False Face Must Hide What the False Heart Doth Know: Review and Model of Workplace Microaggression

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Microaggression contains elements of workplace aggression, bullying, incivility, stigmatization, and ostracism. We argue that studies of the phenomenon should be broadened to cover all workplace members. Anyone with distinctly different ascribed status, physical and/or psychological characteristics from the mainstream may be subjected to negative micro-acts. We address two questions of concern: Why microaggression has not been recognized to be as problematic in "normalized" work settings as with bullying and harassment, and how workers exposed to such micro-aggressive acts might respond. Theories of signal detection and coordinated management of meaning are used to explain how targets attribute the reasons for these negative acts, and manage to either mitigate or prevent them. We suggest ways of reducing the prevalence of microaggression by coordinating the management of meaning between the perceiver-as-target and the perpetrator. This leads to adaptive coping (Marrs, 2012) and fosters supportive workplace climates (Kim et al., 2018). Implications for workplace practices and policies are provided.

Keywords: workplace microaggression, signal detection theory, coordinated management of meaning, unwanted repetitive patterns, coping approaches

INTRODUCTION

> *False face must hide what the false heart doth know.*
> —Shakespeare, 1606, *Macbeth*, Act 1, Scene 7

Macbeth's infamous utterance was as much to convince Lady Macbeth of his determination to murder King Duncan as the need to operate with stealth and deception for his plan to succeed. In the workplace, less extreme negative acts also operate to confuse would-be targets from discovering the motives of their perpetrators. Microaggression includes acts where perpetrators consciously or subconsciously hide their intentionality in sensitive situations. Such acts are prone to escalation, precisely because the opposing parties are unwilling or unable to discuss their differences openly.

This paper considers how the ambiguous and oftentimes conniving nature of micro-aggressive acts are evaluated by potential targets through the processes of signal detection (Martin and Rovira, 1981) and causal attribution (Kelley and Michela, 1980). In turn, communication patterns between targets and perpetrators affect subsequent interactions and coping through coordinated management of meaning

(CMM). Before discussing signal detection theory (SDT) and CMM, the definition and classification of microaggression are introduced. We then review research on microaggression across all work settings. We propose a model of workplace microaggression antecedents and consequences based on Lee and Brotheridge's (2017) theoretical framework. Next, we examine the impact of microaggression on targets, observers, and perpetrators. Last, we consider the practical implications. Our distinct contribution is using SDT to point out how microaggression overlaps with other forms of negative acts and use CMM to explain how workplaces can best manage microaggression.

Definitions and Forms of Microaggression

The term microaggression was coined by Chester M. Pierce in the 1970's as various insults and dismissals he observed perpetrated by non-black Americans towards African Americans. Microaggressions were defined as "subtle, stunning, often automatic, and nonverbal exchanges which are 'putdowns'" (Pierce et al., 1978, p. 66). In 1973, Mary Rowe proposed that certain types of remarks targeted toward women could also be considered microaggressions. She referred to these actions as "apparently small events which are often ephemeral and hard-to-prove, events which are covert, often unintentional, frequently unrecognized by the perpetrator, which occur wherever people are perceived to be 'different'" (Rowe, 2008, p. 2).

Since the 1970s, the concept of microaggression has further expanded to refer to primarily unintentional, unplanned degradation of socially marginalized group members (e.g., Johnson and Johnson, 2019; Paludi et al., 2010). Members of groups that experience "societal exclusion due to race, gender, social economic status (SES), disability, and/or sexual orientation" are likely subjected to microaggressions (Johnson and Johnson, 2019, p. 2). Sue (2010) defined microaggressions as "the brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, and sexual orientation, and religious slights and insults to the target person or group" (p. 229). In its evolution, the term microaggression has expanded from forms of racism to recognizing "the subtle indignities regularly suffered by marginalized groups" (Johnson and Johnson, 2019, p. 2).

Classifications of Microaggression

Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal and Esquilin (2007) posited that microaggression appears in three distinct forms, where persons of color are targeted. These classifications are microassault, microinsult, and microinvalidation. These micro-acts have been perpetrated on the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender LGBTQ+ community (Nadal, 2013), and other communities of people (Nadal, 2018).

Microassault

These are verbal or non-verbal insults and behaviors, often conscious and overt, similar to traditional forms of discrimination. These include acts such as name-calling, verbal comments that are demeaning, or inactions such as avoidance behaviors and non-inclusion. Some microassaults are both deliberate and blatant, such as when a hiring manager requests an employment agency recruiter not to refer any "lazy people" and then refers to a particular marginalized minority group of which the recruiter at the employment agency is a member. They can express conscious or implicit biases but are not intended to be malicious. For example, it is common in humor to make jokes referring to stereotypes of groups of people, often when the comedian is a member of the group. Although not intended to be harmful, these jokes or comments can reinforce socially undesirable stereotypes.

Microinsult

These are verbal comments or behaviors that express stereotypes about people of various groups. These microinsults can be covert, conscious or unconscious, intentional or unintentional, and often convey a hidden insulting meaning (Berk, 2017). These can include rude or insensitive comments, subtle snubs, or degrading messages that the perpetrator does not realize (Sue et al., 2007; Nadal 2013). On the other hand, intentional verbal and non-verbal behaviors such as profiling a black person as more likely to be engaged

in criminal behavior and acting accordingly or making verbal comments about the "femininity" of a gay man in a grocery store, are also examples of microinsults. Put-downs, sarcastic remarks, and wisecracks, often categorized as humor, perpetuate stereotypes to make fun of members of groups and can be considered microinsults (Berk, 2017). Microinsults are often how a perpetrator's implicit biases reveal themselves (Berk, 2017).

Microinvalidation

These are typically verbal and attempt to reject, rebut, or challenge the lived experiences of members of targeted groups. This can include situations where people are told that their perceptions of not being considered equal citizens are unsubstantiated and that they need to stop complaining about something that does not exist. In Canada, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission published 94 calls to action to help repair the harm caused by residential schools to Indigenous peoples and to jointly move forward with reconciliation. Regardless, some non-Indigenous individuals still believe that the lasting effects of the residential school system on Indigenous peoples are minor or inaccurately elaborated, and Indigenous people may be subject to gaslighting by being told that these harms did not occur.

Themes of Microaggression

In considering racial microaggression, Sue et al. (2007) proposed nine themes of microaggression listed in their Table 7. As is evident from the themes of microaggression developed by Sue et al. (2007) and Sue (2010) relating primarily to microaggression experienced due to racialized community, gender or sexual orientation, and the revised racial taxonomy of Williams, M.T., Skinta, and Martin-Willet (2021), verbal comments and other forms of communication can lead to divergent experiences of microaggression.

Williams, M.T. et al. (2021) expanded upon Sue et al.'s (2007) taxonomy of racially-motivated microaggression based on a review of 61 studies. This taxonomy is comprised of 16 categories: namely, Not a true citizen; Racial categorization and sameness (added); Assumptions about intelligence, competence, or status; False color blindness/invalidating racial or ethnic identity; Criminality or dangerousness; Denial of individual racism; Myth of meritocracy/race is irrelevant for success; Reverse-racism hostility (added); Pathologizing minority culture or appearance; Second-class citizen/ignored and invisible; Tokenism (added); Connecting via stereotypes (added); Exoticization and eroticization (added); Avoidance and distancing (added); Environmental exclusion; and Environmental attacks (added).

Although the above examples are verbal, acts of microaggression are frequently nonverbal in nature. The nonverbal microaggressions can be specific actions, inactions expressed through body language or environmental assaults, whether intentional or not. Some examples of nonverbal microaggressions (Gueits, 2022; Nadal, 2018; Sue, 2010; Torino et al., 2019; Williams, M.T., 2019) include:

- People only check their phones in a meeting when you are speaking or trying to make a point.
- People visually "tune-out" when you identify that you feel invalidated.
- Physically turning away or avoiding face-to-face interactions.
- Eye-rolling or facial expressions that show derision or disdain when you speak.
- Not considering or ensuring that meeting spaces are accessible for persons with disabilities.
- People talking over you or continuing their conversation excluding you.
- Providing food at meetings but not ensuring that everyone's dietary needs are considered in the food choices.
- You contribute an idea at a meeting, but it is only acknowledged when someone else again suggests it.
- A cashier puts your change on the counter rather than in your hand, where the other customers received their change in their hands.
- Unveiling a statue honoring a past leader that perpetuated intergenerational trauma.

Microaggressions are, therefore, more than merely insensitive comments, insults, or poor behaviors. They are quite specific and include the types of questions, quips, comments, or hurtful acts as they refer to a person's membership in a group that may be discriminated against or subject to stereotypes (Desmond-

Harrisjenne, 2015). Desmond-Harrisjenne (2015) states that they often happen carelessly and casually, and often without intending harm to others.

EXAMINING MICROAGGRESSION THROUGH TWO CONCEPTUAL LENSES

Signal Detection Theory

We outline the features of SDT applicable to understanding microaggression. According to SDT, the reporting of a signal is influenced by two sequential stages: signal discrimination processes and judgment/decision-making processes (Martin and Rovira, 1981). Signal discrimination is affected by the difference between the noise and the signal plus noise distributions. This first stage involves sensory data input, which may or may not originate from the signal (e.g., unclear whether negative comments about the perceiver's job performance came from a particular co-worker). In the second stage, the perceiver must apply decision rules or criteria for recognizing the occurrence of a signal event (e.g., source committed similar acts before, so the perceiver judges the most recent one as hostile rather than as benign). Noise creates uncertainty for the perceiver (Lynn and Barrett, 2014). One type of noise is intrinsic, such as infrequent exposure to harsh comments, thus making it difficult to accurately discern between constructive criticism and belittlement. The other type of noise is extrinsic, such that the harsh comments were due to the source's own distress rather than anything to do with the perceiver. The perceiver's discrimination threshold changes with increased exposure to similar such acts (Martin and Rovira, 1981), which can be a double-edged sword. Experienced perceivers will likely have fewer "misses" (i.e., not detecting actual micro-acts). Still, they will likely have more "false alarms" (i.e., misjudging acts to be harmful when the source's intentions were benign). In contrast, less experienced perceivers will likely have more "misses" but fewer "false alarms."

Many microaggressions are unintentional behaviors and therefore are not perceived by the perpetrator as negative or harmful, which in SDT contribute to "misses." Indeed, many perpetrators believe that their communications or behaviors are helpful and supportive (Smart Richman and Leary, 2009; Williams, M.T., 2019). In some cases, perpetrators see their comments as part of their personal style, which is part of the "extrinsic noise" in SDT (Lynn and Barrett, 2014), where the use of sarcasm or pithy choice of words is their trademark (Berk, 2017).

Table 1 shows six possible dimensions of microaggression. While distinct from each other, the extent of dimensional overlap awaits further investigation. The dimensional anchors of covertness, subtlety, indirectness, passivity, and the three manifestations of microaggression collectively increase uncertainty for the perceiver. SDT posits that such ambiguities make it difficult for the perceiver-as-target to interpret the source-as-perpetrator's intentions and motives and then to be able to respond appropriately.

TABLE 1
MICROAGGRESSION DIMENSIONS

Dimension A	Overt	Covert	
	Mispronounces target's name in his/her and coworkers' presence	Alters target's report without his/her consent	
Dimension B	Blatant	Subtle	
	Disallows wearing of military dress uniform for "non-working" royal family members	Removes small shoulder patch on uniform of one "non-working" royal family member	

Dimension C	Intentional	Unintentional – as perceived by others	
	Gaslights target as "imagining things"	Arrives late to scheduled meeting with target	
Dimension D	Direct	Indirect	
	Perpetrator microinsults target one-on-one	Perpetrator has a coworker microinsult target	
Dimension E	Active	Passive	
	Instructs only the target to work overtime	Only the target is not invited to office party	
Dimension F	Verbal	Behavioral	Environmental
	Uses jargon target does not understand	Turns back on target during in-person interaction	Lacks accommodation for target with disability

Coordinated Management of Meaning

Developed in the 1970's, CMM is a theory which posits that our social worlds are constructed through communication where we create relationships, institutions, cultural values, beliefs, rituals, and even our sense of self (Pearce, 2005). According to Jensen and Penman (2018), through CMM, we connect, experience empathy and compassion, distance ourselves from others, experience isolation and even fear (Marrs, 2012). Even though the microaggression may lead to anger, hurt and resentment, the dyad tends to repeat this communication pattern.

We are constantly interacting with others in constructing meanings. Coordination draws our attention when we work jointly with others in the meaning-making process through emergent communication patterns. Meanings become mutually coherent through our storytelling, even if such stories are incomplete or imperfect. Mystery suggests that our social world to be far more complex than we can imagine. We are always making/managing meaning and enacting within multiple contexts, which include our definitions of the situation, our relationships, and social identities (i.e., ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, political, religious, national), organizational/group/family cultures, worldviews, and philosophical stances. These various contexts are nested within each other, where higher-order contexts encompass lower-order ones, influencing the action and meaning-making that take place.

As for the linkage with microaggression (Wasserman, 2014), CMM considers the influence of Unwanted Repetitive Patterns (URPs). URPs occur when one or both parties feel obligated to interact in narrow and specific ways in response to the other's actions, no matter the negative consequences or what each believes/expects should happen (Cronen et al., 1979). Even though the microaggression may lead to anger, hurt and resentment, but the dyad repeats this communication pattern. As URPs occur outside conscious awareness, mindfulness training would nudge the communicators to think about and notice such counterproductive relationships (Pearce, 2012, e.g., Wasserman, 2014).

CMM has three forms of loops that focus on the reflexive quality of acts relative to the social context (Philpsen, 1995). For a charmed loop, an act reinforces the coherence and legitimacy of the context; for a subversive loop, an act reveals the impotency of the context; for a strange loop, an act constitutes a direct challenge to the legitimacy of the context. In the charmed loop, persuasive appeals are grounded in shared, historically sanctioned premises. Each party's perceptions and actions reinforce the other's perceptions and actions. Allocating benefits and perks based on rank in academic settings (Berk, 2017) is not microaggression but deemed acceptable by all members. The relation between text and context is irreparably breached in the subversive loop. When challenged on why s/he engaged in an intentionally outrageous act, a perpetrator responds with, "No need to explain myself, as you would never understand!" The answer renders the context as practically inadequate to the task at hand. In the strange loop, the actions

involve repetitive (often unwanted) communication patterns alternating between contradictory meanings (Oliver, 2004). After a perpetrator is identified as a bully by coworkers, they cease the abuse. Following the change, however, the perpetrator becomes convinced that they are not really a bully and resumes the negative acts until called out by coworkers again. They vacillate between inconsistent self-perceptions of being, then not being, a bully.

OVERLAP WITH RELATED CONSTRUCTS

Through the lens of SDT, we interpret the overlap with other forms of negative acts.

Social Dominance

Microaggressions worsen over time since the fundamental cause of these behaviors supports social disparities and hierarchies that are desired by the in-group and at the out-group's expense (Williams, M.T., 2019). Social-dominance theory (Pratto, 1999) posits that group-based inequalities are strengthened via intergroup behaviors. These behaviors include behavioral asymmetry (such as microaggressions) and individual discrimination (Sidanius and Pratto, 2012), and are rationalized by justifying the consideration of cultural myths which create inaccurate stereotypes that result in supporting and proliferating inequality (Sidanius et al., 1992; Williams, M.T., 2019). However, given that its motive often is not apparent, yet when frequently exposed to similar such negative acts, the perceiver may detect more "false alarms" than "misses" (Lynn and Barrett, 2014).

Aggression

Aggression is "behavior intended to harm another person who is motivated to avoid that harm" (Allen and Anderson, 2017, p. 2). Allen and Anderson (2017) specify that two main criteria must be met to be considered aggression. First, aggression involves an observable behavior (i.e., high signal strength, low noise according to SDT). It cannot be a thought, belief or feeling. Second, the behavior must be intentional and conducted with the willful desire to harm a person (i.e., strong signal and low noise decreases uncertainty). Any harm inflicted accidentally has no malice and should not be regarded as aggression. As microaggressions may be unintentional, even well-intentioned, and possible harms may be considered small, these acts are not commonly considered aggressive or violent (Williams, M.T., 2019). SDT posits, however, that often such acts are missed precisely because their ambiguous nature leads to misinterpretations of the source's motives, especially with "small" effects.

The underpinnings of the aggression versus microaggression literatures come from divergent target experiences. Pierce et al. (1978) envisioned the term microaggression to be a term used to describe all forms of covert and subtle racism. Multicultural psychology has referenced the term microaggression for over 50 years (Williams, M.T., 2019). As discussed by Freeman and Stewart (2019), the term microaggression is appropriate as "micro" signals, based the magnitude of the offense from the perpetrator's perspective, whereas "aggression" refers to the target's viewpoint in the situation. In addition, aggression may occur when the target of a microaggression attempts to reject it but fears confronting the perpetrator (Williams, M.T., 2019). As such, microaggressions are unwelcome and unpleasant, and targets are often unable or willing to reject them (Nadal, 2018; Sue, 2010; Torino et al., 2019). The heightened possibility of over/misinterpreting the source's behavior only adds to the perceivers' self-doubt and dysfunctional coping (Lee and Brotheridge, 2006).

Bullying

Workplace bullying is persistent exposure to interpersonal aggression and mistreatment (Matthiesen and Einarsen, 2010). It is a subtype of aggression where aggression is goal-directed and intentional (Neuman and Baron, 2005). However, the concept of intent distinguishes workplace aggression from bullying, since consideration of perpetrators' intentions is normally not required in bullying research (Zapf and Einarsen, 2005). Often, it is difficult to confirm the presence of intent in bullying behaviors (Zapf and Einarsen, 2005). Similarly, often the possible motive behind acts of microaggression are unapparent to the

perceivers and can lead to more "false alarms" than "misses" among those frequently exposed to negative acts (Lynn and Barrett, 2014). Although many similarities exist between bullying experiences and microaggression, bullying consists of repeated incidents or a pattern of behavior by the perpetrator. In contrast, microaggression may consist of a single incident or experience, although the harm felt by the target may be just as acute (Berk, 2017).

Incivility

According to Andersson and Pearson (1999, p. 456), incivility is "low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target." In contrast to aggression, the distinct characteristic of incivility "is that the intent to harm – as perceived through the eyes of the instigator, the target, and/or the observers – is ambiguous." When the perpetrators' motives appear to be unclear, they can deny malicious intentions, where their comments or behaviors were declared as not meant to be harmful. Rather, the hypersensitive target had misconstrued the act/comment meant as a joke (Andersson and Pearson, 1999; Nadal, 2018; Reich and Hershcovis, 2015). Thus, incivility and microaggression are closely aligned with each other. For both, SDT posits that the proportion of "false alarms" to "misses" will be a function of the targets' experience and discrimination threshold (Martin and Rovira, 1981).

As a manifestation of subtle bias, microaggression overlaps with selective incivility (Haynes-Baratz et al., 2021). Evidence suggests that observers or bystanders who vicariously experience incivility after observing coworkers' mistreatment also have negative outcomes (Cortina et al., 2013; Lim et al., 2008). The bystanders' interpretation of whether the noise is intrinsic or extrinsic (Lynn and Barrett, 2014) and their discrimination thresholds (Martin and Rovira, 1981) will jointly determine whether and how they will intervene on behalf of the targets (Reich and Hershcovis, 2015).

Social Ostracism

Workers experiencing social rejection will be in a state of deprivation detrimentally affecting their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors (Baumeister and Leary, 1995; Smart Richman and Leary, 2009). Therefore, when an individual or group is ostracized or a group member is excluded from a group, this threatens the target's desire of being valued and accepted by others (Smart Richman and Leary, 2009; Williams, K.D., 2007; Williams, K.D. and Nida, 2022). More implicit signals of "prejudice and stigmatization are couched in neutral (and even positive) terms (McConahay, 1986), instances in which people are avoided or ignored are often subtle, and people sometimes have difficulty knowing whether a criticism connotes well-meaning constructive feedback or a sign of social devaluation and lowered acceptance" (Smart Richman and Leary, 2009, p. 366). Similarly, SDT would predict that infrequent exposure to harsh comments reduces accuracy in differentiating between constructive criticism and belittlement (Lynn and Barrett, 2014).

DeSouza, Wesselmann, and Ispas (2017) argue that both microaggression and ostracism are subtle forms of discrimination that stigmatized persons' experience in their workplaces. They argue that microaggression theory is based on an extension of stigma research by Sue et al. (2007) and Nadal (2008). Increasing evidence shows that stigma is at the root of ostracism and bullying behaviors.

Social ostracism can be experienced in many social contexts (Williams, K.D., 2009). Ostracism is perceived as a threat to basic psychological needs, including belonging, control, self-esteem, and meaningful existence (Baumeister and Leary, 1995; Smart Richman and Leary, 2009; Williams, K.D., 2007; Williams, K.D., 2009; Williams, K.D. and Nida, 2022). DeSouza et al. (2017) conceptualized microaggressions:

> As acts of commission (e.g., making a subtle but insulting comment typically aimed at or intended for an out-group member). In contrast, ostracism may be conceptualized as acts of omission (e.g., ignoring an individual) that are typically generalized and can be used on either in-group or out-group members, thus being hard to substantiate with perpetrators easily evading blame (Williams, K.D., 2001) …Further, bystanders may assume that the

target is simply being overly sensitive because there is no direct evidence of discrimination.
(pp. 124-125)

Other authors in microaggression research conceptualize ostracism behaviors as forms of microaggression, those under the theme of invisibility, second-class citizen, or non-verbal behaviors (e.g., Gueits, 2022: Nadal, 2018; Sue et al., 2007; Sue, 2010; Torino et al., 2019; Williams, K.D., 2009; Williams, M.T., 2019). In response to either stigmatization or ostracism, SDT would posit that targets and observers with varying exposure levels to intrinsic/extrinsic noise and discrimination thresholds (Martin and Rovira, 1981) will likely respond and cope differently from each other to these negative acts.

REVIEW OF WORKPLACE MICROAGGRESSION

Contextual Factors

Research in microaggression has filtered down from society-at-large to specific work settings (Nadal, 2011). We review representative studies on workplace microaggression based on race/ethnicity/culture, gender, sexual orientation, and people with disabilities.

Under race, Pitcan, Park-Taylor and Hayslett (2018) examined the experiences of racial microaggression among 12 early-career professional Black men working in predominantly White organizations. Exposure to racially motivated hostile acts was associated with perceptions of workplace discrimination and linked to poor mental health outcomes. The documented experiences of racial microaggressions included "different worlds and different rules," assumption of inferiority, adverse cognitive and affective reactions, psychological and career-related costs, and internal (e.g., compartmentalizing) and external (e.g., using social networks) coping responses.

DeCuir-Gunby and Gunby (2016) examined the impact of racial microaggressions, racial/ethnic identity in African American educators, and coping, as they affected job satisfaction. Exposure to racially motivated hostile acts was negatively associated with job satisfaction, whereupon the educators engaged in detachment coping. They studied how 15 African American instructors/professors and administrators in four-year and two-year higher education institutions experienced and coped with racial microaggressions. Across institutions, participants reported exposure to an array of racially motivated hostile acts. They addressed the associated stressful experience through both adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies.

Microaggression may manifest differently with "model minorities" (Kim et al., 2021). Positive stereotypes of Asian Americans include being hard-working, industrious, and technically competent. Such perceptions can influence workers' attitudes toward Asian Americans, affecting their ability to perceive the adverse effects of subtle racial microaggressions, which can be just as or more harmful than overt microaggressions. Kim et al. (2021) had their study participants read a series of vignettes depicting blatant (microassault) and various types of subtle (microinsult, microinvalidation, and over-validation) racial microaggressions. Participants with more positive attitudes toward Asian Americans viewed the blatant microaggressions against Asian Americans as more harmful compared to those with less positive attitudes. However, positive attitudes toward Asian Americans did not influence perceptions of the harmful effects of over-validation and microinvalidation.

Like many other visible minority groups, immigrant professionals in the US experienced verbal, attitudinal, and professional microaggressions stemming from their ethnic/cultural origins (Shenoy-Packer, 2015). The immigrants made sense of their mistreatment by resorting to critical discursive strategies ("us vs. them", "I am from a country different from most of my coworkers"); rationalizing ("Coworkers are ignorant about my ethnicity/culture"); creating alternative selves ("Coworkers consider me to be an expert in this field"); and, taking ownership/blaming self ("My heavy accent has led others to misunderstand what I'm saying").

Under gender, although overt expressions of sexism appear on the decline in the US, discrimination has increasingly become indirect and ambiguous. Drawing from Sue et al.'s (2007) and Sue, Lin and Rivera's (2009) construct of microaggressions, where the acts range from subtle to overt, Basford, Offermann and Behrend (2014) examined gender differences in perceptions of microaggressions toward

women at work. Undergraduate women and men read vignettes describing interactions between male supervisors and female subordinates, which portrayed potentially discriminatory supervisor behaviors, ranging from subtle to blatant acts. Although both genders perceived differences in microaggression explicitness, women detected greater discrimination than men, particularly with subtle acts. However, both expected microaggressions to generate more negative work outcomes with increasing explicitness. These findings call for greater awareness of the less overt forms of gender microaggressions and the need to develop support programs to help observers of discrimination, who themselves are likely to be women in cases of female targets.

Moore and Nash (2021) examined how gender interacted with race, ethnicity, and/or culture to affect the microaggressions experienced by visibly and culturally diverse women in Australian Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, and Medicine (STEMM) settings. Based on 30 interviews with women in academia, industry, and government who self-identified as women of color or as culturally diverse, the findings reveal that the challenges experienced by them are not due solely to gender. Rather, race and gender intersect to create overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination and disadvantage, despite claims that STEMM fields are inherently gender- and race-neutral. Even where the hostile acts are clearcut, racial microaggressions may be invisible to members of the dominant racial group, who are likely to be the peers and managers of visibly and culturally diverse women. White managers and peers can become allies of women of color in STEMM by learning to recognize and express their concerns whenever racially motivated hostile acts appear, thereby promoting inclusive workplaces for all members.

Exposure to workplace microaggressions among the LGBTQ+ has received increasing research attention (Galupo and Resnick, 2016). Galupo and Resnick (2016) interviewed 100 working Americans who identified as sexual minorities, including 13 who also identified as transgender. Participants described LGBTQ+ microaggressions that contributed to a hostile and/or heterosexist workplace climate. These LGBTQ+ microaggressions were often entrenched within the organizational structure and reflected the power disparity across hierarchical status. Many of the microaggressions also were linked to workplace policies. The tolerance of such hostile acts revealed stark disconnects between the organization's equity, diversity, and inclusion statement and current policies, between current policies and government laws, and between current policies and the ability or willingness to follow them in practice.

Under people with disabilities, these workers are frequently exposed to microaggressions as thinly veiled expressions of discrimination and disparaging slights. Lee, Ditchman, Thomas and Tsen (2019) investigated how workplace hostilities were directed at workers with multiple sclerosis (MS). Study participants with multiple sclerosis shared their experiences through focus group interviews, where nearly all reported exposure to workplace microaggressions. Several important themes emerged, including pathologizing, assumption of disability status, second-class members, lack of awareness, social distancing, and denial. The targets' stressful experiences were associated with exposure to hostile acts, which exacerbated the negative impact of their distress, and felt job insecurity. Participants reported adopting several coping responses, including involvement in support groups and meditation. The findings have implications for promoting healthy work life, job retention, and fostering the well-being of workers with MS and other disabilities.

More than 100 studies since 2007 have explored microaggressions relating to communities of color and LGBTQ+ people (Nadal, 2018; Resnick and Paz Galupo, 2019). Individuals with specific identities such as race, ethnicity/culture/nationality, gender/cisgender, sexuality and sexual orientation, people with mental disability or illnesses, physical disabilities, ageism/age generation, religion, and intolerance to different belief systems have all experienced micro-aggressive behaviors (e.g., Berk, 2017). Members of these groups are now being more commonly studied to determine whether their experiences of microaggressions are similar or whether differences exist. Intersectional microaggression has also been examined since 2015 to consider microaggressions that occur due to an individual's membership in more than one group (Nadal et al., 2015; Weber et al., 2018). As people's identity groups are combined and may influence how others perceive them, this may affect their aggregate experience with microaggressions. For example, a person who identifies as female and disabled may experience microaggressions related to both identities, plus cumulative microaggressions related to identifying as both female and disabled.

Perpetrators of microaggression, who target based on race, gender, or other social identities, are often unaware that they have engaged in such communications (Wasserman, 2014). Communicators of different cultural and social backgrounds are often at odds, leading to misjudging acts as microaggression where none was intended (Jensen, 2020). Communication among ingroup members becomes "ethnocentric" by excluding or de-valuing others from "outside" groups. Jensen suggests how coordination of actions can bridge these differences by reducing misunderstandings due to a lack of coherence of meaning. Improving communications through improved mindfulness (i.e., higher accuracy of signal detection) and use of CMM to reduce/prevent microaggression by considering the highest level of context can be achieved where the perceived slight becomes less important than what can be achieved together (Wasserman, 2014).

Hierarchical Relations

In our review of microaggression research, Young, Anderson and Stewart (2015) extended the classifications of microaggressions to a broader workplace context, namely, hierarchical microaggressions, with Berk (2017) extending the discussion of this concept. Using academia as their workplace context, Young et al. (2015) proposed that the established hierarchy of workplace positions could lead to microaggressions perpetrated by those in high-status positions over those perceived as lower in the hierarchical structure. Not surprisingly, such hierarchical relations will be more likely to reinforce a charmed loop (Philpsen, 1995).

In academia, a person's identity or professional role is initially ranked based on their amount of education. Those with a doctoral degree have a high level of privilege, whereas those with lesser degrees or none are accorded a lower or lack of privilege (Berk, 2017; Young et al., 2015). Further, there are hierarchical relationships between and within categories of positions, such as administration, faculty, and staff. Those in academic administration (president, deans, department chairs, etc.) have the highest level of privilege. Faculty (professoriate-ranked individuals, instructors, and adjuncts) have the next level of privilege. Finally, staff (administrative assistants, technology specialists, and nonfaculty employees such as plumbers, painters, and janitors) have the lowest level of privilege. Of course, within each category, a further hierarchical ranking or "pecking order" exists. This hierarchical ranking of the "value" of positions in the work environment supplies the opportunity for hierarchical microaggressions to occur (Young et al., 2015).

Young et al. (2015, p. 61) discovered four themes to describe these hierarchical microaggressions: "valuing/devaluing based on role/credential, changing accepted behavior based on role, actions (ignoring/excluding/surprise/interrupting) related to role, and terminology related to work position". Moreover, hierarchical microaggressions are also prone to intersectional identities where the combined effect of their position in the organization and being a member of an underrepresented group can create additional targeting by a perpetrator of microaggressions (Berk, 2017; O'Farrell et al., 2018, Williams, M.T. et al., 2021; Young et al., 2015). As underrepresented employees are frequently found at the lower ranks in an academic workplace, or are in temporary or contingent positions, this can also exacerbate the potential to be a target for microaggression (both hierarchical and membership in an underrepresented group).

Extending Microaggression to All Workers

Anecdotal and research evidence reveals that any definable group can be subjected to microaggressions. Indeed, microaggression can be viewed as a form of bullying behavior that uses linguistic power to marginalize any target with a subtle indication of intolerance by demonstrating the concept of *other* (Gendron et al., 2016). As such, micro-aggressive behaviors appear to occur within all societal sectors, whether in work, public and private realms. Although research has focused mainly on underrepresented groups or those belonging to groups that have been marginalized, we posit that all individuals can be exposed to microaggression due to some characteristic that the perpetrator finds of less or greater value. Microaggression should be examined in workplace environments wherein any individual that is considered *different* or *other* may be readily targeted. The possible reasons for being targeted and examples of how others may notice microaggression are shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2
REASONS FOR BEING TARGETED AND MICROAGGRESSION EXAMPLES

Reason for becoming a Target (Otherness)	Why is it noticed at the workplace	Microaggression comments or behaviors
Accent	Speaking to coworkers or clients	Can you speak clearer? Whaaaat?
Allergies/Dietary restrictions (not related to religion)	Considered "high maintenance" or a hassle	You must be special.
Attractiveness	Receiving more tips than other servers	Leave some for the rest of us, won't you?
Family size/type (not gender specific)	Maternity (female), Parental (typically male), or Adoption leaves of absence from work (either gender)	You're not having another one, are you? Great – now we get to do your work too!
Food choices other than allergies/dietary restrictions	Smells related to food being heated up at the workplace, or sharing a communal refrigerator	What is that stench? Don't put that near my food in the fridge!
Promotion to higher position	Seen in organizational structure	What did you have to do to get the promotion?
Socioeconomic Status	Clothing, brand of vehicle driven	You must be making more money than I thought. Don't they pay you here?

Sue (2010) proposed that four psychological dilemmas contribute to the difficulty in discussing or addressing microaggression, particularly in "normalized" settings.

A Clash of Realities

This relates to the conflict that may occur when people interpret situations or events differently. The perpetrator may believe that their comments or behaviors are harmless or benign, but the target experiences them as malicious or discriminatory. This is a common instance of a "false alarm" according to SDT. As such, the behavior is difficult to address, as it may result in defensive attitudes and actions (Ashforth and Lee, 1990). For example, a supervisor considers themselves non-racist but uses language that may be outdated such as referring to an indigenous person as native or aboriginal. The person experiencing the outdated terminology may feel targeted but is unsure of how to address the inappropriate language by the supervisor, as it may cause the supervisor to feel defensive, creating an uncomfortable working environment.

The Invisibility of Unintentional Bias

As societal members are typically socialized to dominant norms, this can lead to implicit bias towards members of marginalized groups. For example, in Western cultures, it is typically expected that people make eye contact when speaking with another person. In many Eastern cultures, making prolonged eye contact is considered disrespectful. In an employment interview, if a candidate does not make eye contact, the interviewer may perceive the person as shy and less likely to interact well with co-workers or clients. As a result, they may not be selected. Even when hired, the supervisor, co-workers, or customers may verbalize the perceived disrespect they received from the employee due to a lack of eye contact in interactions.

Perceived Minimal Harm of Microaggressions

The prevailing belief is that experiencing microaggression has minimal negative impact on the target. Although many studies support the relationship between microaggressions and negative health outcomes (e.g., Brees et al., 2013; Brotheridge and Lee, 2002; Brotheridge et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2018; Lee and Brotheridge, 2006; Lynn and Barrett, 2014), others will disbelieve, ridicule, and/or scoff at the perception that the comments or behavior cause harm. Perpetrators may perceive the inability of the target to "get over it", as being a sign of weakness ("just put on your big girl panties and deal with it") or oversensitivity ("stop acting like a baby"). Several authors have espoused that microaggression theory is either not supported thoroughly (Lilienfeld, 2017) or creates a culture of victimhood (Campbell and Manning, 2014). As such, they consider the concept of microaggression "pure nonsense" (Thomas, 2008, p. 274).

Catch-22 of Responding to Microaggressions

Targets may experience difficulty in responding to microaggressions due to concerns over exacerbating or escalating negative consequences further. For example, if an employee attempts to address a perceived microaggression with their supervisor, the supervisor may feel challenged. This may have longer-term ramifications for the career path of the employee. Responding inappropriately because of low discrimination thresholds (Martin and Rovira, 1981) will not only lead to more "false alarms" but will escalate subsequent distrust and conflict (Zapf and Gross, 2001). The employee may choose to not address the issue since it might affect their promotion opportunities. In addition, addressing the issue may take valued resources such as time, energy, and effort on the part of the employee, and cause stress. For these reasons, targets may choose to not respond. However, the situation may still take its toll on targets as they think about and relive the microaggression experiences.

A MODEL OF MICROAGGRESSION

Research on microaggression has not extensively examined causal attributions and coping approaches (cf. Lilienfeld, 2017). Both are worth considering due to their impact on emotional well-being (Kim et al., 2018; Owen et al., 2019). Our discussion draws from research on the triggers of workplace microaggression (i.e., indirect put-downs, undermining the targets' credibility/reputation, gaslighting, and ostracizing) from supervisors/managers, subordinates, and coworkers (Kim et al., 2018), based on the conceptual framework of Lee and Brotheridge (2017).

Workplace Events as Microaggression Triggers

Any number of workplace events may trigger perpetrators to engage in microaggression from the stigmatizing of the targets based on physical and social attributes (age, gender, race, culture, disability; Smith and Griffiths, 2022), and/or perceived dispositional traits (e.g., express low self-confidence) to relational difficulties due to incompatible value/expectations, competition over scarce resources, communication difficulties to perceived inequities (e.g., Offermann et al., 2013). Within the work setting, trigger events affect social interactions and the joint attributions of perpetrators and targets that create conditions for mistreatment. Such triggers can operate either at the organizational level such as downsizing activities or at the interpersonal level such as conflicts (Mazzula and Campón, 2018; Zapf and Gross, 2001).

Unlike overt acts, micro-acts are difficult to discern by targets and observers alike. The microaggression may be indirect (e.g., recruiting coworkers to act with hostility) or so subtle (e.g., gaslighting) that the perpetrator/s' intentions are initially ambiguous in their motives and intentions. Only after recurring events that lead to a similar pattern of interactions will targets be better able to ascertain whether would-be perpetrators are hostile. Understanding the relational context is necessary to determine whether acts were done in jest or meant to cause distress/harm (Aquino and Lamertz, 2004). The nature of the context and repeated interactions between the two parties influence targets' attributions. For example, staff members working in the British royal household were instructed to work discreetly when going about their chores and to hide from view whenever a royal family member approached nearby. Over the years, several of the

staff have complained about this "dehumanizing" practice that reinforced an outdated class system and a toxic work climate where all servants were considered expendable (Llewelyn, 2020).

We posit that dramatic events, such as when managerial perpetrators fear loss of power or job after organizational downsizing or restructuring, will trigger targets' exposure to microaggression, which then sets in motion: (1) targets' attributions of the involved parties, i.e., self, perpetrator/s, and the organization, most accountable for the mistreatment, and (2) their choice of coping. These attributions impact coping, which in turn leads to broader consequences. Organizational factors such as size, flexibility in HR policies, and the extent of supervisor/collegial support moderate the impact of coping on the outcomes either by neutralizing the harmful consequences of ineffective coping or by strengthening the positive consequences of effective coping (Lee and Brotheridge, 2017).

Causal Attribution

Targets' attributions of perpetrators' motives affect how they assign responsibility for others' behaviors (Neuman and Baron, 1998). Given the ambiguity in interpreting the source's motive for microaggression, such as with gaslighting, SDT recognizes how "misses" and "false alarms" increase misunderstanding and inappropriate responses of those self-identifying as targets/victims. To reduce "noise" and misjudgments, perceivers would seek more information on the source of (potential) microaggression. As Kelley and Michela's (1980) attribution model reveals, the observers as "naive scientists" compare how the actors interact with both the target and coworkers across situations and over time. These additional information sources will allow for more accurate inference of whether the apparent micro-acts were intentional or not. Any heightened arousal from unexpected, negative outcomes leads targets to search for explanations as to why the microaggression occurred (Weiner, 1995). To comprehend why they have been subject to possible hostilities after a trigger event, targets make an attribution about whether the cause was internal (i.e., originated from the self) or external (i.e., originated from another party), stable (i.e., likely to persist) or unstable (i.e., temporary), controllable or uncontrollable, and intentional or unintentional. With the added information, CMM (Pearce, 2005) can then be conducted by the involved parties, which will influence their subsequent interactions.

Zero Attributions

In cases where the microaggression is deemed as acting in jest, such as when a younger worker innocently jokes to targets that they may be "getting a bit too old for this [physically demanding] job," blame is removed, and counter-aggression is less justifiable.

Internal and Stable Attributions

If targets make internal and stable attributions for negative outcomes, this will rarely lead to counter microaggression, since these tend to result in personal blame, guilt, and loss of self-esteem. For example, a target is repeatedly warned by a co-worker that their figures in a financial statement "seem a bit off." Initially, the target takes it personally but after the third remonstration, they double-check the calculations and discover that the wrong formula has been used all along. These attributions may result in self-directed aggression, such as substance abuse, neglect, and/or depression (Brees et al., 2013).

External, Stable, Controllable, and Intentional Attributions

In contrast, if targets make external, stable, controllable, and intentional attributions for negative outcomes, they will experience anger and frustration, which will stimulate retaliation, revenge, and sabotage toward perpetrators (Brees et al., 2013; Douglas and Martinko, 2001). With increased exposure to such acts, the perceiver will miss fewer subsequent incidents of microaggression (Martin and Rovira, 1981). For example, their co-worker consistently mispronounces the target's name, even after being told the correct way to pronounce it. Others who mispronounced the name quickly corrected it later. The frustration targets experience (stemming especially from controllable and intentionality attributions) may increase the severity of counter-hostilities toward perpetrators.

External, Stable, and Uncontrollable Attributions

However, non-hostile reactions are more likely when targets make external, stable, and uncontrollable attributions. For example, a researcher is impatient with another colleague for not submitting their part of a research report. Initially, the target thought this was due to recalcitrance ("show them up") until informed that the colleague recently experienced a major life event change that has been too pre-occupying and stressful to work on the report. Upon learning this, the researcher expressed empathic concern to the colleague. Such extrinsic noises, which increase "false alarms" (Martin and Rovira, 1981), will motivate the perceiver to seek additional information about the source for making "correct" causal inferences in the future (Kelley and Michela, 1980; Weiner, 1995).

Direction of Attributions

Targets may direct hostilities toward the specific perpetrators or the entire organization if they believe the latter bears responsibility for negative outcomes. Although targets often attribute the cause of aggression to certain perpetrators, various reasons exist for why they may blame the organization and judge it as blamable for the presence and actions of the perpetrators. For example, senior management may become aware of the aggressive acts but fail to ameliorate the toxic work climate.

Coping Approaches

How situations are appraised and interpreted determine the target's affective response to negative acts (Roseman, 1991). According to Scherer, Schorr and Johnstone's (2001) two-stage situational appraisal process, the targets initially determine whether an event merits attention and violates normative expectations regarding conduct (Bies, 2001). They then evaluate the situation using several criteria including, for example, their motivational state (Is the situation experienced as rewarding or punishing?) and causal agency (Who caused the situation?) (Roseman, 1991). This two-stage process is nearly identical to that of signal discrimination processes and judgement/decision-making processes identified in SDT (Martin and Rovira, 1981).

Coping is dynamic, based on temporal fluctuations in fear and threat responses (Marrs, 2012), mindfulness of the meaning and impact of previous interactions (Wasserman, 2014), and the reflexive quality of acts relative to changing circumstances (Oliver, 2004). Hamlet's desire to exact revenge on Claudius, whom he believes murdered his father to seize the crown and marry his mother (Shakespeare, 1599-1601) sets in motion changing coping responses. Initially, the prince was racked with self-doubt and angst, unsure of how to proceed, reflected in his soliloquy,

> *To be, or not to be, that is the question:*
> *Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer*
> *The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,*
> *Or to take Arms against a Sea of troubles…*
> —Shakespeare, 1599-1601, *Hamlet*, Act 3, Scene 1

Yet, in the next scene, he has re-scripted a moment in the play recreating the murder to gauge his uncle's reaction. Their subtle and covert exchanges escalated to open hostilities and conflict only after Hamlet was convinced of Claudius' guilt.

Negative acts may trigger inward-focused affect (i.e., sadness, restlessness, confusion, tiredness) where targets contemplate their own contribution to them. Both intrinsic and extrinsic noises (Lynn and Barrett, 2014) increase the likelihood of self-blame and decrease the likelihood of blaming others for micro-hostilities. This fits with Lee and Brotheridge's (2006) study, which found targets to report lower self-esteem after exposure to bullying. Targets also are likely to self-blame, experience helplessness and fear after feeling physically and/or psychologically threatened (Johnson-Laird and Oatley, 1992) due to the often-unpredictable nature of bullying (Roseman et al., 1996).

Based on Lazarus and Folkman's research (1987), two types of microaggression coping responses are possible:

Problem-Focused

To manage perceived mistreatments, targets may adopt these strategies.

- **Problem-Solving.** Targets may engage in discussing the incident with the perpetrator to clarify perceptions and establish boundaries for appropriate behavior (Lee and Brotheridge, 2006). This approach is likely used when the target can accurately discern the perpetrator's motives, and through experience, is able to de-escalate or prevent conflict (Zapf and Gross, 2001).
- **Direct Retaliation Against Perpetrators.** This problem-focused coping approach is frequently discussed in the literature. A tit-for-tat response after repeated exposure to microaggression is common (Andersson and Pearson, 1999). According to this research, targets are likelier to engage in deviant acts toward perpetrators with high formal or referent power but low task interdependence. The desire to retaliate against one's perpetrator occurs when a target is not dependent on their perpetrator to complete their work tasks and/or meet their performance goals.
- **Indirect Retaliation against Others.** Targets whose work was undermined are more likely to undermine others in a "kick the dog" fashion (Lee and Brotheridge, 2006). In comparison with employees who held less favorable attitudes toward revenge, those experiencing higher levels of victimization and held attitudes supporting revenge reported engaging in more antisocial behavior directed at coworkers (Aquino and Douglas, 2003).
- **Withdrawal.** Targets may cope by quitting or requesting a job transfer (Zapf and Gross, 2001), using sick leave time (Kivimäki et al., 2000), avoiding the perpetrators, or ignoring their behaviors (Keashly et al., 1994). For example, a target has been ordered to perform an undesirable task whenever their supervisor is within proximity. Instead of saying "no can do," the target leaves the workstation just before the supervisor approaches. The problem is "solved" by this strategic retreat, whereupon the supervisor will then direct a coworker to complete the task (Ashforth and Lee, 1990's "Avoiding Action").
- **Support Seeking.** As an antidote for microaggression, support from coworkers and managers/supervisors after victimization has been associated with reduced adverse health outcomes (Kim et al., 2018). Informational support through training on how to manage such threatening workplace events has been associated with higher emotional well-being following victimization. Conversely, in their study, Lewis and Orford (2005) found that a lack of coworker and organizational support impaired female employees' ability to defend themselves against their perpetrators. This led to isolation, vulnerability, and diminished self-worth.

Emotion-Focused

To ameliorate the effects of victimization, targets may adopt these emotion-focused strategies (Aquino and Thau, 2009).

- **Humor.** The first is to use humor as a lens through which targets interpret a potentially hostile situation. If a seemingly micro-aggressive act was done in jest, humor would be an appropriate response to head off any misinterpretation of the other party's intentions. On the other hand, if the same act was done with malice, humor may serve to de-escalate a tense situation (Hogh and Dofradottir, 2001).
- **Emotional Labor.** The second is emotional labor (Kim et al., 2018). Targets are likely to respond to micro-aggressive encounters by hiding socially undesirable feelings and faking desirable ones to dissipate potentially hostile encounters. Conversely, positive refocusing and perspective-taking, elements of deep acting, are likely to be used by the targets facing less stressful situations (Brotheridge and Lee, 2002).
- **Forgiveness.** The third is forgiving the perpetrator for their mistreatment however intentional it may be. Through forgiveness, targets seek to overcome their negative feelings and thoughts about the perpetrator by replacing them with neutral or even positive feelings (Aquino et al., 2006; Freedman and Enright, 1996). As in direct problem-solving, this approach is likely used

when the target can accurately discern the perpetrator's motives, and through forgiveness, prevents conflict escalation (Zapf and Gross, 2001).
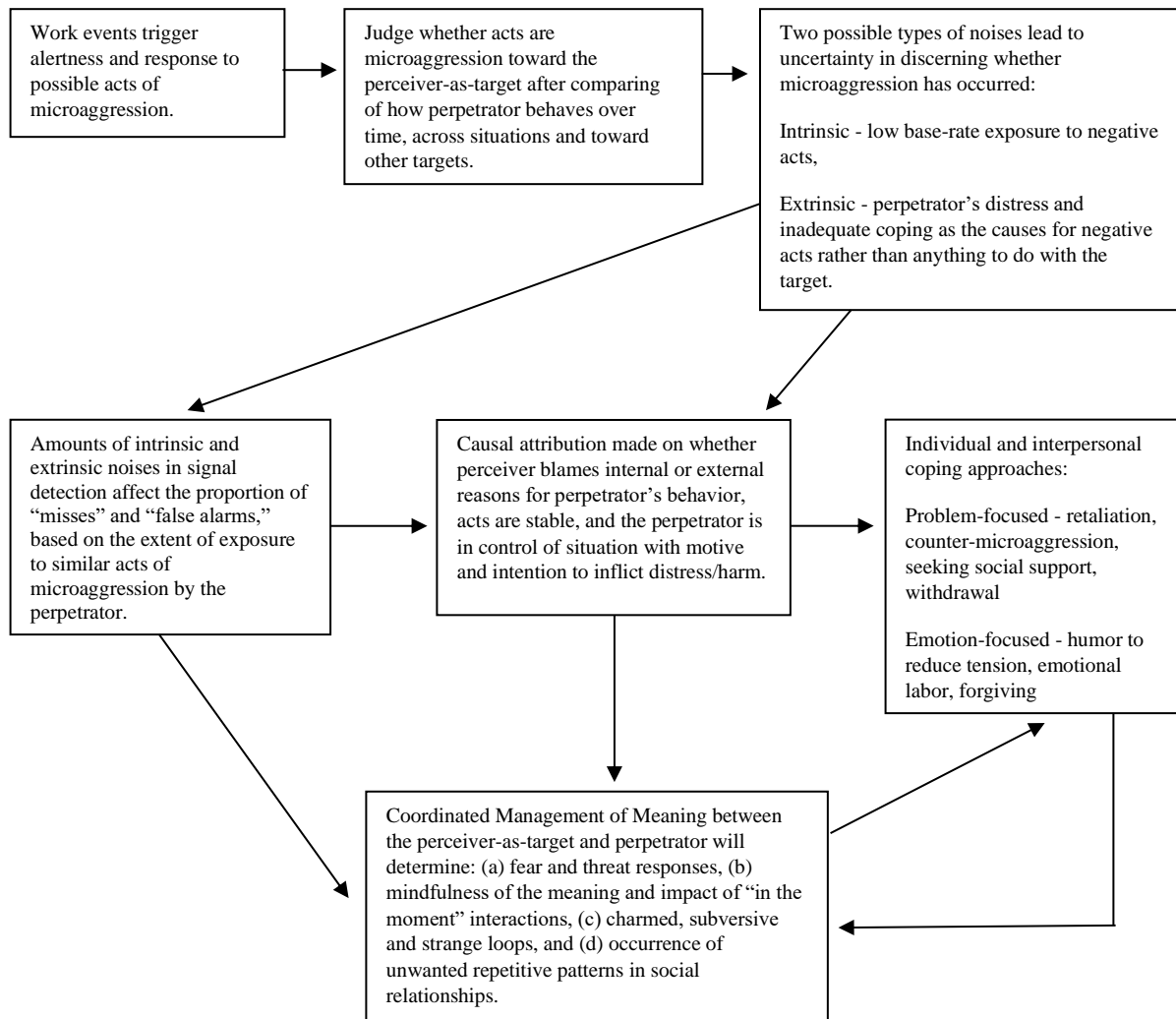
These coping approaches may operate in tandem (Lazarus and Folkman, 1987). Whereas retaliation is problem-focused, it may also facilitate the release of a target's anger and frustration, which then serves an emotion-focused function. In contrast, whereas avoidance is problem-focused since it permits targets to escape short-term abuse, it also provides targets a reprieve from the negative emotions associated with mistreatment, and consequently, better enables them to respond constructively over time (Folkman and Moskowitz, 2004).

Response to Perceived Microaggression

From the above discussion, Figure 1 presents a model of how perceivers-as-targets rely on signal detection to discern whether acts indicate microaggression, which will impact their coping. After specific events have triggered alertness to possible microaggression, the targets compare how potential perpetrators acted over time, across situations and interacted with others in similar contexts (Kelley and Michela, 1980). However, ambiguous situations undermine the accuracy of causal inference. As noted earlier, SDT posits that both intrinsic and extrinsic noises increase such uncertainties, affecting the ratio of "misses" to "false alarms" in detecting acts of microaggression. The figure shows that noises in signal detection and the proportion of "misses" to "false alarms" will jointly influence judgements of negative acts as microaggression. In turn, causal attribution will influence the coping approaches selected, either problem- or emotion-focused. Such judgmental errors will likely lead to inappropriate responses undermining the relations between the target and (possible) perpetrator (Zapf and Gross, 2001).

As posited in Figure 1, CMM will partially mediate signal detection and causal attribution on the antecedent side and coping approaches on the outcome side. Specifically, the extent of exposure to identical or similar such acts of microaggression, along with the attribution of intentionality and motives, will jointly strengthen (a) fear and threat responses (Marrs, 2012), (b) awareness of the meaning and potential impact of "in the moment" interactions (Wasserman, 2014), (c) the loop on the reflexive quality of acts (Philipsen, 1995), and (d) occurrence of URPs in dyadic interactions (Cronen et al., 1979; Oliver, 2004). These four aspects of CMM, in conjunction with causal attribution, will influence the choice of coping (Jensen and Penman, 2018). Following Lee and Brotheridge (2017), our model includes a feedback arrow from the coping approach to CMM. Thus, coping through retaliation (Andersson and Pearson, 1999) or counter-microaggression (Bies, 2001; Lee and Brotheridge, 2006) will likely escalate the conflict between the target and the perpetrator. In contrast, collegial support will likely lead to future constructive interactions between the parties. Improved CMM between the two will be likely when humor is used to relieve tension (Hogh and Dofradottir, 2001) or the aggressor is forgiven (Aquino et al., 2006; Zapf and Gross, 2001).

FIGURE 1
RESPONSE TO PERCEIVED MICROAGGRESSION

Work events trigger alertness and response to possible acts of microaggression.	Judge whether acts are microaggression toward the perceiver-as-target after comparing of how perpetrator behaves over time, across situations and toward other targets.	Two possible types of noises lead to uncertainty in discerning whether microaggression has occurred: Intrinsic - low base-rate exposure to negative acts, Extrinsic - perpetrator's distress and inadequate coping as the causes for negative acts rather than anything to do with the target.
Amounts of intrinsic and extrinsic noises in signal detection affect the proportion of "misses" and "false alarms," based on the extent of exposure to similar acts of microaggression by the perpetrator.	Causal attribution made on whether perceiver blames internal or external reasons for perpetrator's behavior, acts are stable, and the perpetrator is in control of situation with motive and intention to inflict distress/harm.	Individual and interpersonal coping approaches: Problem-focused - retaliation, counter-microaggression, seeking social support, withdrawal Emotion-focused - humor to reduce tension, emotional labor, forgiving
	Coordinated Management of Meaning between the perceiver-as-target and perpetrator will determine: (a) fear and threat responses, (b) mindfulness of the meaning and impact of "in the moment" interactions, (c) charmed, subversive and strange loops, and (d) occurrence of unwanted repetitive patterns in social relationships.	

IMPACT OF MICROAGGRESSION

Our discussion on the impact of workplace microaggression on targets, observers, and perpetrators is based on a recent review of microaggression studies (Owen et al., 2019). As noted earlier, microaggression involves indirect and subtle acts that are construed as performed either in jest or to inflict harm. The uncertainty may require considerable sense-making effort for both targets and observers to determine the appropriate response (Ng et al., 2020). The situational ambiguity *and* having to determine how best to cope will jointly contribute to targets' degree of wellness.

Targets infrequently respond with retaliation or counter-aggression against perpetrators wielding influence and/or resource control over them (Bies, 2001). In a survey of Canadian workers from diverse industries, Lee and Brotheridge (2011) found that only 22 percent of the supervisory respondents reported that the aggressor was of lower status, and nine percent of the non-supervisory respondents reported that the victim was of higher status. Upward aggression is more likely when the perpetrator's intention was perceived as malicious and seeking to inflict harm (Bies, 2001). The prevalence to which targets engaged in counter-microaggression has not been well-documented. Instead, much discussion has been on how one *should* respond after exposure to negative acts (e.g., Levitt and North, 2022; Sue et al., 2019). Based on a

comprehensive review of responses to racially motivated microaggression, Sue et al. (2019) suggested that the targets can use problem-focused responses: (a) remaining passive or giving up; (b) striking back or hurting the aggressor; (c) stopping, diminishing, deflecting, or ending the harmful act; (d) educating the perpetrator; (e) seeking social support and/or (f) seeking outside authority or institutional intervention. Alternatively, targets using emotional labor to placate the aggressors (Kim et al., 2018) will be susceptible to burnout. The mental capacity needed for surface acting, has been linked to emotional exhaustion, the core component of burnout (Brotheridge and Lee, 2002). Furthermore, microassaults like belittlement have increased levels of self-doubt and indirect/passive coping responses. Self-doubt, in turn, has been associated with increased levels of burnout and symptoms of ill-health (Lee and Brotheridge, 2006). Among college students of color, the cumulative stress due to microaggression was linked to higher amounts of depression and anxiety, and lower degrees of self-esteem (Williams, M.T. et al., 2020).

For observers, the challenge is interpreting and responding to the microaggression witnessed (Reich and Hershcovis, 2015). Merely perceiving the acts will be emotionally draining (Totterdell et al., 2012). A dynamic interplay occurs between the observers and actors through their CMM (Pearce, 2005). Observers' attributions evolve over repeated exposure to negative acts, as their responses impact subsequent interactions between perpetrators and targets (Ng et al., 2019). Initially, observers are more likely to take the target's perspective than that of the perpetrator, which lead them to view the perpetrator more negatively, and targets more positively. Observers react angrily and view the perpetrators as incompetent (Reich and Hershcovis, 2015). Yet, when perpetrators undermine targets' ideas, observers may perceive the latter to be less competent, devalue their ideas, and reduce their desire to work with them (Duffy et al., 2002).

For perpetrators, the negative consequences are often overlooked and less well-understood (Lilienfeld, 2017). As Macbeth observed, acts of (micro)aggression require emotional regulation and labor to mask the perpetrators' intentions (Kim et al., 2018). As noted earlier, such forms of surface acting have been linked to emotional exhaustion and unhealthy detachment (Brotheridge and Lee, 2002). Often the perpetrators themselves have been subjected to microaggression, leading them to engage in counter-aggression toward their abusers or others (O'Farrell et al., 2018). Resorting to such acts is ultimately self-defeating (Aquino and Thau, 2009). Targets engaged in retaliatory acts experience higher levels of negative health outcomes than targets who do not (Brotheridge et al., 2012). Attempts to cope in multiple ways were ineffective, as reflected in their diminished well-being.

As the feedback sequence in Figure 1 indicates, each party will gauge the impact of the initial coping responses and modify/change them until the desired outcomes are achieved (Lee and Brotheridge, 2017). This sequence, however, can devolve into a loss spiral such that those with insufficient access to resources will be susceptible to distress (Lee and Brotheridge, 2011; Rodriguez-Muñoz et al., 2015). URP further deepens such spirals (Cronen et al., 1979; Oliver, 2004), especially when the parties are unaware of its repetitive nature leading to counterproductive interaction patterns (Pearce, 2012). Prolonged exposure to "conversations gone bad" will likely increase fear and perceived threat (Marrs, 2012), defensiveness, i.e., avoiding action, blame, and/or change (Ashforth and Lee, 1990), and maladaptive coping (Folkman and Moskowitz, 2004).

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The workplace context may either fuel or extinguish the flames of microaggression. Brotheridge and Lee (2006) found that poor team climate has been linked to targets' work being undermined and belittled. Low job autonomy and unfair treatment have also been associated with belittlement. In contrast, the mechanisms for discouraging microaggressions include promoting empowerment and equitable treatment of all organizational members and fostering a climate of support (Kim et al., 2018). Greater numbers of progressive organizations are leading the way to ensure that microaggressions do not degenerate into toxic work climates (Zapf and Einarsen, 2005) and overt conflict (Prieto et al., 2016).

The long-term challenge is how workplaces can make all members feel included and valued. To maintain a respectful and tolerant work climate, managers and supervisors should demonstrate an "ethics

of care" approach to their members (Prieto et al., 2016). Sue et al. (2019) suggest that organizations should validate and support the targets, while also educating perpetrators. In promoting a climate of diversity, all organizational members should acknowledge that microaggression exists, frequently leading to psychological distress.

CMM can increase mindfulness and relational eloquence, i.e., continuously expanding how one frames one's own story in relationship to another's story (Wasserman, 2014), to encourage inclusion. The fear and threat of microaggression may be reduced through Marrs' (2012) six-step intervention: (1) awareness of reaction in self and coworkers, (2) label self-reaction as "fear," (3) pause and shift physical activities (e.g., take relaxing walks), (4) reality check: Is the threat from coworkers real? (5) reduce tensions through dialogue (e.g., apologize, clarification), and (6) make wise/choiceful action as alternative to fear-driven reaction.

Communication among ingroup members is inherently "ethnocentric" by excluding or de-valuing others from "outside" groups (Jensen, 2020). Jensen suggests that coordination of actions between members of the in- and out-groups encourages cosmopolitan communications, which will reduce misunderstandings due to lack of coherence of meaning. Strange loop interventions are additional ways to improve CMM (Oliver, 2004), and discourages microaggression (see Wasserman, 2014). These CMM methods dovetail with SDT principles (Lynn and Barrett, 2014) by decreasing noise (i.e., "false alarm" inference of hostile acts when none was intended) while increasing signal strength through mindful interactions (e.g., reflexive inquiry; relational eloquence).

To ensure that visible minorities and vulnerable members are not disproportionately exposed to microaggression, the "Broken Windows" approach may help promote diversity and inclusion (Prieto et al., 2016). Whenever a workplace has a "broken window" (i.e., one micro-aggressive incident) that is left unchecked, soon more "broken windows" will appear (i.e., the occurrence of other similar incidents). For example, the first author and several colleagues discussed how US public servants undergo intense socialization akin to boot camp soon after being promoted to the top ranks. The author casually remarked that this encouraged a "machismo culture" whereupon the associate dean retorted that such socialization processes may involve women. Her calling out this *faux pas* of implicitly supporting the "glass-ceiling" exclusion of women from the upper echelons of government is a way to mend one "broken window" and discourage future micro-expressions. In this case, the pattern of communications led to a CMM (Pearce, 2005), which shaped our future interactions.

Training at all organizational levels to identify micro-aggressive acts (Haynes-Baratz et al., 2021) and how to break the vicious cycle of URPs (Oliver, 2004; Pearce, 2012) will help decrease adverse events in the workplace. Emphasis should be placed on institutionalizing non-adversarial ways of dealing with conflict and communicating effectively through CMM (Pearce, 2005). Since microaggression is hard to detect, much less prevent, practicing "management by walking around" (Prieto et al., 2016) also may increase the signal-to-noise ratio (Martin and Rovira, 1981) when detecting potential adverse events. Like the "broken windows" approach, this will "nip the issue in the bud" and discourage the most indirect and subtle of hostile acts. Would-be aggressors will be made aware of how these acts would hurt the most stigmatized and vulnerable targets (Lee and Brotheridge, 2011). Microaggression may seem harmless to some, but left unchecked, it will reoccur and worsen with time.

CONCLUSION

We discuss how microaggression is situated within the nomological network of other forms of negative acts (i.e., workplace aggression/bullying) receiving greater attention in the literature. Microaggression is not limited to members of specific underrepresented groups, but rather any workplace member may be exposed to hostile acts for any of a multitude of characteristics that distinguish them from others. SDT and CMM will help evaluate the ambiguous nature of such acts, which are artifacts of miscommunications. To the extent that micro-aggressive and other forms of negative acts share attributes of covertness, passivity, subtlety, and indirectness (Table 1), our Figure 1 model may be applied to examining a broader array of workplace interactions. Through training, CMM principles and methods can help promote a climate of

equity, diversity, inclusion (Kim et al., 2018; Prieto et al., 2016), and interpersonal awareness to reduce microaggression (Marrs, 2012; Wasserman, 2014).

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