

Have I Ever Said That? Sensitivity at Work

Qing Meade, Diversity & Inclusion Librarian, qmeade@ewu.edu

Doris Munson, Access Services Librarian, dmunson@ewu.edu

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Libraries

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start something **big**

Agenda

- What is microaggression?
- Types of racial and gender microaggressions that can be encountered at work.
- Identify ways to respond to microaggressions.

What is a Microaggression?

“Microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, sexual-orientation, and religious slights and insults to the target person or group. Perpetrators are usually unaware that they have engaged in an exchange that demeans the recipient of the communication.”

- Derald Wing Sue (2010)

Source: Sue, D. W. (2010). *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Forms of Microaggression

- **Microassaults:** Conscious and deliberate, either subtle or explicit discriminatory actions on one's heritage or identity.
- **Microinsults:** Often unconscious communications that subtly convey rudeness and insensitivity that demean a person's heritage or identity.
- **Microinvalidations:** Often unconscious communications that subtly exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person's identity.

Source: Sue, D. W. (2010). *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Examples of Racial Microaggressions

Microaggression	Message
“You speak English really well”	Assuming different races are foreign-born.
“You are so articulate”	Assigning intelligence to someone based on one’s race.
“I am not racist, I have black friends”	Denying racial bias.
“Why don’t you celebrate Christmas?”	The notion that the dominant cultures are ideal.
“No, where are you REALLY from?”	Assuming different races are foreign-born.

Examples of Gender Microaggressions

Microaggression	Message
Labeling an assertive female manager as “bitch” while describing their male counterpart as “a forceful leader”	Women should be passive and allow men to be the decision-maker.
Mistaking a female physician wearing a stethoscope as a nurse	Women are less capable than men.
Asking the woman to get coffee during a meeting	Women are servants.

Consequences and Impacts of Microaggressions

- Impacts the mental and physical health of recipients
- Creates a hostile and intimidating work climate
- Perpetuates stereotypes
- Continues devaluation of certain social groups
- Lowers work productivity and problem solving abilities

Source: Multiple Studies

Microaggressions In Librarianship

- LIS Microaggressions Project: a space for those working in libraries, archives and information fields to share their experiences with microaggressions

<http://lismicroaggressions.tumblr.com/>

Can you teach me Spanish?

I have witnessed so many microaggressions in my current place of work - particularly rash assumptions about a person's cultural background. Most notably, one of my new(er) colleagues is of Mexican descent and was asked by our supervisor if s/he could teach s/he Spanish. This particular employee also receives random clippings from articles and journals about Latino-related news. If that isn't a microaggression, then I don't know what is.

....because you're Jewish....

I was asked to create a LibGuide on Holocaust Studies because I was one of the few Jewish librarians at my University...Why do they assume I am the expert on Judaism or Jewish history? I'm secular and my background is Sociology, not History.

Are You Something?

I have been called "ethnic," "exotic," and "festive" by my coworkers. I've also been asked if "I'm something," with something meaning a race other than white.

(Eastern European/Italian ancestry)

Don't like Christmas trees? Go back to your own country.

At the reference desk at a public college in New York City, we were discussing why our Chief Librarian no longer puts up the Christmas tree. One librarian told me how stupid it is that we no longer have a Christmas tree in the library. I told her I was secular and Jewish and it did not offend me. I did not care. She said, "I hope it does not offend you. The Christmas tree is "American" and not "Christian" and if you don't like it, then go back to your own country. I told her that in Canada (where I'm from), Christmas trees are popular there too.

Group Discussion



What is your observation/experience with microaggressions at work?



What Can We Do?

- Check your own biases - be open to discussing your own attitudes and biases and how they might have hurt others.
- Be open-minded to perspectives from people who are different from you in social identities.
- Be an ally – stand personally against all forms of bias and discrimination.



What Are Your Suggestions?

Suggested Readings

Books:

Dowd, A., & Bensimon, M. (2015). *Engaging the "race question" : Accountability and equity in U.S. higher education*. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.

Hollins, C., & Govan, M. (2015). *Diversity, equity, and inclusion : Strategies for facilitating conversations on race*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Nadal, K. (2013). *That's so gay! : Microaggressions and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community* (1st ed., Perspectives on sexual orientation and gender diversity series). Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.

Sue, D. (2010). *Microaggressions in everyday life : Race, gender, and sexual orientation*. Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley.

Sue, D. (2010). *Microaggressions and marginality : Manifestation, dynamics, and impact*. Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley.

DVDs:

Nadal, K., Rivera, David, Watkins, Nicole, & Microtraining Associates. (2012). *Microaggressions: The new face of discrimination*. Alexandria, VA: Microtraining.



THANK YOU!