

MICROAGGRESSIONS

Commonplace, usually unintentional, negative slights and expressions of bias toward socially devalued groups.

Themes	Microaggression Examples	Underlying Message
Second class citizen: seeing certain groups as less worthy, less important, less deserving and inferior. People get excluded, ignored, or discriminated against.	Not knowing the name of lower status workers. Ignoring the contributions of marginalized people in groups. Overlooking the person of color on line.	Who you are and what you have to say is not important.
Inferiority or pathology of marginalized culture/identity: assuming that certain groups are abnormal, deviant or pathological. Assumes dominant cultural norms are correct and superior.	Saying to an African-American person, "You speak really well. You sound white." Asking, "Why do they have to be so loud/so quiet/dress like that?" Not putting a person with a disability in a front line position. "That food smells really funny."	Who you are is not acceptable or not as good as people from the dominant culture.
Assuming the normality and superiority of the dominant culture	Asking everyone to contribute money or attend an event without considering financial differences. Assuming that people are in heterosexual relationships. "Saying to a woman, "So what does your husband do?"	You should conform to dominant cultural norms regardless of who you are or the dominant cultural norms are what's "normal."
Assuming inherent abilities or qualities	Saying to an Asian person, "Do you work in the math or computer fields?" "I don't think a woman can handle this position—we need someone strong and decisive." Assuming a tall black man plays basketball.	Your individuality doesn't matter, I know what you are like.
Assuming homogeneity: assuming that all people from a certain group are alike. Not seeing individual and group differences.	Asking a Black person, "So what do Black people think about Obama?" Asking a Latina (who is Columbian) to explain Cinco de Mayo (a Mexican holiday). Assuming a Sikh is a Muslim.	You are all alike.
Ascription of intelligence: making assumptions about a group's intellectual ability, competencies and capabilities.	Saying to a service worker, "Wow, that sounded smart. How did you know that?" Saying to a Black person, "You're so articulate!" Speaking more slowly and simply to a person with a physical disability (who does not have a cognitive disability) Not encouraging females to pursue high level math and science. Assuming Asians are good at math.	You're not as intelligent or you must be good at this activity.

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Alien in one's own land: being perceived as a perpetual foreigner or being an alien in one's own country.	Saying to a Latino- or Asian-American, "So where are you <i>really</i> from?" or "You speak really good English." Saying to an African-American or Muslim, "If you don't like it here, you can just go back to Africa/the Middle East."	You're not really an American. You don't really belong here.
Assuming criminality: presuming that certain groups are dangerous or criminals.	Crossing the street or holding one's purse tighter around Black/Latino men. Not wanting one's child to be taught by gays or lesbians. Only asking people of color for ID when using checks or credit cards.	You can't be trusted. You might be dangerous.
Using offensive/biased language: referring to individuals or groups in ways that are insensitive or derogatory.	Calling women "girls" or "hon". Not using the correct gender pronoun. Using the term "illegal alien". "That's so gay." "That's so ghetto."	Who you are is not important or worthy of respect.
Myth of meritocracy: assuming that all groups have equal opportunity and that there is a level playing field. Therefore, success or failure is due to individual effort and attributes. "Blaming the victim"	"I had no problem finding an internship/job, you must not be trying hard enough." "I just want to hire the most qualified person."	Your marginalized status or experiences with inequality don't matter.
Ignoring/Denying Differences: unwillingness to acknowledge or admit seeing someone's social identity and thus the significance of it.	"I don't see color, I just see people." "You're so pretty I forget that you're a lesbian."	Your identities don't matter.
Denying personal bias: unwillingness to admit individual prejudice or discriminatory behavior.	"I can't be racist, some of my best friends are Black". "My sister has a disability so I have no prejudice against people with disabilities." "I'm not homophobic, that was just a joke."	You're wrong. I don't have any bias.

Adapted from: Sue, D.W. (2010). *Microaggressions and Marginality and Microaggressions in Everyday Life*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons.

For more examples of microaggressions see: www.microaggressions.com