

Microaggressions

The everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership.

Examples of Microaggressions

Racial Microaggressions

- A White man or woman clutches her purse or checks his wallet as a Black or Latino man approaches or passes them. (Hidden message: You and your group are criminals.)
- An Asian American born and raised in the United States, is complimented for speaking “good English.” (Hidden message: You are not a true American. You are a perpetual foreigner in your own country.)
- A Black couple is seated at a table in the restaurant next to the kitchen despite there being other empty and more desirable tables located at the front. (Hidden message: You are a second-class citizen and undeserving of first-class treatment.)

Gender Microaggressions

- An assertive female manager is labelled as a “bitch,” while her male counterpart is described as “a forceful leader.” (Hidden message: Women should be passive and allow men to be the decision makers.”
- A female physician wearing a stethoscope is mistaken for a nurse. (Hidden message: Women should occupy nurturing and not decision-making roles. Women are less capable than men.)
- Whistles or catcalls are heard from men as a woman walks down the street. (Hidden message: Your body/appearance is for the enjoyment of men. You are a sex object.)

Sexual Orientation Microaggressions

- Students use the term “gay” to describe a fellow student who is socially ostracized. (Hidden message: People who are weird, strange, deviant, different are “gay”.)
- A lesbian client in therapy reluctantly discloses her sexual orientation to a straight therapist by stating she is “into women.” The therapist indicates he is not shocked by the disclosure because he once had a client who was “into dogs.” (Hidden message: Same-sex attraction is abnormal and deviant.)

- Two gay men hold hands in public and are told not to flaunt their sexuality. (Hidden message: Homosexual displays of affection are abnormal and offensive. Keep it private and to yourselves.)

Other Microaggressions

- When bargaining over the price of an item, a store owner says to a customer, “Don’t try to Jew me down.” (Hidden message: Jews are stingy and money grubbing)
- A blind man reports that people often raise their voices when speaking to him. He responds by saying, “Please don’t raise your voice; I can hear you perfectly well.” (Hidden message: A person with a disability is defined as lesser in all aspects of physical and mental functioning.)
- The outfit worn by a TV reality-show mom is described as “classless and trashy.” (Hidden message: Lower-class people are tasteless and unsophisticated.)

Reference

Wing Sue, D. (2018). Microaggressions, marginality, and oppression: An introduction. In M. Adams, W. Blumenfeld, D. Catalano, K. DeJong, H. Hackman, L. Hopkins, B. Love, M. Peters, D. Shlasko & X. Zúñiga (Eds.), *Readings for diversity and social justice* (4th ed., pp. 22-26). New York, NY: Routledge.