Resolution to Address Microaggressions

Whereas – Microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental actions (whether intentional or unintentional) that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults toward members of oppressed or targeted groups regarding an individual’s race, ethnicity, religion, color, sex, age, national origin, sexual orientation, disability, gender identity or expression, ancestry, pregnancy or any other characteristic prohibited by law

Whereas – Microaggressions are not limited to human interactions, but may also be environmental, as when one’s identity can be minimized or made insignificant through the exclusion of decorations or literature that represents various groups.

Whereas – It is argued that racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination are no longer as blatant as in the past. Instead, people may demonstrate their biases and prejudices in more subtle ways, otherwise known as microaggressions.

Whereas – Microaggressions commonly take place in three forms: microinsult, microassault and microinvalidation.

- Microinsult - (Often unconscious) Behavioral/verbal remarks or comments that convey rudeness, insensitivity and demean a person’s racial heritage or identity.
- Microassault - (Often conscious) Explicit denigrations of targeted groups characterized primarily by violent verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior or purposeful discriminatory actions.
- Microinvalidation - (Often unconscious) Verbal comments or behaviors that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings or experiential reality of a person of a targeted group.

Whereas – Microaggressions are not harmless and have a significant negative impact on people’s mental and physical health, including but not limited to, depression, anxiety, trauma and a negative worldview.

Whereas – Harmful behaviors are committed via microaggressions regardless of intent.

Therefore, BE IT RESOLVED that Oregon Nurses Association will create policies that will promote respect for all communities and people.

Therefore, BE IT RESOLVED that ONA will be a safe organization for those who are victimized by microaggressions.

Therefore, BE IT RESOLVED that ONA will endeavor to be vigilant to avoid microaggressions in language and other subtle messages used.

Therefore, BE IT RESOLVED that ONA will educate about microaggressions, diversity, equality, equity and respect.

Therefore, BE IT RESOLVED that when any ONA action or statement inadvertently commits a microaggression, ONA will assume accountability and adapt and reconcile accordingly.
MICROAGGRESSIONS

Microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental actions (whether intentional or unintentional) that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward members of oppressed or targeted groups including:

- People of color
- Women
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) persons
- Persons with disabilities
- Religious minorities (Nadal, 2014).

They are not limited to human encounters, but may also be environmental, as when an office setting that unintentionally assails their identity. One’s identity can be minimized or made insignificant through the exclusion of decorations or literature that represents various groups (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal & Esquilin, 2007).

It is argued that racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination are no longer as blatant as they may have been in the past. Instead, people may demonstrate their biases and prejudices in more subtle ways, otherwise known as microaggressions (Nadal, 2014).

Three forms of microaggressions have been identified: microassault, microinsult, and microinvalidation.

Microassault

Microassaults are overt forms of discrimination in which actors deliberately behave in discriminatory ways, but do not intend to offend or may think that their actions are not noticed or harmful. These types of experiences are similar to the “old-fashioned” discrimination that existed in earlier times, but different in that people may not openly proclaim their biases. For example, when someone says “That’s so gay!” to connote that something is weird, the person is aware of the words that they choose; however, they may not realize that using such language is considered homophobic and can offend LGBT people. Similarly, when a comedian makes a racial joke or uses racial slurs, they intend to say the offensive comment, but will end with “I was just joking” as a way of denying prejudice (Nadal, 2014). Referring to someone as “colored” or “Oriental,” using racial epithets, discouraging interracial interactions, deliberately serving another patron before someone of a targeted group, and displaying a swastika are also examples. Microassaults can be conscious and deliberate often expressed in limited situations that allow some degree of anonymity. These people who hold notions of minority inferiority privately usually only display them publicly when they lose control or feel relatively safe to engage in a microassault (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal & Esquilin, 2007).

Microinsult

Microinsults are statements or behaviors in which individuals unintentionally or unconsciously communicate discriminatory messages to members of target groups (Nadal, 2014). Microinsults are subtle snubs, frequently unknown to the perpetrator, but convey an insulting message to the recipient. When an employee of color is asked “How did you get your job?”, the underlying message from the perspective of the recipient is that people of color are not qualified, and as a minority group member, you must have obtained the position through affirmative action and not because of ability. Microinsults
can be nonverbal, when a White supervisor seems distracted during a conversation with a Black employee by avoiding eye contact or turning away. The message conveyed is that their contributions are unimportant (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal & Esquilin, 2007).

Microinvalidation

Microinvalidations are statements that deny, negate, or undermine the realities of members of various target groups. For example, when a white person tells a person of color that racism does not exist, they are invalidating and denying the person of color’s racial reality. Similarly, when someone tells a woman that she is “being too sensitive,” or that an LGBT person “should stop complaining,” they invalidate the reality of discrimination in these people’s lives (Nadal, 2014).

The Effect of Microaggressions

Some people may feel that microaggressions are harmless, the reality is microaggressions negatively impact people’s mental and physical health including depression, anxiety and trauma. There is a strong relationship between microaggressions and intense psychological distress (Nadal, 2014).

How to Respond to Microaggressions

When people are the victim of a microaggression they may question if a microaggression has really occurred (i.e., “Did I hear him correctly when he made that comment?”). Next, they decide whether or not to take action. If the individual does respond, there is a likely outcome (e.g., arguments, defensiveness, denials, or additional microaggressions). If the individual does not respond, there is also an outcome (e.g., regret, resentment, sadness). The process of deciding how to respond to a microaggression can be stressful in itself.

A three-step process to react to a microaggression, ask yourself the following:

1. Did this microaggression really occur?
2. Should I respond to this microaggression?
3. How should I respond to this microaggression?

Did this microaggression really occur?

Sometimes microaggressions are obvious, a person can identify them effortlessly.

- When a man of color notices that a white woman clutches her purse as he enters an elevator, he is confident that she assumes he is a criminal.
- When someone says “That's so gay!” in front of an LGBT person, the LGBT individual knows the person is using homophobic language.

With some encounters, an individual may question whether a microaggression has happened.

- If a woman hears someone whistle as she walks down a street, she may think, “Did that really just happen or am I hearing things?”
- If a coworker makes a seemingly transphobic comment in front of a transgender female colleague, the recipient might question whether she heard the statement correctly.
When there are people around (particularly people who the individual trusts) to verify and validate the microaggression, it makes it easier for the individual to definitively label the event as a microaggression. When there is no one around, it may be helpful to seek support from loved ones.

**Should I respond to this microaggression?**

If an individual is certain (or moderately certain) that a microaggression did occur, they ponder the potential risks or consequences of responding or not responding. Some questions include:

If I respond,
- could my physical safety be in danger?
- will the person become defensive?
- will this lead to an argument?
- how will this affect my relationship with this person?

If I don’t respond,
- will I regret not saying something?
- does that convey that I accept the behavior or statement?

**How should I respond to this microaggression?**

If individuals decide to take action, they have to decide how to react.

1. Passive-aggressively communicate that they are upset or annoyed.
   - Make a joke or a sarcastic comment
   - Roll their eyes
   - Sigh
   - Talk to others and hope it will get back to them

2. Proactively, might be effective when the victim does not have the energy to engage the perpetrator in a discussion. Sometimes individuals who experience microaggressions regularly may feel so agitated that they just want to yell back. For some, an active response may be a therapeutic way of releasing years of accumulated anger and frustration.

3. Assertively - Often the perpetrator will become defensive, which may lead to further microaggressions (particularly microinvalidations).
   - Calmly addressing the perpetrator about
     - how it made them feel.
     - educating the perpetrators
     1. describing what was offensive about the microaggression
   - Use “I” statements (e.g., “I felt hurt when you said that.”), instead of attacking statements (e.g., “You’re a racist!”).
   - Address the behavior and not the perpetrator, instead of calling the perpetrator “a racist,” say that the behavior he or she engaged in was racially charged and offensive.
   - People don’t like being called a racist, sexist or homophobe, to have an effective avoid using such language.

When the interaction is over, it is important for the victim of the microaggression to seek support. Seeking support can include
Practical support (e.g., at a workplace, Human Resources)
Social support (e.g., loved ones or peers with similar identities who can validate the experiences).

Processing one’s emotions, microaggressions have been known to lead to an array of mental health problems including depression, anxiety, and trauma. Therefore, individuals who experience microaggressions may find it helpful and necessary to discuss their cognitive and emotional reactions with their loved ones or mental health professionals. Doing so, may avoid accumulating negative and detrimental feelings, which may affect their mental health.

What If I Commit a Microaggression?

Everyone commits microaggressions. We have all done or said something that we did not intend to offend someone, but did. Sometimes we are aware of our actions, other times it takes another person to point them out. If we were completely unaware that something we said or did was hurtful or offensive, there really isn’t anything we can do. However, when we are even slightly aware that we may have committed a microaggression or if we are confronted about it, there are several things that we can do. There may be moments when you think you may have committed a microaggression. Have you ever said or done something in which an individual winced or clearly reacted negatively? When someone’s behavior is noticeable, we might be able to detect that something we said or did may have caused it. If you are able to detect the potential cause, OWN UP TO IT! We need to admit when we commit microaggressions, learn from the wrongdoing, and apologize. We all make mistakes, consciously and not, and need to own up to them when we do.

When someone confronts you on your behavior, listen to what he or she is trying to tell you and try not to be defensive. The worst thing that we can do is to deny that someone is hurt or offended by something we said or did. Invalidating their experience is a microaggression in itself. Admit to the wrongdoing and genuinely apologize.

To avoid microaggressions

- Be aware of the language that you use. Common phrases like “That’s so gay!” often go under the radar because people do not realize that the language is actually homophobic and insulting. If something is weird, say it is weird! Why does it have to be called gay?
- Be aware of other subtle messages. For example, the color white is often used to convey that something is good (e.g., little white lie, white collar), while the color black is used to denote that something is bad (e.g., black sheep, blackmail, Black Friday).
- Education about microaggressions. The more people are aware of the term and concept, the less likely they will be defensive when confronted about their behaviors.
- Teach about diversity and equality, we have the ability to transform minds.
- Respect each other (Nadal, 2014).

Nine categories of racial microaggressions identified with distinct themes:

1- Alien in own land
• When Asian Americans and Latino Americans are assumed to be foreign born “Where are you from?”, “Where were you born?”, “You speak good English”
• A person asking an Asian American to teach them words in their native language.
• You are not American.
• You are a foreigner.

2- Ascription of intelligence

• Assigning intelligence to a person of color on the basis of their race “You are a credit to your race” “You are so articulate”
• Asking an Asian person to help with a math or science problem.
• People of color are generally not as intelligent as Whites.
• It is unusual for someone of your race to be intelligent.
• All Asians are intelligent and good in math/sciences.

3- Color blindness

• Statements that indicate that a White person does not want to acknowledge race “When I look at you, I don’t see color.” “There is only one race, the human race.” Denying a person of color’s racial/ethnic experiences.
• Assimilate/acculturate to the dominant culture.
• Denying the individual as a racial/cultural being.

4- Criminality/assumption of criminal status

• A White man or woman clutching their purse or checking their wallet as a Black or Latino approaches or passes
• A store owner following a customer of color around the store
• A White person waits to ride the next elevator when a person of color is on it
• You are a criminal.
• You are going to steal/ You are poor/ You do not belong.
• You are dangerous.

5- Denial of individual racism

• A statement made when Whites deny their racial biases “I’m not racist. I have several black friends.” “As a woman, I know what you go through as a racial minority.”
• I am immune to racism because I have friends of color.
• Your racial oppression is no different than my gender oppression. I can’t be a racist. I’m like you.

6- Myth of meritocracy

• Statements which assert that race does not play a role in life successes. “I believe the most qualified person should get the job.” “Everyone can succeed in this society, if they work hard enough.”
• 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.
7- Pathologizing cultural values/ communication styles

- The notion that the values and communication styles of the dominant/White culture are ideal
- Asking a Black person: “Why do you have to be so loud/animated? Just calm down.”
- To an Asian or Latino person: “Why are you so quiet? We want to know what you think. Be more verbal.” “Speak up more.”
- Dismissing an individual who brings up race/culture in work/school setting
- Assimilate to dominant culture.
- Leave your cultural baggage outside

8- Second-class citizen

- Occurs when a White person is given preferential treatment as a consumer over a person of color
- Person of color mistaken for a service worker
- Having a taxi cab pass a person of color and pick up a White passenger
- Being ignored at a store counter as attention is given to the White customer behind you
- “You people…”
- People of color are servants to Whites. They couldn’t possibly occupy high-status positions.
- You are likely to cause trouble and/or travel to a dangerous neighborhood.
- Whites are more valued customers than people of color.
- You don’t belong. You are a lesser being.

9- Environmental microaggressions

- Macro-level microaggressions, which are more apparent on systemic & environmental levels
- A college or university with buildings that are all named after White hetero-sexual upper-class males.
- Television shows & movies that feature predominantly White people, without representation of people of color
- Overcrowding of public schools in communities of color
- Overabundance of liquor stores in communities of color
- You don’t belong/You won’t succeed here. There is only so far you can go.
- You are an outsider/You don’t exist.
- People of color don’t/shouldn’t value education.
- People of color are deviant.

**Environmental Microaggressions (Macro-Level)**

Racial Assaults, insults and invalidations which are manifested on systemic and environmental levels.

- Ascription of Intelligence
- Assigning a degree of intelligence to a Person of color based on their race.

Second Class Citizen

- Treated as a lesser person or group.
Pathologizing Cultural values/ Communication Styles

- Notions that the values and communication styles of people of color are abnormal.

Assumption of Criminal Status

- Presumed to be a criminal, dangerous, or deviant based on race.

Alien in own land

- Belief that visible racial/ethnic minority citizens are foreigners.

Color Blindness

- Denial or pretense that a white person does not see color or race.

Myth of Meritocracy

- Statements which assert that race plays a minor role in life success.

Denial of Individual racism

- Denial of personal racism or one’s role in its perpetuation. (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal & Esquilin, 2007).

**Microaggressions Guide**

Racial

- Assumptions of Criminality
  - When people of color are assumed to be dangerous or deviant.
    - If a clerk follows an African American around in a store, they are presuming that the person of color is going to steal.
- Exoticization
  - When people of color are objectified or treated as tokens.
    - A man tells an Asian American woman that she is “exotic,” or that “he has an Asian fetish.”
- Assumptions of Intellectual Inferiority
  - When people of color are assumed to be less intelligent or capable than whites.
    - Someone overemphasizing to a Latina that she is “so articulate” subtly communicating that they did not expect her to be.
- Pathologizing Cultural Values
  - When people of color are criticized for their communication styles, behaviors, styles of dress.
    - When an Asian American or Latina/o is told to “get rid of your accent,” a subtle message is sent that one needs to assimilate.

Gender

- Sexual Objectification
  - When a woman is treated as a sexual object.
• When a woman is catcalled on the street or a man attempts to look at a woman’s breasts, he is communicating that women’s bodies are allowed to be sexualized.

• Assumptions of Traditional Gender Roles
  o When an individual assumes that a woman needs to uphold traditional gender roles.
    ▪ Many women are told that they need a husband to be happy.

• Assumptions of Inferiority
  o When a woman is assumed to be physically or intellectually incompetent, particularly in comparison to men.
    ▪ When a woman is carrying a box and a man takes it away from her (without her permission), assuming she isn’t physically strong.

LGBT

• Use of heterosexist or transphobic terminology
  o When offensive language is used towards or about LGBT people.
    ▪ It is commonplace for some people to use the word “faggot” casually when describing someone as weak.

• Discomfort/ Disapproval of LGBT experience
  o When LGBT individuals are treated with disrespect or condemnation because of their sexual orientation or gender presentation.
    ▪ A person staring at a same-sex couple holding hands.
    ▪ Someone who makes prejudicial remarks about a transgender person.

• Assumption of Sexual Pathology and Abnormality
  o When LGBT persons are presumed to be oversexualized or sexual deviants.
    ▪ When someone presumes that all LGBT people may have HIV/AIDS.
    ▪ Stereotypes LGBT people as child molesters.

Religious

• Endorsing religious stereotypes
  o When people make presumptions about religious minority groups.
    ▪ When someone makes a joke about Muslim people being terrorists or Jewish people being cheap.

• Pathology of different religious groups
  o When someone judges another religion as being inferior or substandard.
    ▪ When someone treats a non-Christian as a second-class citizen.

Intersectional

• Occurs as a result of an individual’s multiple groups and may influence the intensity or frequency of microaggressions.
  o Women of color may experience intersectional microaggressions, as a result of their gender and race
    ▪ Latina who is denied service at a restaurant or store because of both her race and gender.
LGBT persons of color may experience intersectional microaggressions as a result of their sexual identity and race.

- When a passerby ridicules a Black transgender woman, it can be due to her gender identity, her race, or both (Nadal, 2014).

References
