

Examples of Racial Microaggressions

Theme	The Microaggression	The Message
<i>Alien in one's own land</i> When Asian Americans, Latino Americans, and other people of color are assumed to be foreign-born.	"Where are you from?" "Where were you born?" "You speak good English." Asking to be taught words in another language.	You are not American. You are a foreigner.
<i>Ascription of Intelligence</i> Assigning intelligence to a Person of Color on the basis of their race.	"You are a credit to your race." "You are so articulate." Asking an Asian American to help with a math or science problem.	People of Color are generally not as intelligent as Whites. It is unusual for someone of your race to be intelligent. All Asians are intelligent and good in Math and the Sciences.
<i>Color Blindness</i> Statements that indicate that a White person does not want to acknowledge race.	"When I look at you, I don't see color." "America is a melting pot." "There is only one race, the human race."	Denying a Person of Color's racial and ethnic experiences. Assimilate / acculturate to the dominant culture. Denying the individual as a racial / cultural being.
<i>Criminality – Assumption of Criminal Status</i> A Person of Color is presumed to be dangerous, criminal, or deviant on the basis of their race.	A White man or woman clutching their purse or checking their wallet as a Black or Latino approaches or passes. A store owner following a customer of color around the store. A White person waits to ride the next elevator when a Person of Color is on it.	You are a criminal. You are going to steal. You are poor. You do not belong here. You are dangerous.
<i>Denial of individual racism</i> A statement made when Whites deny their racial biases.	"I'm not a racist. I have several Black friends." "As a woman, I know what you go through as a racial minority."	I am immune to racism because I have friends of color. Your racial oppression is no different than my gender oppression. I can't be a racist. I'm like you.
<i>Myth of meritocracy</i> Statements which assert that race does not play a role in life successes	"I believe the most qualified person should get the job." "Everyone can succeed in this society, if they work hard enough."	People of Color are given extra, unfair benefits because of their race. People of Color are lazy and / or incompetent and need to work harder.

Theme	The Microaggression	The Message
Pathologizing Cultural Values / Communication Styles The notion that the values and communication styles of the dominant / White culture are ideal	Asking a Black person: “Why do you have to be so loud / animated? Just calm down.” To an Asian or Latino person: Why are you so quiet? We want to know what you think. Be more verbal.” Speak up more.” Dismissing an individual who brings up race / culture in work / school setting.	Assimilate to dominant culture. Leave your cultural baggage outside.
Second-Class Citizen Occurs when a White person is given preferential treatment as a consumer over a person of color.	Person of color mistaken for a service worker. Having a taxi cab pass a person of color and pick up a White passenger Being ignored at a store counter as attention is given to the White customer behind you. “You people ...”	People of Color are servants to Whites. They couldn’t possibly occupy high-status positions. You are likely to cause trouble and / or travel to a dangerous neighborhood. Whites are more valued customers than People of Color. You don’t belong. You are a lesser being.
Environmental Microaggressions Macro-level microaggressions, which are more apparent on systemic and environmental levels.	A college or university with buildings that are all names after White heterosexual upper class males. Television shows and movies that feature predominantly White people, without representation of People of Color. Overcrowding of public schools in communities of color. Overabundance of liquor stores in communities of color.	You don’t belong. You won’t succeed here. There is only so far you can go. You are an outsider. You don’t exist. People of Color don’t / shouldn’t value education. People of color are deviant.
How to Offend Without Really Trying	“Indian giver.” “That’s so gay.” “She welshed on the bet.” “I jewed him down.” “That’s so White of you.” “You people ...” “We got gypped.” Imitating accents or dialects of others.	

Adapted from: Wing, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, Esquilin (2007). Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Implications for Clinical Practice. American Psychologist, 62, 4, 271-286

Silence Breakers for Whites in Cross-racial Discussions

These “Silence Breakers” are suggested openings to address two common challenges for whites in cross-racial discussions:

1. They speak to the fear of losing face, making a mistake, or not being able to manage impressions that often prevent whites from authentic engagement;
2. They engender a stance of curiosity and humility that counters the certitude many whites have regarding their racial perspectives.

Using these phrases in conversations tends to open, rather than close, discussion and connection.

1. I’m really nervous/scared/uncomfortable to say this... and/but...
2. From my experience/perspective as (identity)...
3. I’m afraid I may offend someone, and please let know if I do, but...
4. It feels risky to say this and/but...
5. I’m not sure if this will make any sense, and/but...
6. I just felt something shift in the room. I’m wondering if anyone else did.
7. It seems like some people may have had a reaction to that. Can you help me understand why?
8. Can you help me understand whether what I’m thinking right now might be problematic?
9. This is what I understand you to be saying... Is that accurate?
10. I am unsure of how we are using the term... in this discussion...?
11. I have always heard / thought that.... What are your thoughts on that?
12. Can you help me understand ...?
13. Is... a good example of what ... is saying?
14. How would you respond to... from an anti-racist framework?
15. I am having a “yeah but.” Can you help me work through it?
16. This perspective is new to me, but I’m wondering if it is accurate to say that...?
17. I’m still working through / processing this, but right now where I am at is...
18. Such and such point was made. I am still thinking through that and trying to make sense of it for myself.

Devveloped by Anika Nailah &
Robin DiAngelo, 2013

