

Using the Critical Race Tools of Racial Microaggressions to Examine Everyday Racism in Academic Spaces

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**UC Office of the President
Faculty Leadership Seminar Series
Fostering Inclusive Excellence**

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**We all come to this place
with our own racial/ethnic,
community and family
histories**

Chester M. Pierce



Racial Microaggressions

Professor Emeritus of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and
Professor Emeritus of Education at Harvard University

Chester Pierce (1974)

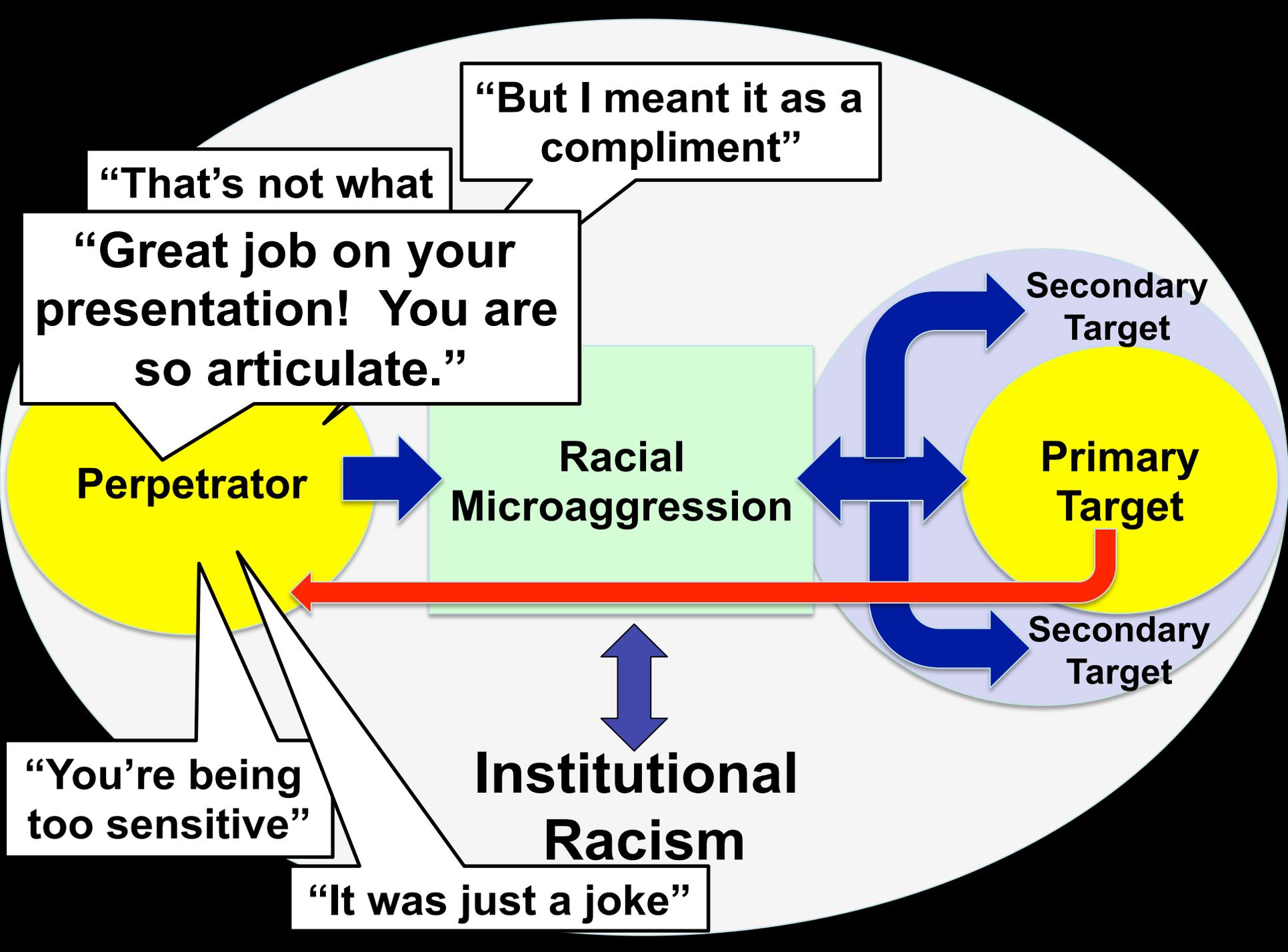
“...one must not look for the gross and obvious. The subtle, cumulative mini-assault is the substance of today’s racism” (p. 516).

Racial Microaggressions

How Do We Define Racial Microaggressions?

- Racial microaggressions are one form of systemic **everyday** racism used to keep those at the racial margins in their place.
- Racial Microaggressions are:
 - **Verbal and non-verbal assaults** directed toward People of Color, often carried out in **subtle**, automatic, or unconscious forms.
 - **Layered assaults**, based on a Person of Color's race, gender, class, sexuality, language, immigration status, phenotype, accent, surname, or college type;
 - **Cumulative assaults** that take a physiological, psychological, and academic toll on People of Color.

Death by a Thousand Cuts



**Racial Microaggressions
are a form of
Unconscious Racism**

A Model for Understanding Racial Microaggressions

**Types of
Racial
Microaggressions**

Some Examples of Racial Microaggressions

- “When I talk about *those Blacks*, I really wasn't talking about you.”
- “You're not like the rest of *them*. You're different.”
- “I don't think of you as a *Mexican*.”
- “You speak such *good* English.”
- “But you speak without an *accent*.”
- “How do Black people *feel* about...?”

“There are very few African American men in this country who haven't had the experience of being followed when they were shopping in a department store. That includes me. There are very few African American men who haven't had the experience of walking across the street and hearing the locks click on the doors of cars. That happens to me...There are very few African Americans who haven't had the experience of getting on an elevator and a woman clutching her purse nervously and holding her breath until she had a chance to get off. That happens often.”

President Obama
July 19, 2013

“And race matters for reasons that really are only skin deep, that cannot be discussed any other way, and that cannot be wished away. Race matters to a young man’s view of society when he spends his teenage years watching others tense up as he passes, no matter the neighborhood where he grew up. Race matters to a young woman’s sense of self when she states her hometown, and then is pressed, “No, where are you really from?”, regardless of how many generations her family has been in the country.”

Justice SOTOMAYOR Dissenting

in

**SCHUETTE v. BAMN,
572 U. S. ____ (April 2014)**

A Model for Understanding Racial Microaggressions

**Types of
Racial
Microaggressions**

**Context of
Racial
Microaggressions**

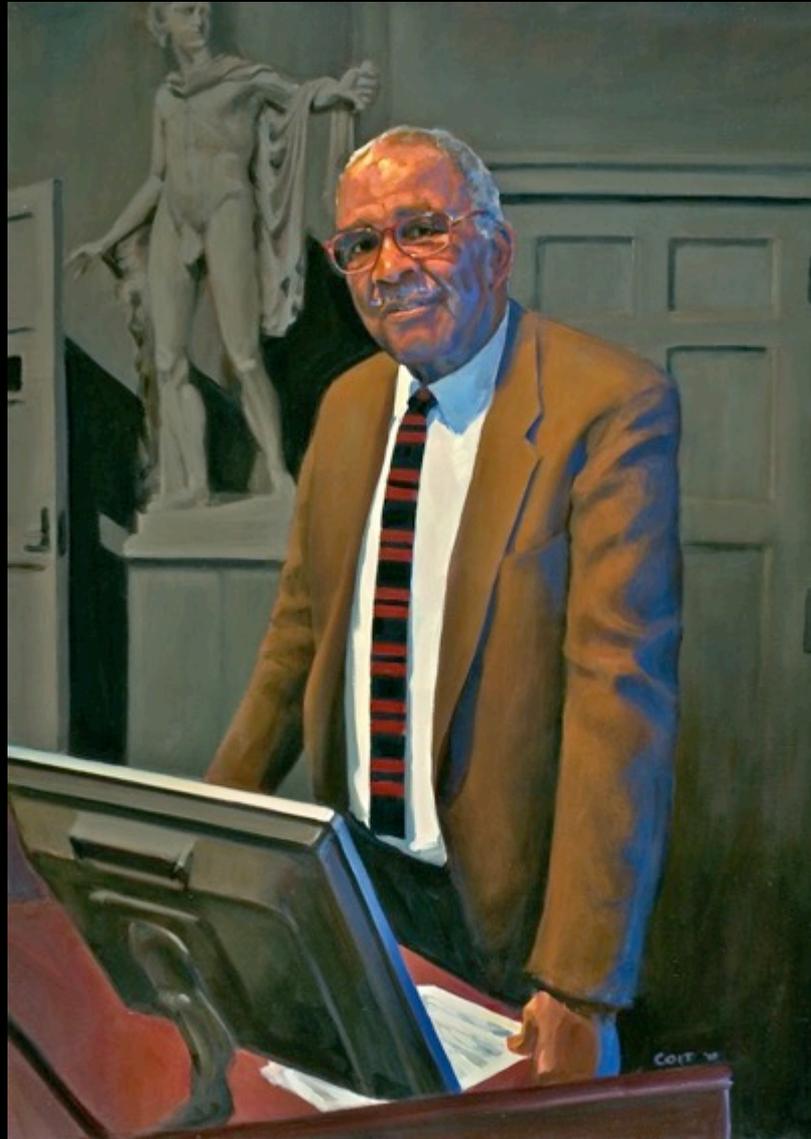




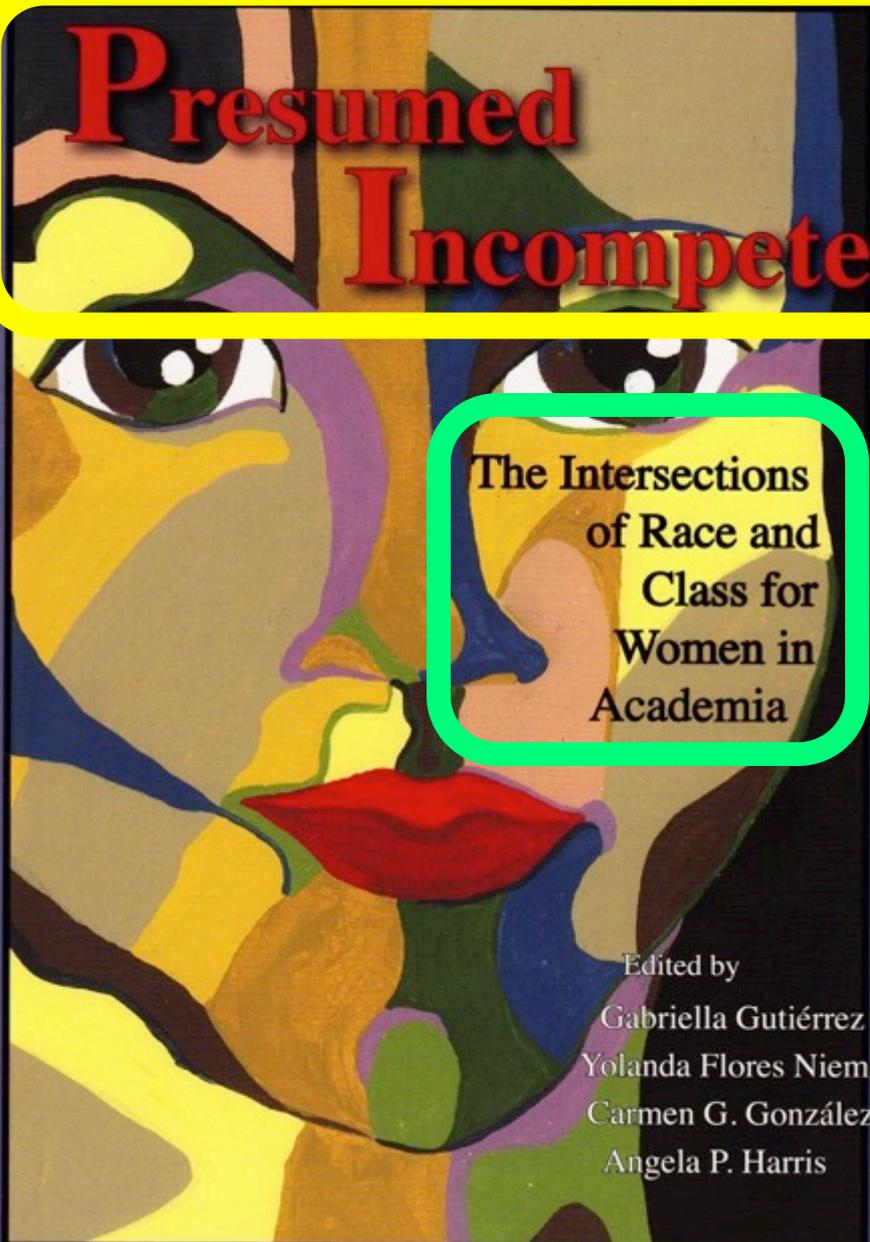
**Hyper
Visibility**

Invisibility





“I notice in a class I teach that after each session a white, not a black, will come up to me and tell me how the class should be structured or how the chairs should be placed or how there should be extra meetings outside the classroom, etc...One could argue that I am hypersensitive, if not paranoid, about what I know every black will understand, is that it is not what the student says in this dialogue, it is how he approaches me, how he talks to me, how he seems to regard me. I was patronized. I was told, by my own perceptual distortions perhaps, that although I am a full professor on two faculties at a prestigious university, to him I was no more than a big black nigger. I had to be instructed and directed as to how to render him more pleasure!” (Pierce, p. 277, 1970).



Presumed Incompetent

The Intersections
of Race and
Class for
Women in
Academia

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News

DIVERSITY



Black and Not Feeling Welcome

December 3, 2014

By **Colleen Flaherty**

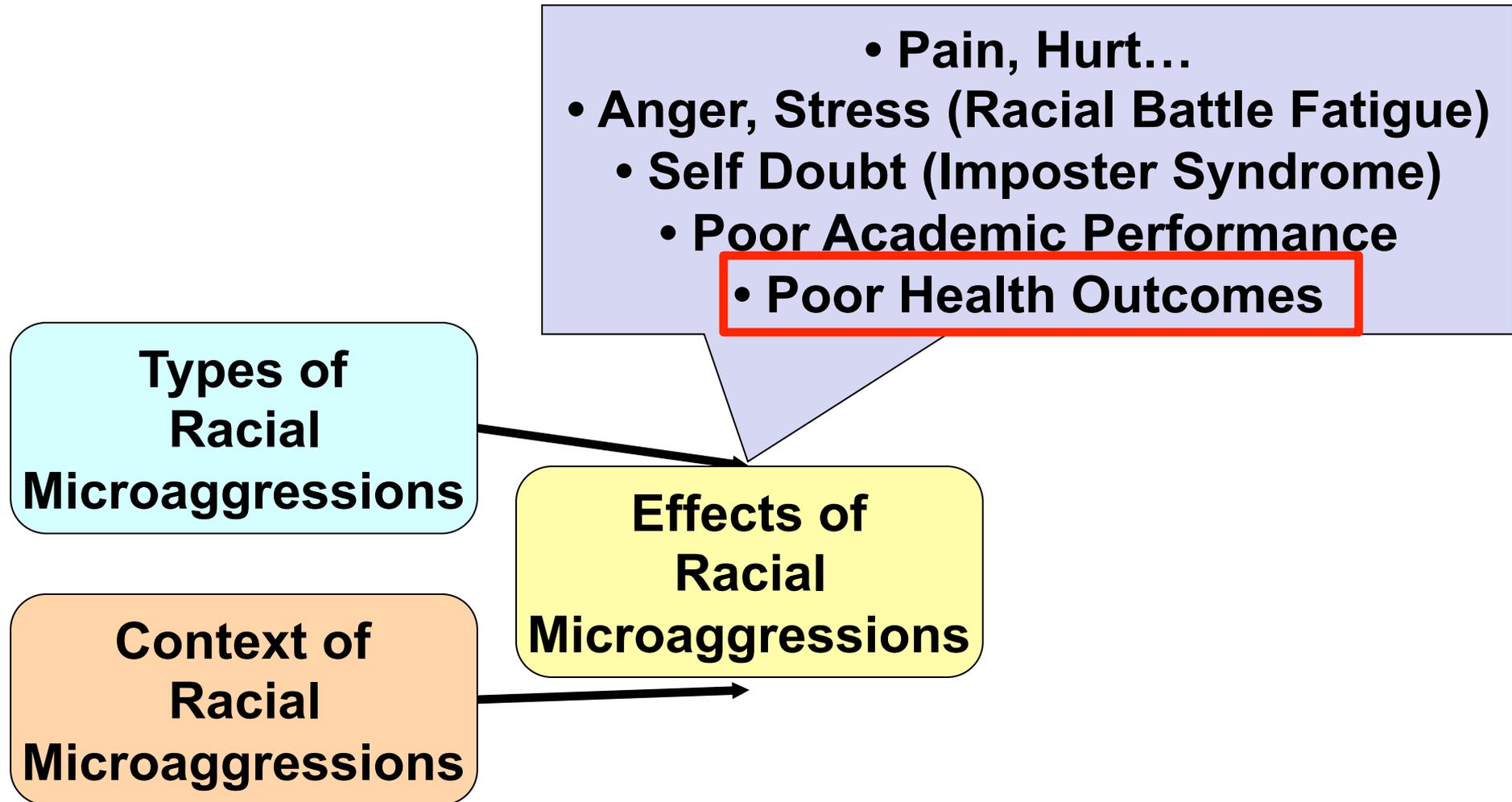
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What's it like to be a faculty member of color at a predominantly white institution? Two essays this week by Vassar professors paint complex pictures of achievement, disappointment, pride and outrage. The pieces have captured lots of attention on social media, as well as from Vassar's administration. Many say the professors' experiences speak to faculty diversity concerns on many campuses, including those that don't fit the cloistered, elite Vassar profile.

RELATED

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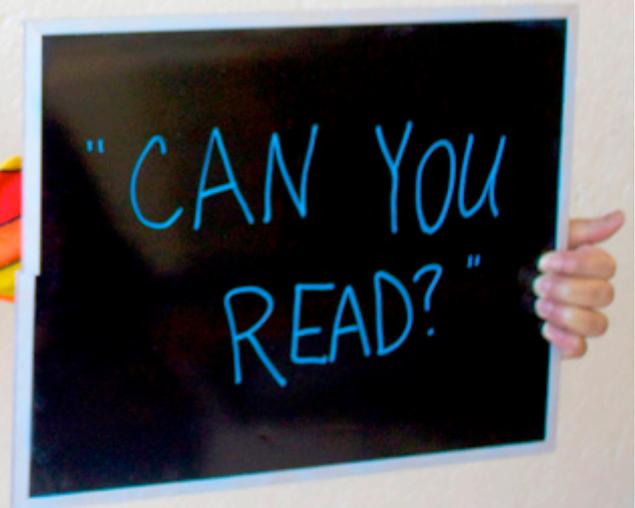
**Effects of
Racial
Microaggressions**

**Responses to
Racial
Microaggressions**

- Denial
- Self Policing
- Prove Them Wrong
- Resistance
- Counterspaces
- Various Art Forms

One response

#itooamharvard



Kimiko Matsuda-Lawrence, Harvard Sophomore

I, Too, Am Harvard

**Premiering as part of the 16th Annual
Dr. Walter J. Leonard Black Arts Festival**

Our Stories. By Us. For Us.

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Tickets at the Harvard Box Office and online at: www.boxoffice.harvard.edu

Patricia J. Williams—*The Nation*



“They are treated with open disdain, the champagne flutes snatched from their hands at cocktail parties as they are mistaken for waiters. They are figured as criminals when they walk across campus. Their sexual prowess is interrogated, their beauty denigrated. They hesitate before asking questions in class—for a dumb question from a white person isn’t heard as a reflection on all white people, but any question from a black person tends to be scrutinized for inherent inferiority, “proof” that the student’s lonely little voice is the evil marker of where a ‘more qualified white person’ ought to be sitting” (On-line; March 12, 2014).

I TOO AM _____

Another response

Justice SOTOMAYOR's Dissent

“In my colleagues’ view, examining the racial impact of legislation only perpetuates racial discrimination. This refusal to accept the stark reality that race matters is regrettable. The way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to speak openly and candidly on the subject of race, and to apply the Constitution with eyes open to the unfortunate effects of centuries of racial discrimination. As members of the judiciary tasked with intervening to carryout the guarantee of equal protection, we ought not sit back and wish away, rather than confront, the racial inequality that exists in our society.”

Still other responses...

Some Comments to Racial Microaggressions

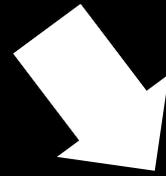
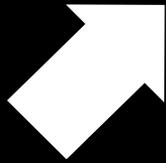
- “It’s the accumulation of all these little insults that everyone denies are insults.”
- “I’m tired of all the ‘coded’ language around race and gender.”
- “The racial tone (the undercurrent) of the conversations is what angers me.”
- “Why is it that ‘diversity’ work is expected and then not valued by the university.”
- “What we are talking about is only the tip of the iceberg. I don’t think we want to see what’s underneath. They are symptoms of a much larger problem.”
- “Those subtle racial or ethnic comments at faculty meetings about research add to the stress I feel and remind me how difficult it is to come to those meetings. It’s part of the department culture. Maybe it’s a school-wide culture...”

What Can We Do?

“The black must be taught to recognize...microaggressions and construct his future by taking appropriate action at each instance of recognition.”

-Chester Pierce, 1974

**Critical
Reflection**



Recognition

**Appropriate
Action**

**Again,
What Can We Do?**

**Acknowledge our own racial history
and how we view ourself and others**

Confront our own biases

**Actively work to develop our
recognition, reflection, and action
skills**

THANK YOU

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