

## MICROAGGRESSION OVERVIEW

***Microaggressions are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership.<sup>1</sup>***

### Microaggressions: Characteristics

- Everyday actions that occur all around us, usually by people who believe they are fair-minded, without prejudice
- Possibly, without any conscious intent or malice
- Usually unaware of how their comment, tone, or behavior negatively impact others
- May be considered “no big deal”
- Few recognize the cumulative, enduring impact of constant barrage of microaggressions
- Some may not even recognize they experienced a microaggression until later

### Potential impact and emotional toll on members of marginalized groups

- Uncertainty – never knowing when they will experience another microaggression
- Constantly being vigilant, always tracking their surroundings
- Self-doubt: Given the ambiguous nature of some situations, some might obsess over questions like, “Am I over-reacting? Being too sensitive? Misinterpreting what just happened? Just being paranoid?”
- If they bring it up to the member of the privileged group, they are often met with denial, defensiveness; fear that this could hurt their relationship, career path
- Left out feeling: “I don't belong, I can't be successful here”
- May change their behavior in hopes that this may lessen their experiences of microaggressions; may come across as overly friendly, helpful, passive, soft-spoken, ingratiating....
- Feel pressure to “act right” or their actions could be used to reinforce stereotypes about their marginalized group; carry the group on their shoulders
- Damages the respect they may have for members of privileged groups; may not use them as resources in the future
- Often invest time and energy trying to diagnose what happened, manage the impact and feelings, decide if and how to respond

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<sup>1</sup> Blog by Dr. Derald W. Sue, Microaggressions: More than Just Race - Can microaggressions be directed at women or gay people? Published on November 17, 2010 <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/microaggressions-in-everyday-life/201011/microaggressions-more-just-race>

- If the target chooses to “let it go,” may judge self as colluding; feel guilty for not stepping up