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# Introduction to microaggressions



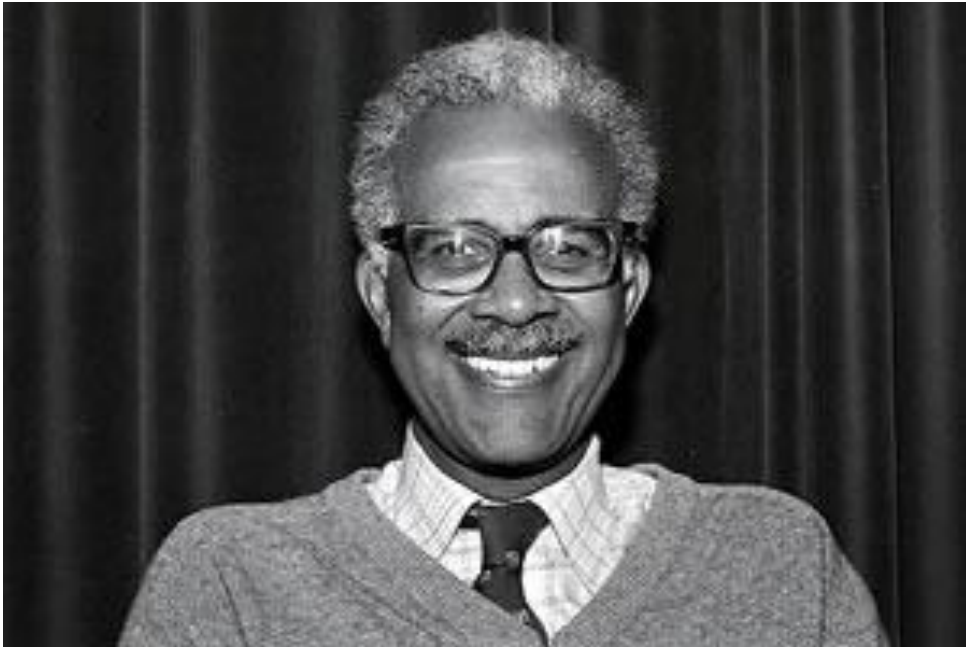
Elizabeth Wynn

She/her

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## Definition

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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

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- Small
- Common
- Subtle
- (Unintentional)
- Harmful

# Types of microaggression

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- 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

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

## Examples – race/ethnicity



Fordham University campaign

# Examples – LGBTQ+

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



## Examples – LGBTQ+



On Sex and Gender, Connecticut University; GLAAD campaign



# Examples – gender

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

## Examples – gender



On Sex and Gender, Connecticut University; Forbes

## Why do we need the term 'microaggression'?

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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

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- Remember: your experience is valid
- Come up with tactics for frequent occurrences
- Consider the circumstances and outcomes

# What to do: witness

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- Challenge discrimination
- Prepare responses for common occurrences
- Be an ally
  - Believe the person's experience
  - Follow their lead

# What to do: perpetrate

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- 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.



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Any questions?

## Further reading

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- [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](#)