



**LMU**

**D & I QUICK TIPS**

USEFUL REFERENCES IN  
THE PROMOTION OF DIVERSITY & INCLUSION  
**MICROAGGRESSIONS**

**Think  
before you  
speak.**

Consider  
before you  
assume.

# Microaggressions

Microaggressions perpetuate harmful ideas and stereotypes that reinforce group differences in power and privilege and contribute to systemic marginalization and inequality.

## DEFINITION

**Microaggressions** are defined as “everyday encounters of subtle discrimination that people of various marginalized identities experience throughout their lives” (Sue, 2014). It is important to note that microaggressions may not always appear with malicious intent, as they are learned behaviors and ideas based on dominant norms in society. For marginalized groups, it is not just about hurtful comments; microaggressions reinforce group differences in power and privilege through repeated dismissals, insults, and invalidations.

## IMPACT

Research has shown that microaggression in everyday life as well as in society, media, etc. can be a detriment to individuals' [mental health](#), self-esteem, and [sense of belonging](#). Furthermore, microaggressions often perpetuate [harmful ideas](#) and stereotypes that reinforce systemic marginalization and inequality, such as (but not limited to):

- a) criminalization of Black and Brown individuals;
- b) anti-immigrant sentiment and barriers to citizenship;
- c) gender disparities such as wage gaps, roles, education and career; and
- d) invalidation or lack of adequate care for those with invisible disabilities.

## Disarming Microaggressions

### TARGET

For those who find themselves a [target of microaggression](#), it is important to first attend to your own physical and psychological well-being. Know that your feelings are valid, and that you have the choice to step away, react, or respond.

- **Expose the implicit message:**  
"What do you mean by that?" or "Can you explain that joke?"
- **Identify the impact and discomfort:**  
"I think you mean well, but what you said makes me feel..."

### BYSTANDER/ALLY

Microaggressions are not limited to perpetrator and target. Others can be affected in ways such as relation to the denigrated group, connection to either individual, or by way of a hostile or uncomfortable social environment.

[Witnesses can also be empowered](#) by challenging microaggressions. Provide multiple means of representation; options for perception and comprehension.

- **Educate the perpetrator and express disapproval:**  
"That is a negative stereotype. Actually..."
- **Promote empathy:** "How would you feel if someone assumed something about you because of your...?"

### PERPETRATOR

Being a perpetrator of microaggressions does not mean you are a bad person, and you may be unaware of the hidden and historic context of your communication. [If accused](#), own your feelings and empathize with the person's vulnerability to share their experience with you.

- **Acknowledge and apologize:** "I am sorry I offended you..."
- **Reflect on where it came from, and how to avoid repeating the behavior in the future.**

## Microaggressions: Terms to Know

There are different types of microaggressions which can help further illumine the concept:

- 1) **Microassaults**, which are explicit derogations  
e.g., name calling, purposeful discriminatory actions
- 2) **Microinsults**, which are subtle snubs that demean a person's cultural identity  
e.g., mocking ethnic-sounding names, commenting on speech or accent, touching hair to feel texture
- 3) **Microinvalidations**, which serve to exclude or negate the experiential reality of a person belonging to a particular group  
e.g., bootstraps analogy, claiming not to "see color," accusing another of "acting white"

As opposed to microaggressions, which are interpersonal and directed towards an individual, **macroaggressions** occur as a result of institutionalized or systemic oppression and are aimed at whole groups or classes of people. Macroaggressions can be recognized in governmental policies and societal norms.

Sue (2010). *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation*.

More resources found on

<https://resources.lmu.edu/officeofinterculturalaffairs/resources/diversityinclusion/>



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