

Tool: Recognizing Microaggressions and the Messages They Send

Microaggressions are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership (from *Diversity in the Classroom*, UCLA Diversity & Faculty Development, 2014). **The first step in addressing microaggressions is to recognize when a microaggression has occurred and what message it may be sending. The context of the relationship and situation is critical.** Below are common themes to which microaggressions attach.

THEMES	MICROAGGRESSION EXAMPLES	MESSAGE
<p>Alien in One's Own Land When Asian Americans, Latino Americans and others who look different or are named differently from the dominant culture are assumed to be foreign-born</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Where are you from or where were you born?" • "You speak English very well." • "What are you? You're so interesting looking!" • A person asking an Asian American or Latino American to teach them words in their native language. • Continuing to mispronounce the names of students after students have corrected the person time and time again. Not willing to listen closely and learn the pronunciation of a non-English based name. 	<p>You are not a true American.</p> <p>You are a perpetual foreigner in your own country.</p> <p>Your ethnic/racial identity makes you exotic.</p>
<p>Ascription of Intelligence Assigning intelligence to a person of color or a woman based on his/her race/gender</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "You are a credit to your race." • "Wow! How did you become so good in math?" • To an Asian person, "You must be good in math, can you help me with this problem?" • To a woman of color: "I would have never guessed that you were a scientist." 	<p>People of color are generally not as intelligent as Whites.</p> <p>All Asians are intelligent and good in math/science.</p> <p>It is unusual for a woman to have strong mathematical skills.</p>
<p>Color Blindness Statements that indicate that a White person does not want to or need to acknowledge race.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "When I look at you, I don't see color." • "There is only one race, the human race." • "America is a melting pot." • "I don't believe in race." • Denying the experiences of students by questioning the credibility /validity of their stories. 	<p>Assimilate to the dominant culture.</p> <p>Denying the significance of a person of color's racial/ethnic experience and history.</p> <p>Denying the individual as a racial/cultural being.</p>
<p>Criminality/Assumption of Criminal Status A person of color is presumed to be dangerous, criminal, or deviant based on his/her race.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A White man or woman clutches his/her purse or checks wallet as a Black or Latino person approaches. • A store owner following a customer of color around the store. • Someone crosses to the other side of the street to avoid a person of color. • While walking through the halls of the Chemistry building, a professor approaches a post-doctoral student of color to ask if she/he is lost, making the assumption that the person is trying to break into one of the labs. 	<p>You are a criminal.</p> <p>You are going to steal/you are poor, you do not belong.</p> <p>You are dangerous.</p>
<p>Denial of Individual Racism/Sexism/Heterosexism A statement made when bias is denied.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I'm not racist. I have several Black 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? I can't believe it." 	<p>I could never be racist because I have friends of color.</p> <p>Your racial oppression is no different than my gender oppression. I can't be a racist. I'm like you.</p> <p>Denying the personal experience of individuals who experience bias.</p>
<p>Myth of Meritocracy Statements which assert that race or gender does not play a role in life successes, for example in issues like faculty demographics.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I believe the most qualified person should get the job." • "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." 	<p>People of color are given extra unfair benefits because of their race.</p> <p>The playing field is even so if women cannot make it, the problem is with them.</p> <p>People of color are lazy and/or incompetent and need to work harder.</p>