



## Microaggressions: Considering the Impacts of What We Say and Do on the Lives of Others

### Introduction

Have you ever thought about how the things that you do and say might affect the people around you? You may have heard of the terms “discrimination” and “harassment.” These terms refer to things that people say or do that are generally intentionally offensive, meaning that someone says or does something on purpose to cause harm to someone else. There are also “little” forms of discrimination and harassment that exist. Lots of different people can encounter these “little” acts of discrimination and harassment on a daily basis.

### What are Microaggressions, really?

These “little” acts of discrimination or harassment are often called microaggressions. Microaggressions are often things that we say and do that cause harm to other people without us even realizing it. Microaggressions are often influenced by our implicit and explicit biases (see fact sheet XX for more information on implicit and explicit bias). It is not uncommon for people with disabilities to experience microaggressions.

Derald Sue Wing, a leader in the field of microaggression research, wrote that microaggressions are “micro” because they are occurring on a small person-to-person level and an “aggression” because they are behaviors that may or may not be intentionally harmful (2020, p. 7). To sum up: microaggressions are things that we say or do that we might not think are harmful, but they do cause harm to others.

### What do microaggressions look like when interacting with people with disabilities?

A common microaggression that people with disabilities face are sayings that make light of disability and/or use outdated words that can be offensive, such as “At least you got a place to sit,” in relation to an individual using a wheelchair, or, “they’re so retarded” (Pulrang, 2022). Other sayings that might make light of disability include comments like, “You don’t look disabled”, or “Ugh, I can’t read, I’m totally dyslexic” (“Disability Related Microaggressions,” n.d.)

### How to Address Microaggressions

It’s important to remember that we all have implicit bias, and many people who do or say things that are microaggressions are unaware of the effect they have on the people around them. One way to address microaggressions is to ask yourself: what bias do I have that might influence what I say and do? You can ask yourself: “Am I saying or doing things that might unintentionally cause harm to someone else?” Project Implicit of Harvard University has created the Implicit Association Test, and you can pick out a topic, such as disability, age, sexuality, and more to test your implicit biases about different categories. Another great way to start addressing microaggressions is with micro-affirmations to create a more inclusive, or welcoming, environment and prevent microaggressions (“Disability Related



Microaggressions,” n.d.). Micro-affirmations are little actions, or things that we say and do, that provide support in private and public to help other people feel included (Rowe, 2008). A good example of a micro-affirmation is turning captions on when you’re watching a movie or show with friends for someone who may be deaf or hard-of-hearing. If someone else says or does something that might be a microaggression and you would like to help prevent it from happening again, you can calmly



address the comment in private or public in a safe setting in a way that does not make the person feel as if they are being attacked. (Washington, 2022). Remember—we all have bias that influences what we say and do. If you feel comfortable talking to the person about what they said or did that hurt your feelings and caused intense emotions, then you could take into consideration the relationship you have with

them and address the comment or action with them. Are they easy to talk to, safe, understanding, or do you need extra support from someone (Washington, 2022)?

## Conclusion

Overall, microaggressions are things that we say and do that are harmful to others, but we may not realize it. However, we can take specific steps to prevent them and create safe living and working environments for everyone. We can help prevent microaggressions towards people with disabilities by thinking about how what we say and do affects the people around us, standing up for others when they experience microaggressions, and intentionally supporting others through micro-affirmations.

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## References

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