

## Recognizing Microaggressions and the Messages They Send

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

The first step in addressing microaggressions is to recognize when a microaggression has occurred and what message it may be sending. The context of the relationship and situation is critical.

Below are common themes to which microaggressions attach.

THEMES	MICROAGGRESSION EXAMPLES	MESSAGE
<p><b>Alien in One’s Own Land</b> When Asian Americans, Latino Americans and others who look different or are named differently from the dominant culture are assumed to be foreign-born</p>	<p>“Where are you from or where were you born?”</p> <p>“You speak English very well.”</p> <p>“What are you? You’re so interesting looking!”</p> <p>A person asking an Asian American or Latino American to teach them words in their native language.</p> <p>Continuing to mispronounce the names of students after students have corrected the person time and time again. Not willing to listen closely and learn the pronunciation of a non-English based name.</p>	<p>You are not a true American.</p> <p>You are a perpetual foreigner in your own country.</p> <p>Your ethnic/racial identity makes you exotic.</p>
<p><b>Ascription of Intelligence</b> Assigning intelligence to a person of color or a woman based on his/her race/gender</p>	<p>“You are a credit to your race.”</p> <p>“Wow! How did you become so good in math?” To an Asian person, “You must be good in math, can you help me with this problem?”</p> <p>To a woman of color: “I would have never guessed that you were a scientist.”</p>	<p>People of color are generally not as intelligent as Whites.</p> <p>All Asians are intelligent and good in math/science.</p> <p>It is unusual for a woman to have strong mathematical skills.</p>

<p><b>Color Blindness</b> Statements that indicate that a White person does not want to or need to acknowledge race.</p>	<p><i>"When I look at you, I don't see color."</i></p> <p><i>"There is only one race, the human race."</i></p> <p><i>"America is a melting pot."</i></p> <p><i>"I don't believe in race."</i></p> <p>Denying the experiences of students by questioning the credibility /validity of their stories.</p>	<p>Assimilate to the dominant culture.</p> <p>Denying the significance of a person of color's racial/ethnic experience and history.</p> <p>Denying the individual as a racial/cultural being.</p>
<p><b>Criminality/Assumption of Criminal Status</b> A person of color is presumed to be dangerous, criminal, or deviant based on his/her race.</p>	<p>A White man or woman clutches his/her purse or checks wallet as a Black or Latino person approaches.</p> <p>A store owner following a customer of color around the store.</p> <p>Someone crosses to the other side of the street to avoid a person of color.</p> <p>While walking through the halls of the Chemistry building, a professor approaches a post-doctoral student of color to ask if she/he is lost, making the assumption that the person is trying to break into one of the labs.</p>	<p>You are a criminal.</p> <p>You are going to steal/you are poor, you do not belong.</p> <p>You are dangerous.</p>
<p><b>Denial of Individual Racism/Sexism/Heterosexism</b> A statement made when bias is denied.</p>	<p><i>"I'm not racist. I have several Black friends."</i></p> <p><i>"As a woman, I know what you go through as a racial minority."</i></p> <p>To a person of color: <i>"Are you sure you were being followed in the store? I can't believe it."</i></p>	<p>I could never be racist because I have friends of color.</p> <p>Your racial oppression is no different than my gender oppression.</p> <p>I can't be a racist. I'm like you.</p> <p>Denying the personal experience of individuals who experience bias.</p>

<p><b>Myth of Meritocracy</b>  Statements which assert that race or gender does not play a role in life successes, for example in issues like faculty demographics.</p>	<p><i>"I believe the most qualified person should get the job."</i></p> <p><i>"Of course he'll get tenure, even though he hasn't published much—he's Black!"</i></p> <p><i>"Men and women have equal opportunities for achievement."</i></p> <p><i>"Gender plays no part in who we hire."</i></p> <p><i>"America is the land of opportunity."</i></p> <p><i>"Everyone can succeed in this society, if they work hard enough."</i></p> <p><i>"Affirmative action is racist."</i></p>	<p>People of color are given extra unfair benefits because of their race.</p> <p>The playing field is even so if women cannot make it, the problem is with them.</p> <p>People of color are lazy and/or incompetent and need to work harder.</p>
<p><b>Pathologizing Cultural Values/Communication Styles</b>  The notion that the values and communication styles of the dominant/White culture are ideal/"normal".</p>	<p>To an Asian, Latino or Native American: <i>"Why are you so quiet? We want to know what you think. Be more verbal."</i> <i>"Speak up more."</i></p> <p>Asking a Black person: <i>"Why do you have to be so loud/animated? Just calm down."</i>  <i>"Why are you always angry?"</i> anytime race is brought up in the classroom discussion.</p> <p>Dismissing an individual who brings up race/culture in work/school setting.</p>	<p>Assimilate to dominant culture.</p> <p>Leave your cultural baggage outside.</p> <p>There is no room for difference.</p>
<p><b>Religious and Spiritual Beliefs</b>  The notion that beliefs of the dominant/Christian community are ideal.</p>	<p><i>"What are you doing for Christmas?"</i></p> <p><i>"Where do you go to church?"</i></p> <p>Scheduling mandatory meetings, potlucks, or special events on important religious holidays. For example: Ramadan, Rosh Hashanah, Diwali, Eid</p>	<p>Christian beliefs and values are superior</p> <p>Christian traditions take priority over other faith traditions</p>

<p><b>Second-Class Citizen</b> Occurs when a target group member receives differential treatment from the power group; for example, being given preferential treatment as a consumer over a person of color.</p>	<p>Faculty of color mistaken for a service worker. Not wanting to sit by someone because of his/her color.</p> <p>Female doctor mistaken for a nurse.</p> <p>Being ignored at a store counter as attention is given to the White customer.</p> <p>Saying “<i>You people...</i>”</p> <p>An advisor assigns a Black post-doctoral student to escort a visiting scientist of the same race even though there are other non-Black scientists in this person’s specific area of research.</p> <p>An advisor sends an email to another work colleague describing another individual as a “good Black scientist.”</p> <p>Raising your voice or speaking slowly when addressing a blind student.</p> <p>In class, an instructor tends to call on male students more frequently than female ones.</p>	<p>People of color are servants to Whites. They couldn’t possibly occupy high status positions. Women occupy nurturing positions. Whites are more valued customers than people of color.</p> <p>You don’t belong. You are a lesser being.</p> <p>A person with a disability is defined as lesser in all aspects of physical and mental functioning. The contributions of female students are less worthy than the contributions of male students.</p>
<p><b>Sexist/Heterosexist Language</b> Terms that exclude or degrade women and LGBT persons.</p>	<p>Use of the pronoun “he” to refer to all people. Being constantly reminded by a coworker that “<i>we are only women.</i>”</p> <p>Being forced to choose Male or Female when completing basic forms.</p> <p>Two options for relationship status: married or single.</p> <p>A heterosexual man who often hangs out with his female friends more than his male friends is labeled as gay.</p>	<p>Male experience is universal. Female experience is invisible.</p> <p>LGBT categories are not recognized.</p> <p>LGBT partnerships are invisible.</p> <p>Men who do not fit male stereotypes are inferior.</p>

<p><b>Traditional Gender Role Prejudicing and Stereotyping</b> Occurs when expectations of traditional roles or stereotypes are conveyed.</p>	<p>When a female student asks a male professor for extra help on an engineering assignment, he asks <i>“What do you need to work on this for anyway?”</i></p> <p><i>“You’re a girl, you don’t have to be good at math.”</i> A person asks a woman her age and, upon hearing she is 31, looks quickly at her ring finger.</p> <p>An advisor asks a female student if she is planning on having children while in postdoctoral training. Shows surprise when a feminine woman turns out to be a lesbian.</p> <p>Labeling an assertive female committee chair/dean as a “b____,” while describing a male counterpart as a “forceful leader.”</p>	<p>Women are less capable in math and science.</p> <p>Women should be married during child-bearing ages because that is their primary purpose.</p> <p>Women are out of line when they are aggressive.</p>
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Adapted from Sue, Derald Wing, *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender and Sexual Orientation*, Wiley & Sons, 2010.