

Specific examples of microaggressions to recognize:

Denial of racial reality/Denial of Individual Racism/Sexism/Heterosexism (e.g. dismissing- whether directly or inadvertently- claims that race was relevant to understanding a student's experience); a statement made when bias is denied

- "I'm not racist. I have several Black friends...My friend is Puerto Rican ... I voted for Obama ... My girlfriend is Asian, etc."
- "I'm not homophobic, I have gay friends!"
- "As a woman, I know what you go through as a racial minority."
- To a person of color: "Are you sure you were being followed in the store?"
- "They probably didn't mean it like that."
- "It was just a joke, relax"
- "Just to play devil's advocate... (proceeds to invalidate other student's experience)" or "Just hypothetically..."
- "We don't know both sides" or "How can we say for sure this was racially motivated"

Ascription of intelligence (e.g. unintelligent or smarter than average based on appearance or accent)

- "You are a credit to your race."
- "You are so articulate." or "You sound white."
- Asking an Asian person to help with a Math or Science problem.

Toxic positivity (e.g. excessive and ineffective overgeneralization of a happy, optimistic state across all situations, resulting in denial, minimization of the other student's feelings)

- "Our society loves Black people! Look at how many successful people there are in music and sports!"
- "Everyone just needs to love each other."
- "We need to focus on all the good in the world, and not complain about everything"
- "You should focus on the positive right now. Look at how many people are coming out to support this movement"
- "It's a lot better now than in the past!"

Color Blindness (e.g. Statements that indicate that a White person does not want to acknowledge race)

- "I don't see color."
- "America is a melting pot."
- "There is only one race, the human race."

Myth of meritocracy - Statements which assert that race does not play a role in life successes, or implying that affirmative action is the reason for BIPOC success

- "I believe the most qualified person should get the job."
- "Everyone can succeed in this society, if they work hard enough."
- "Of course he'll get tenure, even though he hasn't published much—he's Black!"
- "Men and women have equal opportunities for achievement."
- "Gender plays no part in who we hire."
- "America is the land of opportunity."

- “Everyone can succeed in this society, if they work hard enough.”
- “Affirmative action is racist.”

Tools/Strategies to address microaggressions:

Disarm: Perpetrators of microaggressions typically fear being perceived — or worse, revealed — as racist. Explain that the conversation might get uncomfortable for them but that what they just said or did was uncomfortable for others. Invite them to sit alongside the group in the awkwardness of their words or deeds while you get to the root of their behavior together.

Defy: Challenge the individual to clarify their statement or action. Use a probing question, such as “*How do you mean that?*” This gives them a chance to check themselves as they unpack what happened, present an opportunity to better gauge the perpetrator’s intent. Reframe the conversation around the impact of the microaggression. Explain how it was initially interpreted and why. If they continue to assert that they “*didn’t mean it like that,*” remind them that you appreciate their willingness to clarify their intent and hope they appreciate your willingness to clarify their impact.

Five strategies to share with students when confronting microaggressions

- 1) Understand your racial/cultural identity
- 2) Acknowledge and be open to admitting your racial biases
- 3) Validate and facilitate discussion of feelings
- 4) Control the process, not the content, of the dialogue
- 5) Validate, encourage and express admiration and appreciation to participants who speak when it feels unsafe to do so

For Allies:

The work of allyship is difficult. You will make mistakes as you learn — and you will always be learning. For anyone accused of committing a microaggression or counseling someone who has been accused, here are a few notes on how to respond:

- Remember that intent does not supersede impact.
- Seek to understand the experiences of marginalized and minoritized individuals without making them responsible for your education.
- Believe your colleagues when they choose to share their insights; don’t get defensive or play devil’s advocate.
- Center the experiences and voices of students from marginalized backgrounds without overburdening or tokenizing them.
- Get comfortable rethinking much of what you thought to be true about the world and your workplace and accept that you have likely been complicit in producing inequity.”

For further reading:

- <https://www.washington.edu/teaching/topics/inclusive-teaching/addressing-microaggressions-in-the-classroom/>
- https://academicaffairs.ucsc.edu/events/documents/Microaggressions_Examples_Arial_2014_1_12.pdf
- <https://www.sph.umn.edu/site/docs/hewg/microaggressions.pdf>
- <https://diversity.cupahr.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Microaggressions.pdf>
- <https://hbr.org/2020/07/when-and-how-to-respond-to-microaggressions>
- <https://ct.counseling.org/2015/12/race-talk-and-facilitating-difficult-racial-dialogues/>