

Let's Talk: Microaggressions

EQUITY AND INCLUSION COUNCIL

FACILITATED BY: DR. BEVERLY BROWN, ASPEN CHANG

What is a Microaggression?

Microaggressions are “the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership” (Sue, 2010).

- The term “microaggression” was first used by Harvard University psychiatrist Chester Pierce (1970).
- Referred to as “a subtle slight or snub directed toward historically stigmatized individuals, especially minorities” (Lilenfeld, 2017).
- Sue and colleagues first brought the term into academic attention in 2007.
 - They conclude that the toxicity of microaggressions lay largely in their ambiguity.

Types of Microaggressions

1. Microassaults

- Overt discrimination
- Intentional act

2. Microinsults

- Often rendered as a compliment

3. Microinvalidations

- Can be a comment or action
- Dismisses experiences of historically disadvantaged groups

Microaggressions can often do one of the following:

- Invalidate the group identity or the reality of the recipient
- Demean a group or individual on a personal/group level
- Communicate a lesser status or suggest the individual does not belong with the majority group
- Threaten and/or intimidate an individual or group
- Relegate individual or group to inferior status and treatment (Sue, 2010)

(Focused Arts Media Education, 2017)

Have you ever experienced or been a witness to a microaggression?

What were your thoughts and feelings at the time?

Examples of Microaggressions

How would you handle these situations if they occurred in your classroom?

- “You’re really good at math for a woman.”
- Eye rolls and groans sound from the class when a student makes the comment “I wish there were more [Latinx/Black/Asian] faculty on campus.”
- “Oh, that’s so gay.”

How to Handle Microaggressions

- Understand the general definition of microaggressions
- Recognize your own biases, interactions, and behaviors
- Recognize that good intentions can have harmful impacts on others
- When a microaggression occurs:
 - Stay calm
 - Acknowledge the moment
 - Acknowledge the issue and the emotions in the room
 - Ask for clarification and hold everyone accountable
 - Validate and support those who are targeted/impacted
 - Follow up as needed

(Center for Teaching and Learning, 2020)

References

Center for Teaching and Learning. (2020). *Addressing microaggressions in the classroom*. University of Washington. <https://www.washington.edu/teaching/topics/inclusive-teaching/addressing-microaggressions-in-the-classroom/>

Focused Arts Media Education. (2017, May 14). *Microaggressions in the classroom* [Video]. Youtube. <https://youtu.be/ZahtlxW2CIQ>

Lilienfeld, S. (2017, June 23). *The science of microaggressions: it's complicated*. Scientific American. <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/the-science-of-microaggressions-its-complicated/>

Sue, D. W. (2010, Nov. 17). *Microaggressions: more than just race*. Psychology Today. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/microaggressions-in-everyday-life/201011/microaggressions-more-just-race>

Additional Resources

- University of Washington Center for Teaching and Learning “Addressing Microaggressions in the Classroom”: <https://www.washington.edu/teaching/topics/inclusive-teaching/addressing-microaggressions-in-the-classroom/>
- Faculty Focus “Responding to Microaggressions in the Classroom”: <https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/effective-classroom-management/responding-to-microaggressions-in-the-classroom/>
- Inside Higher Ed “3 Approaches for Confronting Microaggressions”: <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2018/07/20/how-deal-microaggressions-class-opinion>
- New York Times “How to Respond to Microaggressions”: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/03/smarter-living/how-to-respond-to-microaggressions.html>
- A Guide to Responding to Microaggressions: [https://advancingjustice-la.org/sites/default/files/ELAMICRO%20A Guide to Responding to Microaggressions.pdf](https://advancingjustice-la.org/sites/default/files/ELAMICRO%20A%20Guide%20to%20Responding%20to%20Microaggressions.pdf)