

Come Again?

Poems inspired
by microaggressions

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Foreword

Words matter. I've been on the receiving end of microaggressions. I've probably been on the other end, too. I just didn't know it. I made up words for microaggressions. The poems are their definitions. I hope you enjoy them. Thank you to those who shared their stories.

Stazzle

[staz-uhl]

verb

The way your voice jumped,
it went an octave higher.
Almost as if you had just heard
the unthinkable and unspeakable.
Does it faze you
that I know the action of articulation?
The cadence of my words longer
than four syllables brings shock to
your ears.
If only mine did the same
when I hear,
“You’re so well spoken.”

Lazite

[ley-zahyt]

noun

As Pusha T. said,
“My name is my name.”
My mother went to great lengths
to ensure she chose the right name.
Each syllable was carefully weighed,
paying special attention
to how it would sound
in moments of pride.
My name is my name.
She told me a name is important,
but i never realized how important
until I grew older.
When she named me,
she gave me permission to find my identity.
So, no.
You can’t call me fucking Patty.
My name is Pratika.

Groople

[groo-puhl]

noun, verb

Minutes.

That's how long we've known each other.

It seems like forever to you.

I know, I know.

Comfort and ease spill from me

like a fire hydrant on a sticky summer day.

That must be why you feel comfortable
touching my hair without my permission.

“OMG, how do you get your curls like that?”

My curls? They're natural.

I call it being one part black,

one part Puerto Rican.

We were strangers two minutes ago.

I guess we're friends now.

Surrupsult

[sur-up-suhlt]

noun

How am I supposed to look and act?
Should I have short, buzzed hair
and proclaim myself Queen of the Lesbians?
Should I start every sentence with
“Nigga please?”
Sorry, I’m not wearing my hijab today.
How will you designate who I am
and the box to put me in
without any of these things?

Askroot

[ahsk-root]

noun

Slowly. Steadily.

You watch me.

I can see from the way
your eyes get smaller
and closer together that you seem
confused and skeptical.

I would be, too.

How can I,
owner of eyes not round,
possessor of skin not white,
speaker of a first language that did not invent “LOL”
really be from here?
I, too, am confused.

Ethistify

[eth-is-tuh-fahy]

verb

I like to think of myself as a complicated recipe, too.

One part black, one part Puerto Rican,

a pinch of Scottish, and just a dash of Spanish.

It took nine months for me to grow.

It's taken thirty years for me to ripen.

I used to get angry,

but that was when I didn't know myself.

I know who I am now.

That's why I'm no longer phased when asked,

"What are you?"

Manify

[man-uh-fahy]

verb

Countless hours spent in the library,
my eyes so worn you could hang hangers
on the bags underneath them.

Two degrees later,
my subordinates ask me questions
they cannot answer themselves.

I answer with the authority
that my foresisters never could.

Their voices drowned out
by those that were deeper than theirs.

You came to my business today
with questions lassoed around your lips.

You don't know my background.

I guess that's fair.

I can see why you had to ask Daniel
the same question I just answered for you.

Who am I?

Just a woman with two degrees
and an executive title, I guess.

Racentical

[reys-en-tuh-kuhl]

noun

Language is a funny thing.
We all have the same required parts
to utter particular syllables.
And yet, I only speak Korean and English.
My neighbors across the sea
look similar to me you say.
This might be true.
Our eyes blink the same.
We both have feet and put one foot
in front of the other when we walk.
The language
that leaves my mouth is carried by wind
and falls on the ears of the Ignorant.
“Can you read this?” you ask.
“No, I can’t. I’m not Japanese.”

Compliot

[kom-pluh-not]

noun

Thank you. Thank you.
I needed to hear that today.
You see,
when I woke up this morning
I crinkled my nose, stretched, and thought,
“Today will be a great day.”
Like an empty cup,
I am filled with joy and happiness
that I get to spend another day in a world where
Nutella exists.
And apples.
And Quentin Tarantino films.

I met you at a party later that day.
We exchanged laughs
about that time at that place
when that person we both know
did that thing.
Cue laugh track.

You were fun so I asked you out.
You said yes.
I muttered something unintelligible and sped off,
nearly tripping over my own two feet.
I came back later with a drink.
The corners of my mouth touched the ceiling.
Until your friend came by and said,
“Your face is so pretty. You’d be beautiful if you
started watching what you eat.”
I smiled.
“Fuck you.”
Today was still a great day.

Blackitude

[blak-i-tood]

noun

When you hear a loud woman,
I hear a woman who isn't listened to.
When you see a woman over exaggerating,
I see a woman fed up.
If I cry,
I'm too emotional.
If I'm stoic,
I'm too robotic.
If I speak up for myself,
I'm being hostile.
If I'm quiet,
I still, somehow, have an attitude.
It must be my pigment,
dark like a sweet Hershey's Kiss,
that naturally gives me attitude.
No matter the circumstance.

Inspiration

“Someone once told me,
‘Wow. You don’t look like a lesbian!’”

“A white student once told me, ‘I’m really impressed you got into the Brandcenter.’”

“Someone called me ‘chinky-eyed’
and told me to go back to my home country.
But I’m not Chinese and I was born in Canada.”

“Sometimes, customers need to have my answers
validated and will ask a male employee the same
questions I just answered.”

“Your face is so pretty. You’d be beautiful
if you started watching what you eat.”

“One of my college professors asked me
if I understand English well enough.”

“Pratika? Cool name. Could I just call you Patty instead?”

“People randomly touch my hair all the time because it looks cool and different. And they never ask.”

“I showed a game I developed by myself at a festival and most people were very nice. But some male gamers would ask me, ‘So you work for the developer?’”

“Where are you really from?”

“People are always telling me how articulate I am for a black girl.”



