

# Microaggression in Radiology

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A microaggression is a comment or an action that subtly and often unconsciously or unintentionally expresses a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a marginalized group (such as a racial minority) [1].

Microaggressions can be seen in all aspects of society in everyday life. As members of the Association of Program Directors in Radiology and/or the ACR Diversity Committee, we want to raise awareness about microaggressions in everyday practice and in our radiology literature.

Microaggressions can occur daily in work. For example, a man might say to a female radiologist, “You are too pretty to be a radiologist and sit in the dark, you should be in pediatrics.” An attending radiologist might say to a minority radiology resident, “It is really impressive how well you are doing considering your background.” Telling a group of male residents that they can bring their wives or girlfriends to a residency function would be a microaggression to a member of the LGBTQ community. One attending physician saying to another who is Asian in appearance, “We have a Chinese patient and need an interpreter, you speak Chinese, right?” when the physician is Korean is a microaggression.

We need to be cognizant of how statements such as these affect people and how they affect the culture of the workplace. When such a comment is heard as an isolated

event, they can cause the recipient to become angry or frustrated. However, when people are subjected to microaggressions on a regular basis, it can affect their self-confidence and self-image and can lead to mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. Microaggressions are often subtle and subconscious; therefore many microaggressors are unlikely to recognize their own role and negative impact on others.

Microaggressions can be found in the media and medical literature. For example, in a letter to the editor in *JACR*, it was stated that an Asian author was “kowtowing to the status quo” [2]. In Chinese culture, kowtowing (kneeling and touching one’s forehead to the ground) is considered a sign of respect. However, it has taken on an alternative negative meaning of groveling or behaving in an excessively subservient manner.

A phrase that should be avoided is “chink in the armor.” This phrase created controversy in 2012 when used in the headline of a story on Jeremy Lin, the Chinese American basketball player [3].

Why is it so important to avoid the use of these microaggressions, specifically in the radiology literature? Well, think of microaggressions like mosquito bites. A single or occasional mosquito bite is annoying for a second but can be ignored, but when the mosquito bites are unrelenting and in large numbers, they

can be damaging [4]. The quote “the pen is mightier than the sword” (by Edward Bulwer-Lytton in 1839) best explains why written microaggressions cause more damage than verbal ones. A verbal microaggression is said and then goes away; a written one is there for posterity and can be read repeatedly, causing repeated damage. Every time a radiologist picks up an article from the radiology literature containing a microaggression, it may cause damage.

We want radiology to be a specialty that embraces diversity and inclusion. We believe that diversity in the workplace creates innovation. To attract this diverse group of individuals, people from different backgrounds should feel welcome in our specialty without being subjected to microaggressions. We need to be allies and demonstrate this in our everyday interactions. Those of us who publish in the radiology literature, serve on editorial boards, and serve as reviewers should be allies and edit papers to exclude microaggressions. To be most successful in this process, many educators and academics will need to work on adjusting their own language, removing old habits to improve themselves and our field.

In conclusion, we need to strive for the elimination of microaggressions within our workplace, our residency programs, and our literature. We must first educate ourselves to recognize and

eliminate such potentially hurtful language in our own conversations in person and in print.

## REFERENCES

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