

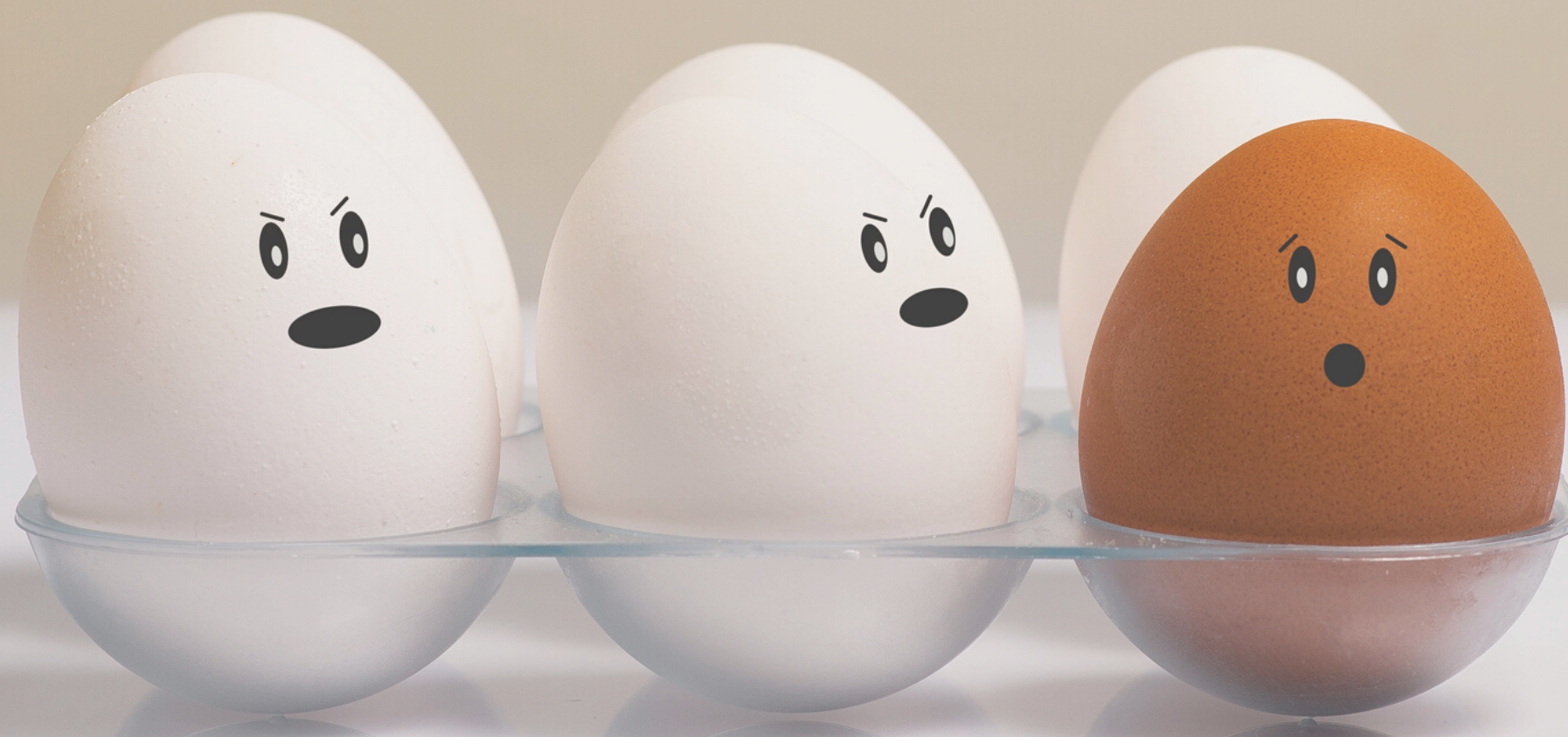
Little Acts of Disrespect

'...In addition I noticed the importance of "little issues." Little acts of disrespect, and failures in performance feedback, seemed to corrode some professional relationships like bits of sand and ice. "Little issues" included names mistakenly left off a list, people who were not introduced at meetings, or mistakenly introduced as someone else.

I learned of inequitable job assignments, failures to provide schedules or food or space that were needed by a particular group or individual, invitations that were uncomfortable.

In 1973 I began writing about "micro-inequities." I defined them as "apparently small events which are often ephemeral and hard-to-prove, events which are covert, often unintentional, frequently unrecognized by the perpetrator, which occur wherever people are perceived to be 'different.' I concluded that micro-inequities have been a principal scaffolding for discrimination. Micro-inequities appeared to be a serious problem since much of this bias is unconscious and unrecognized—and even hard to believe when described—unless videotaped.'

(Professor Mary Rowe, 1973)



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- Micro-inequities are subtle, often unconscious, messages that devalue, discourage and impair workplace performance
- They are conveyed through verbal and non-verbal communication (facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice, etc)
- They occur wherever people are perceived to be 'different' and are a form of indirect discrimination difficult to recognize
- They communicate to others that they don't belong to the majority, that they're "lesser" individuals

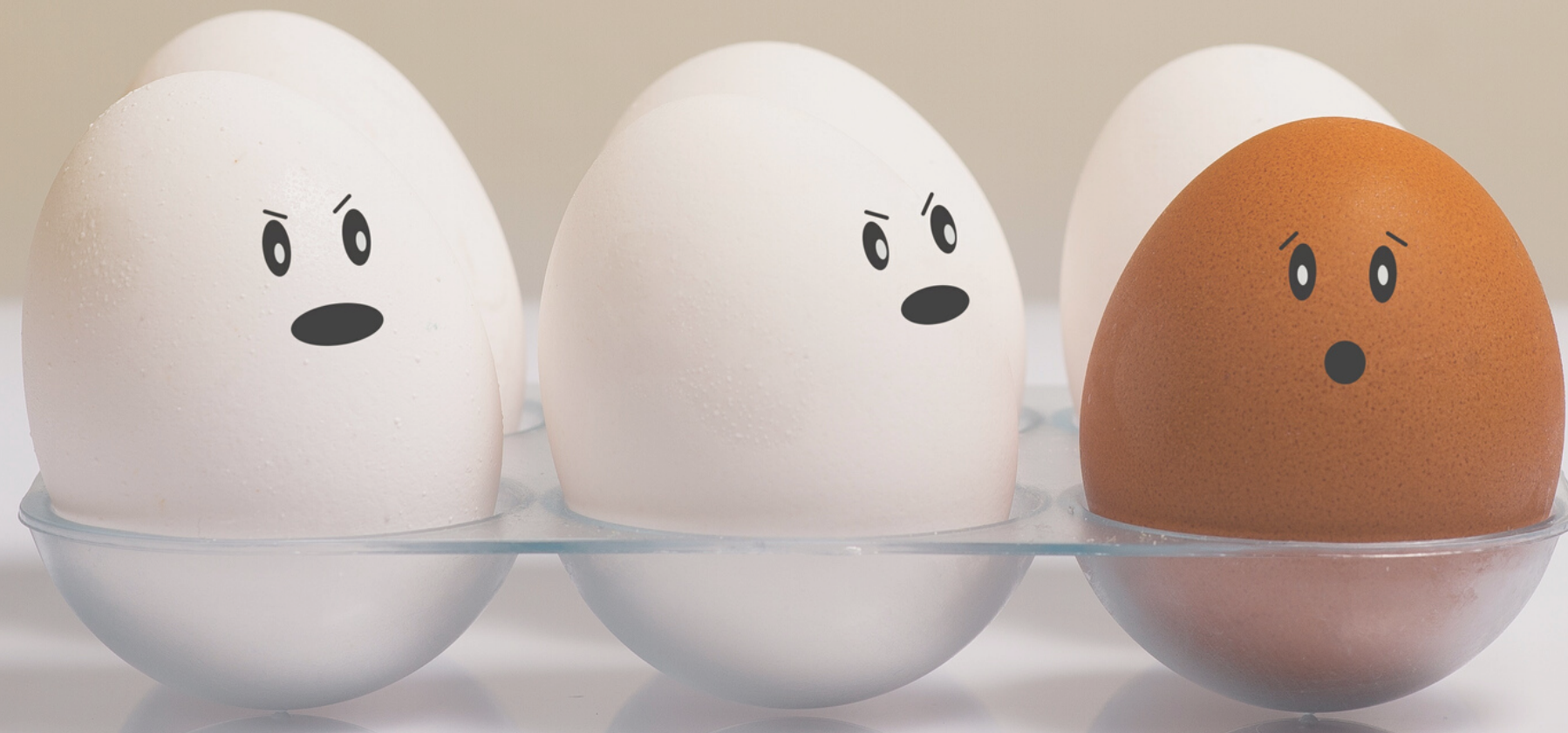
Examples of micro-inequities include, among others:
"mansplaining", consistently ignoring someone's emails, only reading half of a person's email and then asking them about the content later, interrupting or completing sentences for other people, omitting someone from an important communication, leaving someone out of social gatherings, sighing heavily or rolling eyes, checking the phone while someone is trying to have a conversation



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What does a micro-aggression look like?

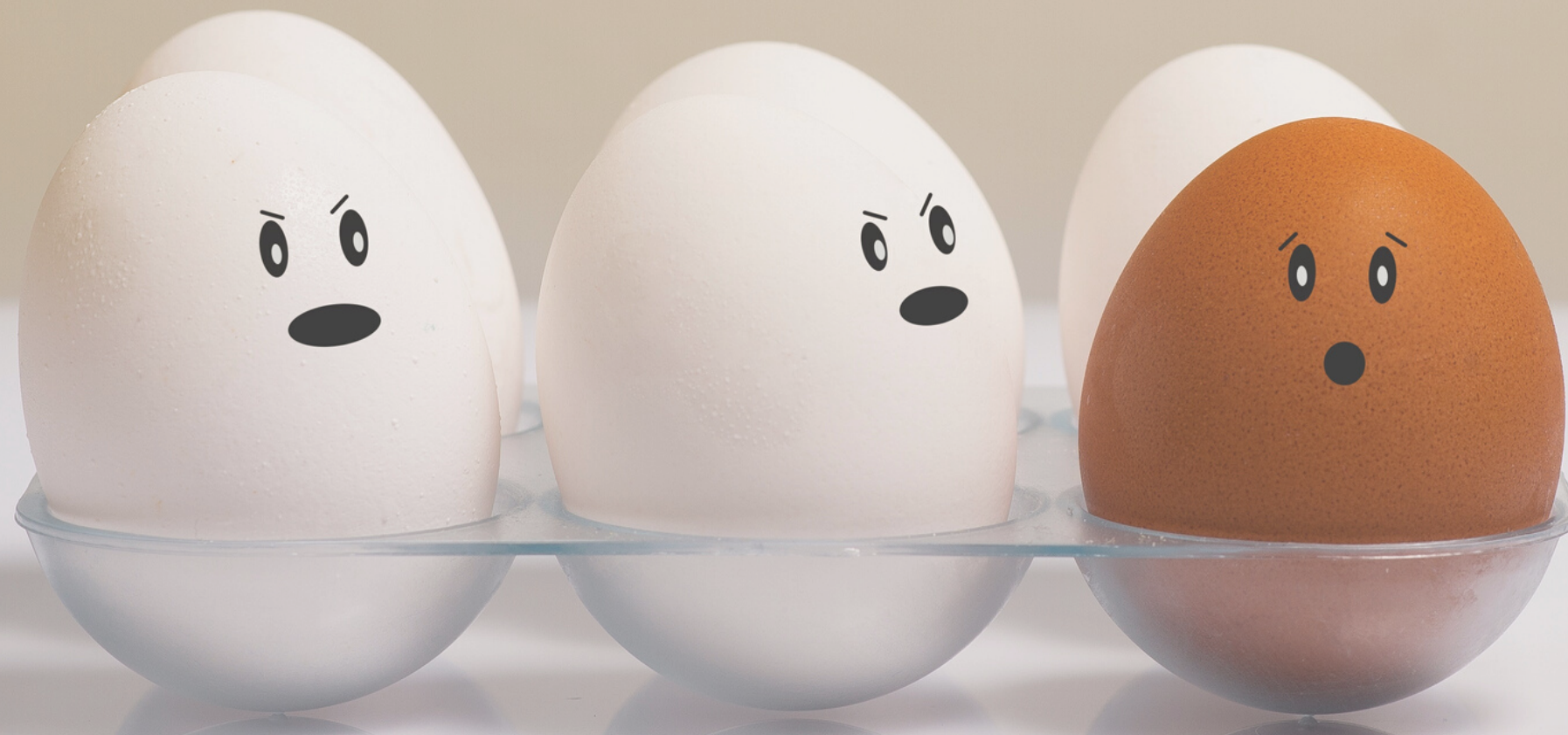
- Someone's name is constantly mispronounced and labeled as "too difficult" to learn
- Male colleagues talk about a sport event and disregard the women in the room, presuming they know nothing about sports
- Someone assumed to be foreign-born is praised for being fluent in their native language
- A female doctor is mistaken for the nurse
- An individual of different nationality is told that they don't act, sound or look like a typical person from their own Country
- An assertive female leader is described as "aggressive", while her male counterpart is praised for his leadership skills



Little Acts of Disrespect

"Organizations have done a great job at controlling the big, easily-seen offensive behaviors but have been somewhat blind to what is rarely observed. Organizations have done great work at controlling the few elephants, while being overrun by a phalanx of ants."

("The DNA of Culture Change", Joyce Tucker)



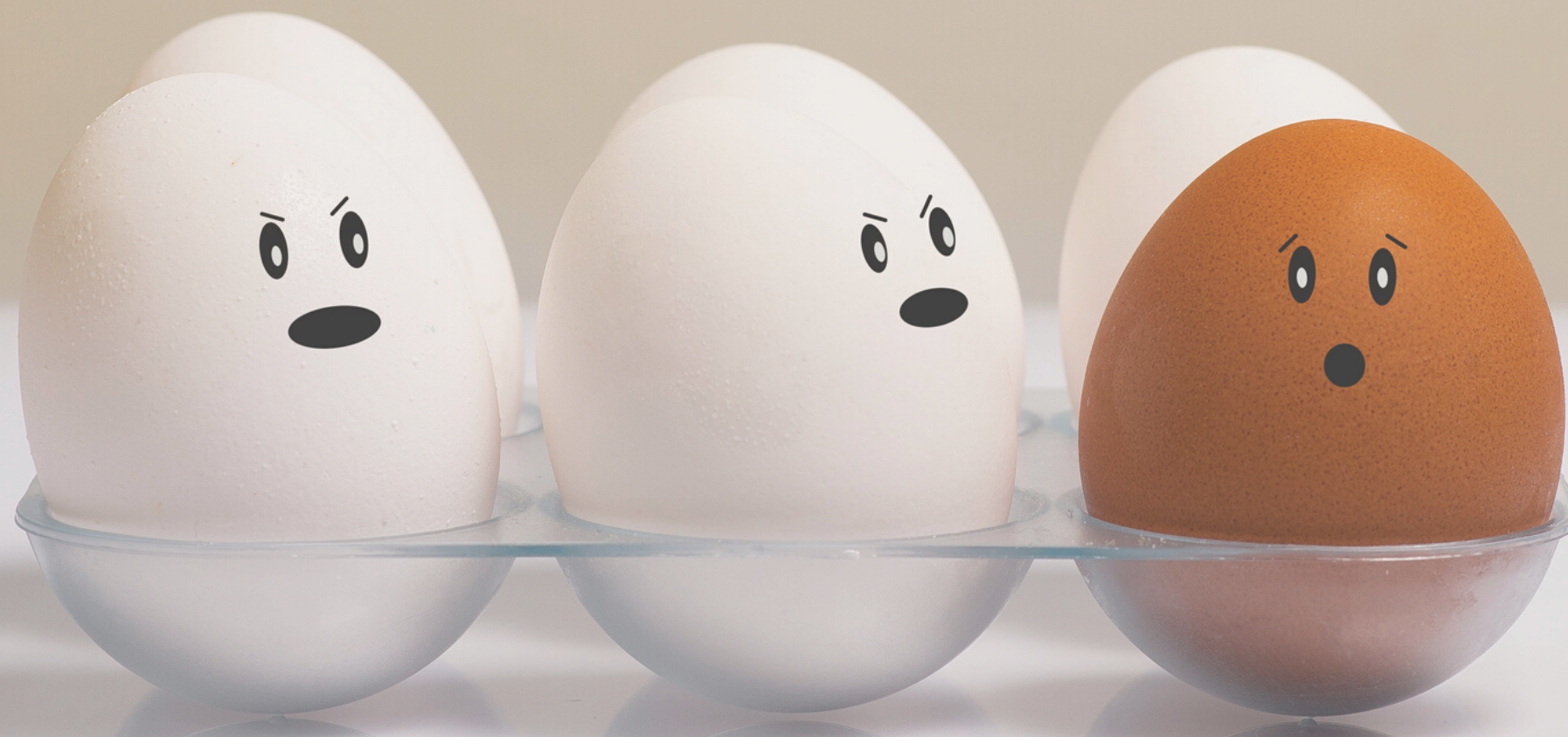
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Repeated experiences of micro-aggressions in the workplace can have a devastating impact on the mental health of those at the receiving end.

Continuous experiences of invalidation and exclusion are likely to lead to anxiety, depression, loss of creativity, lower engagement, lower productivity, increased turnover.

Since micro-aggressions are subtle and extremely difficult to detect and to explain to a casual observer, victims tend second-guess themselves and rarely report the issue.

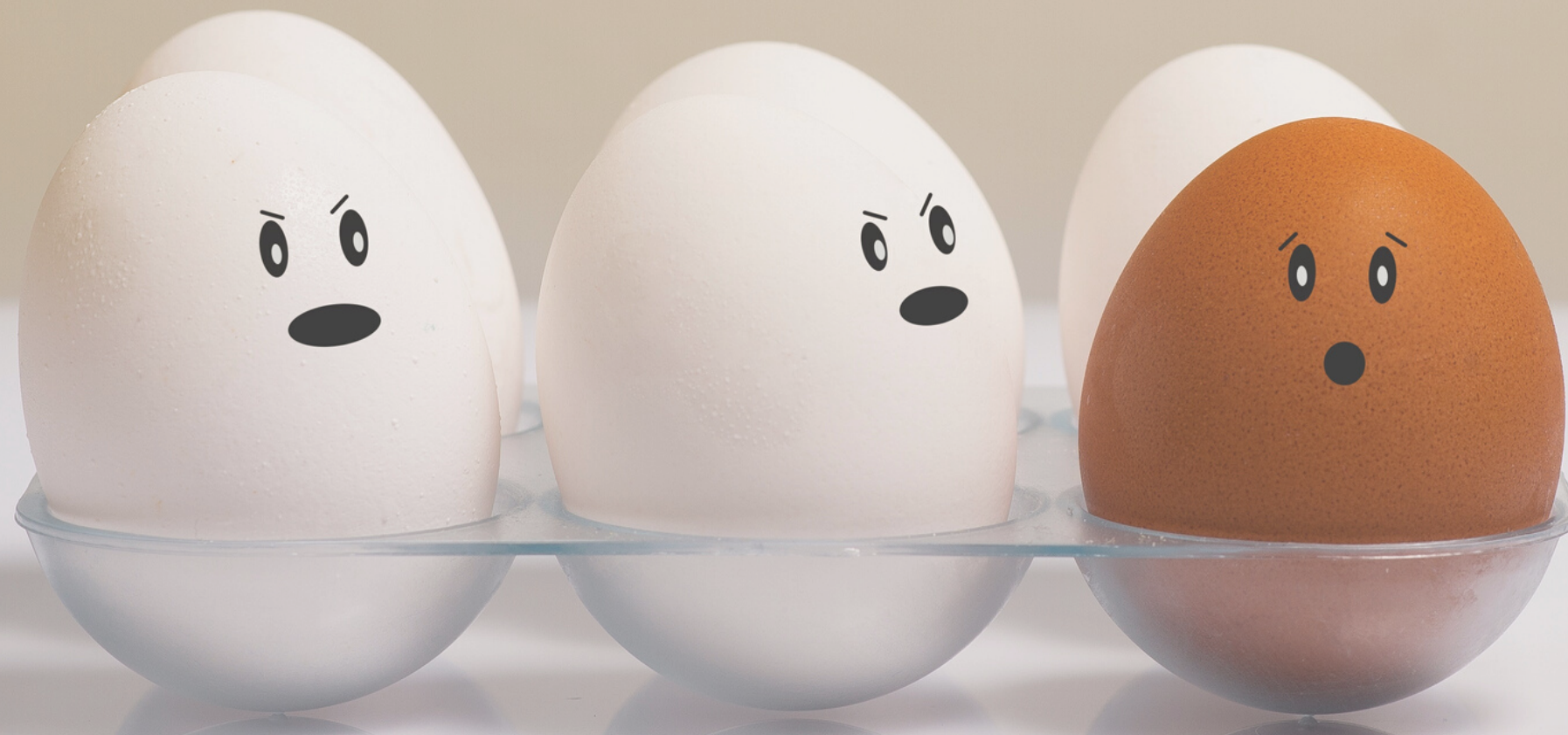
The effects of micro-aggressions can be mitigated through the use of micro-affirmations and through unconscious bias training.



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"Micro-affirmations are tiny acts of opening doors to opportunity, gestures of inclusion and caring, and graceful acts of listening. Micro-affirmations lie in the practice of generosity, in consistently giving credit to others—in providing comfort and support when others are in distress, when there has been a failure at the bench, or an idea that did not work out, or a public attack. Micro-affirmations include the myriad details of fair, specific, timely, consistent and clear feedback that help a person build on strength and correct weakness."

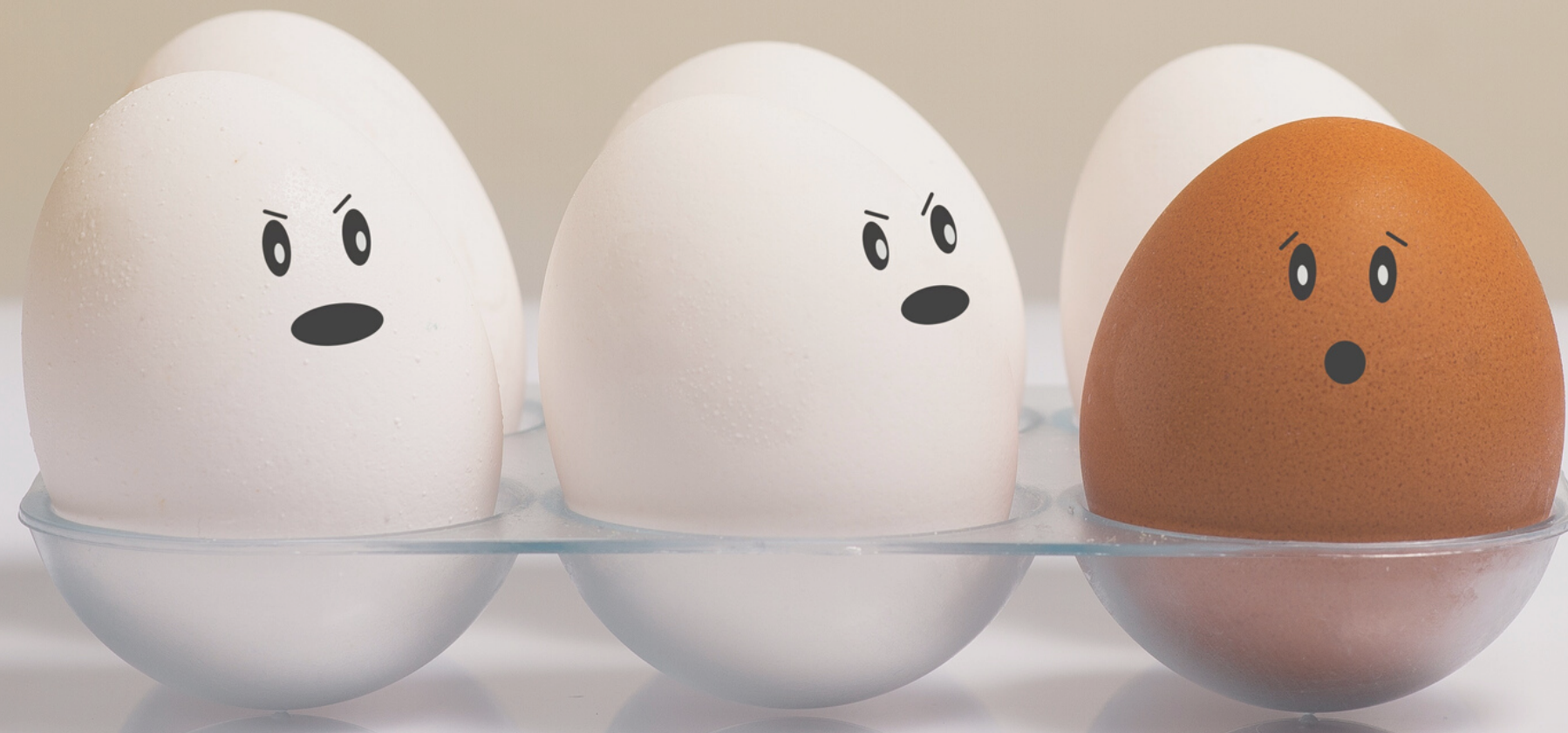
(Professor Mary Rowe, 1973)



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What does a micro-affirmation look like?

- Constructive feedback that builds on strengths and corrects weaknesses
- Support when others are in a difficult situation
- Visible confrontation of hostile, biased behaviour
- Simple non-verbal gestures: smiles, nods, eye-contact
- Attribution of ideas (the “owner” of an idea is publicly acknowledged)
- Attentive listening
- Positive personal interaction (requesting other people's opinions, asking questions, etc)
- Inclusion in social occasions



Sources

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