

# Microaggression Activity

## Part 1: Read aloud:

What are microaggressions? Microaggressions are brief, every day, verbal, behavioral and environmental exchanges, both unintentional and intentional, that send disparaging messages to individuals based on their group membership. Microaggressions can have a serious impact and should not be dismissed because of their brief or often unintentional nature. Researchers have linked continuous exposure of microaggressions to depression, anxiety-related symptoms, diminished psychological well-being and physical health.

Behavioral examples of microaggressions and possible hidden meanings behind them are:

- A white person grabs their purse or wallet as an African American or Latino approaches them. (This is an assumption of criminality.)
- A white individual waits to ride the next elevator when a person of color is on it. (This is also an assumption of criminality.)
- Mistaking a person of color as a service worker (Treating an individual as a second class citizen)

Verbal examples and possible hidden meanings are:

- “You are so articulate.” (Believing people of color are less intelligent than whites) • “I don’t see color.” (I don’t want to acknowledge race)
- “You speak great English.” (Assuming someone is foreign born)
- “I’m not racist. I have several black friends.” (Denial of any individual racism – because I have friends of color I can’t be racist)

**Exercise:** (5 minutes) One member reads the instructions aloud, then all members do the Microaggressions Worksheet.

**Instructions:** On your worksheet, draw a line connecting the statements in the first column to the possible interpretations in the second column. There may be multiple possible interpretations for each statement. Think about how these statements can be interpreted as disparaging remarks.

**Discuss:** (10 minutes)

- How did it feel to connect the statements to the possible interpretations?
- Did this exercise make you aware of any microaggressions you may have committed? If so, how does it feel?

**Read aloud:** It is important to acknowledge that everyone has committed or experienced microaggressions. Part of eliminating microaggressions from a normative place in our society is learning to recognize them and also admitting if you are guilty of using one. If you commit a microaggression and someone calls you on it, stop and listen to that individual. Do not dismiss someone when they feel a microaggression has occurred. Try and avoid becoming defensive. Instead, be open to discussing and clarifying the matter. Afterward, acknowledge your own cultural conditioning and biases which may have contributed to your actions and think about how to challenge those personal biases.

## Microaggressions Worksheet

Draw one or more lines connecting the statements in the first column to the possible interpretations in the second column. There may be multiple possible interpretations for each statement. Think about how these examples can be interpreted as disparaging remarks.

### Column A:

#### Statements

“Don’t be such a sissy.”

“Of course you have a bad relationship with your parents. You’re gay.”

“You speak English very well.”

“America is a melting pot.”

“I don’t see color.”

“I have Black friends, so what. I say isn’t offensive.”

“Everyone knows Blacks are more likely to shoplift.”

[A professor asks a Latina student in front of a class] “What do Latinas think about this situation?”

“That’s retarded.”

### Column B:

#### Possible Interpretations

Feminine traits are undesirable.

People with disabilities are less important, likeable or competent.

You don’t belong.

Being gay is unacceptable.

Your sexual orientation is your most important characteristic.

You are not man enough.

Your culture is your most defining feature.

People of your background are unintelligent

You look like a criminal.

I see you as your skin color