

# DID YOU REALLY JUST SAY THAT?

IDENTIFYING AND RESPONDING TO  
MICROAGGRESSIONS



"Why haven't you found a husband yet?"



"YOU were born in Canada?"



"You have a mental disability? You seem perfectly normal to me."

# MULTICULTURAL STUDENT CENTER

- *The MSC exists to make sure students from all racial and cultural backgrounds are successful and welcomed at UW-Madison*
- Find Support – Advocacy, Resources
- Build Leadership Skills – Workshops, internships
- Hang Out – Lounge, Study Space, Classroom, Kitchen
- Talk About Social Justice – Workshops, Speakers, Peer Educators

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# WHAT ARE MICROAGGRESSIONS?

## Microaggressions Defined:

- verbal, behavioral, or environmental slights
- Often automatic and unintentional
- Occur in brief instances on a daily basis
- Communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative worldviews



<https://youtu.be/xAIFGBIEsbQ>

# MICROAGGRESSIVE THEMES

| Microaggression   | Theme                      | Message  |
|---|----------------------------|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “You are a credit to your race”</li><li>• Asking an Asian person for help with math or science.</li></ul> | Ascription of Intelligence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• People of color are generally not as intelligent as whites.</li><li>• All Asians are intelligent and good at math/ science</li></ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “Where are you from?”</li><li>• “You speak good English.”</li></ul>                                       | Alien in Own Land          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• You are not American.</li><li>• You are a foreigner.</li></ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• ”I don’t see color.”</li><li>• ”There is only one race, the human race.”</li></ul>                        | Colorblindness             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Denying a person of color’s racial/ ethnic experiences.</li></ul>  |

# ENVIRONMENTAL MICROAGGRESSIONS

Macro- level aggressions, which are more apparent on systematic and environmental levels.

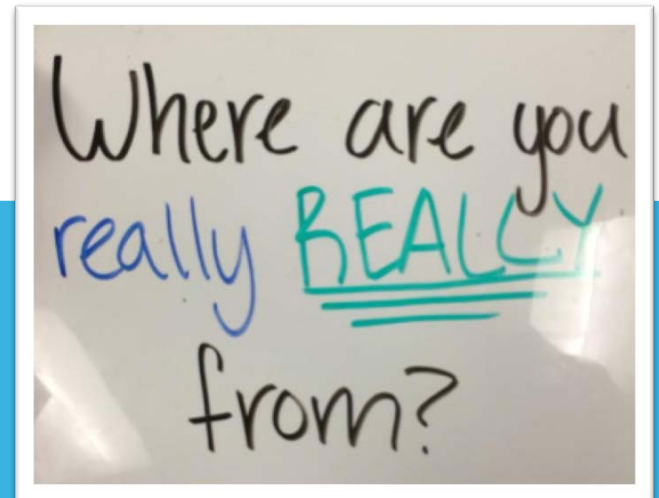
## Examples

- A college or university with buildings that are all named after white heterosexual men.
- TV and movies that only depict white people, with no representation of people of color.



## IT MIGHT BE A MICROAGGRESSION IF...

- “Why are you being so sensitive?”
- “OMG, I was just joking!”
- “You are overreacting”
- “I’m not trying to be racist/sexist/homophobic, but...”



# WE'VE ALL BEEN THERE!

Describe a time when you committed a microaggression.

What was the underlying message? What was the impact? What did you do?

Describe a time when you personally experienced or witnessed a microaggression. What was the underlying message? What was the impact? What did you do?



# MICROAGGRESSIVE STRESS





# INTERNAL DILEMMA

Experiencing a microaggression may lead us to think...

- Did I interpret that correctly?
- Did they say what I think that they just said?
- What did they mean by that?
- Should I say something?
- Saying something may make it worse.
- They will probably think that I am overreacting.
- Speaking up is going to hurt more than it helps.



## **WHAT'S THE IMPACT?**

**Racial microaggressions create a hostile and invalidating climate for people of color, saps their spiritual and psychic energies, and their cumulative nature can result in depression, frustration, anger, rage, loss of self-esteem, anxiety, etc...**

(Derald Wing Sue)



# WHAT'S THE IMPACT?

To name a few...

- Hostile and invalidating environment
- Devalue social identities
- Perpetuate stereotype threat (when people feel they are or feel themselves to be at risk of confirming negative stereotypes about their social group)
- Physical and emotional stress
- Isolation
- Fear or Mistrust of systems, people, and places



# MICROAGGRESSIONS CAN IMPACT RELATIONSHIPS

Professional and/ or personal relationships may be affected, therefor damaging established rapport and trust...

- Student – Student
- Student – Instructor/ Advisor
- Colleague – Colleague
- Supervisor – Supervisee
- Advisor – Advisee
- Professor – Student
- Employer – Employee
- Provider – Patron



# MICROAGGRESSIONS IN THE WORKPLACE

- **Start with the culture**
  - Do employees feel comfortable speaking up or addressing concerns
  - Have you set 'norms' re: mutual respect, managing conflict, and interpersonal communication
- **How are those norms modeled, communicated, and enforced**
- **Remember: microaggressions pile on**
  - Cumulative impact/ hostile environment
- **64% of employees of color report facing microaggressions daily, weekly, or monthly**

Hunter, Ronee L. (2011) An examination of workplace racial microaggressions and their effect on employee performance. Master's thesis. Accessed from: <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/docview/915679506?accountid=465>

# MICROAGGRESSIONS AND WORKPLACE PERFORMANCE


How does an experience of microaggressions affect workplace productivity for people of color?

- Sad: may affect how I think others perceive me
- Cautious: may affect someone's view of my confidence
- Affected: I continually look for another job
- Hopeless: Try to just get through the day – glad to have a job
- Angry: May affect someone's view of my attitude
- Depressed: May affect my productivity and relationships

# RESPONDING: ASSESS THE SITUATION

- Find a way to pause from assuming or reacting right away. If it the first time and the incident is new, you could ask the person to repeat what they said or did.
- Your first concern must be that you are safe from physical, emotional, or psychological abuse of any kind.
- Ask yourself...
  - What kind of risk will I be taking if I do this?
  - Is this particular action worth my time and effort?
  - Do I know what I want to achieve?

# RESPONDING: MODEL THE BEHAVIOR

- Model the behavior you want from the person or people you are confronting.
  - Try to avoid being sarcastic, snide, mocking, or arrogant – even though this may be tempting.
  - Remember – the goal is education. The goal is not to win a point or make someone feel bad or wrong. Help someone understand something from an another/ different perspective.
  - Use yourself as an example. None of us were born with the knowledge that we have now about microaggressions, social justice, or diversity. It may be helpful to use your own stories of how you’ve “unlearned” certain hurtful, inaccurate, and misleading information.
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# REWIND & REVISIT

Even if the moment has passed, go back and address it.

**Research has shown that an unaddressed microaggression can leave just as much of a negative impact as the microaggression itself.**

# COMBATTING MICROAGGRESSIONS

- Learn from our own biases and fears
- Experiential reality is important – interact with those different from us
- Avoid getting defensive
- Be open to discussing your own attitudes and biases and how they have hurt others in the past
- Be an ally: stand personally
- It's not easy, we all make mistakes
- Do your best, get a sense of the situation
- Learn from one another and practice





**Become aware of our own unconscious bias**

**Be observant – notice reactions**

**Listen when someone raises a concern**

**Be open to feedback**

**Interrupt microaggressions**

**Recognize the role you play (inaction can speak louder than words)**

**WHAT CAN WE DO?**



**Inquire**

**Paraphrase & Reflect**

**Reframe**

**Use Impact & “I” Statements**

**Use preference statements**

**Re-Direct**

**Use strategic questions**

**Revisit**

**HOW CAN WE INTERVENE?**

**QUESTIONS?**

GABE.JAVIER@WISC.EDU

# REFERENCES

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Banks, Brea. (June 2015) "This impact of microaggressions – An introductory training"  
[[http://cehs.unl.edu/images/EdPsych/nicpp/NICPP\\_microaggression\\_presentation\\_2015-06-02.pdf](http://cehs.unl.edu/images/EdPsych/nicpp/NICPP_microaggression_presentation_2015-06-02.pdf)]

Breaking the Prejudice Habit: <http://breakingprejudice.org/teaching/group-activities/microaggression-activity/>

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[<https://www.minitex.umn.edu/Training/DisplaySessionHandout.aspx?Title=Identifying%20and%20Responding%20to%20Microaggressions&SessionID=580>]

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