It Starts With Me: Understanding Racial Micro-Aggressions

Sara Stahlberg, MPH
Associate Director, Programs

Neil Rana
Manager, Health Equity
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Lillian Pinto
Senior Manager, Adolescent Sexual Health

Leandra Lacy, MPH
Manager, Capacity Building
Objectives:

• Identify and define racial and other micro-aggressions
• Develop skills to effectively name, respond to, and prevent racial micro-aggressions and personal and professional settings
Ground Rules

- Respectful and mindful
- Assume good intent
- Open-minded
- Share experiences
- Listen
- Oops/ouch

What’s learned here leaves here, what’s said here stays here

One diva, one mic
Large Group Activity

• The purpose of this activity is to acknowledge how diverse a group we are, with varied identities, including different beliefs, values, cultural omnibet representations, etc.

• Please stand as you hear things that you identify with
  – If you do not wish to share, you do not have to.
Understanding Implicit Bias

**Implicit bias** refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner.

- **Pervasive.** Everyone possesses them
- **Malleable.** Can be unlearned.
- **Related but distinct** from explicit biases
- **Do not necessarily align with core beliefs**
- **Usually favor** our own ingroup
Defining Micro-Aggressions

Racial micro-aggressions are the brief and everyday slights, insults, and indignities and/or denigrating messages sent by well-intentioned people who are unaware of the hidden messages they communicate. (*Derald Wing Sue, Columbia University*)
Other Varieties

**Micro-Assaults:** Conscious and intentional actions or slurs; Examples include: slurs, catcalling, intentionally mis-gendering or outing somebody

**Micro-Insults:** Subtly convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person’s identity; Examples include: “that’s so gay”, purse grab, “articulate”

**Micro-Invalidations:** Alien in your own country, unintentionally mis-gendering, denial of individual racism/sexism/heterosexism, myth of meritocracy
Example
Example
Impact

- Depression and trauma
- Suicide ideation
- Trust in service providers
- Medication adherence
Video Example

https://youtu.be/hDd3bzA7450
## Examples and Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Microaggression</th>
<th>Message</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alien in own land</td>
<td>“Where are you really from?”</td>
<td>You aren’t American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ascription of intelligence</td>
<td>“You are so articulate”</td>
<td>It is unusual for someone of your race to be intelligent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Color blindness</td>
<td>“When I look at you, I don’t see color”</td>
<td>Denies a person of color’s racial/ethnic experiences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assumption of criminal status</td>
<td>A store owner follows a customer of color around the store</td>
<td>You are going to steal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denial of individual racism</td>
<td>“My best friend is black” or “as a woman, I know what you go through”</td>
<td>I’m immune because I have friends of color. Your racial oppression is not different than my gender oppression</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Activity

EXAMPLE

[Professor to Latina student during class] “What do Latinas think about this situation?
Did I interpret that correctly?

Did she say what I think she said?

What did he mean by that?

Should I say something?

Saying something may make it worse.

They’ll probably think I’m overreacting

Speaking up is going to hurt more than it helps.

Experiencing a Micro-Aggression
Appeal to Values

Ask yourself this question, “what are my values?”
Express Your Feelings

You’re making me uncomfortable.
YOU KEEP USING THAT WORD. I DO NOT THINK IT MEANS WHAT YOU THINK IT MEANS.
Empathize with the Underlying Feeling
Separate Intent from Impact

That’s not what this is about.
Give Information
Use Humor

Would you like some aloe vera? ‘Cause you just got burned.
Involve Others
Responding as a Perpetrator

AWARENESS

ACCEPTANCE

ACTION
Resist the urge to defend yourself.
Apologize (genuinely) ASAP

Thank them

Acknowledge what you’ve learned

I’ve made a huge, tiny mistake.

Don’t expect anything in return

Remember this doesn’t make you a bad person

Do Your Research!

Try Harder in the Future

Activity: Case Studies

• Which parts (if any) of this interaction are a micro-aggression? Why?
• If you overheard this interaction, how would you respond?
Case Study #1

• A black gay man works at a health department within the administrative division.
• He is constantly asked to speak to issues within the black gay community.
• While he is happy to speak from his perspective, he has insisted that he does not and cannot speak for the entire community.
• Staff refer to him as their “gay black representative” and sometimes ask him questions that make him uncomfortable related to his race and sexuality.
• What are some micro-aggressions that this person’s coworkers might be exhibiting?
Case Study 2

A pregnant young woman of color walks into a clinic seeking prenatal health services. She is shown to an exam room and asked by the clinician if she would like to participate in a special program for pregnant unmarried women, which offers birth control and STD/HIV testing services free of charge.
Case Study #3

The local health department wants to order penis models for condom demonstrations at the local high school, and propose ordering them in a variety of skin tones. Leadership at their agencies denies the request, indicating that the darker toned models are too “explicit” and inappropriate for students.
Case Study #4

Sam, a young man born in Ecuador who has lived in the US for 15 years, recently started a new job. At his first staff meeting, he is asked to introduce himself and he mentions that he is from Ecuador. One of his colleagues responds by saying, "Wow! But your English is so good!"
Questions / Discussion

Yeah, I have a lot of questions.
Resources

• Harvard University Project Implicit: https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html
• MTV Look Different: http://www.lookdifferent.org/
• Recognizing Microaggressions and the Messages They Send: https://academicaffairs.ucsc.edu/events/documents/Microaggressions_Examples_Arial_2014_11_12.pdf
• How Microaggressions Are Like Mosquito Bites (Video): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hDd3bzA7450