

# Interrupting (Micro)aggressions

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NDEP Professional Development Webinar

Moderator: Alessandra Sarcona, EdD, RDN, CSSD

1

## About the Presenter/Disclosures

- Name pronunciation: Mree-dool
- Pronouns: She/her/hers
- Transplant
- Disclosures:
  - Financial: None
  - Employment: Iowa State University
    - Clinical Associate Professor
    - Director, Master of Professional Practice in Dietetics
  - Intercultural Development Inventory Qualified Administrator
- Academy Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Access (IDEA) Committee
  - Chair, 2023-2024
  - Vice-chair, 2022-2023
  - Member, 2021-Present
- Member, Oncology Nutrition DPG, IDEA committee, 2023-Present
- NDEP representative, Academy IDEA advisory group, 2020-2021
- Iowa State University Diversity, Equity, Inclusion committee
  - Chair, 2021-2023
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2

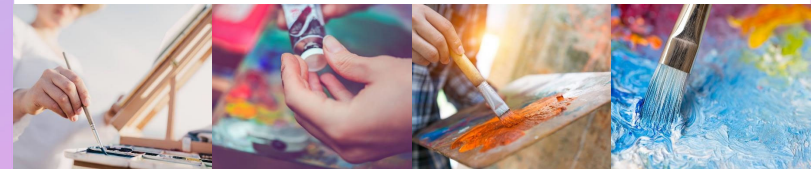
## Disclaimer

- Presentation content:
  - Reflects my perspective and opinions...not my employer or the Academy
  - Is not about politics or religion
  - May make you uncomfortable and question some long held beliefs

3

## Agenda

Defining Culture, (Micro)aggression  
Implications  
Interrupting (Micro)aggressions  
Resources



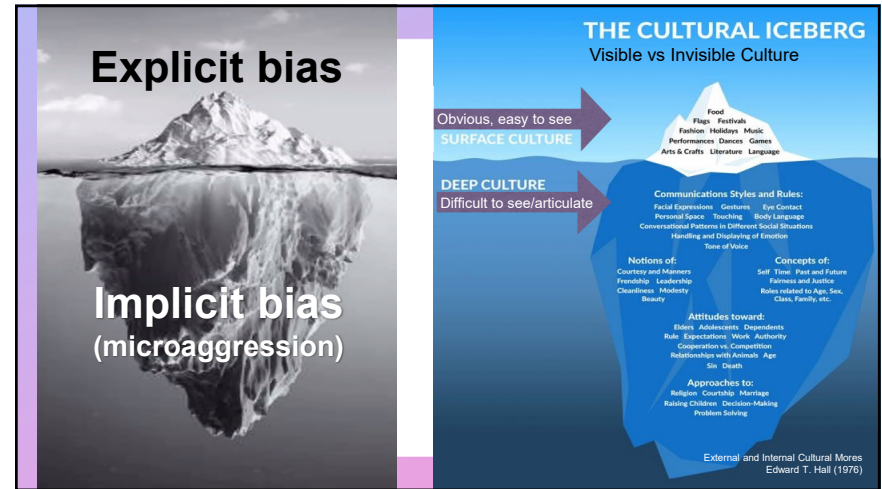
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## Learning Objectives

- At the end of this presentation, attendees will be able to
  - Recognize and respect cultural and racial diverse backgrounds to effectively interact and build meaningful relationships with others
  - Recognizes the importance of diversity, orientation, social and cultural norms that may have an impact on individuals, groups and plans of care.
  - Implements strategies and creates culturally sensitive and diverse resources to support diverse populations.

Performance indicators: 1.7.1, 1.7.2; 1.7.4, Level II

5



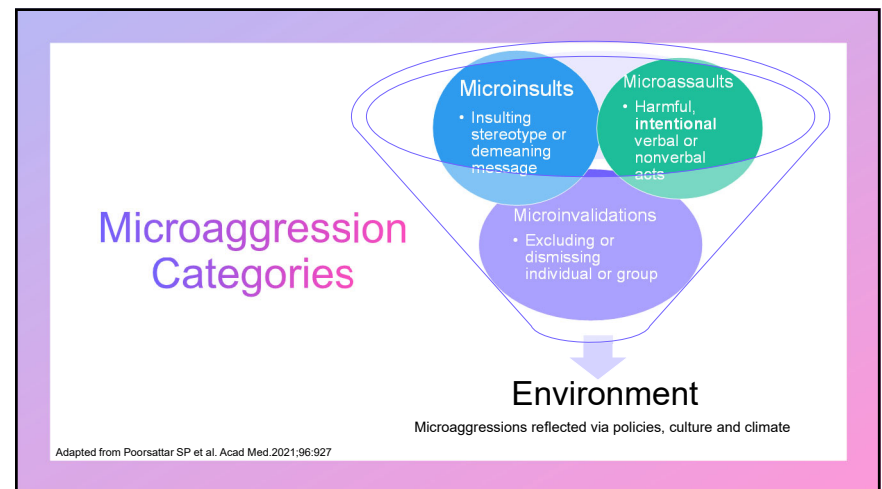
6

## Microaggression (Implicit bias)

- Everyday “slights” communicating aggression or undermining a person’s value based on marginalized social identities
  - People of color, women, LGBTQ+ and other marginalized groups
- Happen casually, frequently and often without intended harm?
- Often brief and occur in conversation or daily interactions
  - More than insensitive comments or insults. It’s not being “too sensitive”
  - Positive/negative statements
  - Exclusion
  - Action/Inaction
  - Environmental

Stekettee A et al. *Perspect Psychol Sci.* 2021;16(5): 1075-1098  
 Williams MT. *Perspect Psychol Sci.* 2020;15(1):3-26  
 Johnson NN & Johnson TL (2019). Navigating Micro-Aggressions Toward Women in Higher Education  
[University of California San Francisco unconscious bias training](#)

7



8

**TABLE 1. Microaggressions in science examples (inspired by Sue et al., 2007)** Harrison & Tanner DOI:10.1187/cbe.18-01-0011

Type	Microaggression	Message
Microassault	"It's so gay that we can't get this assay to work correctly."	Being gay is bad/abnormal.
	"Really, it's ridiculous that anyone believes in God, you can't be a real scientist if you believe in God."	Religious people cannot be scientists.
	"You should do med school back in Mexico, because I don't think people like you can succeed here."	Hispanic people cannot be successful in America.
Microinsult	"It's a shame you are having kids in graduate school, you could have really been something special!"	Women cannot have children and succeed in science.
	"I didn't do well, but, oh well, girls aren't supposed to be good at science anyway, ha-ha."	Women cannot be good at science.
	"Is there any way you could dial back the accent a bit? It really makes you sound unscientific."	You cannot have an accent and be a scientist.
	"You're the first Black person I have had in my bio classes, it must be hard being an athlete and a biology major."	African Americans are only in school for athletics.
Microinvalidation	"A plain white lab coat? But you're gay, so your lab coat should be fabulous!"	All gay people dress a certain way.
	"Race isn't an issue in our department, students just need to take better advantage of the resources on campus."	Students' racial experiences do not matter.
	"The book is expensive, but it shouldn't be an issue. Just have your parents pay for it."	Students' financial situations are not an issue in my class.
	"We only focus on males mating with females in this class because that is all we care about in genetics."	We do not care about nonheterosexual experiences.
	"I don't believe Dr. Doe was being sexist with his comments, you're blowing this out of proportion."	You are being too sensitive, and I understand your experience better than you.

## Categories of Racial, Gender, & Sexual-Orientation Microaggressions

1. Alien in one's own land
2. Ascription of intelligence
3. Color blindness
4. Criminality/assumption of criminal status
5. Myth of meritocracy
6. Assumption of abnormality
7. Second class citizen
8. Pathologizing cultural values communication style
9. Traditional gender role prejudicing and stereotyping
10. Sexual objectification
11. Use of sexist/heterosexist language
12. Denial of individual racism/sexism/heterosexism

Sue DW. Microaggressions in everyday life

Themes	Microaggressions	Message
<b>Alien In One's Own Land</b> When Asian Americans, Latinx and others who look different are named differently from the dominant culture are assumed to be foreign-born	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* "Where are you from?"</li> <li>* "Where were you born?"</li> <li>* "What are you?"</li> <li>* "How do you say XXX in your language?"</li> <li>* Continuing to mispronounce the names of students after students have corrected the person time and time again. Not willing to listen closely and learn the pronunciation of a non-English based name</li> </ul>	<p>You are not a true American.</p> <p>You are a perpetual foreigner in your own country.</p> <p>Your ethnic/racial identity makes you exotic.</p>
<b>Ascription of Intelligence</b> Assigning intelligence to a person of color or a woman based on his/her race/gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* "You are a credit to your race."</li> <li>* To an Asian person, "You must be good in math, can you help me with this EN/PN calculation?"</li> </ul>	<p>People of color are generally not as intelligent as Whites.</p> <p>All Asians are intelligent and good in math/science.</p>
<b>Color Blindness</b> Statements that indicate that a White person does not want to or need to acknowledge race	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* "America is a melting pot"</li> <li>* "When I look at you, I don't see color"</li> <li>* "There is only one race, the human race"</li> <li>* Denying the experiences of students by questioning the credibility/validity of their stories</li> </ul>	<p>Assimilate to the dominant culture.</p> <p>Denying the significance of a person of color's racial/ethnic experience and history.</p> <p>Denying the individual as a racial/cultural being.</p>
<b>Criminality/Assumption of Criminal Status</b> A person of color is presumed to be a dangerous, criminal, or deviant based on his/her race	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* A White man or woman clutches his/her purse or checks wallet as a Black or Latinx person approaches</li> <li>* While walking through the halls of the Chemistry building, a professor approaches a graduate student of color to ask if she/he is lost, making the assumption the person is trying to break in to one of the labs</li> </ul>	<p>You are a criminal.</p> <p>You are dangerous.</p>
<b>Denial of Individual Racism/Sexism/Heterosexism</b> A statement made when bias is denied	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* "I'm not a racist. I have several Black friends."</li> <li>* To a person of color: "Are you sure you were being followed in the store? I can't believe it"</li> </ul>	<p>I could never be a racist because I have friends of color.</p> <p>Denying the personal experience of individuals who experience bias.</p>

Adapted from Sue, David W. *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation*. Wiley & Sons, 2010.

Themes	Microaggressions	Message
<b>Myth of Meritocracy</b> Statements which assert that race or gender does not play a role in life successes, for example in issues like leadership or faculty demographics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* "I believe the most qualified person should be the job"</li> <li>* "Of course he'll match, he's black"</li> <li>* "Men and women have equal opportunities for achievement"</li> <li>* Everyone can succeed in this society, if they work hard enough."</li> </ul>	<p>People of color are given extra unfair benefits because of their race.</p> <p>The playing field is even so if women cannot make it, the problem is with them.</p> <p>People of color are lazy and/or incompetent and need to work harder.</p>
<b>Pathologizing Cultural Values / Communication Styles</b> The notion that the values and communication styles of the dominant/White culture are ideal/ "normal"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* To an Asian, Latinx or Native American: "Why are you so quiet? We want to know what you think. Be more verbal."</li> <li>* Asking a Black person: "Why do you have to be so loud/animated? Just calm down."</li> <li>* "Why are you always angry?" anytime race is brought up in the classroom discussion</li> <li>* Dismissing an individual who bring up race/culture in work/school setting</li> </ul>	<p>Assimilate to the dominant culture.</p> <p>Leave your cultural baggage outside.</p> <p>There is no room for difference.</p>
<b>Second-Class Citizen</b> Occurs when a target group member receives differential treatment from the power group; for example, being given preferential treatment as a consumer over a person of color	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Speaking to a patient about their nutrition therapy and a White doctor comes in the room and ignores that you are talking to the patient</li> <li>* Raising your voice or speak slowly when addressing a blind student</li> </ul>	<p>You do not belong. You are a lesser being.</p> <p>A person with a disability is defined as lesser in all aspects of physical and mental functioning</p>
<b>Sexist/Heterosexist Language</b> Terms that exclude or degrade women and LGBTQ persons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Being forced to choose Male or Female when documenting in the patient chart</li> <li>* Two options for relationship status: married or single</li> </ul>	<p>LGBTQ categories are not recognized.</p> <p>LGBTQ partnerships are invisible.</p>
<b>Traditional Gender Role Prejudicing and Stereotyping</b> Occurs when expectations of traditional roles or stereotypes are conveyed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* An advisor asks a female student if she is planning on having children while in their dietetic internship</li> <li>* Shows surprised when a feminine woman turns out to be a lesbian</li> <li>* Labeling an assertive female Program Director as a "b_____" while describing a male counterpart as a "forceful leader"</li> </ul>	<p>Women should be married during childbearing age because that is their primary purpose.</p> <p>Women are out of line when they are aggressive.</p>

Adapted from Sue, David W. *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation*. Wiley & Sons, 2010.

## Is this a Microaggression? Why/Whynot?

1. "Let me do that for you" (said to a person with disability)
2. "As a person of color, I am offended that you would imply that I'm racist/homophobic"
3. Wishing everyone Merry Christmas
4. Being forced to choose male or female in the medical record
5. You are so articulate

13

## (Micro)aggression

"There's nothing micro about micro aggressions" — Britt Hawthorne, anti-racist educator

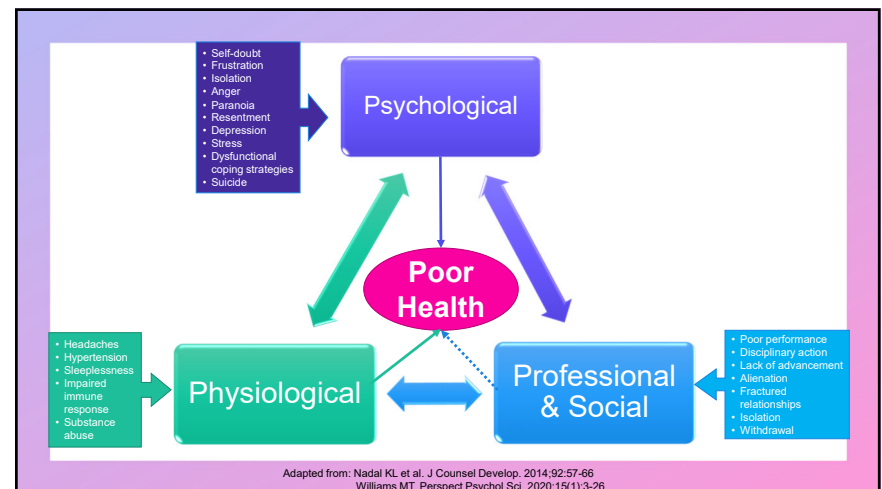
14

**You have no idea how long  
something you say can stay  
inside someone's mind.**

Scarlett Leithold

tinybuddha.com

15



16

## Interrupting (Micro)aggressions

17

## If You Experience A Microaggression

### Recognition

- Recognize that a microaggression occurred.
- Accept your feelings in the moment and talk to someone.
- Take care of yourself...practice healthy sleeping habits and self-care strategies, such as mindfulness.

### Critical Reflection

- Take a step back and think about how you want to respond. Consider the context. What is your relationship with the person? Decide how you want to respond.
- If possible, take the incident and turn it into a teaching/learning moment for the person who said the microaggression and the bystanders who did not address it.

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18

## If You Experience A Microaggression

### Appropriate Action

- Speak to the aggressor or ask a third party to do so if you feel uncomfortable and take action to protect yourself. Ask questions like:
  - "I know you didn't intend this, but when you said \_\_\_\_\_, I felt \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_."
  - "I noticed you have difficulty pronouncing my name. Can I help?"
  - "This/that makes me feel uncomfortable."
  - "I'd prefer you don't use language like that."
  - "I'm offended by that."

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19

## If You Witness A Microaggression

### Check-In

- Ask the party what happened, how the microaggression impacted them, and what help they may need.
- Share resources that may help them.

### Support

- Be responsive.
- Don't try to speak on behalf of the person who has experienced the microaggression, doing so can itself be a form of microaggression.

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20

## If You Witness A Microaggression

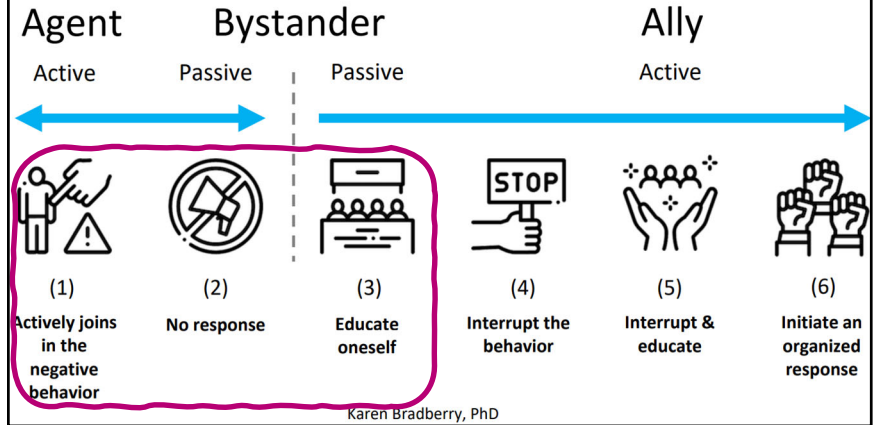
### Take Action

- Talk to the person who caused the harm privately
- Discuss intent behind their statement/action.
- Take the event as a learning experience; develop ways to promote fair inclusivity through meaningful circles and discussions.
- Engage in a proactive, nonreactive strategy called "microresistance" (Ganote et al., 2016; Irej, 2013; Rockquemore, 2016c). It involves four steps:
  - **Observe:** State in clear, unambiguous language what you see happening;
  - **Think:** Using "I" statements – express what you think or what you imagine others might be thinking;
  - **Feel:** Express your feelings about the situation; and
  - **Desire:** State what you would like to have happened

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21

## Bystander to Ally



22

## If You Cause A Microaggression

### Awareness

- Engage in self-reflection.
- Become aware of your own biases, anxieties, and motivations behind the harm.

### Acceptance

- Take accountability for your actions.
- Acknowledge the other person's hurt and apologize.
- Move away from shame, denial, and embarrassment.

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23

## If You Cause A Microaggression

### Action

- Engage in critical thinking.
- Seek help from others.
- Make things right by listening to the harmed.
  - "Can you help me understand what just happened?"
  - "I'm sorry that what I said hurt you. That wasn't my intention, but I *will be* intentional about trying to avoid hurting others in that way in the future."
- Educate yourself about your actions and take this as a learning experience to improve yourself.

### Reflection

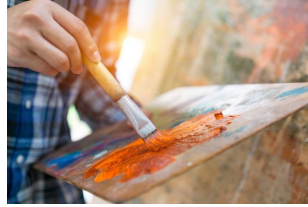
- Since you're more likely to give in to your biases when you're under pressure, practice ways to reduce stress and increase mindfulness, such as focused breathing.
- Pause and reflect to reduce reflexive actions.

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24

## Summary

- (Micro)Aggressions:
  - Are a real threat (in healthcare)
  - Are unprofessional
  - Violate code of ethics
  - Have significant and long lasting psychological, physical and emotional impact
- Educate yourself and Act!
- Become an ACTIVE ally!



25



Thank you

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26