



Microaggressions

What's this got to do with research?

Cleveland Piggott, MD, MPH

Vice Chair Diversity, Equity, Inclusion for Family Medicine

University of Colorado

Objectives

- Be able to define and recognize a microaggression
- Understand how microaggressions can have a negative impact in both small and large ways in our lives and with our work
- Feel more comfortable with effectively interrupting a microaggression

Definition of a Microaggressions

A statement, action, or incident regarded as an instance of indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a **marginalized** group such as a racial or ethnic minority.

Types of Microaggressions

- 1. Microassault**
- 2. Microinsult**
- 3. Microinvalidation**

Microassault: *A blatant verbal, nonverbal or physical attack intended to convey biased sentiments.*

Examples:

- In 2014 an African American student at San Jose State University was tormented by his white roommates physically and mentally and the perpetrators were only charged a misdemeanor and not a hate crime.

Microinsult: *unintentional behavior or speech that conveys rudeness or insensitivity, or demeans a person's race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or other aspects of their social or cultural identity.*

Example:

- “You’re too pretty to be a lesbian.”
- “Oh, you’ll get accepted into graduate school, you’re a minority”

Microinvalidation: *comments or behaviors that exclude, negate, or dismiss the thoughts, feelings, or experiences of the target group.*

Example:

- On a document respondents are asked to identify themselves as male or female (negating other gender constructs).
- When a Latinx couple is given poor service at a restaurant compared to white customers and shares their experience with White friends, only to be told “Don’t be so oversensitive”. The racial experience of the couple is being nullified and its importance is being diminished.
- Another example of this is the response to “Black lives matter” movement with “Blue lives matter”.

Think of it like a Mosquito bites

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nQ9l7y4UuxY>



Why does this Matter?

- How does this effect self-esteem or self-efficacy (your belief in your ability to solve a problem, reach a goal, complete a task, and achieve what you set out to do)?
- How does this impact your relationship with colleagues?
- How does it promote disparities?
- How can this impact the work you in research?

In the Chat: Activity

- Please share an example of 1-2 examples of a microaggression you have either experienced or witnessed.
- If you don't feel comfortable, feel free to private chat me and I will share it to protect anonymity.

Ideas for Interrupting Microaggressions

- Repeat back what is said
- **Ask for more information**,
e.g. *Can you elaborate on that?*
- Play dumb; challenge the stereotype. E.g. *Can you explain it to me?*
- Promote **Empathy**
- Express your feelings
- Share your process
- Separate **intent from impact**
- Tell them they're too smart to say something like that
- Appeal to values and principles
- Point out what they have in common with the other person
- Point out policy/law that prohibits such conduct

Why is this Hard?

- You don't see it coming and sometimes are in shock.
- **Often come from someone you care about.**
- We don't like to be confrontational
- There is a **power or privilege** differential
- Some of us experience this so often, to interrupt the process can be exhausting
- We don't practice



YOU CAN CHOOSE
COURAGE,
OR YOU CAN
CHOOSE COMFORT,
BUT YOU CANNOT
CHOOSE BOTH.

— BRENE BROWN



Practice (if time)

- Use an example of something provided or that you feel comfortable sharing from a personal experience (you can also make something up)
- Take turns being the perpetrator and receiver/witness of the aggression and make sure you set the stage (time for maybe 1-2 role plays).
- **You can choose to talk it out (not as helpful) vs actually practice saying the words**

Examples

- I feel like I'm the low man on the totem pole
- You'll get that job, you're _____ (insert an aspect of a person's identity e.g. race, gender, etc)
- Ugh, why don't they just speak English

Further Discussion?

Helping to change the culture:

- **Ouch and Oops** (psychological safety)



Defensiveness (micro-invalidating)

- We need to be open and set up a safe space for dialogue to move forward. We also need to be aware that we may be part of the problem and do hard work grappling with that.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cT-nzPyhH1o>