Recognizing Microaggressions: Am I Doing That?

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Speaker Disclosure

• Financial:
  – Dean of the College of Nursing and Health Sciences at the University of Vermont
  – Financial compensation from ASHA

• Nonfinancial:
  – ASHA SIG 14 affiliate
  – Member of National Black Association for Speech-Language and Hearing
We all have implicit biases and assumptions.

We are all shaped by our position within our society, which can vary greatly and in different ways.
"Individuals do not perpetuate microaggression in a vacuum but rather in a macro-context of power and privilege."

“They believe in the superiority of their values, worldview, and ways of being over all others’.”

The term *microaggression* was coined by Dr. Chester Pierce in 1978, who described them as “subtle, stunning, often automatic verbal and nonverbal ‘put-downs.’ ”

- Microaggressions are unintentional or intentional acts of:
  - Racism
  - Genderism
  - Sexism
  - Heterosexism
  - Classism
  - Ableism

[Sue & Spanierman, 2020]
The micro- part of the word means that they are interpersonal acts.

The -aggression part of the word means the behavior is harmful.

Microaggressions are NOT small, NOT harmless, and NOT benign.

Microaggressions hurt, assault, invalidate, and insult.

AuD Faculty

Met with a new AuD student in her first term.

She was feeling overwhelmed and isolated but was passionate about “giving back” to her community.

I suggested that she might feel more comfortable looking at a different field of study, something like education that would best serve her community.
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The student was African American. She had graduated valedictorian from her high school and magna cum laude from her undergrad CSD program.

We are often unaware that we have engaged in an exchange that may deeply demoralize another.
Microaggressions can be self-perpetuating.

When unchallenged, the behavior is seen as acceptable by those making microaggressions.

In groups, when unrecognized, these behaviors can create an isolating and hostile environment.

Repeated microaggressions can become microbullying.

Microbullying is repetitive and targeted.

Microbullying may be subtle to everyone except the person experiencing it.
How To Avoid Being a Microaggressor or Microbully

• “Learn from constant vigilance of that quiet voice in your head.”
  – That quiet voice that’s surprised when a person of color is the top achiever in their SLP courses.
  – That quiet voice that’s surprised when a junior faculty member, who is Hispanic, is awarded an external research grant with their first submission.
  – That quiet voice that says the two African American AuD students are in the program because the department wants more diversity, so they must have received scholarships.

(Anderson & Young, 2020)
“When you hear that voice, you can train yourself to question the voice’s assumptions and even to tell it that it’s wrong. The more often you do, the more your brain will listen and make fewer assumptions based on human categories.”

(Anderson & Young, 2020)

- Embrace learning about different cultures, perspectives, and sociocultural experiences.
- Strive to engage genuinely with people of different cultures and perspectives.
  - Do you have any friends whose cultures and perspectives are different from yours?
  - Ask a trusted friend about their marginalizing experiences.
- Don’t impose your personal values, morals, or beliefs on others.
- Show respect to all.

(Anderson & Young, 2020)
Resources

- Examples of Common Racial Microaggressions
  nortonism.tumblr.com/
- ASHA Voices: Ijeoma Oluo Talks Race, Conversation, and Microaggressions
  leader.pubs.asha.org/do/10.1044/asha-voices-ijeoma-oluo-talks-race-conversation-and-microaggressions/full/
- You’ve Been Called Out for a Microaggression. What Do You Do?
  hbr.org/2020/07/youve-been-called-out-for-a-microaggression-what-do-you-do?

Coming up next

We’ve explored the concept. In the next activity, we’ll review some examples.
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REVIEWING EXAMPLES

Today we’re celebrating unity at work and a new colleague, who is African American, came in with a natural hairstyle.

When I saw it, I told her I thought it was amazing. I reached out and touched her hair.

She seemed to pull back.
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I feel a sense of awkwardness now. I said her hair was beautiful. What’s the big deal?

What did I do? Did I commit a microaggression?

How could I think more about what I did and what is problematic?

When you touch someone or invade their personal space without asking, it’s disrespectful and dehumanizing. It also draws (potentially unwanted) attention and signals to them that they are different, a novelty.

“I’m really sorry, I don’t know what I was thinking. It was rude to touch your hair like that.”
The Accent

Last week, a parent expressed concerns over a colleague’s ability to help her child, citing her “Mexican” accent.

To avoid an awkward interaction, I removed the child from her caseload.

The Accent

What message am I sending to my colleague about her expertise and my confidence in her?

Am I Doing That?

What message does it send to the parent about my acceptance of their comments?
I was talking with the mother of a new child I’m working with, both of whom are African American.

The news happened to be on in the background and it was an awful story about police abuse.

I said how horrible I thought the story was, that America is a melting pot, and that I don’t see color.

She didn’t seem to appreciate it.

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What’s wrong about not wanting to see color?

What did I really mean when I said that? Does what I mean really match up with what I said?

How can I think more about this? What could be problematic with it?
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The Parent

Am I Doing That?

Saying that color doesn’t matter ignores the tremendous value of diversity and the reality that people of color have vastly different experiences in our society. It signals that I don’t care about their experience.

“I’m sorry I disregarded your experience as a person of color. I know racism exists and ignoring color doesn’t help. I need to educate myself on ways to really help.”

When Called Out

• Be available as a good listener and show empathy.
• Avoid being defensive or focusing on your intent.
• Acknowledge the impact and apologize.
• Reflect on how you can avoid similar mistakes in the future and grow as a person.
Coming up next

We’ve explored the concept and reviewed some examples. The next activities are your turn to plan, practice, and reflect.

What About Me?

Let’s assume that I have unintentionally committed microaggressions.

What have I said, or what could I imagine myself saying?

How would I talk about it?
Imagine that earlier today, you unintentionally committed a microaggression when interacting with a colleague and now realize it. What will you do or say? Plan/script out a practice conversation, that you’ll speak out loud to yourself, or have with a friend.

Spend 5 minutes at work putting your plan into action.

Acknowledging your microaggression and its impact could be tough. Think about the harm these statements can do. What kind of a colleague do you want to be? Find a friend at work you can practice with, or practice on your own somewhere at your workplace.
### ’s REFLECTIONS

**WHAT HAPPENED**

**WHAT WORKED WELL**

**IDEAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

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### SPEAKER TIPS

How did it go? What was harder to say? What was easier? How could you improve? Would practicing again help? Talking with a friend?

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### LEARNING ASSESSMENT

Spend 5 minutes to complete your learning assessment in the ASHA Learning Center.

You’ll have access to a certificate of completion immediately after you complete and submit your assessment.