



MICRO AGGRESSIONS: A PRIMER

According to Derald Wing Sue, “microaggressions are every day encounters of subtle discrimination that people of various marginalized identities experience throughout their lives.” They are often subtle and unintentional and the person who commits a microaggression is often unaware they have hurt someone. Nonetheless, the accumulated impact of daily microaggressions cause real pain, anxiety, depression, self doubt and may even have adverse health impacts on the recipients.

1

Definition:

Microaggressions are brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals based on their group membership.

- They are SUBTLE put downs
- They may be verbal, non-verbal or environmental
- They may be intentional or unintentional
- They may seem harmless but after a lifetime of accumulation, they can contribute to bad health outcomes, anxiety, depression, self-doubt and more.
- Perpetrators of microaggressions are often unaware that they engage in such communications

2

Examples of Microaggressions:

- “You don’t act like other _____ (insert e.g., Blacks, Asians...).”
- “Don’t all your people do _____.”
- “But you don’t look Jewish”
- “Where are you *really* from?”
- “What *ARE* you?”
- Asking women in meetings to take notes and not men.
- Avoiding eye contact with someone who has a disability.

3

Impact of Microaggressions:

- Self doubt
- Feeling invisible
- Feeling as though I don’t belong
- Adverse impacts on health
- Feelings of worthlessness
- Depression/Anxiety/Anger

4

Strategies to Address Microaggressions:

IF YOU ARE MICROAGGRESSIONED:

- Take a deep breath
- Assume good intentions
- Speak your truth, name what happened
- Calmly share your experience
- Identify support network
- Self Care
- Empower yourself

IF YOU ARE ACCUSED OF COMMITTING A MICROAGGRESSION:

- Listen with respect/don’t be defensive
- Be open to your own biases
- Acknowledge that you do not know something
- Refer to PALS handout



BUILDING INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

6

MICRO AGGRESSIONS: A PRIMER

The Tips for Building Inclusive Communities Series was designed to address questions from faculty, staff, students, and community members about how to create inclusive spaces in classrooms, meetings, on study abroad, in community settings and beyond. Every Tip in the series is designed to share basic details about different methods for creating inclusive communities in a way that is quickly accessible to the reader.

BUILDING INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES is a university-wide initiative that reflects Michigan State University's core value of inclusion and its rich history in supporting the efforts of every student to realize their full potential through academic pursuit. Students, alumni, faculty, and staff carry this message forward, on campus and across the globe to help build inclusive communities where diversity and differences are acknowledged as strengths.

It is the mission of the Office for Inclusive Excellence and Impact to promote Building Inclusive Communities so that our differences will be acknowledged as our strength, so that we can be different together, and that our many voices sound together to form one will. The need to embrace and share this message has never been greater.

Why Build Inclusive Communities? When we participate in the process of Building Inclusive Communities we create the opportunity to see the world differently, in our research, in the work we pursue, in the classroom, in social relationships, as consumers, voters, partners, families, travelers, and more. Building Inclusive Communities starts with a frame of mind and a deep-seated understanding that inclusion is at the core of MSU's values and the very foundation of our life-long educational journey. But results don't occur overnight. It takes time and commitment to sustain. Together we will create a supportive and welcoming environment for all Spartans.

