

FIX YOUR CLIMATE

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO REDUCING MICROAGGRESSIONS, MICROBULLYING, AND BULLYING IN THE ACADEMIC WORKPLACE

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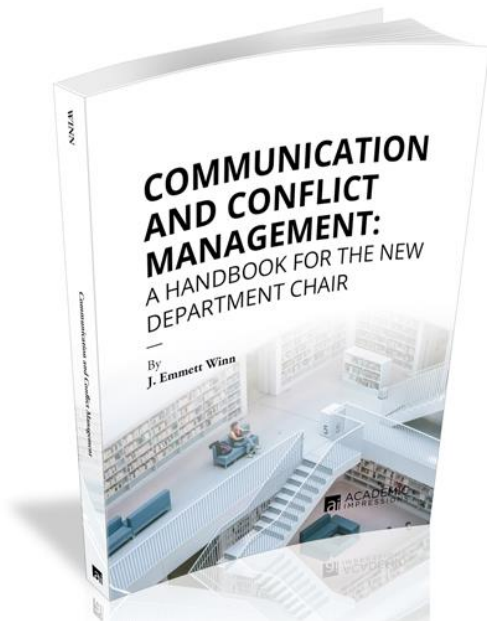
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FOREWORD

As the world becomes more connected and organizations become more diverse, we must begin to understand the intersection of our internal and external identities to foster the collaborations needed to thrive in the 21st century college or university. It is very important that the organizational climate within your institution is as strong as possible.

In our years of experiences working, consulting, and engaging with many people within many different organizations, we have observed that the top core element to strong organizational functioning (if they can be ranked) is the strength of the human capital within the institution.

Microaggressions have taken place for many years, but it's only recently that the research has reached a wide audience and started to infuse into institutions. Our research draws on existing microaggression research and extends it to the particular variation found within institutions of higher education, *hierarchical microaggressions*. We then also make a connection between microaggressions and bullying and posit that a new concept in the literature, microbullying, links these two experiences. Microaggressions, microbullying, and bullying can be the "silent destroyers" of an institution's climate. Similar to high blood pressure, they are difficult to detect on the surface. If undetected and untreated, they can destroy relationships and morale, as well as lead to reduced collaboration, productivity, and sense of belonging, ultimately leading to a toxic environment. A toxic environment destroys the overall climate health of the department, school, college, or university. Simply put, microaggressions and microbullying actions slowly destroy

your space and destroy the overall human capital. If left untreated, they can lead to a unit's demise.

Reducing microaggression, microbullying, and bullying actions has an instant positive individual effect on a department, unit, or school, which then leads to systemic, positive organizational effects that create a welcoming climate for everyone within the institution.

Luckily, there is much you can do at the individual and systemic levels to reduce microaggressions, microbullying, and bullying. Committed people are the first line of defense against these behaviors. Leaders are in positions to model expected behavior and to take bad behavior seriously. You can reduce microaggressions so that they do not turn into microbullying or bullying. You can let others know of the department or school's norms and be the first to require all adhere to these norms. You can work to create practices and policies that support a welcoming institution. You can work to create practices and policies to let people know what happens if they cross that line. You can drive these changes to improve campus climate one interaction at a time.

Key Terms

Ally - people who stand up and take on the problems borne of oppression as their own, even if they cannot fully understand what it's like to be oppressed.

Bullying - unwanted repeated, aggressive behavior that involves a real or perceived power imbalance; behavior that manifests as verbal abuse; conduct which is threatening, humiliating, intimidating; or sabotage that interferes with work thus creating a hostile, offensive, and toxic workplace.

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Bystander Intervention - anyone in a larger peer culture, whether or not they are present at the time of a specific incident, who can step in and say something about the incident.

Campus Climate - this is a measure of the real or perceived quality of interpersonal, academic, and professional interactions on a campus and consists of "the current attitudes, behaviors, and standards of faculty, staff, administrators, and students concerning the level of respect for individual needs, abilities, and potential" (Hurtado, 1992).

Diversity - the mix of differences that may make a difference in an interaction, always depending on the context such as the ability to meet individual or group goals, the ability to effectively meet intercultural challenges, safety, cost, and legality.

Dominant Identity - an identity that is systematically advantaged by the society.

Equity - providing varying levels of support based on need, context, or ability.

Hierarchical Microaggressions - represent the everyday slights found in higher education that communicate systemic valuing (or devaluing) of a person because of the institutional role held by that person in the institution.

Implicit Bias - the biases that impact us even when we do not really know they are impacting us; often the little voice in our heads that say things related to stereotypes about people.

Inclusion - using differences in a way that increases contributions and opportunities for everyone; often

happens when people work together effectively, and their cultural experiences and differences are valued.

Marginalized Identity - an identity that is systematically disadvantaged by the society.

Microaffirmation - tiny acts of opening doors to opportunity, gestures of inclusion and caring, and graceful acts of listening.

Microaggression - a comment or action that subtly and often unconsciously or unintentionally expresses a prejudiced or stereotyping attitude toward a member of a marginalized group.

Microbullying - when the intentional or unintentional microaggressions become repetitive from one individual to another.

Micro-Resistance - when you proactively work, every chance you have, to create an inclusive environment around you.

Mobbing - when more and more people are involved in the bullying of one individual or a small group of individuals.

Positive Inquiry - an approach to organizational change that focuses on strengths of the organization and people in it, rather than on their weaknesses.

Privilege - unearned advantage or entitlement that benefits oneself or harms others; often, if you benefit from privilege you are unaware you have; you might feel like your life is “normal.”

Restorative Justice - a space where people (often when there is a power imbalance but not always) can come

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together with a facilitator to ensure that people are recognizing when they're doing something wrong and finding a way to make it right.

Trigger - a strong emotional/physical response to a person or an event.

A Roadmap for This Book

Each chapter in this book will include:

- A conceptual framework
- Practical scenarios
- Worksheets and items to take for action

Each chapter will close with a list of questions for reflection, a challenge to take on, and a list of resources for learning more.

Chapter 1 of this book is a quick primer on the history and development of microaggression research. We provide definitions of microaggressions, microbullying, and bullying. The chapter explains the difference between a microaggression and an ordinary insult. It goes on to explain how to prevent, identify, reduce, and remove microaggressions and what to do if you did not intend to microaggress against someone. The chapter provides lists of do's and don'ts to help make your campus a more inclusive and welcoming place, thus allowing faculty, staff, and students to thrive. It then explains how to identify and prevent bullying and offers lists of personal and institutional changes to reduce bullying at your institution. Peppered

throughout the chapter are reflective and pragmatic tools to use at your own institution.

Chapter 2 details the relationship between microaggressions, bullying, and campus climate. It introduces a useful conceptual tool called the 4-Way Implementation Model that campuses can use to examine their own policies and programs in the name of improving campus climate. This chapter explains how to think about institutional policies and programs through four interrelated lenses: systemic, individual, proactive, and reactive. This tool can also be used for short- and long-term planning of new policies and programs. This chapter shares examples of institutional policies and programs that address each of the four areas. The end of the chapter has a series of worksheets that any institution can use to map its own policies and processes using the 4-Way Implementation Model.

Chapters 3 and 4 put these ideas into practice by providing stories of microaggressions that happen in higher education. Each story explains why something is a microaggression, details what the intent and impact of the action might be, and then provides steps to address the microaggression. Chapter 3 shares examples of how deans, vice presidents, and others in senior leadership can address microaggressions at an institution. Chapter 4 focuses on the role of the chair and departmental influencers in responding to microaggressions at the departmental level. Following each story and solution is a reflective tool to use in your own practice. At the end of these chapters, you will be able to create your own stories and put them through the same process.

Chapter 5 moves the conversation from microaggression identification and removal to understanding the relationship

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between microaggressions, microbullying, and bullying and how one can morph into the next if nothing is done to remove and reduce the negative behaviors. This chapter specifically focuses on the role of microbullying and what units and departments can do to address this problematic behavior.

Chapter 6 explains how institutions often foster bullying through socialization and institutional processes and offers ways to combat bullying throughout departments, units, and the institution.

Chapter 7 offers a case study of how one university developed a bullying policy - the steps taken and the challenges faced in this endeavor. The chapter provides a template of a bullying policy and flow charts of the process from complaint to resolution for different constituent groups.

Chapter 8 provides extra worksheets and scenarios to use in your own unit or department.

How to Use This Book

This book can be used in many ways to improve your institution's climate.

1. As an individual, you might read the book and share or recommend the book to a friend or colleague. This is an organic way to start a discussion and provide a resource that can influence change in your environment. We are believers that, in general, people at their core are good and want to do the right thing as they engage

with colleagues. However, sometimes they do not know or are unaware of the adverse effect of their actions, even though their intent is positive. As discussed in this book, oftentimes microaggressions are unintentional while the impact is still harmful. Increased awareness and understanding will provide a greater opportunity for reduction. Microbullying is a new term. We have found that having a definition helps people feel like they finally have a way to talk about actions that have been harming them but for which they didn't have a name. Naming the actions provides an opportunity to reduce and remove such actions from the community. Without a way to talk about these behaviors, institutions have little chance to take them seriously and correct them before they escalate further and damage the institutional climate.

2. The book can be used as awareness piece and, if read by your workforce, will provide an education platform for your members to check themselves and begin to remove microaggressions, microbullying, and bullying actions from the environment. Once aware, you may use this text to review the many scenarios related to microaggressions and microbullying. You have an opportunity to take a deeper educational dive on situations that might be relevant to your environment. This book is packed with many scenarios that involve faculty, staff, and administrators. However, even if the scenario is not exactly titled to your work classification, the spirit of each scenario can be applied throughout many job categories thus providing you with examples and recommendations to reduce microaggressions and microbullying in your institution.

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3. You can ask your staff or department to read this book and work through the worksheets, independently or in professional development groups, to increase the shared language about these issues which can magnify the entire organization's work toward improving the climate. Having one or two people read the book within a department or organization is helpful; it is an individual approach. However, if everyone understands these principles then you are more likely to have a significant and systemic impact on daily interactions and practices throughout your institution. This improves your changes of moving the entire institution down a path of creating a more welcoming and inclusive climate.
4. Another strategy may be to use this book as a reminder and a workbook for your institution. This book will provide you with theory and policy examples, will allow you to pull information from scenarios, and will provide "tools for action" for different situations that might relate to your organization. You could encounter an issue similar to a scenario in the book, adopt the "tools for action" examples, and have a resolution you can apply right away. You have instant access to tools for reducing microaggressions and microbullying. In essence, this can serve as your "welcoming and inclusive climate workbook" that deans, chairs, department heads, committee chairs, or anyone who leads an area, department, committee, or group within your college can incorporate as "just-in-time" learning strategies. You can use the information from this book to improve the climate that you lead.

The more people who use this book as an awareness and education tool or a workbook to incorporate "just-in-time"

learning strategies to reduce microaggressions and micro-bullying, the greater chance for a behavioral shift, organizational buy-in, and a systemic movement toward creating a welcoming and inclusive climate.

CHAPTER 1: RESEARCH AND DEFINITIONS

SUMMARY

The first chapter of this book is a quick primer on the history and development of microaggression research. We provide definitions of microaggressions, microbullying, and bullying. This chapter explains the difference between a microaggression and an ordinary insult. It goes on to explain how to prevent, identify, reduce, and remove microaggressions as well as what to do if you did not intend to microaggress against someone. This chapter provides lists of do's and don'ts to help make your campus a more inclusive and welcoming place, thus allowing faculty, staff, and students to thrive. It then explains how to identify and prevent bullying and offers lists of personal and institutional changes to reduce bullying at your institution. Peppered throughout the chapter are reflective and pragmatic tools to use at your own institution.

Introduction

Microaggressions feel like a slap in the face. Microaggressions hurt both physically and psychologically. If we are not OK with physical violence at colleges and universities, we should not be OK with psychological violence

either. Being a good person is not enough to ensure that you will not inadvertently microaggress against someone else.

Read the following excerpt of a new faculty member's experience trying to navigate her way through her new job.

SCENARIO

Maria and two other assistant professors were recently hired. The department they joined is tight on space. The other two junior faculty received an office of their own. Maria was given the office of someone on sabbatical while the department sorted out "what to do with her." She was also told that "she should just be thankful that she did not have to share an office." No one mentioned that the other two new faculty did not have to share their offices nor did they have to squat in someone else's space.

Her new chair, one of the people who interviewed her, helped get her keys and supplies, and was charged with facilitating the onboarding process for the department, would see Maria in the hallway and ask her if she was a new student and needed anything. This happened on and off for over a month.

Finally, Maria thought things were going better, and the chair was beginning to see her as a competent, new faculty member. Then, when discussing something else, the chair mentioned that Maria had been hired through a "Special Hires" program designed to diversify the faculty. Maria was

stunned. She reminded the chair that she had not been hired through the “Special Hires” program. She had been hired through the traditional institutional hiring process similar to her other two newly hired colleagues. The chair then said, “Oh, yeah,” and moved on with the conversation.

Let’s unpack

First a little context. In this excerpt, Maria is a newly hired faculty woman of color. The other two newly hired faculty are white women. The department chair is a white woman and has been the chair of the department for many years. This context is important as it establishes race, role, and hierarchy.

You might read this excerpt and assume that the new chair probably thought all the new hires were students. No. Maria asked the others. They were never assumed to be students. You might assume, of course, space is tight, and someone had to squat. You would be right. But did the chair even think of the implications of asking the one faculty of color to squat but not the two white colleagues. You might assume it is an honest mistake for a chair to think a person of color was hired through a special hiring program. You would almost be right. As special hiring programs are becoming more popular, the majority of faculty hirings still take place through traditional hiring processes and making an alternative assumption links to implicit bias when hiring faculty of color. It seems like honest mistake, at least from the chair’s position.

Here are the problems with these assumptions. For the chair, a white woman, thinking Maria was a student was

funny and highlighted Maria's youthful air. However, this was received as a slight to Maria's accomplishments and ability to perform her faculty duties. For the chair, explaining the hiring process wrong was just a quick mistake. For Maria, this "mistake" placed a label on how she earned her position and implied that she was not hired on her skills and abilities but because of her race or gender. The chair did not even think through the implications of office assignment. Why does the person of color not receive the same office opportunities as her newly hired white colleagues?

For Maria, this was not just one slight, one time. These were several small slights that Maria kept experiencing from her chair, slights that might have related to her age, her role, and/or her ethnicity—Maria did not know what was provoking the chair into interacting with her in these negative ways. All she knew was that she was feeling unwelcome, devalued, not treated like a colleague or even an adult, and that her chair had the impression that she got the job by being "less than" her peers. For Maria, these small experiences were microaggressions. Even though the chair might not have meant anything by what she said or the decisions she made, Maria received the messages loud and clear—messages that were hurtful to her sense of self, personally and professionally.

The experience of these sorts of messages stay with people who experience them forever. Several years later, when Maria shared her stories, she told them with the same emotional pain as if they'd happened yesterday. That is what microaggressions sound like. That is what microaggressions feel like.

Where did the term “microaggression” come from?

The term racial microaggression was coined in the 1970s by Dr. Chester Pierce and his colleagues. They sought to explain experiences African Americans were having that caused physical and psychological pain—experiences that did not look the same or sound the same as pre-Civil Rights forms of discrimination. These microaggressions were experienced as brief and commonplace indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicated hostility or negative slights that potentially had harmful or unpleasant psychological impact. The harm might be expressed as anger, shame, annoyance, pity, or even resignation. Although that should be enough to explain the trouble with microaggressions and why institutions of higher education should reduce them, a compounding problem is that these comments and actions reinforce stereotypes or prejudices about a social group – which makes them not only a slap in the face, but a slap in the collective face of an identity group.

In 2007, a seminal article emerged from Dr. Derald Sue and colleagues titled *Racial microaggressions in everyday life: Implications for clinical practice*. It led to an explosion of articles, social media sites, and news features related to racial microaggressions in workplaces and in everyday life. This article also led researchers to examine what other social identities might experience microaggressions, beyond the social category of race. Researchers found similar microaggressive experiences related to people’s gender, sexuality, age, etc. Across research studies, issues related to people feeling second-class, put down, and less-than

appeared again and again across contexts—all related to outward-facing identity characteristics, not personality or internal characteristics.

Ways to experience microaggressions

Microaggressions can be verbal, non-verbal, electronic, environmental, and/or organizational.

- **Verbal microaggressions** are spoken statements or questions that can harm through the actual words, or the tone of the words. An example might be when a new faculty is hired and someone says, “Are you sure you have a PhD?” sending an implication of disbelief for many reasons (e.g., youth, intellect, etc.) and implying lack of trust in your credentials, skills, and abilities.
- **Nonverbal microaggressions** are any sort of body language that sends the message that the receiver of the microaggression is not a person of worth. For example, someone might only greet the dean and ignore anyone of a lower rank who is standing beside the dean.
- **Electronic microaggressions** are sent over email or on social media, such as copying people who are not directly involved in an email chain repeatedly to “out” someone else’s ideas or opinions.
- **Environmental microaggressions** are those that are institutionalized into the environment of an

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institution. An example might be when a person who uses a motorized wheelchair is forced to use the industrial elevator, often located near trash bins, since the regular elevator does not go to the needed floor.

- **Organizational microaggressions** are systemic and are part of the fabric of the policies and programs within an institution. For instance, an institution might only have time off slated for Christian holidays, and you must ask for time off if you practice a different religion than Christianity.

Hierarchical microaggressions

This initial research paved the way for us to examine hierarchical microaggressions—those that happen due to the role or position someone holds at an institution of higher education. Hierarchical microaggressions represent the everyday slights found in higher education that communicate systemic valuing (or devaluing) of a person because of the role held by that person in the institution. These happen in a variety of ways, but most happen by (slightly adapted from Young, Anderson and Stuart, 2016):

1. **Valuing/devaluing someone based on their role/credential:** For example, a department head makes a decision that increases the workload for staff and does not consult with the department staff prior to making that decision. Department staff feel they have no voice and are undervalued. They feel that if they held more high-status positions, their input would be requested.

2. **Changing accepted behavior based on role:** For instance, a senior faculty member comes into the front office of a department and shouts at the front desk staff for forgetting to note down the change in meeting location. The front desk staff gently tells the senior faculty member that the chair of the department is the one who changed the meeting at the last minute; thus, the staff had no role in noting the change in venue. A few minutes later, the same staff person hears the senior faculty member joking about the change in venue with the chair, acting like the lack of notification was no big deal. The staff notices that the senior faculty member feels free to treat a subordinate without respect, but because of the higher status of the chair, will not treat her in a similar manner.
3. **Actions (ignoring/excluding/surprise/interrupting) related to role:** There is a new staff member who is responsible for keeping track of faculty appointments. One faculty member comes in and asks about his appointments for the day. The staff member rattles off the list of appointments without looking at the online schedule. The faculty asks, “Are you sure?” The staff member says, “Yes, I have a good memory.” The faculty then says, with surprise, “I didn’t know staff could learn things so quickly!” and walks away. The staff member is extremely frustrated by the faculty member’s assumption of his lack of memory.
4. **Terminology related to work position:** A student who helps at the front desk at an office within the institution regularly hears, “Oh, you’re a just a work-study.” They feel that it devalues the work they do and indicates to others their lack of finances, which embarrasses them. They would

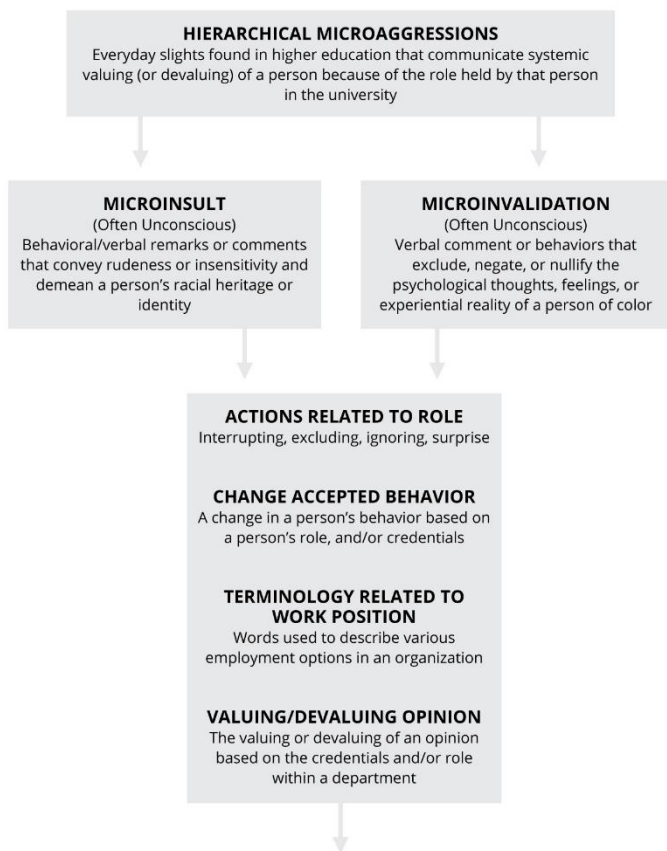
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prefer to be called a part-time worker, which they are, and not have to endure the connotation of being an under-skilled “charity case.”

Climate, productivity, and the presence of microaggressions go hand-in-hand. It is important for institutional leaders to be able to identify microaggressions as a primary step in improving organizational climate. Everyone wants to work where they are valued for who they are, for the work they accomplish. It is important for institutional leaders to be able to identify microaggressions, as a primary step in improving organizational climate. (See the chart on the following pages.)

How to identify microaggressions

Microaggressions hurt, but because of their fleeting nature, one of the ways of recognizing something as a microaggression is to note the second guessing you do when you experience one (Did that really happen? Did he really say that? Did I hear it wrong?). Microaggressions attack not just you but an aspect of your identity that you cannot easily change (i.e., race, class, gender, ability, gender identity, age, role, etc.). Microaggressions are defined by the person who experiences them, not the person who says or does them, and are often related to people’s non-privileged identities (take this BuzzFeed Quiz to “check” your level of privilege here: <https://www.buzzfeed.com/regajba/how-privileged-are-you?bfsource=bfocomparison>). People in higher education often experience microaggressions that harm several aspects of their identity at once—and that adds to the confusion (Did that happen because I am a woman? Because I am a lesbian? Because I am a student worker?).



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Isms Enacted - prejudice or discrimination against (insert a recognized social group here)

Age: Prejudice or discrimination against a particular age-group

Disability: Prejudice or discrimination against a person's physical or mental abilities

Gender: Prejudice or discrimination against the state of being any gender (typically used with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones)

Language: Prejudice or discrimination against someone because of how they speak the dominant language

Race: Prejudice or discrimination against a person's skin color

Role: Prejudice or discrimination against someone for the position s/he holds in an organization

Sexuality: Prejudice or discrimination against a person for their attraction to a specific gender or genders

Other: Includes additional "isms" (including: appearance, culture, general, geographic, income, informality, military, politics, etc.)

(This chart is adapted from Young, Anderson, and Stuart, 2016)

What is the difference between a common insult and a microaggression?

Social science research shows that one of the major differences between common insults and microaggressions is that microaggressions have been found to affect people long after the actual experience. Insults hurt, but the pain goes away relatively quickly. Microaggressions are cumulative. They happen over and over and are related to someone's social identity characteristics (i.e., race, class, gender, sexuality, disability status, age, role/ position, religion, etc.) and possibly to their role or hierarchy within an organization (e.g., work study, classified staff, affiliate professor, assistant professor, associate professor, dean, administrator, etc.).

Microaggressions often feel like they have to be deciphered. The person is left wondering: did she really say that, or did he really act that way towards me? Insults might also have this component, but since the questions are not related to parts of you that you cannot change, the wondering is not tied to identity.

Microaggressions are reminders of a person's second-class status in society or in their organization. They symbolize historical and organizational injustices like how groups from marginalized backgrounds receive lower pay, are hired at lower rates, recover from recessions more slowly, have worse health and educational outcomes, own houses that appreciate slower, etc. Common insults, on the other hand, do not generate these humiliating associations with the person's identity group.

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Microaggressions are like repeated toe stubs. The pain of them builds and grows with each subsequent hit. Imagine if you hit your toe first thing in the morning. It hurts, but you move on. Then you bang your toe nine more times during the day. Finally, while you are grocery shopping, someone accidentally steps on your toe. You cry out, “*Ouch!*” Why did this tiny mishap make you shout so loud? All that happened was that someone accidentally slightly stepped on your toe. Your toe has been hurt a little bit so many times in one day, that when it is hurt one more time, the multiplier effect takes place and produces so much pain that you are overwhelmed, and you shout. This last stub, although the same as the first, is worse than the others because of the cumulative harm your foot has experienced throughout the day. The pain from microaggressions grows similarly. Maya Angelou calls this “death by 1,000 cuts.”

How do you know if a slight is a microaggression?

