Introduction to microaggressions

Elizabeth Wynn
She/her
26/3/2020
**Definition**

Chester M. Pierce

“Black-white racial interactions [that] are characterized by white put-downs, done in an automatic, preconscious, or unconscious fashion.”

**Microaggression**: brief and common verbal, behavioural, and environmental communications, whether intentional or unintentional, that transmit hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to a person because they belong to a marginalised group.
Characteristics

- Small
- Common
- Subtle
- (Unintentional)
- Harmful
Types of microaggression

- Microassault: explicit verbal and nonverbal derogatory remarks or actions
- Microinsult: subtle remarks about a person’s marginalised identities that are insensitive, demeaning and rude
- Microinvalidation: an experience that excludes, negates, and nullifies a person’s marginalised reality

Sue et al. 2007
### Examples – race/ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Message</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alien in one’s own land</td>
<td>“You speak English really well.” “Where are you really from?”</td>
<td>You are a foreigner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colour-blindness</td>
<td>“I don’t see race.” “I don’t think of you as a Black/Asian/etc person.”</td>
<td>You don’t have different experiences based on your race/ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denial of individual racism</td>
<td>“I’m not racist; I have BME friends.” “As a woman, I understand what discrimination is like.”</td>
<td>I am immune to racism because I have BME friends or am from a marginised group myself.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Examples – race/ethnicity

“Why do you sound White?”

“Can you see as much as white people? You know, because of your EYES...?”

“So, like, what are you?”

Fordham University campaign
### Examples – LGBTQ+

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Message</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dismissal</td>
<td>“She used to be bisexual but now she’s married to a man.”</td>
<td>Your sexual orientation or gender identity isn’t real</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“There are so many identities now. What is demisexual anyway?”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invasion of privacy</td>
<td>“Have you had the surgery?”</td>
<td>I have a right to know personal things about you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Have you come out to your parents yet?”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universal LGBTQ+ experience</td>
<td>“You don’t dress like a gay person.”</td>
<td>You aren’t a real queer person if you don’t behave in a specific way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Did you watch the latest episode of Drag Race?”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Examples – LGBTQ+

On Sex and Gender, Connecticut University; GLAAD campaign
### Examples – gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Message</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Myth of meritocracy</td>
<td>“The best person should get the job, regardless of gender.” “She only got the job because they wanted to hire a woman.”</td>
<td>If you don’t succeed, it’s due to your effort not your gender. Women get special treatment in hiring and promotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental</td>
<td>Rooms or buildings are all named after men Only portraits of men on the walls</td>
<td>You are an outsider here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second-class citizen</td>
<td>Assuming a woman is more junior than she is</td>
<td>Someone like you cannot be high status</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Examples – gender

"Now, majoring in Computer Science is pretty great for a girl."

"Given what your husband does, do you really need to work?"

"STOP being so EMOTIONAL."

On Sex and Gender, Connecticut University; Forbes
Why do we need the term ‘microaggression’?

Their size and ambiguity makes microaggressions hard to recognise and easy to dismiss. However, the cumulative effect is damaging.

Being able to label microaggressions helps us address them and recognise systems of oppression.
What to do: experience

• Remember: your experience is valid
• Come up with tactics for frequent occurrences
• Consider the circumstances and outcomes
What to do: witness

• Challenge discrimination
• Prepare responses for common occurrences
• Be an ally
  • Believe the person’s experience
  • Follow their lead
What to do: perpetrate

• Don't be defensive
• Apologise and reflect
• Be aware of your own biases and privilege
• Learn
  • Do research
  • Interact with people who are different from you, in terms of race, culture, sexual orientation, and other characteristics.
Any questions?
Further reading

• What exactly is a microaggression?
• On Sex and Gender
• Unmasking racial microaggressions
• The microaggressions still prevalent in the workplace
• Language Matters: Considering Microaggressions in Science
• Racial Microaggressions Are Real. Here’s How to Navigate Them
• Did you really just say that?
• 4 workplace microaggressions that can kill your confidence—and what to do about them