

Topic: Understanding Microaggressions

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- Microaggressions are:
 - Incidents in which someone accidentally (or purposely) makes an offensive statement or asks an insensitive question
 - Verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults to the target person or group
- Happen casually, frequently, and often without any harm intended, in everyday life
- Seem small; but compounded over time, they can have a harmful impact on an employee's experience, physical health, and psychological well-being
- Research suggests that subtle forms of interpersonal discrimination like microaggressions are as harmful as more-overt expressions of discrimination
- Microaggressions occur because they are outside the level of conscious awareness of the perpetrator
- The best solution to decrease microaggressions is to increase awareness, insist people stop committing them, and calling out those who do.

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Examples of Verbal and Non-Verbal Microaggressions

Microaggression	Theme	Implicit Bias/Context	Impact/Message
"Where are you from?" "Where were you born?" "You speak good English."	<i>Alien in own land</i>	When Asian Americans and Latino Americans are assumed to be foreign-born	You are not American. You are a foreigner
"You are a credit to your race." "You are so articulate." Asking an Asian person to help with a Math or Science problem.	<i>Ascription of Intelligence</i> - Assigning intelligence to a person of color on the basis of their race.	People of color are generally not as intelligent as Whites. All Asians are intelligent and good in Math / Sciences.	It is unusual for someone of your race to be intelligent.
"When I look at you, I don't see color." "America is a melting pot." "There is only one race, the human race." "All lives matter"	<i>Color Blindness</i> - Statements that indicate that a White person does not want to acknowledge race	Since race doesn't have an affect on me (white person) I can't see why we can't all get along.	Denying a person of color's racial / ethnic experiences. You must Assimilate / acculturate to the dominant culture. Denying the individual as a racial / cultural being.
A White man or woman clutching their purse or checking their wallet as a Black or Latinx person approaches or passes. A store owner following a customer of color around the store. Crossing the street when a person of color approaches.	<i>Criminality</i> – Assumption of criminal status on the basis of race	A person of color is presumed to be dangerous, criminal, or deviant on the basis of their race.	You are a criminal. You are going to steal You are poor You do not belong You are dangerous.

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"Don't you want a family?" "Have you ever had real sex?" "So who is the man in the relationship?"	<i>Heteronormativity</i>	That people who aren't in heterosexual relationships are unable to have a family. Assumptions that they all relationships must fall along heteronormative lines.	Your relationship isn't real. You can't be fulfilled. You must pick a side.
"You're going to stay home with the kids right?" "What she's trying to say is..." "You should smile more"	<i>Sexism</i>	That women must fall into gendered roles from the 1950's. That male affect, presence, behavior is the standard and everything else is contrary to.	You shouldn't be working. You're a failure as a woman. You're not good enough. You're not being listening to and valued.
"You have a mental illness, but you seem so normal" "Why don't you just get out of bed and get some fresh air"	<i>Invalidation of Severity of Mental Illness</i>	That mental illness looks/behaves a certain way. General misunderstanding of the effects that mental illness can have.	You must not be hurting that much. It must not be that bad. Why can't you get over this?
"Oh! I wouldn't think <i>you</i> live here" "Oh you haven't been to Europe, you really should go"	<i>Classism</i>	Assuming someone doesn't live in a certain neighborhood because of how they look, talk, act. Assuming that everyone has means to travel	You don't belong. You're not going to lead a fulfilling life.
Washington Redskins Robert E. Lee High School College rooms and hallways with pictures of predominantly White heterosexual upper class males	<i>Environmental</i>	Assumes that harm cannot take place by names or visuals. Assumes that	You don't belong. You're not welcome here.

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✓ Topic Talking Points

- Why microaggressions matter:
 - They derail or distract and make the environment uncomfortable
 - Although they're seemingly small and sometimes innocent offenses, can take a real psychological toll on the mental health of their recipients
 - Can affect a work environment, making it more hostile and less validating

✓ Discussion Questions

- Have you experienced microaggressions and how did that impact you?
- How can we at NASA ensure microaggressions are not part of our culture?

✓ List of Resources and POC's

- Harvard Business Review article <https://hbr.org/2020/07/when-and-how-to-respond-to-microaggressions>
- Example of Verbal and Nonverbal Microaggressions <https://www.cambridgema.gov/-/media/Files/officeofthemayor/2019/deepmicroaggressionsworksheetfilledin012619.pdf>
- Office of Diversity & Equal Opportunity (ODEO): Visit Building 1100, Room 11147, call 688-1037, or email ssc-odeo@mail.nasa.gov
- ODEO website: <https://www.nssc.nasa.gov/eo>
- NASA ODEO website <https://odeo.hq.nasa.gov/>