



Micro-Aggressions Fact Sheet

What Are Micro-Aggressions?

- Commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward minorities.
- Actually, they are macro-aggressions and emerge from the social conditioning of members of a society that ranks and interiorizes folks because of their identities.
- Pervasive, conscious or unconscious, subtle or stunning, often automatic, verbal or non-verbal exchanges which are 'put-downs' of individuals by offenders.
- The chief vehicles for pro-discriminatory behaviors.
- Perceived as innocuous and harmless, and perceived as free speech.
- Intentionally discriminatory attacks or avoidance behaviors.
- Communicated through verbal, non-verbal and environmental channels (awkward silences, failure to make eye contact, closed body contact).
- Often marked by a loss of impulse control.
- Come from the social conditioning of whites.

Micro-Aggressions Are Categorized in These Ways:

- *Micro-assaults* are frequently compared to the old-fashioned concept of racism, because both consist of overt, racially charged, intentional discriminatory attacks or avoidant behaviors.
- *Micro-insults* are communications that convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person's racial heritage.
- *Micro-invalidations* are communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of minority persons.

Examples of Micro-Aggressions

- Alien in one's own land
- Ascription of intelligence
- Color blindness and white privilege
- Criminality & assumption of criminal status
- Denial of individual racism
- Myth of meritocracy
- Pathologizing cultural values & communication styles
- Second-class status
- Environmental examples

What Is the Big Deal About Micro-Aggressions?

- If left to fester, micro-aggressions can cause serious psychological and physical damage
- They create tremendous stress (both conscious and unconscious)
- They justify inequality
- They reinforce stereotypes
- They send societal cues that signal devaluation of social group identities
- They reinforce destructive power dynamics
- They create micro-inequities
- They firm up and legitimize hidden or unintentional bias
- They create a hostile and invalidating climate for marginalized groups, and sap energies
- Cumulatively they can result in depression, frustration, anger, rage, loss of self-esteem, and anxiety
- They create disparities in law, health care, education, legislation, and other spaces in society
- They are not free speech

What Are the Dilemmas of Detecting Micro-Aggressions?

- Did the person engage in micro-aggressive behavior or did the “victim” misinterpret the action?
- The perpetrator is usually sincere in the belief that they acted without bias.
- How does one prove a micro-aggression has taken place and how do you make the perpetrator realize that this event has occurred?
- These unintentional expressions of bias often appear “invisible.”
- There is a perceived minimal harm of micro-aggressions.
- When the perpetrator is confronted, they often accuse the victim of overreacting.
- The perpetrator and victim are most likely to “let it go,” thereby allowing the behavior to persist.
- Problems result when the cumulative product of “letting it go” creates a negative climate, with emotions of self-doubt, frustration, and isolation.
- Catch-22 of responding to the micro-aggression, because:
- One might experience self-doubt: “Did what I think happened really happen? Was this a deliberate or intentional act? How should I respond? Should I sit and stew or confront? What are the consequences? Should I drop the matter?”
- One might fall into the “it won’t change anything anyway” trap.
- Calling out micro-aggressions may encourage a non-response.
- It may lead to denying an individual’s experiential reality.
- Responding in anger is likely to encourage negative responses.
- “Damned if you do, damned if you don’t.”

What Are Some Strategies One Can Use to Effectively Deal with Micro-Aggressions?

- Understand yourself as a racial/cultural being by making the “invisible, visible”
- Accept that due to cultural conditioning, you have inherited the biases, fears, stereotypes, of your ancestors
- Accept that you will project micro-aggressions
- Watch for emotional roadblocks:
- “I feel guilty, I could be doing more.”

- "I feel angry; I don't like to feel I'm wrong."
- "I feel defensive: Why blame me, I do enough already?"
- "I feel turned off; I have other priorities in life."
- "I feel helpless, the problem is too big, what can I do?"
- "I feel afraid."
- Control the process and not the content in a difficult dialogue
- Intervene in the process rather than the content
- Help individuals see the difference between intention and impact
- Move to the feeling tone level of the communication
- When a difficult dialogue occurs and an impasse seems to have been reached, do not allow it to be brewed in silence
- Interrupt micro-aggressions when witnessing them
- Educate others about micro-aggressions to be able to identify and stop them
- Understand that everyone will commit blunders or make insensitive statements. **The issue is how you recover, not how you cover up**

How to Deal with A Microaggression If You Are the Victim

- Decide if you are able to respond with patience and compassion
- If not, determine the cost to you
- If so, call out the microaggression by saying that the statement or perception is problematic and hurtful
- Ask the person who made the microaggression if they are able to hear why this act or statement was a microaggression
- Explain the MA with an intent to have the person understand and prevent the microaggression from happening again
- Focus on explaining the impact and avoid debating the intent
- Tell the person how they can restore your relationship and recover from the MA
- Allow the person who committed the MA the opportunity to learn and recover

How to Own the Microaggression If You Committed One

- Sense if there is a change in the relationship or atmosphere
- Ask if you have done or said something wrong
- Apologize
- Ask the victim to explain how this was a microaggression
- Compassionately listen with an intent to learn
- Don't focus on your intent, listen to the impact the microaggression had on the person
- Ask how you can make this right and make sure that you follow through with the instructions
- Learn more about this type and other MAs to avoid making similar mistakes