Tackling Micro-Aggressions in Organizations:
A Broken Windows Approach

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Micro-aggressions are the subtle verbal and nonverbal slights, insults, and disparaging messages directed towards an individual due to their gender, age, disability, and racial group membership, often automatically and subconsciously. The authors of this manuscript contend that companies should adopt an ethic of care approach to managing diversity, and take some meaningful steps to ensure that their minority employees are treated with respect. The paper proposed a broken windows approach to reducing micro-aggressions within firms via leader acknowledgement, management by walking around, and micro-aggression training.

INTRODUCTION

In their seminal article on Broken Windows theory, Wilson and Kelling (1982) stated that it is important to maintain and monitor urban environments to prevent small crimes such as vandalism, public drinking and toll-jumping to help create an atmosphere of order and lawfulness, thereby preventing more serious crimes from happening. One may be wondering what this has to do with tackling micro-aggressions. This paper posits that the broken windows theory can be used to effectively reduce micro-aggressions, and manage diversity. Managers and employees alike can maintain and monitor the workplace and themselves, and prevent micro-aggressions in order to create and maintain a positive diversity climate, thereby reducing workplace incivility, turnover intentions and employee disengagement.

Micro-aggressions are the subtle verbal and nonverbal slights, insults, and disparaging messages directed towards an individual due to their gender, age, disability, and racial group membership, often automatically and subconsciously. They are usually committed by well-intentioned individuals who are

sometimes unaware of the hidden messages being communicated. Micro-aggressions have been likened to carbon monoxide - invisible, but potentially lethal (Sue & Sue, 2003).

In this paper we are extending the existing literature on workplace diversity by utilizing a well-known and sometimes controversial theory in criminology as a way to help reduce micro-aggressions in the workplace, and potentially eradicate it before it snowballs into other forms of workplace incivilities and counterproductive work behaviors that may result in inflicting more harm on the individual and organization alike. This article makes a novel contribution to the diversity literature by taking a theory used in criminology that is often criticized as being used to victimize minorities with measures such as stop and frisk in New York, and "flipping it" in order to help minorities and other disadvantaged groups from being victims of micro-aggressions. The broken windows theory has the potential to be an effective tool in ensuring that employees regardless of age, gender, religion, disability, and ethnicity are treated with respect within their organizations.

DIVERSITY MATTERS

Organizations that want to remain competitive must be knowledgeable about the diversity that is present in the current workforce and marketplace if they hope to have a sustainable business. These organizations are facing many new challenges and opportunities that our national diversity presents, such as attempting to understand the differences in the workforce and ways to create a cohesive team regardless of the differences that do exist. Other challenges and opportunities include understanding the ethical issues that come with employing a more diverse workforce. If embraced, diversity has the potential to offer increased innovation via new perspectives, ideas, and ways of working, that more homogenous employees and teams may not offer.

The increasing diversity in the United States is reflected in places of employment where employees of all races and ethnicities represent a microcosm of race relations in our society. The United States is projected to become more racially and ethnically diverse in the coming years. Interestingly, most of the population growth is projected to be of visible racial/ethnic minority groups. Such demographic changes are due primarily to recent immigration rates of documented immigrants, undocumented immigrants, and refugees. Furthermore, Colby and Ortman (2014) proposed that mothers that come from racial/ethnic minority groups have more children per mother than White mothers. It is estimated that more than half of all Americans are expected to belong to a minority group (any group other than non-Hispanic White alone), and by 2060, nearly one in five of the nation's total population is projected to be foreign born (Colby & Ortman, 2014).

Given the population growth projections, the workforce of the United States will likely undergo a drastic change. These changes are significant for the world of work, and our society. The economic implications of these changes will be dramatic. The new workforce, a majority of people of color, will be the driving force in contributing to social security as the baby boomers, primarily Caucasians, retire. Nevertheless, if this trend continues, it will likely reduce the retirees' future securities. Current data reports that people of color continue to be the most underemployed and unemployed when compared to Whites (U.S. Department of Labor, 2015). The representation of people of color in higher levels of employment is much lower (except for Asians) than Whites in management and professionally related occupations: 35.5% of Whites, 26% of African Americans, and 17% of Hispanic/Latinos (Sue, 2010). This trend validates the feelings of many employees of color finding the workplace reflecting the power and privilege of their White counterparts.

In the past, organizations tended toward homogenizing their workforces, getting everyone to think and behave in similar ways (Suarez-Orozco, 2002), perhaps as a result of the melting-pot metaphor, where people of color and newly arrived immigrants were expected to assimilate into a larger American identity. Also according to Erica Folder, an NYU Professor, and author of the book The Color Bind, "part of the problem, particularly in hiring, is that employers look for the right "cultural fit," which often means someone who is similar to the person doing the hiring (Race and Reality, 2015). For many, the melting pot phenomenon symbolizes societal pressure to assimilate to White American values, norms, and culture

while ignoring and devaluing the culture of people of color. We anticipate that more organizations will begin to recognize that diversity can be a competitive advantage. In the next section we will look at micro-aggressions and the ways in which it harms employees.

MICRO-AGGRESSIONS: AN INVISIBLE THREAT

It can be said that most discriminatory laws that restrict privileges for persons of color have been abolished, and many argue that racism no longer exists in the United States due to less instances of overt forms of racism, such as denying privileges based on race. However, the nature and expression of racism has evolved into a subtler and ambiguous form, perhaps reflecting society's belief that overt and blatant acts of racism are unjust and politically incorrect (Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakami, & Hodson, 2002). In other words, racism has become more camouflaged and covert.

In reviewing the literature on subtle and contemporary forms of bias, the term micro-aggression seems to best describe the phenomenon in its everyday occurrence (Sue et al., 2007b). Sue (2010) defined micro-aggressions as brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to a target group - people of color, religious minorities, women, people with disabilities, and gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered individuals. Whether intentional or unintentional, these micro-aggressions can be demonstrated verbally, nonverbally, visually, or behaviorally. The term racial micro-aggression was originally coined by Chester Pierce to describe the subtle and often automatic put-downs that African Americans face (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Willis, 1978). Sue et al. (2007a) proposed that micro-aggressions (a) tend to be subtle, unintentional, and indirect; (b) often occur in situations where there are alternative explanations; (c) represent unconscious and ingrained biased beliefs and attitudes; and (d) are more likely to occur when people pretend not to notice differences, thereby denying that race, sex, sexual orientation, religion, or ability had anything to do with their actions. The forms of micro-aggressions are (a) micro-assaults, (b) micro-insults, and (c) micro-invalidation (Sue et al., 2007a).

The experience of micro-aggressions is not new to people of color, women and other marginalized groups. It is the constant and continuing everyday reality of affronts and invalidations disseminated by well-intentioned friends, co-workers, employers, and educators. The power of micro-aggressions lies in their invisibility to the perpetrator, who is unaware that he or she has engaged in a behavior that threatens and demeans the recipient of such a communication (Sue, 2010).

There have been many discussions that the United States is currently in a post-racial era since the 2008 election of a bi-racial president (although labeled as African American) whose biological mother is White and biological father is African. However, many may recall that during the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination campaign, then Senator Joe Biden described then-Senator Barack Obama as "articulate and bright and clean" in a manner that suggested that people do not expect African Americans to be articulate and intelligent (Thai & Barrett, 2007). This is an illustration of a micro-aggression that demonstrated how unintentional it was for Senator Biden because he revealed that he was actually complimenting Senator Obama, whereas many within the African American community found his remarks offensive.

MICRO-AGGRESSIONS IN THE WORKPLACE

Employers now recognize that their workforce must be drawn increasingly from a diverse labor pool. The economic viability of businesses will depend on their ability to manage a diverse workforce effectively, allow for equal access and opportunity, and make appropriate multicultural organizational change (Stevens, Plaut, & Sanchez-Burks, 2008). Due to the changing demographics of the workforce, there has been a movement toward diversity training to assist in the transition. Nonetheless, people of color continue to describe their work climates as hostile, invalidating, and insulting because of the many micro-aggressions that assail their race, restrict their work options, lower their work productivity, generate suppressed rage and anger, stereotype them as less worthy workers and detrimentally impact

their recruitment/hiring, retention, and promotion in organizations (Hinton, 2004; Rowe, 1990; Sue, Lin, & Rivera, 2009).

Micro-aggressions are especially problematic because of their invisibility and difficulty in being proven (Rowe, 1990), and because they are often minimized as trivial and innocuous (Sue et al., 2007b). As such, many places of employment have focused on the overt forms (e.g., racist jokes or epithets) of discrimination. More difficult to control are complaints by employees of color that they are "watched over" more carefully than their White coworkers (Sue, 2010). The message behind this micro-aggression is that people of color cannot be trusted or are less capable, and therefore require close monitoring. This work environment creates an unwelcoming climate for people of color. Rather than being able to focus on the tasks of the job, many people of color have to cope with these daily hassles that may result in feelings of anger and frustration.

What people consciously believe or say (e.g., "I treat everyone the same… I don't see color") is oftentimes at odds with what they actually do. The micro-aggressions are manifested in being ignored or not invited to have lunch with coworkers, receiving little feedback or mentoring, closer supervision, the supervisor forgetting or mispronouncing the employee's name, being assigned to lesser job tasks, and a continuing onslaught of other verbal micro-aggressions (Sue, 2010). To the person of color, these events could demonstrate a hostile work climate.

While many companies are seemingly making efforts to recruit more employees of color, they are often unsuccessful, especially for upper management positions and professional occupations. "We would gladly hire an African American or Latino for the position, if we could find one who is qualified." This statement represents a micro-aggression. It is a denial of racism and an assumption of inferiority, that helps disguise unconscious biased decisions that justify not offering a position to the African American or Latino applicant. Often, hiring managers may ponder, for instance, whether the African American or Latino applicant will "fit in." This questions what criteria are being used to determine qualified applicants. When people of color are recruited, and the company's management or administration has low minority representation, this propels a powerful message, to the person of color, that advancement opportunities are slim and the environment may be uninviting.

When underrepresented groups are hired, companies may have challenges retaining them. Low retention rates may be the result when minority groups are constantly bombarded by organizational policies, practice, programs, and structures that make them feel unfairly treated (Sue, Lin, & Rivera, 2009). This is often compounded by interpersonal micro-aggressions, or what Hinton (2004) referred to as "*micro-inequities of the vast power of the small slight*".

Within the workplace, micro-aggressions can occur in peer-to-peer or superior-to-subordinate relationships (Sue, Lin, & Rivera, 2009). These interactions, along with company policies and practices, constitute the organizational culture and climate. With the diversification of the workforce, it is imperative that we understand the relationship between micro-aggressions and their impact on diverse work groups in the workplace. Change must occur at both the systemic and individual levels.

Micro-aggressions are difficult to detect. Most individuals who perpetrate micro-aggressions are unaware that their views are hurtful and would vigorously deny that they are discriminatory. This modern form of discrimination is often unintentional, but cannot be eliminated unless people are willing to examine their own contribution to a hostile and uninviting work climate. For example, racial micro-aggressions do not overtly hurt the recipient because of it being a relatively "minor" incident, but an accumulation of micro-aggressions can become burdensome. The counterproductive behavior of micro-aggressions can be costly for an organization both indirectly (by lowering morale and driving off valuable employees) and directly (through financial liability if the organization responds inappropriately).

The next section will examine the controversial Broken Windows theory, and its applicability to the reduction of micro-aggressions within organizations.

BROKEN WINDOWS THEORY

Prior to the development and implementation of broken windows theory, law enforcement professionals and scholars focused primarily on methods of reducing serious crime facing society such as murder, rape, robbery, etc. Wilson and Kelling (1982) in their article entitled *Broken Windows* took a different approach to reducing crime in communities. They viewed serious crime as the final result of a lengthier chain of events, and theorized that it emanated from disorder, and that if disorder were eliminated, then serious crimes would not occur. This was a significant departure from conventional methods that were previously used to tackle crime, especially in urban areas, and it occurred to us that this often criticized theory may be useful in the struggle to eliminate micro-aggressions and other more serious offenses or "disorders" that are harmful to diverse employees within the organizational context.

Wilson and Kelling (1982) highlighted the importance of foot-patrols in communities that had a crime problem, and its role in making a neighborhood safe. They also stated that *what foot-patrol officers did was to elevate, to the extent they could, the level of public order in these neighborhoods. Though the neighborhoods were predominantly black and the foot patrolmen were mostly white, this "order-maintenance" function of the police was performed to the general satisfaction of both parties*. There are implications for managing diversity in the workplace. The concept of Management By Walking Around (MBWA) may be an effective method for organizational leaders to check with employees to determine their emotional well-being, status on projects, and if they need resources that can help them perform their job more efficiently and effectively. According to Mohan, Kumar and Subrahmanyam (2013), MBWA is one of the most important ways to build civility and performance in the workplace. Management guru W. Edwards Deming once said *"If you wait for people to come to you, you'll only get small problems. You must go and find them. The big problems are where people don't realize they have one in the first place"* (Management by walking about, 2008).

It may be necessary for managers to interact with employees on a regular basis to assess their needs, and to find out what is troubling them. Organizational leaders may also play a very active role in being more emotionally intelligent, and determine whether their minority employees are the victims of micro-aggressions in the workplace. MBWA makes supervisors, managers, and human resources staff more accessible to employees and also makes it more likely that inappropriate behaviors may be directly observed or extinguished (Bland & Stalcup, 2001). The manager or supervisor who has regular contact with employees will be able to notice behaviors that may indicate someone is being harassed, such as increased absenteeism; employee withdrawal, and observable discomfort around certain persons (Bland & Stalcup, 2001). If they engage in MBWA, managers can play an active role in reducing micro-aggressions, as their presence would deter perpetrators. The latter may refrain from engaging in uncivil behavior, and if they do exhibit such behavior, it will be more quickly noticed and addressed by authority figures. Employees may also feel more comfortable voicing their discomfort in an environment that is striving to eliminate micro-aggressions in the workplace, thus influencing increased commitment to the firm that is demonstrating that it cares, and reducing turnover intentions.

Proposition 1: There is a negative relationship between Management by Walking Around (MBWA) and Workplace Micro-aggressions and between MBWA and Turnover Intentions.

According to Wilson and Kelling (1982), if within a community petty crimes such as vandalism and graffiti are dealt with swiftly and decisively, it sends a signal that the residents care about their neighborhood, and that they take action when problems arise. It also signals willingness on their part to monitor their community, and contact the police as needed. This requires residents to acknowledge that small crimes may eventually escalate into more serious crimes within their neighborhoods. This has implications for tackling micro-aggressions in organizations.

Organizations that are serious about eliminating micro-aggressions should encourage organizational leaders to acknowledge that they really do exist. A clear message must be sent throughout the entire firm

that micro-aggressions negatively interfere with interpersonal dynamics in the workplace, and impede organizational success, and that they will not be tolerated. According to Judith Williams, Google's global diversity and talent programs manager, "We all have unconscious biases because of our exposure to images in the media and our families of origin, but if we're aware of it we can work together to combat it (Lewis, 2015).

A clear message was also sent by Janet Napolitano, former Secretary of Homeland Security who currently serves as the President of the University of California system. In 2014, President Napolitano invited faculty members to get trained in recognizing micro-aggressions and the messages they send (Watanabe & Song, 2015). One handout, adapted from one of the leading micro-aggression researchers, Derald Wing Sue, offered examples: *Telling people of color they speak English well sends a message they are perpetual foreigners in their own land or asserting that America is a "melting pot" denies the significance of a person's racial or ethnic experiences* (Watanabe & Song, 2015).

> *Proposition 2: There is a positive relationship between Leader Acknowledgeable of Micro-aggressions and Micro-aggressions awareness.*

Wilson and Kelling (1982) stated that *if a window in a building is broken and is left unrepaired, all the rest of the windows will soon be broken….one unrepaired broken window is a signal that no one cares, and so breaking more windows costs nothing*. This has implications for effectively managing diversity in the workplace. For example, if a minority employee is a victim of micro-aggression in the workplace, this may send a signal (consciously or subconsciously) that it is acceptable to engage in workplace incivility. The minority employees may think that it is appropriate to reciprocate that behavior, and in turn they may also behave in an uncivil manner with fellow co-workers and customers. For example, in a recent study by Foulk, Woolum, and Erez (2015), that investigated the contagion effect of rudeness in organizations, they found that low-intensity negative behaviors like rudeness can indeed be contagious. Their research also showed being the target of rude behavior, or even witnessing rude behavior, induces rudeness.

Individuals exposed to rude behaviors tend to have concepts associated with rudeness activated in their minds, and consequently may interpret ambiguous but benign behaviors as rude. More significantly, they themselves are more likely to behave rudely toward others, and to evoke hostility, and negative effect, and even revenge. This has implications for organizations that are rife with micro-aggressions. For example, minority employees who feel hurt and disrespected may themselves engage in different forms of workplace incivilities based on the contagion effect of rudeness. Also other individuals who witness micro-aggressions may themselves become "micro-aggressors".

> *Proposition 3: There is a negative relationship between action against micro-aggressions and workplace incivility, and between action against micro-aggressions and tolerance for workplace incivility.*

Wilson and Kelling (1982) mentioned the 1969 study by Phillip Zimbardo, in which he tested the broken windows theory by leaving a vehicle untended in a neighborhood in the Bronx and within minutes the car was vandalized. They further suggested that "untended behavior" also leads to the breakdown of community controls. According to the authors,

> "*A stable neighborhood of families who care for their homes, mind each other's children, and confidently frown on unwanted intruders can change, in a few years or even a few months, to an inhospitable and frightening jungle. A piece of property is abandoned, weeds grow up, a window is smashed. Adults stop scolding rowdy children; the children, emboldened, become more rowdy. Families move out, unattached adults move in. Teenagers gather in front of the corner store. The merchant asks them to move; they refuse. Fights occur. Litter accumulates. People start drinking in front of the grocery; in time, an inebriate slumps to the sidewalk and is allowed to sleep it off.*

Pedestrians are approached by panhandlers…At this point it is inevitable that serious crime will flourish or violent attacks on strangers will occur (Wilson & Kelling, 1982)."

The presence of workplace incivility affects the organizational climate, and the negative effects multiply if left unchecked (Felblinger, 2008). This suggests that "untended" behavior, such as micro-aggressions, has the potential to snowball into further undesirable behaviors in the workplace and may manifest itself into a negative diversity climate. It is quite possible that the proliferation of micro-aggressions may snowball into a larger problem for firms. Employees from marginalized groups who experience micro-aggressions may view their firm as a place where incivility and discrimination are tolerated by the organization. Therefore, companies that take action to reduce micro-aggressions will send a message to marginalized employees that they care about their welfare, and may result in those employees having a positive perception of their workplace.

> *Proposition 4: There is a positive relationship between action against micro-aggressions and positive diversity climate.*

According to Wilson and Kelling (1982), "untended behavior" leads to the breakdown of community controls. They contend that vandalism and other small crimes can occur anywhere once the sense of mutual regard and the obligations of civility are lowered by actions that seem to signal that no-one cares. It can be argued that a negative diversity climate within organizations may lead to a breakdown of organizational controls that regulate civil behaviors within the firm. According to Boehm, Dwertmann, Kunze, Michaelis, Parks, and McDonald (2014), at the individual level of analysis, perceptions of a positive diversity climate within firms have been linked to various desirable outcomes. It can be inferred that a negative diversity climate may result in negative outcomes.

Cortina (2008) extended the notion of incivility by examining it through lenses of gender and race. The central argument is that incivility, in some cases, is not "general" at all, but instead represents contemporary manifestations of gender and racial bias in the workplace. Furthermore, a recent study by Cortina, Kabat-Farr, Leskinen and Huerta (2013) tested a theory of selective incivility to demonstrate whether it can be considered a modern manifestation of sexism and racism in the workplace. Their study found that women and people of color reported more instances of workplace incivility on the job than men and Whites. There is a possibility that firms that possess a negative diversity climate may experience more occurrences of workplace incivilities in the form of "selective incivilities."

A study by McKay, Avery, Tonidandel, Morris, Hernandez, and Hebl (2007) found that diversity climate influences employee retention. Their findings suggested that organizations should pay greater attention to the diversity climate concerns of black employees given their heightened sensitivity to racial conditions in the workplace. Their study results also suggested that organizations that take steps to improve diversity climate perceptions among Blacks will have the added benefit of reducing turnover intentions for other employee racial (and gender) subgroups (McKay, et al, 2007).

According to Stevens, Plaut and Sanchez-Burks (2008), an all-inclusive multicultural (AIM) approach that promotes a positive diversity climate enhances positive relationships, resulting in heightened employee engagement and individual and organizational performance. With that being said a negative diversity climate may lead to greater instances of employee disengagement.

> *Proposition 5: There is a positive relationship between negative diversity climate, workplace incivility, employee disengagement, and turnover intentions.*

It can be inferred from the broken windows theory that greater instances of crime resulting from community and societal decay are associated with decreased civility and lawful behavior. With that being said, it can also be inferred that greater instances of workplace incivilities, turnover intentions, and employee disengagement stemming from a negative diversity climate may lead to decreased productivity. According to Stewart, Volpone, Avery, and McKay (2011), employees' perceptions of the diversity

climate in their workplace are known to have a significant impact on their job attitudes and behavior. For example, Cortina and Magley (2009) found that employees who are the targets of workplace incivility are likely to experience stress, distraction, and negative emotions as well as lower job satisfaction and sometimes even reduced creativity. This has serious implications because it may decrease productivity in the workplace.

Turnover intentions also have the potential to impact organizational productivity. Krishnan and Singh (2010) found that greater intentions to quit lead to less performance orientation, higher organizational deviance, and fewer organizational citizenship behaviors. On the basis of theories in social exchange and psychological contracts, they further stated that once the employee feels that the psychological contracts have been broken and the quality of exchanges is no longer good, this will lead to less performance orientation, citizenship behaviors, and higher deviant behaviors. Kickul, Neuman, Parker, and Finkl (2001) highlighted, from the perspective of the psychological contract, that these behaviors are employees' reactions to unmet expectations and lack of fair treatment. As it pertains to a negative diversity climate, minority, women, and disabled employees may develop turnover intentions if they are negatively impacted by micro-aggressions, and other unfair treatment, as they may determine that their psychological contract has been broken.

Research from Towers Watson found that the more engaged employees are, the better the company performs (Towers Watson, 2011). According to this study, organizations with high levels of employee engagement were able to improve their operating income by 19.2 percent (Towers Watson, 2011). At the other end of the spectrum, companies with low levels of employee engagement experienced a 32.7 percent decline in their operating income (Towers Watson, 2011). Employees that perceive themselves as the target of micro-aggressions may be more disengaged at work, resulting in lower performance measurements.

Proposition 6: There is a negative relationship between productivity and workplace incivilities, turnover intentions, employee disengagement, and negative diversity climate.

FIGURE 1
A PROPOSED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MICRO-AGGRESSIONS
& PRODUCTIVITY
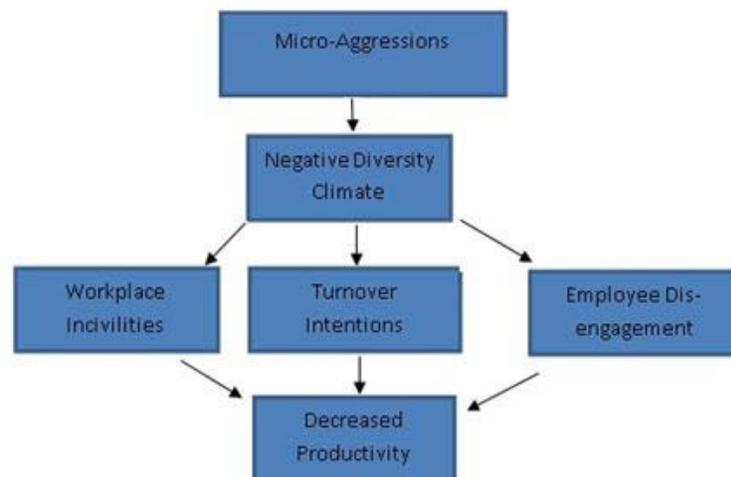
AN ETHICS OF CARE PERSPECTIVE

Organizations need to be progressive in the ways they exhibit care to their employees. Tronto (1993) explained that the ethic of care is a practice, rather than a set of rules or principles, and that the necessary qualities or elements that should be established are attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness. Caring requires consideration and concern for others' needs, the acceptance of the burden of these needs, the ability to meet these needs, and a readiness to consider others' positions as they express it and to be engaged from their standpoints. In order to reduce micro-aggressions, the practice of an ethic of care is needed in organizations to ensure that attention is paid to the needs of diverse employees, valuable stakeholders whose well-being should be viewed as essential by managers. Freeman (1984), in his landmark book entitled "Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach," explained that if organizations are to be successful, then multiple stakeholder groups must be taken into account, as well as the effects of strategic issues on these stakeholders, and strategies must be implemented to address concerns.

In today's prevailing view, employees are identified as stakeholders of the organization from almost all stakeholder perspectives. "Managing for stakeholders involves attention to more than simply maximizing shareholder wealth, and attention to the interests and well-being of those who can assist or hinder the achievement of the firm's objectives is the central admonition of the theory" (Phillips, Freeman, & Wicks, 2005). Burton and Dunn (1996) argued that the ethic of care can ground decision making in a stakeholder model, thereby making that model a viable option for those managers interested in operating according to moral principles. However, the applicability to managing a diverse workforce has been largely ignored. Organizations should consider all their stakeholders, including their minority, female, and disabled employees, and take their needs into account. Effective management is critical for creating a positive diversity climate, and thus, the stakeholder approach and the caring perspective should be considered.

Organizations now increasingly understand the importance of caring about its workforce. In the 21st century we have noticed that a language of care and relationship-building is now prominent, and firms often speak of "nurturing" and "caring" for its employees. It has been recognized that all employees play a significant role in determining the firm's success or failure and that the organization should exhibit an ethic of care. The practice of an ethic of care by organizations that are truly committed to eliminating micro-aggressions may facilitate the connectedness required for attentiveness, responsibility, and competent responsiveness. McDowell (2004) conveyed the belief in the applicability of an ethic of care based on mutual obligations and relations of trust. Thus, care is often reciprocated. For example, The University of California is striving to create a university environment that values all employees regardless of their differences, and that is why there is a focus on micro-aggression training. All organizations should consider doing the same.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

At the organizational level, companies should adopt an ethic of care approach to managing diversity, and take some meaningful steps to ensure that their minority employees are treated with respect. One way to engender goodwill and trust from minority employees is an acknowledgement from organizational leaders that micro-aggressions are indeed real and should be eliminated within the firm. People of color, and other marginalized groups have suffered silently for a long time, and the acknowledgement of this stressor should play a major role in improving the diversity climate of organizations. We are not naïve to think that a simple recognition of micro-aggressions is the cure-all for this organizational "disorder," and with that being said, the top management team has to lead the way in using formal and informal communication channels as well as instituting repercussions to let the entire organization know their commitment to improving the diversity climate by eliminating micro-aggressions.

Since micro-aggressions are so subtle and disguised, micro-aggressions can be a major challenge for the top management team to address the detrimental effects of micro-aggressions within their workplace.

Several important changes and activities are suggested to enhance the workplace environment. Change must occur at both the systemic and individual levels. A strong case can be made that the organization's philosophy, vision statements, and values directly influence the organizational culture and climate, and the actions of its workers. Organizational leadership should take a careful assessment of their corporate climates and whether the underlying assumptions of inclusiveness are based upon mistaken notion of color, gender, and sexual-orientation blindness. Although unintentional, the "blindness" or "neutral" approach to difference can cause great harm to culturally diverse populations in the workforce (Sue, 2010).

We suggest taking a multicultural philosophy. Instead of the common rhetoric of "I treat everyone the same," "I don't see color," or "we need to become more tolerant," the multicultural philosophy emphasizes the benefits of diversity which could help marginalized groups feel more valued. If leadership understands the importance of diversity and its benefits to the organization, the multicultural philosophy would push organizational leaders to questions pertaining to underrepresented groups such as "What obstacles are preventing certain groups from being recruited, retained, and promoted?" and "How can our organization overcome these obstacles?"

Authenticity and commitment from top leadership must be present. While organizations can effectively develop a multicultural philosophy to combat systematic micro-aggressions by instituting initiatives, programs, and activities, it is equally important for these initiatives to be supported from top down. It is just as important for leadership to be extensively educated on micro-aggressions via training. This education should begin with awareness. Increased awareness means examining their own stereotypes and biases. For leadership to examine their own predispositions can be especially challenging because they must acknowledge their hidden biases and stereotypes, and become motivated to change their perceptions of groups different from their own. Secondly, leadership should become knowledgeable of the cultures of their subordinates with regards to the sociopolitical system of how these groups are treated by society. As leaders become equipped with the knowledge of understanding the perspectives of diverse groups via training, this knowledge provides the understanding that many individuals from diverse cultures may interpret events differently.

We acknowledge that it is far more comfortable and feels safer for those in leadership to maintain the status quo regarding cultural diversity. We further acknowledge that for many leaders who may encounter cultural diversity, may have to work harder to function in that environment; however, organizations that want to remain competitive and sustainable must embrace cultural diversity, not merely tolerate diversity. We maintain that the return of investment in self-awareness and knowledge of diverse cultures could greatly reduce the occurrences of micro-aggressions.

After extensive micro-aggression training of all organizational leaders, the top executive team will also need to instruct managers to engage in "Management by Walking Around" to discourage engagement in micro-aggressions, and to address those that are observed and/or reported, as these micro-aggressions may directly or indirectly negatively impact employees as well as the organization. This method will play a role in giving the affected employees voice, which has been shown to increase employee goodwill towards the organization. Minority employees may appreciate this demonstration of an ethic of care and this may increase their engagement on the job.

Upon examining the challenge of utilizing Broken Windows Theory to assess and reduce micro-aggression in the work place, there are two main factors that can support an environment that allows needed changes. Those factors are leadership and education. As expressed, leadership is important and dictates the culture of a company. However, leadership should not only take on the disciplinary role but should also be exemplary. Leadership, or those responsible for enforcing an anti-micro-aggression policy, such as the HR team, should reflect the demographic makeup of the company and show an understanding and interest in the dynamics of the cultural and ethnic backgrounds represented in the workplace. Likewise, establishing collaborative teams that reflect the makeup of a company allow for fair representation in the delegation of company projects. This builds a subconscious effort to establish equality throughout the workplace and a foundation with which to build policies and training programs that encourage inclusiveness and cohesiveness.

Training and education are pertinent to the success of an anti-micro-aggression initiative. The development of the appropriate supportive policy, however, must take into account the nature of the company as well. This is why a "cookie-cutter" approach to diversity management is unfavorable in most cases. Policy must accommodate the group of individuals it is meant to serve and protect. Micro-aggression training is needed to educate all employees, especially the micro-aggressors into gaining an understanding of this "organizational disorder" and the ways it negatively impacts the psyche of their fellow employees. According to McKay and Avery (2005), diversity training must be designed to bring subtle forms of discrimination to the fore and teach employees how to counteract them. Before this training is delivered, there should be a thorough needs assessment or diversity audit that determines whether the company has a positive or negative diversity climate. If the firm does indeed have a negative diversity climate, the HR professional(s) need(s) to investigate what are the root causes of the negative climate, and whether micro-aggressions are playing a role. A thorough needs assessment followed by a training intervention that is tailored to the unique complexities of that particular organization is a more suitable solution than a cookie-cutter, one size fits all approach.

In an interview with Joan C. Williams, law professor at the University of California, she described a situation in which Google systematically changed the culture of the company by revising policy and procedure to fit the demographic makeup of the company (Lewis, 2015). In the situational analysis, Google found that their promotional tactics were invariably biased toward one gender over another. This inherently caused an unequal representation of leadership and a lack of opportunity for one gender to obtain leadership roles (Lewis, 2015). By addressing the underlying causes of prejudices within the company, Google was able to establish a fair and balanced leadership team (Lewis, 2015).

It is essential for organizations to tackle micro-aggressions in the workplace. One way is by asserting the effort through acknowledgment, oversight, and training. Policy and rules within the company must effectively include an acceptance of all ethnic cultures, genders, and other forms of diversity represented in the organization. It is the underlying characteristics of a company that fuels the level of micro-aggression in the workplace. At that foundational level, micro-aggression in the workplace cannot simply be eliminated overnight. Rather, companies will have to take a long-term approach to addressing seeds of micro-aggression before it develops and infiltrates the culture of the company.

FIGURE 2
A BROKEN WINDOWS FRAMEWORK FOR REDUCING MICRO-AGGRESSIONS
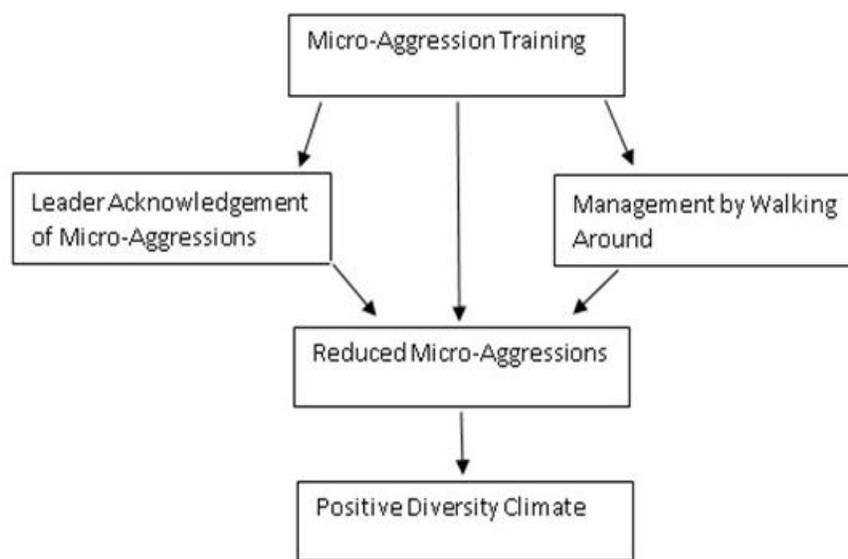
CONCLUSIONS

There was a statement in a recent article in *The Atlantic* entitled "How to Make Your Company Less Sexist and Racist" asserting that "*the dwindling numbers of minorities and women as you cast your eye up the ranks of any business or professional field lend credence to the argument that existing diversity efforts just aren't working*" (Lewis, 2015). The statement rings true for people of color, women, individuals with disabilities, and other disadvantaged groups, and it justifies the conceptualization of novel methods to address issues (including micro-aggressions) facing these groups.

Organizations should consider exhibiting an ethic of care to all employees to ensure that the organizational climate is conducive to their welfare. One possible solution to ensure that minority employees are no longer plagued by micro-aggressions is to utilize a broken windows approach to managing diversity. Organizational leaders who are serious about facilitating a positive diversity climate with their firms need to acknowledge that micro-aggressions are real, and that they do indeed cause harm to minority employees. Some progressive organizations are already leading the way to ensure that micro-aggressions do not snowball into a negative diversity climate, and other forms of incivilities, and it is wise for other firms to follow their lead and ensure that all of their employees feel welcome and valued. Micro-aggressions may seem to be harmless to some, but if it is ignored by organizations, greater problems will occur.

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