

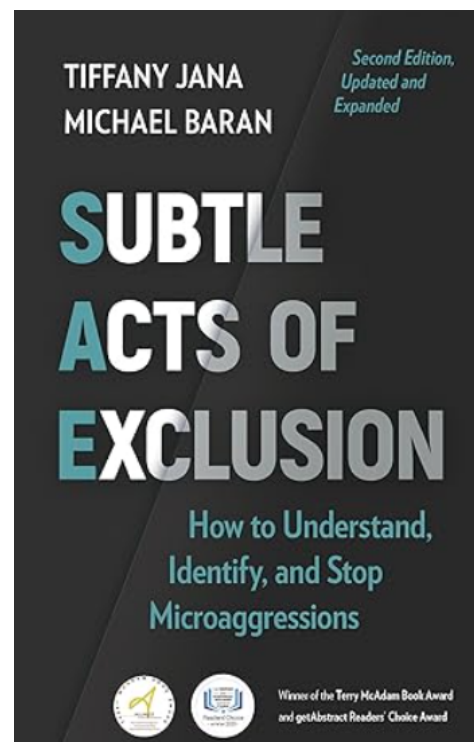
Adapted From
Subtle Acts of Exclusion: How to Understand, Identify, and Stop Microaggressions, 2nd Ed
by Tiffany Jana and Michael Baran (2023)

“I do believe that our institutions can be wonderful places to organically come together across differences and hone some of these deeply urgent interpersonal skills. The skills and tools presented in this book will not only help create stronger, more resilient organizational cultures but also help create tighter bonds, increase empathy, and nurture a sense of psychological safety and belonging”

–Michael Baran

The term *microaggression* originated in the early 1970s in the work of Harvard psychiatrist Chester M. Pierce. Additionally, Columbia Professor of Psychology and Education Derald Wing Sue has written extensively about the topic. More recent criticisms of the term include

1. “This is just another form of political correctness run amok! This is a country with free speech!”
2. “They’re just *micro* aggressions. It’s not like it’s systemic racism or anything.”
3. “Making a big deal about microaggressions is just feeding a culture of helplessness and victimhood. They’re not real *aggressions*.”
4. “There’s nothing *micro* about microaggressions. They cause real harm, especially when someone has to deal with many per day or hundreds in a lifetime.”



“The authors of this book both agree and disagree with some of these arguments. We do find the current climate in which it is hard to talk about sensitive issues problematic. We do want to find a way to create a culture where people can openly discuss sensitive topics, thinking more about the underlying concepts and feelings and less about the specific words people use. However, we also agree that the subtle ways that verbal and nonverbal acts serve to exclude people have real and serious consequences, both in the moment and cumulatively.” (p. 18)

“We propose a new term, subtle acts of exclusion (SAE). Though perhaps not as catchy as ‘microaggressions,’ we believe the term is much more useful because it clearly names and describes the phenomenon we are talking about.” (p. 21-22)

Even though an SAE can be intended as a compliment (“You’re so articulate!”), friendly interest (“Where are you *really* from?”), to show comfort (“You’re from Jamaica? I love Bob Marley!”) or to be funny (see Michael Scott), they often communicate to the receiver one or more of these messages:

- You are invisible.
- You (or people like you) are inadequate.
- You are not an individual.
- You don’t belong.
- You are not typical/normal.
- You are a curiosity.
- You are a threat.
- You are a burden.

When SAE happen, the people involved are usually

- The receiver or subject of the SAE
- The initiator or the person who says/does the SAE
- One or more observers—an observer can be
 - An upstander or ally (chooses to speak up in the moment)
 - A bystander (chooses not to speak up in the moment)

“...observers may feel that it is not their place to speak up if they weren’t the subject of the subtle act of exclusion. And sometimes, that may be true. Each situation is extremely complex, with many factors to consider. There is not one right way to handle every situation. But in general, this book aims to contribute to the discussion of what it means to be an ally. An ally is not someone you can be by just supporting people in your head. It requires a certain kind of everyday activism that includes speaking up when you observe SAE.” (p. 27)

Conversations about SAE “really are gifts that allow us to grow, learn, appreciate others, and build deeper connections.” (p. 44)

Ideally, when we acknowledge an SAE, we engage in calling in rather than calling out.

Guidelines for speaking up as the subject or observer:

1. Pause the action.
2. Assume good intent.
3. Explain why the action was paused.
4. Have patience but expect progress.

Guidelines for responding:

1. Acknowledge the feedback with gratitude.
2. Replace defensiveness with curiosity and empathy. (*Really* listen.)
3. Follow through and follow up.

“Hey, can we pause here for a second? I’m not sure about what I just heard, and I want to make space to think about for a minute.”

“You probably didn’t mean anything by that statement, but I wonder if some might have concerns about it.”

“Hi, this might sound strange coming from me. I know you weren’t even talking to me and that I wasn’t really involved in that interaction. But I overheard, and I’m following a system where I speak up every time I hear something that feels as if it might be excluding someone.”

“Something was just said here, and it doesn’t feel right to me, but I don’t even know why yet. I’m not quite sure how to address it yet, either, but I’ll be giving this some thought.”

Closing summary by Kendra:

We will all undoubtedly commit SAE. *Expect* that we will commit them and we will encounter them in our social interactions. Just like we all have the potential to be physically clumsy (bumping into someone or stepping on someone’s toe), we all have the potential to be socially clumsy. Going through life with the plan of never messing up is unrealistic at best. **The best outcomes include learning from our clumsiness and repairing the relationship.**