Did She Really Just Say That? The Impact of Microaggressions on Wellbeing in the Veterinary Profession
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Serious Concerns in Veterinary Medicine

- High rates of mental stress, depression and burnout
- Higher risk of suicide among veterinary professionals
- Challenges identifying warning signs, and willingness of individuals to take advantage of available resources.

Organizations, academic institutions and industry have worked to address challenges facing profession. Multiple factors impact wellbeing:

- Physical Health
- Work-Life Balance
- Sense of Professional Satisfaction
- Financial Health
- Belongingness

Why This Matters in Veterinary Medicine

- Ethnically diverse U.S. population vs. Largely homogenous veterinary profession.
- The diversity of the profession does not reflect the diversity of the populations we serve. There are implications to the delivery of veterinary services, as well as for members of underrepresented groups within the profession.

AAVMC defines Underrepresented Groups as:

“Populations of individuals whose advancement in the veterinary medical profession has historically been disproportionately impacted by six specific aspects of diversity due to legal, cultural, or social climate impediments.”


Primary Categories:

- Gender
- Race
- Ethnicity
- Geographic
- Socioeconomic
- Educational Disadvantage
The Experience of Underrepresented Individuals in Veterinary Medicine

- Subtle Isolation
- Individual experience vs. Statistical trends
- Invalidation
- Unique stressors for underrepresented individuals:
  - *Heightened imposter syndrome*
  - *Have to do/be/perform more*
  - *Nobody here looks like me/ gets my experience / knows what I feel*
  - *Nobody understands my experience – experience of being the only African-, Latino-, Asian-American/Christian/Woman, etc.*

Implications for Patient Care

- Demographic changes bring new cultural influences on everyday life, including pet care.
- Some data has shown that lack of English proficiency is an impediment to seeking veterinary care, meaning a segment of the pet-owning population is largely going untouched by animal service providers

MICROAGGRESSIONS

“*Brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, negative slights and insults to the target person or group.*”

*Dr. Derald Wing Sue; Professor, Counseling Psychology; Columbia University*

Implicit Bias vs. Explicit Bias

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>IMPLICIT</th>
<th>EXPLICIT</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Outside of conscious awareness</td>
<td>• Consciously held beliefs about a person or group</td>
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<td>• Attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions unconsciously</td>
<td>• Arise mainly as the direct result of a perceived threat</td>
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<td>• Do not necessarily align with our declared beliefs</td>
<td>• When people feel threatened, they are more likely to draw group boundaries to distinguish themselves from others</td>
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*Kirwin Institute, The Ohio State University*
Categories of Microaggressions

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<tr>
<th>FORM</th>
<th>MICRO-ASSAULTS</th>
<th>MICRO-INSULTS</th>
<th>MICRO-INVALIDATION</th>
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<td>DEFINITION</td>
<td>Most overt forms of discrimination; easiest to identify and most closely related to outright prejudice. Conscious, deliberate, subtle or overt and communicated to marginalized groups. Verbal or non-verbal attacks and avoidant behaviors.</td>
<td>“Communication that conveys stereotypes, rudeness, and insensitivity that demean a person’s identity, often unconscious and rude but still cast negative light on particular characteristics or demographic group.”</td>
<td>Communication or cues that exclude, negate or nullify the thoughts, feelings or experiential realities of certain groups.</td>
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<td>EXAMPLE</td>
<td>“It’s a shame you decided to have kids while in vet/tech school — you really could’ve gone far.” “You can’t be a real scientist if you believe in God.”</td>
<td>Telling an Asian American that she “speaks good English.” “Oh, you graduated from XXX Vet School — so you probably weren’t taught a lot of this information.”</td>
<td>“Racism isn’t a problem at this school/practice/company so there’s nothing to discuss.” “I don’t know why everything to you is ‘racist’.”</td>
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How Microaggressions Impact Learning

- Create psychological conditions that impede engagement and belongingness in academic settings
- Cognitive effort redirected away from engagement in academic environments
- Imposter Syndrome and “Stereotype threat”

How Microaggressions Impact Mental and Wellbeing

- Increased Stress, Anxiety
- Physical reactions, avoidance, hypervigilance
- Negative self esteem
- Elevated depression and trauma
- Prolonged and increased levels of stress hormones in the bloodstream

Harvard University Project Implicit:  [https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html](https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html)