

# Learning about Power, Privilege and Oppression

## Microaggressions

Microaggressions reinforce white privilege and undermine a culture of inclusion.

"Microaggressions are small daily insults and indignities perpetrated against marginalized or oppressed people because of their affiliation with that marginalized or oppressed group. Microaggressions are more than just annoyances. The cumulative effect of these constant reminders that you are "less than" does real psychological damage."

As Derald W. Sue, Ph.D., a professor of psychology and education at Columbia University, notes: "In our research, we find that the impact of microaggressions are cumulative, causing major psychological harm." Some, including Dr. Ibram X. Kendi, argue that the term "microaggression" diminishes the cumulative harm of the abuse. **Microaggressions are, simply put, aggressions.**

Examples of Racist microaggressions:

- "Are you the first person in your family to graduate from college?"
- "Are you an affirmative action hire?"
- "Wow, you speak English really well."
- "You aren't like other black people."
- "I thought Asian people eat a lot of rice."
- "Why do black people give their kids such funny names?"
- "That's so ghetto."
- "Is that your real hair? Can I touch it?"
- "You listen to opera? I thought you were Black."
- "Wow, you're so articulate."
- "Your name is too difficult for me. Do you have a nickname?"
- "Where are you from? No... I mean, where are your parents from? I mean... where is your name from?"
- "Is the baby-daddy in the picture?"
- "You have really big eyes for an Asian person."
- "Why are you complaining? I thought Chinese people loved homework."

## Responding to Oppression in Our Work

Examples of Ableist microaggressions:

- "That's so lame."
- "You are so retarded."
- "That guy is crazy."
- "You're acting so bipolar today."
- "Are you off your meds?"
- "It's like the blind leading the blind."
- "My ideas fell on deaf ears."
- "She's such a psycho."
- "I'm super OCD about how I clean my apartment."
- "Can I pray for you?"
- "I don't even think of you as disabled."

Examples of Colonialist microaggressions:

- "That's so exotic."
- Common misconceptions about Africa, or African people: all Africans are poor, or all descendants of slavery, a misconception of Africa as a "single country" vs. diverse continent.
- The assumption that because someone is African, they have experienced poverty or lack of access to healthcare. (Read more on addressing this from [our "Call In, Call Out" guide](#).)

Additional reading and resources:

- ["Power, Privilege, and Everyday Life"](#), Multiple authors
- ["Microaggressions Matter"](#) by Simba Runyowa
- [Examples of Racial Microaggressions](#), University of Minnesota School of Public Health
- ["How and When to Respond to Microaggressions"](#) by Ella F. Washington, Alison Hall Birch, and Laura Morgan Roberts (Harvard Business Review)

For more resource and reading, see our [Anti-Oppression Reading and Discussion Resource List](#).