Understanding Microaggressions: A catalyst for climate change in the workplace

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Organizational Climate

The events, messages, symbols, core beliefs, feelings, and much more, which makes “our community” a welcoming, or not so welcoming environment

(Virginia Tech)
Let’s Chat
Brief and commonplace indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostility or negative slights and insults that potentially have harmful or unpleasant psychological impact.

(Solorzani, Ceja, & Yozzo, 2000; Sue, et.al. 2007)
Our Experiences
Microaggressions at Work

- Don't Take My Bag
- Ignore The Women
- You Speak Excellent English
- Show Me Your Papers
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Microaggression</th>
<th>Message</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Myth of meritocracy: Statements which assert that race does not play a role in life successes</td>
<td>“I believe the most qualified person should get the job.” “Everyone can succeed in this society, if they work hard enough.”</td>
<td>People of color are given extra unfair benefits because of their race. People of color are lazy and/or incompetent and need to work harder</td>
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<td>Occurs when any aspect of a person’s identity other than disability is ignored or denied</td>
<td>“I can’t believe you are married.”</td>
<td>There is no part of your life that is normal or like mine. The only thing I see when I look at you is your disability.</td>
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<td>Assumptions of traditional gender roles: Occurs when an individual assumes that a woman should maintain traditional gender roles</td>
<td>“People expect you to be more polite, more dainty, just because, you know, you are a woman. . . . What is acceptable for a man to do in public is totally different than what a woman is expected to do in public.”</td>
<td>Women should be feminine. Women should be domesticated.</td>
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Sue, et. al, 2007
Well-intended
Group Activity
1. Identify
   A. Microaggression (2)

2. Explain
   A. Microaggression (2)

3. Resolve
   A. Microaggression (1)
More Examples

- Continuing to mispronounce the names of employees after being corrected, or not bothering to pronounce the name correctly in the first place.

- Making assumptions of employees based on their race or ethnicity:
  "Are you here as apart of an affirmative action program?"

- Assuming all employees are from the US and familiar with American culture:
  "What do you mean you've never heard of this show?"

- Hosting discussions in meetings that place employees from groups who may represent the minority opinion in a difficult position.

- Asking people with disabilities to identify themselves:
  "If anyone has a special need and cannot take the test at the normal time please raise your hand"

- Making assumptions about employees and their backgrounds:
More Examples

• Singling employees out because of their background:
  "You're (member of minority group). Can you tell us about a time you were discriminated against?"

• Ignoring employee to employee microaggressions:
  "That party was so retarded"

• Assuming all Latino employees speak Spanish:
  "Can you translate this for me, Hector?"

• Assuming all Asians are good at math

• Assuming the gender of any employee
Cost
Interpersonal Cost
Microaggression Effect

**Biological/Physical**
- Accumulation stressors can equal a catastrophic health event
- Mental Health Issues
- High Blood Pressure
- Physical Health Issues

**Cognitive**
- Disrupted cognitive responses - decreased focus
- Trying to make meaning of incidents
- Identity disengage
- Reduced learning
- Lower productivity

**Behavioral**
- Hyper vigilance/skepticism conflict
- Devalue social group identities
- Fatigue and hopelessness
- Contribute to a hostile climate
- May reduce education quality

**Emotional**
- Emotional well-being
- Psychological turmoil
- Identity disengage
- Low self-esteem

Systematically: creates disparities in health care, education, and employment because they are based upon a biased worldview that is manifested in hiring, retention, and promotion decisions in the workplace.
- May reduce the quality of education received by students of color
- May result in lower quality of health care for certain groups
Organizational Cost
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Discouragement
- Physical health
- Absenteeism
- Presenteeism
- Turnover
- Vengeful activities
- Customer complaints
- Wasted time
- Office politics
- Workers comp claims
- Health insurance
- Litigation

- Quality of work
- Productivity
- Self-esteem
- Job satisfaction
- Company loyalty
- Customer satisfaction
- Number of customers
- Company reputation
- Internal relationships
- Communication
- Decision making abilities
- Innovation & learning
- Employee engagement
- Ability to meet goals
- Bottom line

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The increased cost of employee turnover due to a toxic employee tends to be about $12,000 per toxic worker. What is not captured in the cost is other potential costs, such as litigation, regulatory penalty, and reduced employee morale (Housman and Minor, 2015).

One of the major findings of the 2007 U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey — the largest scientific survey of bullying in the US — was that "Bullying is 4 (four) times more prevalent than illegal, discriminatory harassment," which includes such things as discrimination due to race, gender, ethnicity, religion, disability, or age. Other findings included that the 'stereotype' of the 'bully boss' was very real, with 72% of bullies being bosses, and 55% of those bullied being rank-and-file workers; and that with regard to turnover "40% of bullied workers voluntarily leave", while "Targets lose their jobs to make the bullying stop in 77% of cases."

The Freada Klien Study (2003), Gathered data from SEC filings and other public sources to estimate the cost of unfair treatment in a typical 500 company. Klien concluded that, “the cost of inappropriate/unfair treatment was $919 per employee per year, in 2003 dollars, for a typical fortune 500 service or manufacturing firm. She added that meaningful efforts to prevent or intervene could be undertaken for less then 10% of this figure-i.e. for $90 per employee per year.
Remove and Protect
• Active listening
• Knowledge and resources
• Communication
• Diplomacy
• Advocacy
• Interact with people different than you
• Don’t be defensive
• Be open to discussing your own biases
• Recognize your own biases
• Be an ally – stand against bias
• Agreement to say “ouch”