where you are shunned, insulted, conveniently invisible, and devalued in so many ways to feel like an outsider? Those recruits will soon leave if they are bombarded daily by microaggressions and, eventually, the well-intentioned practice of inclusion will be transformed into "*de facto* exclusion."

Here are 10 suggestions to consider, adapted from Sue (2010), Sue, Lin, and Rivera (2009), Niemann (2012), and Guzman (2008). They relate directly to the issues raised by the microaggressions in the *WMI*:

1. *Plan regular meetings of underrepresented groups with deans and department chairs to maintain an open dialogue on the topics of equal access, opportunities, and microaggressions;*
2. *Organize regular networking meetings of underrepresented employees across faculty, administrators, and staff;*
3. *Manage teaching loads, faculty evaluation, and performance appraisal procedures to ensure fairness to eliminate discrimination, microinequities, and "glass ceilings";*
4. *Outline the expectations and explicit requirements for promotion and tenure to provide transparency in the review process of all faculty;*
5. *Educate underrepresented faculty about the challenges of teaching at a White-majority institution, including adverse risks of teaching in the areas of diversity, multicultural issues, LGBTQ issues, and social justice on promotion and tenure;*
6. *Appoint diverse faculty members to all critical committees, including promotion, search, diversity, oversight, and curriculum;*
7. *Create a work environment that is positive, supportive, welcoming, and cooperative and facilitates productivity and advancement for all employees;*
8. *Provide resources to support the professional development of all underrepresented employees to attend conferences, institutes, grant writing workshops, and other activities to promote their success;*
9. *Extend mentoring programs with qualified mentors to include all underrepresented employees; and*
10. *Infuse accountability monitoring and oversight into all programs and initiatives to evaluate attainment of outcomes on the established timelines.*

Guidelines for Professional Development and Training Workshops

These 10 action steps require a commitment by administrators to implementing a robust professional development program which should initially include measuring everyone's exposure to microaggressions and their implicit biases. The next four sections provide some guidelines.

Top 10 workshop outcomes. Workshops need to be systematically planned, scheduled, and executed for all employees. The offices of diversity, professional and faculty development, and training should coordinate those workshops (Zamudio-Suaréz, 2016). They should focus on the following 10 outcomes. Participants will be able to:

1. *Increase their knowledge and awareness of microaggressions;*
2. *Enhance their knowledge and appreciation of people's differences and their importance to an individual's identity;*
3. *Understand the serious psychological and physical consequences of microaggressions to the victims*;
4. *Identify their implicit biases and prejudices to take immediate action to improve;*
5. *Appreciate the value and status of all employees at all levels of the academic hierarchy;*
6. *Raise their sensitivity levels to recognize microaggressions when they occur;*
7. *Serve as an effective ally and advocate for colleagues and students who are the targets of microaggressions;*
8. *Select the appropriate strategies for the aggressor and victim to respond to microaggressions;*
9. *Formally document all incidents as the aggressor or victim for accountability; and*
10. *Take on the role of change agent to eliminate microaggressions on their campus.*

Once the first wave of workshops is completed, accountability must be established by individuals to address, document, and report all incidents of microaggressions. If victims are hesitant to report, it will be difficult to provide support for them and to identify the aggressors. Follow-up workshops by semester or quarter should be scheduled to report progress, discuss issues and problems, consider adjustments, and acclimate all new faculty. This ongoing process may need continuous tweaks to ensure a decrease in incidents is occurring.

The preceding 10 outcomes can be attained by presenting the basic facts and research on microaggressions and administering self-assessments to all participants in the planned workshops and retreats: *Workplace Microaggression Inventory* and *Implicit Association Test.* These steps are described next.

Microaggressions 101. Professional development workshops should be expressly designed to

level the knowledge playing field for all faculty, administrators, and staff (Hilton & Mitchell, 2017; Jaschik, 2016; Neff, 2015; Zamudio-Suaréz, 2016). They should be based on the aforementioned 10 outcomes and the basic definitions, characteristics, taxonomy, examples, and consequences presented in Part 1 of the trilogy (Berk, 2017). The orientation of new employees should include this content about microaggressions. Facilitators trained to conduct these workshops and initiate an ongoing dialogue should coordinate a program with the institution's diversity, faculty development, and training leadership (Sue, 2015).

Everyone needs to be Mirandized on what microaggressions are, how to recognize them, how to respond to them appropriately, and how to serve as an effective ally for victims. Participants should appreciate the differences among the underrepresented groups of people and the importance of the variability in identities of individuals within each of those groups. The serious psychological and physical consequences of microaggressions to the victims must also be understood.

Workplace Microaggression Inventory (WMI). A checklist self-assessment, such as the *WMI* in this article or an abbreviated version, should be completed by all employees to raise consciousness, awareness, and sensitivity, and refresh memories of the infractions committed and observed. Everyone should be able to recognize microaggressions in a variety of verbal and nonverbal forms. The overall score out of 80 indicates the level of exposure and experience with microaggressions. A score of 40 or more different encounters of the microaggression kind is a very high level. Individual scores should be kept confidential.

Once everyone has their scores, the participants can break into small groups to share what they have learned from the 40 items in the inventory. As questions start flowing in these groups and continue when they reassemble in the larger group, an open dialogue can begin about those items and the questions and concerns they generate. Each person should be encouraged to contribute and raise questions in a safe zone where participants are not accusative or judgmental. The over-riding goal of this exercise is to be able to identify microaggressions when they occur in the workplace. Eventually, everyone should be able to respond to them appropriately and to assist the victim to respond and recover. Strategies for responding are suggested in the final sections of this article.

Implicit Association Test (IAT). The Harvard *Implicit Association Test (IAT)* (Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998; Project Implicit, 2011) should also be taken by all faculty, administrators, and staff. It can pinpoint one's implicit biases to encourage people to begin self-reflection about the flaws each of us must address and how they relate to microaggressions. Unfortunately, the *IAT* is focused only on racial biases, but that is a significant start.

Gates (2014) indicated that "we can cure microaggressions by being self-reflective, empathetic, and willing to address our biases and their impacts on others." The *IAT* is intended to reveal and promote awareness of implicit preferences and stereotypes (Capers, Clinchot, McDougle, & Greenwald, 2016). In the book *Blindspot*, founding researchers Banaji and Greenwald (2013) of Project Implicit explained these hidden biases. There are alternative measures of implicit bias that can also be used (Cameron, Brown-Iannuzzi, & Payne, 2012; Jacoby-Senghor, Sinclair, & Shelton, 2015; Ross, 2014).

This step is critical if we are committed to eliminating microaggressions. Often, though by no means always, *our secret, hidden, unconscious biases lead us to commit microaggressions.* Those biases are the disease, and the microaggressions are the symptoms. We need to treat both. Identifying our personal biases and intimate thoughts, beliefs, and feelings; acknowledging them publicly, and taking responsibility for them are essential to viewing oppression through realistic eyes and *making the invisible visible* (Harper, in press; Sue, 2015; Warikoo, Sinclair, Fei, & Senghor, 2016). Cultural sensitivity and unconscious bias training assist with self-reflection, but additional skills are needed to conduct dialogues effectively about the critical issues (Acosta & Ackerman-Barger, 2016; Ross, 2008; Sue, 2015).

Epilogue to action steps. Do not tackle these steps alone at home. They should be tackled only by a trained professional. If possible, assemble a team of leaders from faculty development, training, and diversity based on your institution's administrative configuration. Although the 10 outcomes and preceding steps may appear daunting at first read,

consider the use of Microaggressions 101, *WMI*, and *IAT* as the beginning of a process.

Start with the step that seems most comfortable and workable for you, and that you think may have the greatest chance of success based on available resources and the campus climate. Take this one step at a time. The information session in 101 is the safest and those sessions involving the *WMI* and *IAT* may be challenging, depending on how the interpretations and ensuing dialogue are handled.

Do not be disheartened by the pushback that is inevitable. It can be reduced by providing incentives for all employees to participate, such as small stipends, a buffet breakfast, or including their attendance and documented outcomes in annual performance reviews and appraisals. Forge ahead with the tasks at hand. Any smidgen of progress that is made to decrease microaggressions and increase diversity is far better than not even attempting to improve the workplace environment.

FOR VICTIMS ONLY: How to Respond to Microaggressions

The menu for responding to a microaggression is limited. The initial choices consist of "do nothing" (pullback) and "do something" (pushback). If you do nothing, you are excusing that microaggression; if you do something, it gets complicated because of the existing relationship between the aggressor and the victim and several other factors. Let's examine the options.

Do nothing. The most frequent response is to "do nothing" (Sue, 2010). Victims are understandably reluctant to call out their aggressors. So much of the abusive and put-down behavior occurs "normally" in academia due to the hierarchical food chain that it may be difficult to distinguish whether the alleged microaggression was racial, sex, gender, LGBTQ, PWD, religiously, or generationally motivated as a hate act (aka "attributional ambiguity"). Moreover, sometimes it is just tough to determine whether a microaggression occurred.

Sue (2010) also suggested several other possible reasons to "do nothing." The victim: (1) is confused over how to respond, (2) is unable to answer because the incident occurred so quickly, (3) denies it happened, (4) rationalizes that responding probably won't have any impact, and (5) fears negative consequences, such as being isolated, being perceived as a troublemaker, or jeopardizing their chances for contract renewal, promotion, or tenure. Frequently, the insult may surprise, stun, or freeze the victim, catching them off balance. This reaction would preclude an immediate response.

However, doing nothing or denying that the microaggression happened gives racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, or other negative 'isms a free pass. It condones and gives tacit approval to the microaggression. A delayed response is better than none. Further, denial of the incident may produce in the victim feelings of loss of integrity and engender anger and frustration which eventually may have physical and emotional consequences (Sue et al., 2007).

Do something. Authors of several studies (Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008; Sue, Lin, Torino, et al., 2009; Sue, Nadal, et al., 2008) have identified a series of sequential phases that a victim experiences, from the initial recognition that a microaggression has occurred to the consequences based on their response. The "response" is one of those phases.

There are certain code- or buzz-words that, when used negatively, can trigger recognition of microaggressions: "you people," "highly qualified," "articulate," "affirmative action," "reverse discrimination," "preferential treatment," and "quotas" (Delgado & Stefancic, 1992; Williams, 1991). These terms contribute to the mounting lexicon of microaggressions along with the other signs mentioned previously (Solórzano, 1998).

At least six factors determine how the victim will respond: (a) the underrepresented group of which the victim is a member, (b) whether the aggressor is in a position superior to the victim, (c) the form of the microinsult or microinvalidation—verbal or nonverbal (e.g., staring, averted gazes, gestures, exasperated looks, and body language), (d) the venue where it occurs—meeting room, office, elevator, hallway, coffee bar, or colleague's home, (e) the victim's previous experience with microaggressions, and (f) how the institution might handle a victim's report of such incidents. Every response is based on a unique combination of those factors.

Possible responses. There is no single best solution or response to every event, although the research and expert commentary have suggested a variety of possible behavioral responses (Christopher, 2015; Fisher, 2015; Ganote, Cheung, &

Souza, 2016; Gray, n.d.; Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., 2012; Irey, 2013; Khan, 2015; Kothari, 2017; Liu, 2015; Perry, 2015; Rockquemore, 2016c, 2016d; Ross, 2008, 2014; Rowe, 2008; Sue, 2010; Sue et al., 2007; Thompson, 2015; Wells, 2013). The goal should be correction and education, not retribution. Focus on the words or behavior, not the person. Here are five generic strategies to consider:

1. *Say something on the spot, so the aggressor knows your feeling of discomfort, disrespect, or hurt.* Taking immediate action at each instance of recognition was recommended over 40 years ago (Pierce, 1974). Try questioning the behavior to place the burden of the insult on the aggressor.
   EXAMPLES:
   "Why did you say that?"
   "Do you think that remark was respectful?"
   "Do you feel that comment was appropriate?"
   "Did I hear you correctly? Would you repeat what you just said?"
   "Why did you move to another seat?"
   "Are you scared of me?"
   "Why do you always ignore me when I say 'Good morning'?"
   "Do I make you uncomfortable?"
   "It's important for you to know that I am not okay with what you just said, but I am not interested in having this conversation right now. Maybe later."
2. *Say something to the aggressor privately in their office (or other appropriate location) at a time after the meeting or event where the incident occurred.* Think carefully what you will say and how you will say it. Be diplomatic and calm, while placing the burden for the infraction on the aggressor as you question the behavior.
   EXAMPLES:
   "Why didn't you call on me and let me contribute to the discussion?"
   "Why do you keep interrupting me when I'm speaking? I don't interrupt you."
   "That sexist remark was totally inappropriate. Why did you disrespect me?"
3. *Open an ongoing dialogue to communicate your feelings and educate the aggressor.* Most microaggressions are based on stereotypes and prejudice. The aggressor needs to be corrected, or they will continue that behavior.
   EXAMPLES:
   "Why did you stare at me in the elevator? Do you know why I wear this *hijab* to cover my head? Let me explain."
   "Do you believe what you said to be true about me?"
   "I noticed you have difficulty pronouncing my name. Can I help?"
   "I identify as _____, and that has not been my experience. I have experienced…"
   "Does my disability make you uncomfortable? Do you want to talk about it?"
   "Why did you take the idea I presented yesterday and claim it as yours in the committee meeting this afternoon? Don't I deserve credit?"
4. *Disengage somewhat from the aggressor by redirecting the conversation (aka change the subject) to avoid an emotional response that might escalate the exchange.*
   EXAMPLES:
   "What did you think of the proposal for schedule changes this summer?"
   "Did you hear that _____ is leaving in January?"
   "Our entering class looks really bright. Those students will keep us on our toes."
5. *Engage in a proactive, nonreactive strategy called* "microresistance" (Ganote et al., 2016; Irey, 2013; Rockquemore, 2016c). It involves four steps:
   (1) *Observe:* State in clear, unambiguous language what you see happening;
   (2) *Think:* Express what you think or what you imagine others might be thinking;
   (3) *Feel:* Express your feelings about the situation; and
   (4) *Desire:* State what you would like to have happened.
   These steps restructure the microaggression attack to relieve the "victim" of the burden of having to fix the problem. This approach presented in workshops by Ganote et al. (2016) can be used by victims and also allies who witness colleagues who are targeted to increase their empowerment and lessen the impact of microaggressions when they occur.

Responding with anger and striking back at the aggressor is not recommended because you could end up in the ER, especially if the aggressor is bigger than you, plus you will have a complaint

filed against you with human resources. Further, relieving pent-up emotions by venting has destructive effects on the aggressor, the victim, and their relationship. It is especially counterproductive in the workplace when these persons see or work with each other regularly.

While it may feel satisfying at the moment, rarely do any positive outcomes result from an emotional outburst. Anger and hostility often increase in both participants, producing a tense work environment. Nobody benefits. Of course, controlling your emotions may be difficult when you are battered day after day with insults.

Challenging microaggressions by responding *appropriately* can help create more honest communication with the people with whom you work. At the very least, it can help the aggressors or potential aggressors understand your perspective and establish boundaries around certain topics.

Once the response is given, and the interaction with the aggressor is "resolved," you should reach out to allies who are close colleagues, friends, or other trusted confidantes to share your feelings about the experience. However, try to move on and not dwell on a single incident; as the song from the movie *Frozen* told us, "Let It Go." Instead, refocus on those aspects of your position that provide the greatest joy and satisfaction, such as your students, teaching, research, writing, business, or clinical practice.

FOR AGGRESSORS ONLY: How to Respond to the Victim Who Responded

After hearing the victim's response, stop for a moment and think carefully about what you just heard. LISTEN, rather than speak. If you did not realize you did anything offensive, take your cue from the victim. Rather than leapfrog over this moment, ask for clarification about why your words or action was insulting. Keep listening, and say "I want to understand, and I am sorry that I upset you. Please tell me more." Acknowledge that a negative event occurred without being defensive. Then own it. Understand the insult. It is *mea culpa* time.

What you say now can significantly change your relationship with the victim. It is about respect for that person and their identity. Lashing out or dismissing the behavior as innocuous and insignificant will not fix the problem. Exhibit a contrite spirit in your response. Saying "I didn't realize that hurt you. I'm sorry" may be enough to mend differences and move forward. Be open to discussing, exploring, and clarifying the insult, perhaps later that day, to allow some time for the emotions to dissipate and to reflect on what happened. Be calm, cool, and collected, but respectful and warm, as you engage in a follow-up meeting.

Learn from that experience to be more sensitive to that microaggression and others that you may have committed. One of the greatest challenges for everyone is to keep our tongue in check. Despite its small size, it can produce major damage to others and get us into trouble. Commit to tongue control not only in what you say but also in how you say it. Patronizing, condescending, and jeering messages aimed at underrepresented or marginalized employees can be just as hurtful as a direct insult. Avoiding or ignoring these colleagues is also offensive. These are all forms of microaggressions. Take the high road in future tempting situations by just holding your tongue or saying something complimentary, which leads us to the question...

Can Microaffirmations Block Microaggressions?

Instead of reacting to microaggressions with one or more of the myriad of techniques described in the preceding sections, what if we could alter the mindset of everyone to focus on searching for effective ways to build people up rather than tearing them down? Unfortunately, the latter seems so much easier than the former as evidenced by current workplace behavior.

However, envision Maxwell's (2015) notion of intentionally adding value to the lives of all employees and students instead of devaluing them with microaggressions. Imagine diversity and inclusion in a healthy academic climate of professional and social support, respect, and career mentoring. These behavioral changes could provide the opportunity to create a "new normal" on your campus.

In the workplace literature, Rowe (2008) introduced the term *microaffirmations*, which are "small acts, which are often ephemeral and hard-to-see, events that are public and private, often unconscious but very effective, which occur whenever people wish to help others to succeed (p. 46)." The operative word here is to *affirm* the work of others. *Tiny*

acts of affirmation that can become conscious, as well as unconscious, can block unconscious insults and slights (Ross, 2008; Scully & Rowe, 2009). We can substitute these acts for offensive ones.

Although changing behavior can occur at any level, we can certainly start with changing ourselves. Rowe (2008) emphasized the following acts:

- Lead rather than push
- Open doors of opportunity
- Foster inclusion and caring
- Build a sense of community
- Listen attentively
- Give credit to others
- Provide comfort and support when others are in distress
- Build on strengths and successes rather than focusing on faults and weaknesses

If your faculty, administrators, and staff were to model these positive acts in their words and behavior, how would your academic culture look? Concentrating on consistent, appropriate affirmation and feedback to the employees with whom you work and your students can be infectious, potentially raising morale and productivity (Hehmeyer, 2014, Powell, Demetriou, & Fisher, 2013). Ultimately, in what type of institution would you prefer to work? Microaffirmations are worth serious consideration in our battle to decrease microaggressions.

Conclusions

You have now completed this vertiginous romp through 52 examples of microaggressions and several response options. Remember Maya Angelou's words in Part 1 of this trilogy (Berk, 2017) about how people make you feel? If you completed the inventory, how do you feel right now?

Since we are nearing the end of Part 2, it seems appropriate to ask: Where do we begin? Answer: With ourselves! If you completed the *Workplace Microaggression Inventory* and *Implicit Association Test*, you have already begun. You took the first step. Solórzano (2014) stated that everyone needs to confront their implicit biases and develop their reflection, recognition, and action skills.

Here is a three-pronged challenge to everyone—faculty, administrators, and staff: (1) perform self-reflection and examination of your behavior to pinpoint your unconscious, implicit biases and take immediate action to improve, (2) initiate an open dialogue about microaggressions with your colleagues individually and in meetings to move others toward change, and (3) facilitate improvement in your institution by becoming a change agent in any capacity you can to eliminate microaggressions and mitigate their effects. A commitment to "do something" is the key *desideratum* to eliminate microaggressions.

As microaggressions continue unabated across campuses, it is time for college and university employees to ramp up their responses to every incident that occurs, if they have not already done so. Using the sampler of 12 microaggressions and the inventory of 40 as starting points and the response options available, a tautly orchestrated plan should be developed based on the action steps and guidelines suggested in previous sections. It can then be executed by the institution's diversity, faculty development, and training leadership to decrease the frequency of those infractions. Once the plan sets the boundaries and procedures for all stakeholders, the task for each employee should become clear.

After a major dent is hammered into the documented microaggressions on campus, the "minority pipeline" may be unclogged to increase the recruitment, retention, and promotion of underrepresented, marginalized employees at all levels (Guzman, Trevino, Lubuguin, & Aryan, 2010). Informed, meaningful mentoring programs designed for these employees can help guide them through that pipeline (Harris & Mack, 2016; Niemann, 2012; Rockquemore, 2016b; Võ, 2012).

As you process this Part 2 of the trilogy, it is time to act on those preceding three prongs with a sense of immediacy and caffeinated energy. Every one of us can participate in the war against "hate and prejudice" in our workplace. I hope you will lean in and join me in that fight.

Stay tuned for Part 3, which will be about microaggressions in the classroom and be focused on student→student, instructor/staff→student, and student→instructor attacks and strategies to respond. Another inventory will be included to raise awareness of microaggressions against students.

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Appendix

Workplace Microaggression Inventory (WMI)

DIRECTIONS: Read each of the following descriptions of microaggressions in the academic workplace. For those that you have **EXPERIENCED** (as the aggressor or victim), place an **X** in the **EXP** column; for those that you have **OBSERVED**, mark an **X** in the **OBS** column. You may mark one or both columns for any item. Add the number of **Xs** in each column to determine your score.

***MICROAGGRESSION*:**

Group Meetings	EXP	OBS
1. White male professor interrupts to clarify what the African-Am female professor was saying, putting down or dismissing her contribution with a condescending tone.	____	____
2. As a White female professor is speaking, a White male professor interrupts to explain something to the professor that she already knows (aka "mansplaining" or "womansplaining").	____	____
3. Latina professor raised her hand in a faculty meeting, and her question was ignored by the chair.	____	____
4. During a discussion or Q & A, the chair ignores and does not call upon underrepresented faculty members or staff to contribute.	____	____
5. The committee chair continues to mispronounce the African-Am, Latinx, Russian, etc. names of faculty or staff after they have been corrected or makes up easier names to pronounce.	____	____
6. When an African-Am female or other underrepresented professor contributes, her ideas are automatically dismissed and discredited by another professor.	____	____
7. As an African-Am or Asian professor is speaking, the faculty chair or dean is paying no attention, looking down, reading something, with no eye contact. No reaction or feedback is given to the speaker. The chair promptly moves on to the next agenda item.	____	____
8. An idea presented by an African-Am male or female professor is claimed (aka stolen) by a White professor in a subsequent meeting (aka "bropropriated" or "sispropriated").	____	____
9. An underrepresented professor or administrative staff is singled out and called upon to provide the African-Am, Latinx, Asian, female or gay perspective on academic issues (aka "spokesperson pressure") in committee discussions.	____	____
10. Muslim, gay, or African-Am female professors are not invited to grant meetings to be included in a proposal within their areas of expertise.	____	____
11. Meetings are scheduled during the religious holidays of Jewish and Muslim faculty so they can't attend.	____	____
12. African-Am faculty and staff are made to feel uncomfortable and unwelcome at the department retreat where they are not permitted to raise questions or participate in certain activities.	____	____
13. African-Am or Latinx administrative assistants are excluded from departmental meetings where decisions are made that affect everyone in the department.	____	____
14. Underrepresented nontenured faculty and staff are discouraged from speaking in meetings they are required to attend.	____	____
15. At a retreat, a White male heterosexual changes his seat to not sit next to an LGBTQ or PWD.	____	____
16. The chair ignores professor-to-professor or professor-to-staff microaggressions that occur in discussions on different topics.	____	____

Individual Office Meetings	EXP	OBS
17. White professor sets the thermostat to an uncomfortably high or low temperature to reduce the meeting time with an African-Am professor.	____	____
18. White male professor creates physical distance and separation with his desk when he meets with LGBTQ faculty or staff.	____	____
19. White female professor mentor is repeatedly late to meetings with her mentee instructor or TA of color.	____	____

CONTINUED

### *Official and Social Events*	EXP	OBS
20. Latinx or African-Am professors are shunned or made to feel uncomfortable at holiday parties for holidays they don't observe.	___	___
21. LGBTQ faculty and staff are not invited to social events, such as holiday parties and cook-outs, at faculty homes.	___	___
22. African-Am junior faculty or administrative assistant is not invited to lunch with other faculty.	___	___
23. A female instructor comments to the female associate dean: "You dress so conservatively. Loosen up a bit."	___	___
24. University chaplain presents opening and closing Christian prayers at convocation, dedication, awards ceremony, and commencement to both Christian and non-Christian employees and guests.	___	___
25. All of the buildings are named after the White male, rich alumni or past college presidents.	___	___
Casual Encounters		
26. Walking down the hall, a Boomer professor passes a Net Gener instructor and says "Good Morning!" or "Hi, how's it going?" Net Gener makes no eye contact and completely ignores Boomer.	___	___
27. The White male professor doesn't hold the door open to the building entrance or classroom for any female colleague.	___	___
28. White female professor in an elevator with an African-Am or Latina administrative assistant comments that "Your hair would look so much better if it were straightened."	___	___
29. White professors continue to mispronounce the African-Am or foreign names of faculty and staff.	___	___
30. Any female professor clutches her handbag as an African-Am male colleague passes her in the hallway or stands in line behind her at the coffee bar.	___	___
31. In the elevator or elsewhere, White or nonwhite personnel stare at a female Muslim professor's or staff member's *hijab.*	___	___
32. Underrepresented faculty and administrative staff must endure inappropriate racist, sexist, or homophobic jokes.	___	___
Promotion and Tenure Review		
33. Nonwhite and/or gay professors are not appointed to serve on P & T and search committees.	___	___
34. Nonwhite assistant professors have their promotions review delayed and remain in rank longer than their White counterparts.	___	___
35. Faculty members of color are assigned more classes to teach, more committees, and more responsibilities, plus have to work harder than many of their White colleagues.	___	___
36. White professor comments in a P & T meeting: "Affirmative action has turned the screws on our promotion decision for this Black candidate."	___	___
37. African-Am or female faculty member is listed as a third or fourth author on a research article when they did most of the work. When this occurs repeatedly, their list of publications can affect chances for promotion.	___	___
38. Latina assistant professor's scholarly contributions receive greater scrutiny and criticism in review for promotion than her White colleagues.	___	___
39. The research/publications of White professors are cited more frequently than those of women and minority professors, which discredits the contributions of the latter when it's time for promotion review.	___	___
40. Promotions committee communicates that a female or Muslim assistant professor is lucky to be in the department, much less promoted.	___	___
TOTAL	___ +	___

MICROAGGRESSION EXPOSURE INDEX (MEI) = **____/80__**

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