

Microaggressions

Definitions of Microaggressions

Microaggressions are defined as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative racial slights and insults that potentially have harmful or unpleasant psychological impact on the target person or group.” (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000)

Microinsults are behaviors, actions, or verbal remarks that convey rudeness, insensitivity, or demean a person’s group or social identity or heritage. (Sue, et. al. 2007)

Microinvalidations are actions that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings or experiential reality of people who represent different groups (Sue, et. al. 2007).

Microaggressions cut across all social identities including race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, disability status, socio-economic class, and other important social dimensions.

Examples of Microaggressions



- Continuing to mispronounce the names of grantees after they have corrected you time and time again.
- Continuing to use the wrong pronouns for grantees after they have expressed how they prefer to be addressed.
- Setting low expectations for applicants from particular groups or institutions of higher education.
- Setting expectations that ignore differences in socioeconomic class status.
- Singling out grantees because of their specific background.
- Asking people with hidden disabilities to identify themselves.
- Disregarding religious traditions when scheduling, planning, and executing important events.
- Using inappropriate humor that degrades different communities or groups of people.
- Expressing racially charged political opinions or heterosexist language assuming that the targets of those opinions do not exist in your audience.
- Making assumptions about grantees and their backgrounds. / Tokenism.



Suggestions for Addressing Microaggressions

1. Do not expect grantees to be experts on any experiences beyond their own and do not make them speak for their entire group (or others). For example, just because a student is black does not mean that they have an academic background in Critical Race Studies. The same can be said about members of the LGBTQI community, Jewish grantees, grantees with disabilities, etc.
2. Do not assume that the groups that you are talking about are not represented in a cohort of grantees. Roughly 27% of people living in the US have a disability, but not all disabilities are visible.
3. Set equally high expectations for all applicants. Do not make assumptions about someone's qualifications based on where they went to school.
4. Work to create a safe environment for all identities in a cohort by establishing ground rules and expectations regarding discussions about and presentations on issues of diversity, for instance at orientation meetings.
5. If you are going to bring in guest speakers, make sure that your objectives are clear in bringing those individuals to orientation meetings or other events. Think about how you want to frame guest contributions understand that there is a risk of silencing grantees who do not agree with the views expressed by your guest.
6. Be cognizant that microaggressions are also directed by grantees against other grantees. Be prepared to interrupt those incidents, too. Stand by your own values.
7. In those cases where grantees do have the courage to contact you and point out that they found a remark that you made or an action that you undertook hurtful, listen to them. It probably took a lot of courage for them to raise the issue with you.

Resources

- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2003). *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Green, E. R., & Maurer, L. (2015). *The Teaching Transgender Toolkit: A Facilitator's Guide to Increasing Knowledge, Decreasing Prejudice & Building Skills*. Ithaca, NY: Planned Parenthood of the Southern Finger Lakes.
- Nadal, K. L. (2014). *That's So Gay!: Microaggressions and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Community*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Sue, D. W. (2013). *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Sue, D. W. (2010). *Microaggressions and Marginality: Manifestation, Dynamics, and Impact*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Steele, C. (2011). *Whistling Vivaldi: And Other Clues To How Stereotypes Affect Us And What We Can Do*. New York: Norton.
- Tatum, B. D. (2017). *"Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?": and other conversations about race* [2nd Edition]. New York: Basic Books
- Alvoid, Tiffany. "Eliminating Microaggressions: The Next Level of Inclusion." TEDxOakland. December 9, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cPqVit6TJjw>

