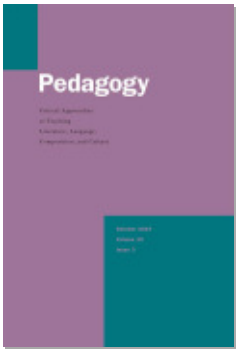
Rhetorical and Pedagogical Interventions for Countering Microaggressions



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Rhetorical and Pedagogical Interventions for Countering Microaggressions

Rasha Diab and Beth Godbee, with contributions by Cedric Burrows and Thomas Ferrel

In bringing critical attention to dynamic relationships, we open new pathways by which to gain rhetorical knowledge and understanding in more fully textured ways.
—Jacqueline Jones Royster

If the field views rhetoric and literacy as a means to social change, how do our choices—how we sponsor students and community members, participate in relevant rhetorics, and provide resources—position our discipline to address the most fundamental abuses of power?
—Ben Kuebrich

Responding to these calls for action, we write at a time of increased urgency to bring attention to dynamic relationships toward addressing the most fundamental abuses of power. Both relationships and power abuses are essential rhetorical and pedagogical matters that call on all of us, as communicators and educators, to respond. These abuses are enacted in everyday, seemingly small, yet cumulative and consequential acts, so responses must be, too.[1] Cross-disciplinary literature on micro-inequities (Rowe 1990) and microaggressions (e.g., Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso 2000; Sue et al. 2007; Young 2010; Sue 2010; Kohli and Solórzano 2012; Nadal 2013) shows that everyday ways of

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being and interacting cumulate over time such that inequities compound like interest in a bank. This literature calls on us to address microaggressions, or "everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals because of their group membership" (Sue 2010: xvi). In such exchanges, we see great stakes. The damage exceeds individual harm when microaggressions "assail the self-esteem of recipients, produce anger and frustration, deplete psychic energy, lower feelings of subjective well-being and worthiness, produce physical health problems, [and] shorten life expectancy" (Sue 2010: 6). Cumulative impact is more insidious still, for microaggressions deny access, constrain agency, and tend to be subtle and unrecognized, undermining possibilities for equity and justice.

Pedagogical spaces inside and outside the classroom abound with microaggressions, and we are haunted by their impact. This article names microaggressions as a rhetorical and pedagogical phenomenon that is conspicuous in many pedagogical spaces. To make the case for rhetorical and pedagogical intervention, we begin by defining and tracing microaggressions (though not named as such) in the literature from rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies. From there, we share cross-disciplinary understandings of microaggressions, discussing three forms: microinsult, microassault, and microinvalidation. We apply this deeper understanding of microaggressions to three instantiations or illustrations of microaggressions in academic contexts. In the first illustration, we describe how epistemic injustice, or harm to persons as knowers (Fricker 2007), impacts undergraduate and graduate student writers as well as marginalized scholars. Educators can counter the various invalidations associated with epistemic injustice by affirming and upholding epistemic rights, or the rights to know, experience, and share with others (Godbee 2017). In the second illustration, we unpack damaging cultural scripts that not only naturalize and recycle microaggressions but also underwrite many of our encounters. These scripts appear in composition textbooks and underline the need to rewrite both the textbooks and the broader stories we tell about rhetoric and rhetors (Burrows 2016). In the third illustration, we identify microaggressions that educators face in their service activities, such as being discounted in meetings, and propose the intervention of a "critical pedagogy of service" (Ferrel 2017), which engages faculty in interrupting business as usual.

Together, these illustrations ask us to (re)consider microaggressions in our everyday lives. We focus on higher education as the space in which we spend much of our time in research, teaching, and service. To focus on these activities is not to say that microaggressions happen only within educational

institutions but to say that we must look at all aspects of our lives, especially those that become familiar and second nature.

As coauthors, we are differently positioned in the world: two of us identify as women, two as men, all of us as cisgender; two of us as white, two as racialized in the United States (as black and brown); three of us with US nationality and one as an international scholar; and all of us as able-bodied, though in different body types and with different visible markers of identity. Together, these and other positionalities allow us to recognize, witness, experience, and perpetuate microaggressions differently. In addition to other positionalities (e.g., class, religion, ethnicity, and linguistic background), these locations in the world provide insights into and, conversely, limit recognition of varied microaggressions. And recognition is further constrained by the additional layer of western-centric (Euro-American) disciplinary training.

Certainly in an article of this length we can attend neither to all types of microaggression nor to the many intersectional identities. Instead, we affirm that our theoretical and analytical endeavors address how varied forms of oppression underwrite microaggressions, which hurt individuals and communities. Collectively, we can learn to better understand and respond with increasing awareness to the many microaggressions on and off campus. Toward this goal, we attend to cases that address sexism and racism while recognizing and affirming that additional attention and further research are needed into microaggressions related to many interlocking systems of oppression. With the hope of inspiring additional rhetorical and pedagogical investment in countering microaggressions, we turn next to discussions in writing studies to show the sometimes subtle, sometimes explicit, and always insidious nature of microaggressions.

Microaggressions and Rhetoric

Scholars in rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies have long invested in understanding violence and injustice, holding the space for thinking about what's now understood as everyday microaggressions. For example, the relation between violence and rhetoric is long and complicated, as evidenced in a recent forum on the violence of rhetoric (Engels 2013). For centuries, learned leaders, rhetoric scholars, and philosophers alike have grappled with rhetoric's potential to counter or retrench deceit, glibness, and power abuse in its varied forms. We think, for example, of Plato in the western rhetorical tradition, Confucius in the Chinese (Ding 2007), and Ptahhotep's wisdom literature in the ancient Egyptian tradition (Fox 1983). To illustrate, scholars of argumentation define rhetoric as an "other to violence" (e.g., Crosswhite

2013) and highlight the "duty to dialogue" as a prerequisite to countering the potential abuses of rhetoric (e.g., Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969). Their work seeks to counter a recurring and consequential rhetorical phenomenon: rhetors have used language to manipulate others; to cause physical, symbolic, and other types of harm; and even to build armies and launch wars. As another example, Kenneth Burke (2006) describes how discourse has been used to conscript soldiers and reconstitute citizens to fight for the nation even when this meant turning against their compatriots. Similarly, scholars explicate how rhetorical misrepresentations have been used systematically to rally people behind policies that bar disenfranchised groups from access to education (e.g., Canagarajah 1999; Prendergast 2003) and health care (e.g., Scott 2003), among other matters. These works critique large-scale violence while helping us understand rhetoric's role in injustice.

A different and complementary line of scholarship looks at more immediate and interpersonal forms of violence while linking violence to institutional, cultural, and disciplinary dynamics. This line of scholarship is the most relevant to our exploration of microaggressions and helps us see why many scholars, especially scholars of color and scholars from marginalized groups, keep shedding light on *rhetorical violence*, which remains ever present. For example, in her 2012 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) chair's address, Malea Powell and other invited scholars offered reflective, testimonial accounts of what we would analyze as acts of microaggression in pedagogical spaces.[2]

As a case in point, Leon Kendall recounted:

> I remember once, during a job interview [the typical entry point for being a teacher], the well-meaning scholar who used me as a teachable moment, letting me know that while I studied Chicanas, using Chicana theory, that some of what these Chicanas were saying had been said by this theorist named Foucault. As if I was not using Foucault because I had not read any of his work and hadn't ever heard of him. (qtd. in Powell 2012: 395)

In this brief reference, Kendall reports how her choices as a scholar were invalidated. Assuming her ignorance and that Chicana theory is not of the same caliber, the interviewer, in a corrective (and we'd argue shaming) measure, references Foucault. Though Kendall does not name this as a microaggression, she explains that "what was lost on this scholar was the intentionality of my practice, the intentionality in citation, in making a lineage worth building upon," especially since this lineage "comes from a place that,

as Cherrie Moraga writes, is emergent from the "physical realities of our lives" (395). What Kendall recounts here dovetails neatly with the cross-disciplinary scholarship on microaggressions, which shows that similar moments arise from such problematic assumptions.

A multitude of documented microaggressions, even if not named as such, abound in scholarship in rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies. Across studies informed by feminist, Indigenous, critical race, postcolonial, transnational, and queer scholarship, we see attention to documenting and explicating moments when someone's knowledge, expertise, voice, and intellectual pursuits are flattened if not totally erased. For example, in "When the First Voice You Hear Is Not Your Own," Jacqueline Jones Royster (1996: 30–31) layers three scenes that showcase how her voice and knowledge (and many others'), as well as the African American creative and intellectual histories, are absented—literally and symbolically:

> I have been compelled on too many occasions to count to sit as a well mannered Other, silently, in a state of tolerance that requires me to be as expressionless as I can manage, while colleagues who occupy a place of entitlement different from my own talk about the history and achievements of people from my ethnic group, or even about their perceptions of our struggles. I have been compelled to listen as they have comfortably claimed the authority to engage in the construction of knowledge and meaning about me and mine, without paying even a passing nod to the fact that sometimes a substantive version of that knowledge might already exist, or to how it might have already been constructed, or to the meanings that might have already been assigned that might make me quite impatient with gaps in their understanding of my community, or to the fact that I, or somebody within my ethnic group, might have an opinion about what they are doing. I have been compelled to listen to speakers, well-meaning though they may think they are, who signal to me rather clearly that subject position is everything. I have come to recognize, however, that when the subject matter is me and the voice is not mine, my sense of order and rightness is disrupted. In metaphoric fashion, these "authorities" let me know, once again, that Columbus has discovered America and claims it now, claims it still for a European crown.

Once again, the voices and interpretations of "these 'authorities'" are centered, earning them credit, while the voices, experiences, and expertise of Royster and others are invalidated, denying credit.

Such invalidating happens repeatedly. Like Royster, Victor Villanueva (2006) presents numerous representative moments of microaggressions in educational settings. These include interactions with his daughter's

teacher, who responds to a disrespectful action by saying, "That might be okay in your culture but not in mine" (13), and a writing center consultation in which the tutor fails to address the author's writing off or excusal of racism in the movie *Crash*. Articulations of how rhetoric and rhetorical education recycle and entrench sexist, racist, classist, homophobic, and other microaggressions can be seen also in the work of Mike Rose (1989), Vershawn Ashanti Young (2010), Eric Pritchard (2013), Elaine Richardson (2013), and Aja Y. Martinez (2016), among others. These scholars recount moments when microaggressions undermined their and others' literacies, learning potential, humanity, and worth. Such moments happen all too frequently in educational settings and in related disciplinary spaces. Though many of these studies (like Kendall's case) foreground moments of microaggressions, those moments cumulate and take larger, systemic turns.

Presentation by presentation, article by article, book by book, microaggressions add up to an exclusionary and inequitable disciplinary landscape (Royster 2003). Royster describes how rhetorical landscapes have typically centered white, male, and elite rhetors and rhetoricians and the rhetorical traditions and practices they represent. Similarly, in *Bootstraps: From an American Academic of Color*, Villanueva (1993) traces how rhetorical education and histories deflect attention from nonwestern rhetorical traditions. This deflection, in turn, excludes peoples, traditions, regions, and centuries from rigorous exploration and results in a very limited view of what we see and count as rhetoric. Within this vicious circle, interpersonal acts of microaggression are informed by and result in macro-level acts of invalidation, which demand disciplinary intervention. The consequences of multilayered invalidations and absenting are addressed in numerous edited collections (e.g., Lipson and Binkley 2004, 2009; Richardson and Jackson 2004; Stromberg 2006; Mao and Young 2008; Baca and Villanueva 2009), anthologies (e.g., Logan 1995; Ritchie and Ronald 2001), and monographs (e.g., Royster 2000; Cushman 2012; Lathan 2015; Ramírez 2015; Carey 2016; Diab 2016; Pritchard 2016; Pandey forthcoming).

Across these works, microaggressions and their consequences are rhetorical phenomena. Microaggressions are mediated by rhetorical acts, assume many forms, are complex, evoke historical discourses, silence their recipients, and mandate a rhetorical response. Yet, this response is challenging for a variety of reasons. When considering an instance of microaggression as a rhetorical situation, it becomes incumbent on us to know its recurring features, how it demands responsivity (Sheridan 2014), and why interlocutors often feel that they have missed the communicative moment. We turn next,

therefore, to defining and explaining microaggressions, believing that this cross-disciplinary (and primarily social science) research provides insights for rhetoricians and educators, while rhetoricians and educators have insights to share across disciplines as well.

Understanding Microaggressions

In *Microaggressions in Everyday Life*, psychologist Derald Wing Sue (2010: 5) defines microaggressions as "the brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, sexual-orientation, and religious slights and insults to a target person or group."[3] These indignities are acts of aggression that are often dismissed as small (i.e., micro- and everyday) and therefore inconsequential. What Sue's definition underlines is the complexity of microaggressions: they assume many forms, target people whose identities are marginalized or Othered, and manifest deep, structural, and societal problems like systemic racism and sexism. As we attempted to show in the literature reviewed above, microaggressions send hurtful, denigrating messages. Figure 1 provides the taxonomy that Sue and colleagues developed for racial microaggressions, which includes three forms: microinsult, microassault, and microinvalidation.

This taxonomy has since been used to explain relationships among forms of microaggressions as well as microaggressions faced by people based on other identities and group memberships. Examples include Kevin L. Nadal's (2013) research focused on gender and sexuality, as well as Mary Louise Gomez et al.'s (2011) work on student status. Across studies, microaggressions both reflect and further ingrain deeper cultural logics, those represented, for example, in the treatment of people as second-class citizens and in the perpetuation of the myth of meritocracy.

To illustrate, our text and talk can evidence assumed incompetence, criminality, or even objectification, resulting in microinsults, microassaults, or microinvalidations. Consider, for example, the statement: "You cannot have written this paper yourself. Who helped you?" Assumed incompetence is a form of microaggression that informs these assertions and makes them insulting, hurtful, accusatory, and pernicious, even when held unconsciously. The implied accusation operates on the basis of assumptions that Sue and colleagues label as "ascription of intelligence" and "pathologizing cultural values/communication styles" (see fig. 1). Such assumptions similarly show up in "compliments" or "positive" articulations for being "articulate," "eloquent," or "a good speaker." Consider statements like "You are a credit to

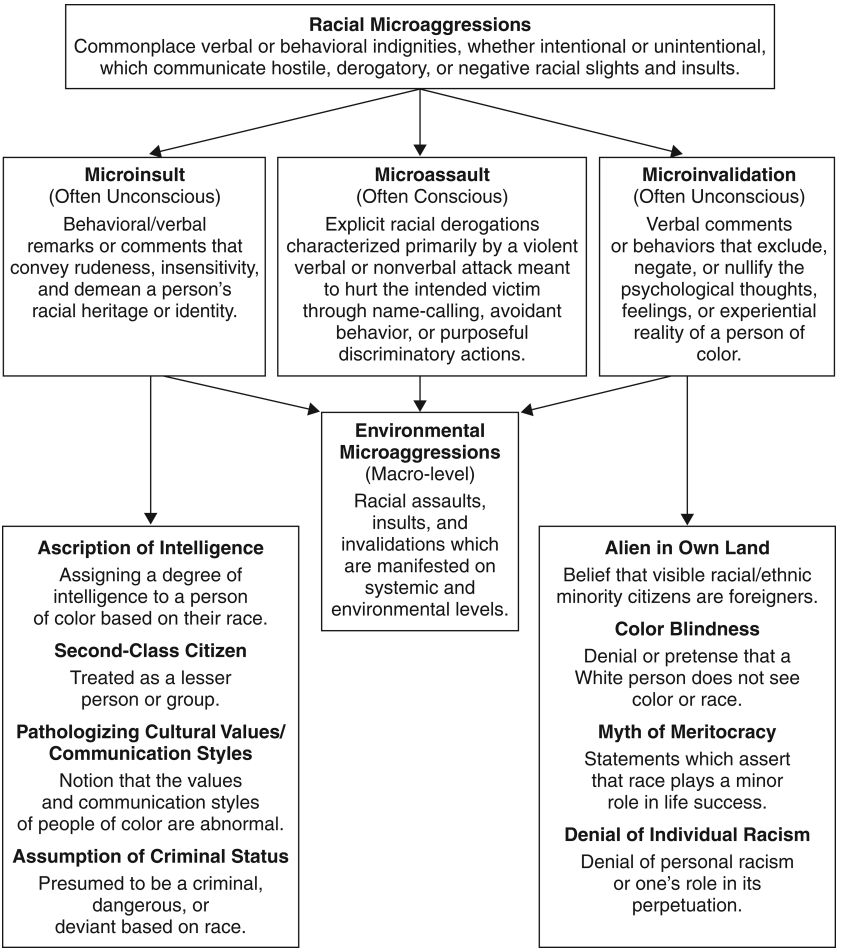

Figure 1. Categories and relationships among microaggressions. Adapted from Derald Wing Sue, Christina M. Capodilupo, Gina C. Torino, Jennifer M. Bucceri, Aisha M. B. Holder, Kevin L. Nadal, and Marta Esquilin, "Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Implications for Clinical Practice," American Psychologist 62, no. 4 (2007): 278. APA is not responsible for the accuracy of this reproduction.

your race" and "You sound well educated" (Sue 2010: 32). These surface compliments are made possible because the opposite is assumed typical and true (i.e., people who look like me aren't typically articulate or intelligent, so I stand out as exceptional and praiseworthy). Regardless of packaging (e.g., praise or doubt, compliment or criticism, overt hindrance or on-the-surface helping), microaggressions do violence. And they do this violence in the form of language, as rhetoric, and within pedagogical settings.

Especially when they are unnamed or un(der)recognized as violence (as is typically the case), microaggressions are perniciously impactful to individuals and communities alike. Sociologist Joe R. Feagin (1992: 549) alerts us to "cumulative discrimination" as cumulative violence.[4] Cumulative violence is debilitating. Microaggressions have been shown to have far-reaching negative outcomes, from lowered self-confidence to depleted energy, heightening harm not only to individuals' physical or psychological well-being but also to the economy, local/national communities, and international relations. Such negative outcomes impact all of us as communicators, as they entrench wider injustice and inequities.

Certainly, all three forms of microaggressions have negative outcomes, but in this article we focus on just two: microinsults and microinvalidations. These two forms are typically implicit, invisible to perpetrators, and interwoven into everyday patterns of life, leaving us unsure or unable to act.[5] Because microaggressions are subtle, they are often difficult to document: "The subtle nature of microaggressions makes it easy to doubt their existence or to dismiss them as innocuous, which contributes to their power" (McCabe 2009: 142). Documenting microaggressions has become a public political project, as we see through the Tumblr/Twitter project @microaggressive (n.d.) and recent news stories (see, e.g., De Witte 2016; Ganote, Cheung, and Souza n.d.; Garcia and Crandall 2016). Without a record to cite as evidence, response to individual microaggressions can feel pointless. These records help make the case that microaggressions—particularly microinsults and microinvalidations—impact graduate students and faculty of color. These records ask those of us in academic spaces to consider whether we recognize violence when we see it, especially when it's packaged as a microinsult or microinvalidation.

We believe that rhetoricians are especially well positioned to name and explain the rhetorical dynamics of microaggressions—to explicate the rhetorical literacies needed to break dysfunctional lack of response. Rhetoricians are particularly well suited to explain what happens in communicative moments—in interactions, utterances, and texts—in which microaggressions occur. Rhetoricians are also trained to read scenes and to imagine (even propose) alternative responses toward alternative ends. Thus, rhetorical education can—should—take up the work of understanding and intervening into microaggressions. We perceive this education to exceed single moments or classroom spaces and to include our disciplinary knowledge, identities, and passing interactions as relevant areas of the reflection-theory-practice cycle. Because we draw on an expanded definition of *pedagogy*, we also imagine

expansive interventions that include relations, identities, activities, programs, and other matters that directly and indirectly impact, shape, support, or undermine pedagogical praxis. Though we can't illustrate the many expansive interventions, we spend the remainder of this article with three cases, illustrating where and how we can begin to intervene as educators.

Illustration 1: Countering Microinvalidations by Affirming Epistemic Rights

Given the pervasiveness of microaggressions in everyday life, it is no surprise that they similarly shape writing activities, especially complicating one's rights to speak, write, conduct research, and share expertise. In particular, microinvalidations can undercut people as knowers—a type of wrongdoing that philosopher Miranda Fricker (2007) describes as "epistemic injustice." In Fricker's words, epistemic injustice hurts "someone specifically in their capacity as a knower" (1). When microinvalidations undermine people as knowers, they also undermine full personhood, which includes having one's experiences acknowledged by others, being able to construct new knowledge, and being able to contribute as a knowledgeable agent within one's community.

Acts of Microaggression: Epistemic Injustice

In academic settings, microinvalidations and microinsults can manifest when someone is assumed less intelligent (ascription of intelligence) or their communicative practices are assumed abnormal (pathologizing cultural values/communication styles) (see fig. 1). As such, microaggressions undermine or discredit writers (undergraduate and graduate students and faculty) as well as limit what is known and knowable—that is, what questions can be asked, what experiences are deemed worth knowing, and what knowledge counts as intellectual currency. The edited collection *Presumed Incompetent* (Gutiérrez y Muhs, Neimann, González, and Harris 2012) shows that widespread epistemic injustice occurs within higher education, especially for women of color, who are frequently, even typically, presumed incompetent by colleagues, students, administrators, and others. This presumption arises in interactions and often around writing and other communication, resulting in the invisibility of one's presence, perspectives, and lived experience. Presumed incompetence impacts one's entire career: in academic contexts, as Angela P. Harris and Carmen G. González (2012: 4) note, "reputation is the coin of the realm, and reputations are built not only by objective accomplishments but through images and sometimes outright fantasies—individual or collective—that cling to the nature of the work and the person being evaluated." As

Harris and González and other authors in *Presumed Incompetent* illustrate, judgments about research need, value, and contributions "are especially susceptible to unconscious bias" (4), and because of bias, microinvalidations happen commonly (not exceptionally) within higher education.

Take this example of epistemic injustice—the experience of being "presumed incompetent"—that we recorded from years of documenting (collaboratively sharing and writing with colleagues) microaggressive moments in writing centers:

> A PhD student in education is "sent" to the writing center by her faculty adviser after failing her first attempt at comprehensive exams. She has been told that her writing is not "graduate level" and not "academic" enough. She comes in devastated. She says that her 20+ years of teaching in a major metropolitan city school system and her intimate knowledge of culturally relevant curriculum are worth nothing in her department, and she feels acutely isolated and misunderstood (if not worse) as the only woman and only person of color in her program. She has also been accused of plagiarizing a complicated diagram in one of her exam papers. After the faculty member who refused to pass her exam learned that she created the diagram herself by integrating several commonly used diagrams into one, he wants to use her work in a textbook he's writing.

In this example, we see ascription of intelligence. Deficit thinking results in significant material consequences when the only student of color in this graduate program fails her prelim exam because she is assumed not capable of creating high-quality work. Not only is the writer tokenized and assumed inferior within her program, but she also undergoes excessive scrutiny, has to work harder than peers to gain professional recognition and respect, and lacks the professional support of her faculty adviser. Adding insult to injury, the faculty member wants to reproduce her diagram—that is, to earn credit and the related academic currency for publishing her work. This scenario exemplifies the typical move of microinvalidation caused by presumed deficit: the writer (and their intellectual capacities) is diminished, while the adviser, who arbitrates the value of the work and can use it for their own personal gain, benefits.

Microinvalidations like these occur far too often when graduate students negotiate projects with advisers, candidates face hiring committees, faculty are reviewed for tenure and promotion, and researchers submit their work for publication. How often do microinvalidations impact professional possibilities or have professional consequences like those Kendall faced during her job search? How often are authors asked to cite Foucault rather than

Anzaldúa or other Chicana scholars for the lineage of their knowledge claims? Judgments about the worthiness of a project reflect/are shaped by the larger disciplinary landscaping (Royster 2003), which we know to be exclusionary and marginalizing. At the same time, these judgments add up to disciplinary norms, constructing the larger landscape. Facing an assumed epistemic deficit, therefore, has far-reaching consequences not only for individual scholars but also for the perpetuation of institutions, disciplines, and higher education as white, male, and elite endeavors.

Rhetorical Intervention: Affirming Epistemic Rights

To counter this sort of epistemic injustice, we must name and unpack the relationships among microinvalidations and linguistic and other forms of prejudice. Within rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies, we have an ever-growing body of literature that advocates for writers' linguistic and cultural rights and, in doing so, addresses the microinvalidation of pathologizing cultural values/communication styles. Such scholarship has led to numerous position statements, including the CCCC's "Students' Right to Their Own Language (SRTOL)" ([1974] 2006) and "Statement on Ebonics" ([1998] 2016). These statements and the policies and practices they advocate for are important starting points for rhetorical intervention.

Building on this language of rights, we can do more to develop an understanding of epistemic rights, or rights to knowledge, experience, and earned expertise (Godbee 2017). During interactions and as a counter to epistemic injustice, educators can affirm marginalized writers' rights to speak from/about experience, to contribute new knowledge, and to share expertise. Rather than undercut and invalidate marginalized writers, we must invest in affirming writers' many rights. Ongoing, persistent validation may be the best antidote to microinvalidation, if/when marginalized colleagues and our/their scholarship are advocated for, read widely, and responded to with mindful reflexivity.

Illustration 2: Recognizing and Rewriting Microaggressions in First-Year Composition Textbooks

Microaggressions manifest not only through interactions around and judgments made about students' and colleagues' writing but also through the writing we bring into classrooms and ask students to read. We have unpacked deficit thinking and presumed incompetence facing writers and their writing, and we turn now to an analysis of textbooks to show how they enact microaggressions through coded, racially charged language that treats marginalized

writers' works as oddities. We show how authors of color and other marginalized writers are limited in the issues they are allowed to address and must defend their views on race and racism, even though they are recipients of direct, cultural, and institutional racism. Looking at the selection, placement, and editorial framing of works by authors of color, we trace microaggressions across four composition textbooks: *Rereading America* (Colombo, Cullen, and Lisle 2007), *The Conscious Reader* (Shrodes et al. 2009), *The Bedford Reader* (Kennedy, Kennedy, and Aaron 2010), and *A World of Ideas* (Jacobus 2010). Reading textbooks as rhetorical documents that are responsive to culture and condition us for particular uptakes, we revisit these four examples, which are not exceptional but rather representative of pervasive cultural scripts replicated across textbooks in our field (Burrows 2016). Textbooks shape countless interactions in classrooms, teacher-student conferences, and student conversational space. Through reading, discussing, sharing, and other activities that take place around textbooks, microaggressions further compound into wide-reaching pedagogical implications.

Acts of Microaggression: Selection, Placement, and Editorial Framing

Read as rhetorical documents, textbooks can be analyzed for the placement of racially coded language as well as the arrangement of selected texts. To begin, arrangement creates a series of microaggressions when all authors of color are lumped into one theme or category, such as in *The Bedford Reader*'s section on "the minority experience" (Kennedy, Kennedy, and Aaron 2010: xxxiii). The phrase and category "minority experience" is microaggressive: it creates a binary of whites versus every racialized group of color and perpetuates a narrative of the white experience as "majority," even when factually inaccurate (i.e., already in some states, including Texas and California, the population of people of color has surpassed the white population). Additionally, grouping every racialized group under "minority experience" fails to recognize diversity. More important, *minority* is a problematic term because it connotes that people of color are a minor part of US culture: the white male author continues to hold the "universal" voice that is tacitly understood as the authoritative figure, while the author of color is considered minor or insignificant. As the "majority" (i.e., white) experience is centered, all others are invalidated and pushed aside.

This compartmentalization of marginalized groups extends to how the editors define "good writing" through coded language. According to its editor, *A World of Ideas* (Jacobus 2010: v) includes selections of "highest quality" because they clarify "important ideas" while "sustaining[ing] discussion

and stimulat[ing] good writing," meaning that students should generate good writing from reading "the great works." Among the forty-seven selections are works by Niccolo Machiavelli, Virginia Woolf, Plato, Karl Marx, Henry David Thoreau, and Carl Jung—thinkers who, the editor believes, created "ideas that shaped generations." The selections seem to be informed by a tacit script: because Plato and Thoreau are "serious and important," students will take the writing course more seriously and will learn to "read more attentively, think more critically, and write more effectively" (vi). This script undermines writers of color, including Martin Luther King Jr. and Frederick Douglass, who are tacitly deemed not "serious." The textbook reinforces deeply problematic ideas about white, male, western, elite authors as "the greats" (see Royster 2003), writing into the textbook a multitude of microaggressions that invalidate writings by people of color and other marginalized writers.

Similarly, *The Conscious Reader* (Shrodes et al. 2009) encourages students to develop self-awareness and broaden worldviews; accordingly, the editors caution students not to dismiss a worldview different from their own, especially one that is considered "weird" or "offensive" (23). Words like *weird* and *offensive* indicate that writings by scholars of color and other marginalized people are exotic and entertaining, if not wrong. The implication is that their voices and insights are relevant only for members of their own racial group. In short, the editors' comments undercut the few selections of writers of color, leading readers to dismiss or at least downplay their work. Again, editorial coded language highlights the textbooks' focus on making the white male's voice universal (i.e., normative, not weird; compelling, not offensive). In short, the editors' comments undercut the few selections of writers of color, leading readers to dismiss or at least downplay their work.

Representations of the white, male, elite voice as universal are additionally apparent through microaggressive language that limits how and what marginalized writers can discuss. To illustrate, the textbooks reviewed tended to ghettoize marginalized groups (e.g., women, people of color, Indigenous peoples, nonwestern peoples, LGBTQ folks, poor people) according to specific topics, such as racism and sexism, matters that could be considered "special interest," whereas others are treated as "universal." African American authors in *The Bedford Reader* (e.g., Maya Angelou, Brent Staples, Alice Walker, Gloria Naylor) focus on racism; Latin@ authors (e.g., Sandra Cisneros and Richard Rodriguez) speak to immigration issues; and the majority of Asian and/or Asian American writers (e.g., Maxine Hong Kingston and Yiyun Li) address assimilation. While there is nothing wrong

with including writings that reflect an author's background, the trouble occurs when marginalized authors speak about only a few focused topics, while white male writers discuss a wide range of topics from world affairs, finance, and politics to questions of philosophy, human existence, and happiness. To illustrate further, in a section like "Cultural Diversity, Communication, and Community," authors of color are the majority, while in "Childhood and Family," the majority of the writers are women. This compartmentalization conditions students to believe that white men can speak about anything, while marginalized authors are further marginalized to singularly write their experiences with oppression.

Microaggressions appear also in the texts selected from marginalized writers. For African Americans, the most anthologized authors are Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Frederick Douglass. King is usually represented by "Letter from Birmingham Jail" and "I Have a Dream." Malcolm X is represented by the stories of when he reads in prison or straightens his hair. Frederick Douglass is represented by his narrative of learning to read with help from his mistress and later his white playmates. The effect is that all of these selections relate personal encounters with racism while backgrounding the cultural and institutional racism that is at the heart of the narratives. Selected texts could highlight the importance of marginalized communities reclaiming voice and speaking out against oppression; instead, the ones selected are framed to illustrate only personal narratives and are devoid of any mention of how institutional racism is a factor in their writings. To illustrate, textbook editors commonly retitle Malcolm X's "Saved" as "Learning to Read," invalidating and stripping away the deeply political and spiritual meanings of the text and treating it as a simple literacy narrative. Further, by anthologizing the same three authors as spokespersons for their race, textbooks reduce the diversity of authors, leaving students to imagine that only a few people of color have successfully written, and they did so in the past (at pivotal historical moments). As a result, these textbooks perpetuate narratives of exceptionalism and tokenism. What is more pernicious is that white audiences can easily believe that racism has been conquered, and there is no need for contemporary voices that call for equity and justice.

These microaggressions continue with the discussion questions. Across composition textbooks, discussion questions put the onus of racism or discrimination on the marginalized group, treating racism as an individual (not systemic) problem and thus excusing people with privilege from complicity. To illustrate, *Rereading America* (Colombo, Cullen, and Lisle 2007) reiterates the trope of the angry black man while not investigating how

whiteness contributed to his anger and therefore obfuscates the question of racial justice. For instance, the textbook does not ask students to think about how whiteness constructed Malcolm X's language; instead, it makes Malcolm X the victim whose views have to be justified or defended: "Some readers are offended by the strength of Malcolm X's accusations and by his grouping of all members of a given race into 'collectives.' Given the history of racial injustice he recounts here, do you feel he is justified in taking such a position?" (251). Malcolm X's words are the ones critiqued instead of the "invisible" whiteness and injustices targeting African Americans. As a result, students risk seeing racialized bodies as unnecessary, angry critics of racism while never having to research how institutions that uphold whiteness make racialized bodies critical of those institutions. Taken together with the deeply problematic selection, placement, and editorial framing of marginalized writers, these discussion questions perpetuate microaggressions, further entrenching larger injustices.

Rhetorical Intervention: Recognizing and Rewriting Damaging Cultural Scripts

Analysis of composition textbooks (the surface of which is barely scratched here) necessitates an immediate and strong response if we are to counter the harms that so casually enter the classroom along with these textbooks. Educators, students, editors, and publishers alike need first to recognize educational materials as rhetorical texts that can convey damaging cultural scripts. These scripts authorize racial coding and other microaggressive acts that move outward, beyond the pages of textbooks, and therefore mandate interrogation. Next, educators, students, editors, and publishers alike need to rewrite these damaging scripts—both in the textbooks and beyond. In doing so, we challenge how society writes about and writes off (i.e., invalidates) people of color and other marginalized peoples. We must all be involved in questioning and revising notions of who is allowed to speak in the public sphere—and about what, when, and to what ends. For example, we can position more diverse voices from marginalized groups throughout textbooks, highlighting intersectional identities and recognizing the diversity of voices within communities of color. These voices would show that conversations about race are grounded in both historical and current cultural moments and are still ongoing and evolving. We need, too, to include writings by women, people of color, LGBTQ+ folks, and other marginalized peoples, not as marked but as part of multiple traditions, so that there is no default standard of who is allowed to address particular issues.

The rhetorical work of rewriting composition textbooks highlights the

need for and urgency of ongoing rhetorical interventions to counter microaggressions in/through teaching. This work calls on all of us to create accountability systems that truly embrace this critique of damaging cultural scripts and to recognize the humanity of all people. Such rewriting could bring publishers and editors into dialogue with people from marginalized communities about how their peoples are portrayed in textbooks. And it necessitates conversations in and out of classrooms, among teachers and students to reflect critically on any texts or textbooks in use. Certainly, this work connects with other sorts of rewriting, revising, and re-seeing needed across our disciplinary practices and lives, as we show next by zooming in on faculty service.

Illustration 3: Intervening through a Critical Pedagogy of Service

In this section, we expand *pedagogy* to go beyond teacher-student interactions and educational materials to consider service. Typically, service is seen as an "amorphous category" that entails "an almost endless number of campus activities—sitting on committees, advising student clubs, or performing departmental chores" (Boyer 1990: 22). As "departmental chores," these and other service activities are undervalued and even viewed as getting in the way of more important work. Yet, service encompasses numerous rhetorical interactions with far-reaching consequences, shaping not only pedagogical decisions but also larger institutional cultures and cultural scripts. Some of the most obvious involve the allocation of faculty and staff time, the contours of the curriculum, and the reach of student support services. Think about the ramifications of hiring, promotion, budgeting, policy making, program review, community engagement, and many other types of leadership. Service has the potential to build or tear down, to inspire or frustrate, to alleviate or cause pain in the pedagogical spaces where we work inside and outside classrooms. Like the production and reception of writing and the use of composition textbooks illustrated above, service is a site of everyday microaggressions, which arise repeatedly: from disembodied online exchanges through listservs and email threads to decision making in committee meetings and behind closed doors. It mandates, therefore, a savvy rhetorical response.

Acts of Microaggression: Service Contexts

To find evidence of microaggressions in service, we can look at our published literature, which includes varied testimonial narratives. In *Bootstraps*, Villanueva (1993) does not just document a personal story of microaggressions involving epistemic injustice, presumed incompetence, and damaging cultural scripts. Villanueva also shows how microaggressions have larger

programmatic and curricular ramifications, including an entire curriculum being undermined and written off. The following excerpt comes from a larger story in which Villanueva describes multiyear work on trying to save and make meaningful a basic-writing program:

> Victor convinces the higher administration that the basic-writing program is a cultural education, not remediation. The program survives, eventually acquiring a regular, permanent administrator.
>
> But while Victor was still there, there was still the disgruntled and the irate to contend with. He prepares a memo that quotes Louis Faraq'an, a naive move. The memo notes that Faraq'an defines black power as the ability for black people to come to the table with their own food. The point is to have teachers stop proffering academic charity, no matter how well intentioned. Victor knows the pain of charity.
>
> He returns to find a memo announcing his replacement for the coming academic year. He had not been consulted. The rationale was that he would surely get a job. But he remembered the teachers' argument in that television show. He had gone too far. (94)

This narrative shows how microaggressions arise from closed-door decision making, from people being invalidated and seen as expendable, and from efforts to keep the status quo. When microaggressions arise within service contexts, careers are sidetracked if not railroaded; people's contributions are diminished if not destroyed; institutions are made inhospitable if not outright hostile to research and pedagogical initiatives like basic writing, multi- and translingual writing, and cultural studies.

We see in this example that a personnel decision (one that could be read as simply impacting Villanueva personally) functions institutionally also. It feeds into larger institutional actions, including the elimination of programs that support students of color and the institutionalization of epistemic injustice when Louis Faraq'an's call is treated as a problem and when culturally relevant pedagogy isn't valued and instead dismissed. Rhetorically, such microaggressions shape thinking about and enactments of everything from what gets taught (curriculum and course assignments) to who does the teaching (faculty hiring and retention). In this way, remarks made behind closed doors get written into memos and have the potential to tear down important pedagogical work.

Moving from local/departmental to national/disciplinary service, we revisit Villanueva's accounts to see how invalidations in committees shape not only individuals' careers but also broader disciplinary landscapes:

> The chair of a national organization on composition studies, an African American woman that year, gives Dr. V a call. She calls to warn him that his candidacy for a committee position has been questioned—to her—on the grounds that the seven-seat committee already has three minorities on it. The committee threatened to have representation rather than tokenism. The committee's charge is to review and comment on manuscripts submitted for publication. He reads like never before, more careful than ever before, at pains to demonstrate his thorough understanding of rhetoric, composition, literacy, philosophy—his competence despite his color. (119)

Here again, microaggressions are much more than micro, much more than a personal story or a single occurrence. Instead, we see how the rhetoric of invalidation creates narratives that reverberate outward: from one comment to inequitable work patterns when the work of disproving invalidation demands never-ending thoroughness to prove "competence despite . . . color." The rhetoric used to question one's candidacy and then the subsequent time and energy that goes into disproving that rhetoric show how microaggressions represent "the everyday reality of slights, insults, invalidations, and indignities" (Sue 2010: xv) in academic spaces. By documenting his experience, Villanueva underlines not only how microaggressive rhetoric perpetuates inequitable work patterns but also how those patterns result in different (differently consequential) conditions in the lives of educators. This microaggressive rhetoric has rippling impact not only on potential, current, and future committee members but also on larger disciplinary participation and leadership.

The examples from Villanueva's *Bootstraps* illuminate how research, teaching, and service collectively and similarly support or constrain pedagogical spaces, as we continue to see in our own service activities. For example, we see diversity initiatives implemented as token gestures (e.g., Milem, Chang, and Antonio 2005), scholarship by faculty of color being overlooked/invisible despite our recognition of the politics of citation (e.g., hooks 2003; Gutiérrez y Muhs, Neimann, González, and Harris 2012), and faculty of color being asked/expected to perform more than their fair share of service (e.g., Gloria 1998; Harris and González 2012). Such microaggressions become normalized because they are so casual, so common, so everyday, all the while seemingly unconnected. Yet, as we've tried to establish throughout this article, they are consequential. How will we respond, as rhetoricians and educators, who are also committee members, program administrators, and professional leaders?

Rhetorical Intervention: Adopting a Critical Pedagogy of Service

To intervene into microaggressions, we must ask when, where, how, why, to whom, and for whose benefit they occur. Such rhetorical inquiry reminds us of the goals of critical pedagogy, which include developing critical consciousness and using critical literacy skills to transform institutions (e.g., Horton 1990; Freire [1970] 2000). Just as critical pedagogy aims to address oppression and enact justice, so too might we conceive of a critical pedagogy of service that works for change within programs, departments, colleges, universities, professional organizations, community settings, and other local and (inter)national networks (Ferrel 2017). A critical pedagogy of service aligns with a rhetoric of responsivity, which asks us to develop and use our response-abilities (e.g., Sheridan 2014). To enact a critical pedagogy of service, we need to build consciousness that reveals how universities and other institutions work: how they oppress marginalized peoples, deny agency and personhood for some, and entrench power and privileges for others.

We have opportunities to rhetorically intervene into inequitable conditions whenever we lead programs, revise curriculum, amend departmental policies, allocate funds, construct strategic plans, and do countless other activities identified as service. To intervene, we must remember that institutions and individuals are not separate but one and the same. James Porter et al. (2000: 611) address the interconnectedness of individuals and institutions, locating the feasibility of institutional change in people: "Though institutions are certainly powerful, they are not monoliths; they are rhetorically constructed human designs (whose power is reinforced by buildings, laws, traditions, and knowledge-making practices) and so are changeable. In other words, we made 'em, we can fix 'em. Institutions R Us." Truly acting as though "Institutions R Us" invites a different sort of agency, ownership, participation, and leadership in service: all can help us rethink praxis in terms of creating and sustaining pedagogical initiatives and teachers/leaders committed to justice. This differently agentive rhetorical stance, we hope, allows us all to see and intervene into everyday microaggressions, as we actualize a critical pedagogy of service.

A Call for Rhetorical Intervention

Returning to the opening epigraphs, we find calls to address abuses of power, and we respond by calling attention to microaggressions—an all-too-frequent occurrence that necessitates response. We see public recognition of microaggressions daily, as we open news feeds to read about the latest swastika drawn on a school building, the latest incident of bullying or hate speech at

one of our campuses, the latest institutional response that falls flat, calling for "unity" without addressing deep hurts. As we hope the three illustrations show, microaggressions run deep, impacting multiple pedagogical spaces and all facets of our teaching/learning lives. The three illustrations underline the need for rhetorical intervention, for an approach to invest rhetorically in life-giving rather than life-denying speech and writing. In the first illustration, such an intervention invites us to rethink what Rochelle Harris (2004: 409) refers to as "pedagogy of response." Truly, our pedagogies must consider how we respond to writers, doing more to give feedback that affirms writers' rights and counters epistemic injustice. In the second illustration, we see the need for critical reading and rewriting of textbooks to reverse the racially coded language embedded in pedagogical materials. In the third illustration, a call emerges for educators to enact a critical pedagogy of service, an intentional approach to institutional leadership. Reminding us that "Institutions R Us," Porter et al. (2000) invite us to reconsider our rhetorical agency in spaces seemingly unrelated to our pedagogical practices. Together, these interventions add up to the need for rhetorical interventions to countering microaggressions.

As rhetoricians and educators, we spend much of our lives devoted to the activities of research, teaching, and service, which inform the learning environments we cocreate. Within these activities, we have daily the potential to enact or, alternatively, to resist microaggressions. We have daily the potential to keep things as they are or, alternatively, to disrupt the status quo and create a different set of relations. We have daily the choice of whether to acknowledge microaggressions as a problem to be reckoned with. Will we choose to invest our energies toward creating a more just world? Will we choose to consider the *micro-* (microaggressions) alongside the macro-logics that generate and fuel aggression or its inverse: affiliation, solidarity, collective action, and social justice?

Returning to the opening epigraphs, we find disciplinary mandates that call on all of us to reflect on how our disciplinary choices position us to sponsor particular narratives, recognize particular rhetorics, provide particular resources, and so on. Taking up Ben Kuebrich's (2015: 568–69) question, we ask: "How do our choices . . . position our discipline to address the most fundamental abuses of power" in the macro as well as the micro? As rhetoricians and educators, we value creative invention as a path to intervention, believing that we must "be adventurous enough in our thinking to take a different path, to find a different viewpoint, and to critique the terms of engagement" (Royster 2003: 161). In resetting terms of engagement, we are guided

by Kuebrich's and Royster's powerful critiques and by the many rhetoricians mapping rhetorical literacies that counter violence and strive for justice. May our call for rhetorical intervention contribute to this work, and may we commit to the ongoing, everyday work of countering microaggressions.

Notes

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1. We attempt here to take a "self-reflexive look at our roles as rhetoricians," as Ellen Cushman (1996: 8) attempted to do and modeled for us. For Cushman, a self-reflexive look involves "turn[ing] our work as scholars inside out, upside down, and back in upon itself" (8) toward necessary re-seeing of what's often unseen. We similarly hope to call attention to what's normalized in our everyday lives. In doing so, we rethink our roles and responsibilities to intervene into everyday violence, injustice, and microaggressions, rhetorically and pedagogically.
2. We find microaggression after microaggression recounted in Powell's collaborative address, so we offer this text as a starting point for readers interested in seeing the range and impact of everyday violence. Powell frames these microaggressions within and speaks to the long reach of colonial legacies as related to national memory/forgetting; sovereignty and political subjecthood; and the meaning and significance of land, belonging, and self to Indigenous communities.
3. Certainly people also face microaggressions through other group memberships (e.g., socioeconomic class, nationality, and language background). It is equally important to recognize intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991)—that is, multiple and interlocking identities that, at the same time, influence social interactions and through which microaggressions and other forms of violence may compound, resulting in double or triple jeopardy.
4. Feagin (1992) studies how manifestations of racism morph, sheds light on a continuum of hostile acts, and explicates how hostile acts cumulate and exceed the negative impact of any one instance. Hostile acts comprise "(a) aggression, verbal and physical; (b) exclusion, including social ostracism; (c) dismissal of subculture, including values, dress, and groups; (d) type-casting, including assuming Blacks are all alike" (574). Feagin explains cumulative discrimination as not "just the occasional or isolated discriminatory act in one of the enumerated categories . . . but rather a college career or lifetime series of blatant and subtle acts of differential treatment by Whites, which often cumulates to a severely oppressive impact" (575).
5. Among other scholars, Julie Minikel-Lacocque (2013: 454) has questioned whether microassaults should be considered part of the microaggressions taxonomy, as they

are the most overt, explicit, and often intentional. Even Sue et al. (2007: 274) describe microassaults as the most like "old-fashioned racism," referencing highly visible acts like intimidation, racial slurs, and physical violence. Similarly, Gina A. Garcia and Marc P. Johnston-Guerrero (2015) found in their study of racially biased campus incidents that microassaults are intentional and therefore unlike microinsults and microinvalidations. All of this led Gina A. Garcia and Jennifer R. Crandall (2016) to focus on just the two forms of microinsults and microinvalidations. Similarly, we focus on these forms of microaggressions, as they illustrate the everyday, communicative, rhetorical work of enacting or, alternatively, countering microaggressions.

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