



Understanding and Connecting Microaggressions and Resilience in the Workplace

-Dr. Danielle D. King

— WorKing Resilience Lab

This research group works to **understand** and **positively influence** the resilience of employees, teams, organizations, and communities.

The following **research questions** are pursued through mixed-methods approaches, multi-time-point and multi-perspective insights, and considering the workplace and beyond:

01

What is adaptive employee resilience?

02

What are improved ways to measure employee resilience?

03

How does identity shape the resilience process?

04

What can organizations do to foster resilience?

— Agenda

- 01 Resilience in the workplace & microaggressions in the workplace
- 02 The necessary connection between microaggressions and resilience
- 03 Organizational implications
- 04 Questions & answers to begin this conversation

— Resilience Considerations

- 01 Adversity is a necessary condition
- 02 Adversity (severity) is perceptual
- 03 “Positive” adaptation depends on the individual’s goals (and goal hierarchy)
- 04 Resilience, as with most things, is not always healthy

“Resilience is continued, self-regulated goal striving (i.e., behavioral and/or psychological) despite adversity (i.e., after goal frustration).”

King, D. D., DeShon, R., Phetmisy, C., & Burrows, D. (2022). What is resilience? Offering construct clarity to address “quicksand” and “shadow side” resilience concern. In P. Perrewé, P. Harms, & C. Chang (Eds.), *Research in Occupational Stress and Well Being* (Vol. 20, pp. 25-50). Emerald Publishing Limited.

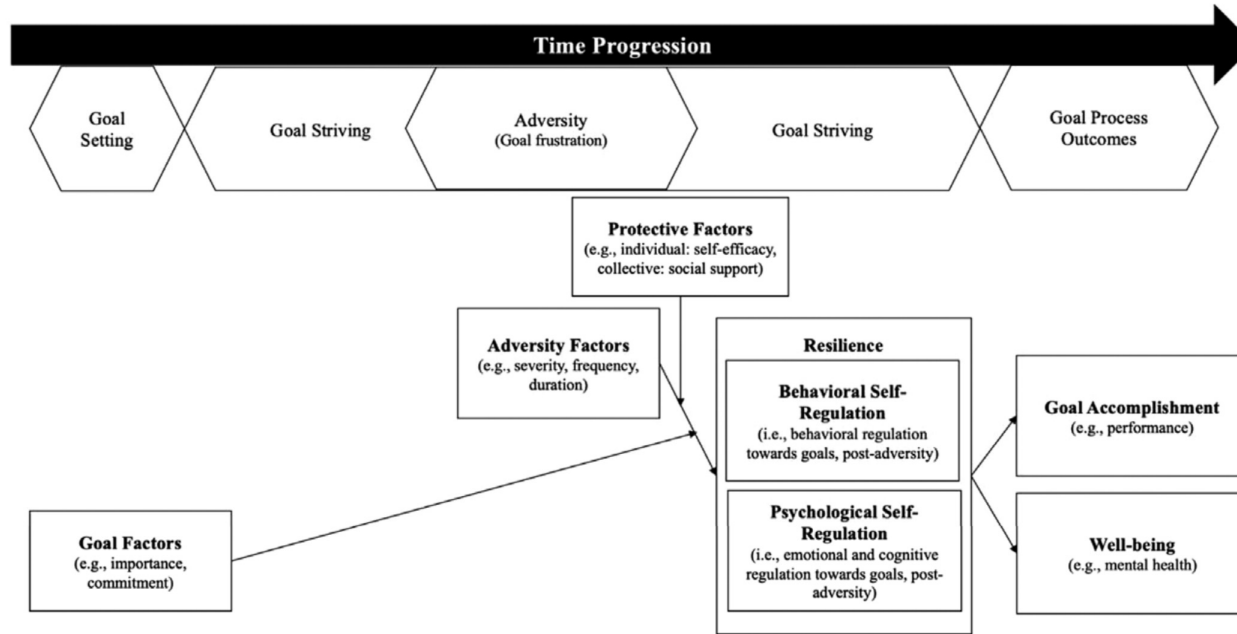


Fig. 1. Proposed Nomological Network Structure of Resilience.

Known predictors of resilience



Mindset

Challenge mindset
Internal locus of control



Emotions

Positive emotions
Complex emotional
experiences



Activity

Seeking social support
Work recovery

What is missing?: Shadow side awareness and identity

Systems change

Chronic adversity

Cumulative depletion

Identity Trauma

Privilege

“We are not all in the same boat. We are all in the same storm. But some people are in yachts, some are in canoes, and others are swimming.”

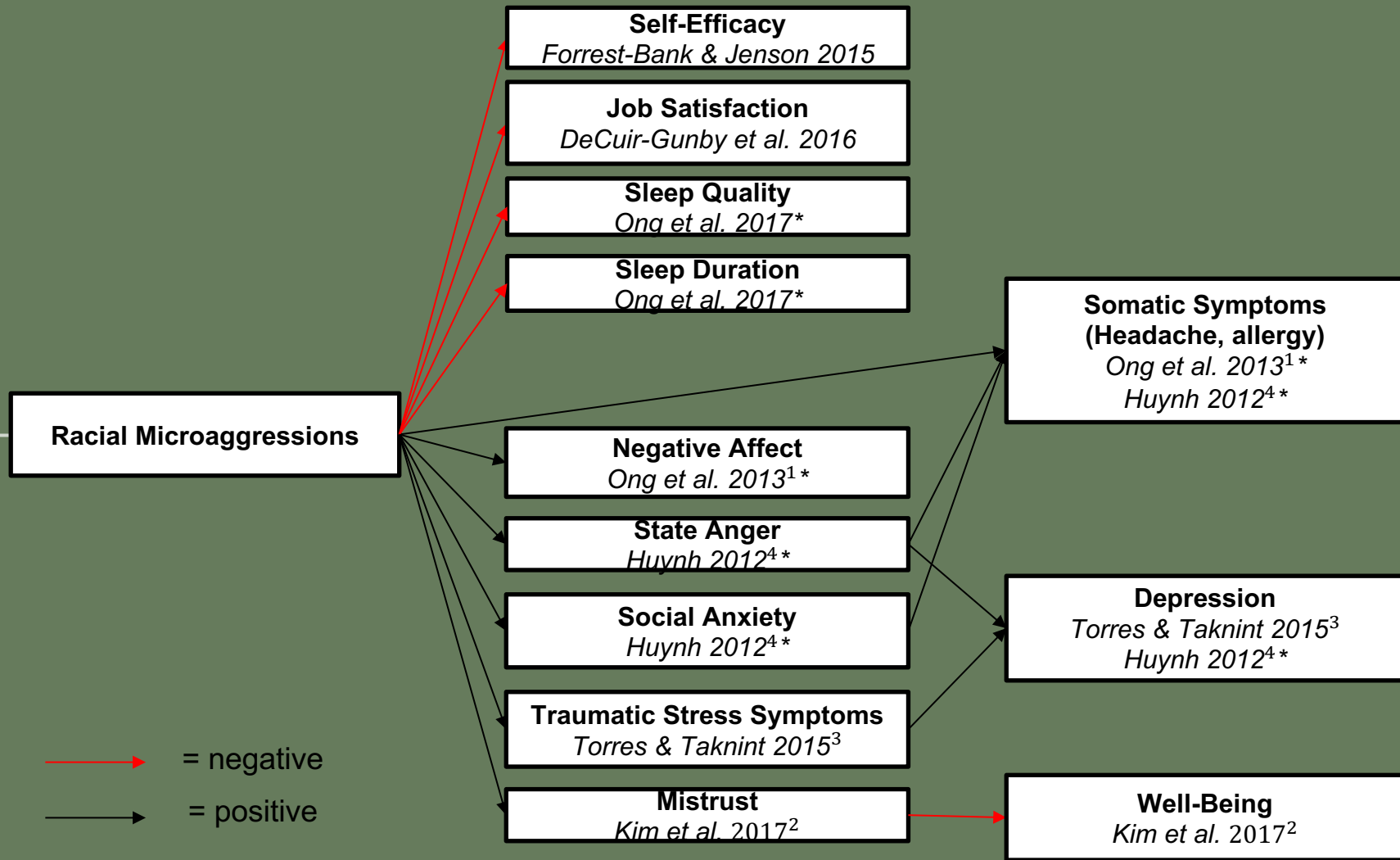
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Microaggressions Considerations

- 01 “Micro” because they are interpersonal, not small
- 02 They are ambiguous by definition, but rooted in racist history
- 03 The target’s experience is a valid viewpoint.
- 04 Intent is not a part of this concept or the experienced effects

“Racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color.”

Sue, D. W., Capodilupo, C. M., Torino, G. C., Bucceri, J. M., Holder, A., Nadal, K. L., & Esquilin, M. (2007). Racial microaggressions in everyday life: implications for clinical practice. *American Psychologist*, 62(4), 271-286.

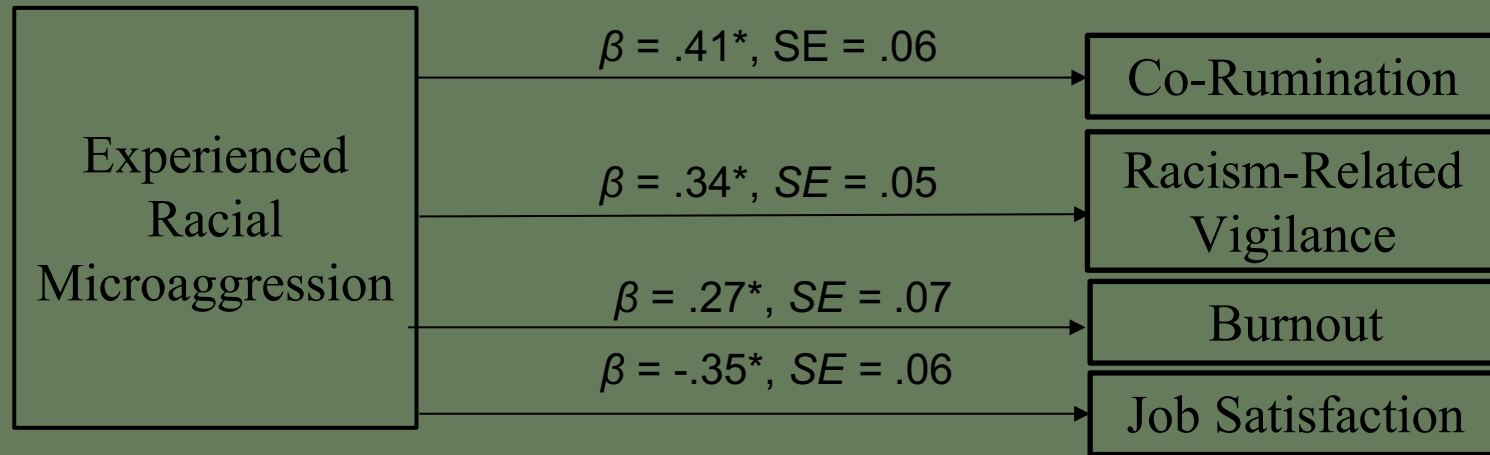


Microaggression examples



1. Alien in own land: “where are you from? No, where were you born?”
2. Ascription of intelligence: “You are a credit to your race?” or “You are so articulate.”
3. Colorblindness: “I don’t see color. There is only one race, the human race.”
4. Criminality: A store owner following a customer of color around the store. A person clutching their bag or locking their door as a person of color walks near them.
5. Myth of meritocracy: “Everyone can succeed, if they work hard enough.”
6. Pathologizing culture: “Your hair is big today! Are you going to wear it like that to the client meeting?”
7. Denial of individual racism: “I am not racist. I have several Black friends.”
8. Second-class citizen: Being ignored as attention is given to racial majority members.
9. Environmental: Spaces that lack numerical representation and visible representation (e.g., images) of people of color

Microaggression effects in the workplace



Controlled for Trait Negativity

* Significant at the 0.01 level

King, D. D., Fattoracci, E., Hollingsworth, D., Stahr, E., & Nelson, M. (2022). When thriving requires effortful surviving: Delineating the manifestations and resource expenditure outcomes of microaggressions for Black employees. *Journal of Applied Psychology*.

When and How to Respond to Microaggressions

by Ella F. Washington, Allison Hall Birch, and Laura Morgan Roberts

July 03, 2020



HBR Staff/SHUTTERSTOCK

Summary. Microaggressions are defined as verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group. For Black people, they are ubiquitous across daily work and life. You can... [more](#)

Recommendations

Ways to respond:

- Let it go (common, but emotionally taxing)
- Respond immediately (corrective but risks both parties being more upset)
- Respond later (requires recall and may be seen as harboring, but less emotional activation on the part of the listener)

Framework for Making Microaggression Response Decisions

– Washington, Birch, & Roberts (2020)



Discern

“Do not feel pressured to respond to every incident.”

Consider:

- Issue and relationship importance
- Your feelings (e.g., confused versus anger)
- Consequences of perceptions



Disarm

“Explain that the conversation might get uncomfortable for them, but that what they just said or did was uncomfortable for you.”

- Invite them to sit alongside you and get to the root together



Defy

“Challenge the perpetrator to clarify their statement or action.”

- Explain your interpretation
- Acknowledge their stated intent & reframe the conversation around impact



Decide

“You control what this incident will mean for your life and work.”

- What would you like to take from this experience?
- What will you not allow it to take from you?

Allyship

Think

- ❑ Believe people when they share their experiences – A “devil’s advocate” adds no value here.
- ❑ Challenge what we have assumed to be true – embrace discomfort as we learn and re-learn.
- ❑ We are all a part of this equation.

Do

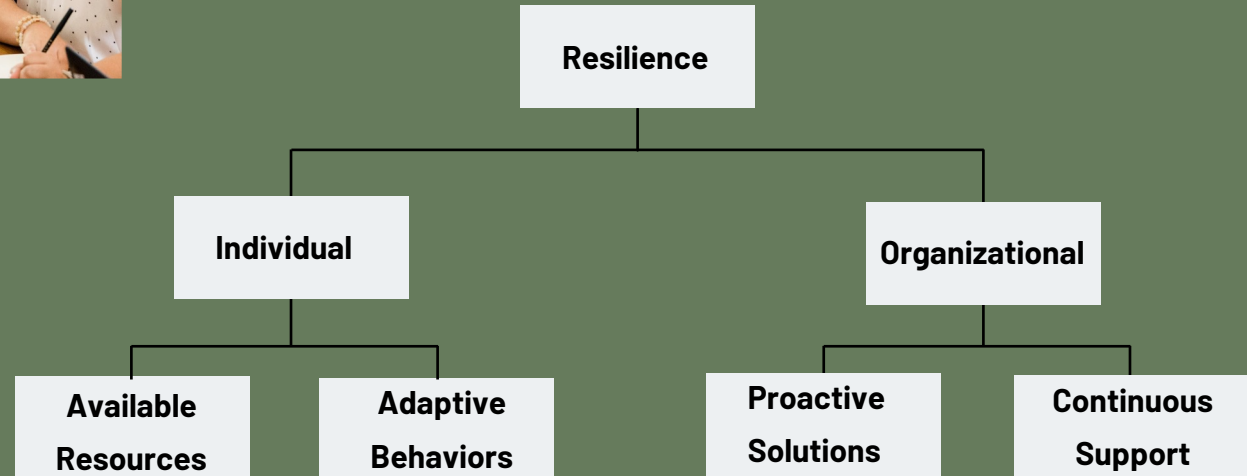
- ❑ Seek to understand what the target needs and wants for repair.
- ❑ Make sure not to center yourself or your perspective in this narrative.

Remember

- ❑ Power dynamics are always at play (i.e., who is more at risk in these conversations).
- ❑ Each person and situation is unique (e.g., org. norms, relationship, history, context, consequences) so it is ultimately up to each person to respond in ways that feel most authentic, safe, and efficacious.



The Co-creation of Resilience in the Workplace



Thank you!

"Our greatest glory is not in never failing, but in rising
every time we fail"
– Confucius

