

MICROAGGRESSIONS: WHY THEY'RE NOT SO MICRO

Seeking Understanding: My Sister, My Responsibility®

Developed by Dr. Suzette Walden Cole

Senior partner and co-founder of Cross Cultural Fraternal Advisors Initiative (CCFAI)

TIME | 60 minutes

Objectives:

- Understand what microaggressions are and how implicit bias plays into them.
- Recognize the ways microaggressions occur and the impact on those targeted.
- Explore ways to address microaggressions.

Group size:

- The program is best facilitated with a group of fewer than 150 members.
- If your group has more than 150 members, we suggest running two or more sessions (either separately or concurrently) to cultivate a more conducive learning environment.

Setup:

- Choose a space where the group can sit and face the facilitator comfortably.
- Use a room without fixed furniture and with an open space in front.
- It is best to reserve a room where groups of two to three people can work comfortably throughout the workshop.
- You will play a PowerPoint presentation during the workshop, so you will need to connect a laptop to a projector and screen or open the presentation from a web browser.
- Confirm you can amplify sound. You may need a mic depending on the space and your ability to project. Using a mic is the most inclusive option in case of unknown hearing impairments.
- Make a copy of the “Microaggressions: Why They’re not so Micro” handout for each participant.
- It is preferable to have a remote to change the PowerPoint slides.

Preparation:

- Reflect on personal experiences with microaggressions both as a perpetrator and target.
- Think about the ways that these concepts show up on campus and in life for members of the chapter.
- Familiarize yourself with the shared language definitions and the concepts in the Genuine Conversations and Power and Privilege workshops.
- Consider the areas where you and/or the Executive Committee officers think the chapter has work to do and/or any incidents that may have occurred on campus.
- There are six workshops in the *Seeking Understanding* component of *My Sister, My Responsibility*. We recommend facilitating the workshops in this order: In My Sister’s Shoes, Personal and Social Identity, Genuine Conversations, Cultural Appropriation, Microaggressions, Unpacking Power and Privilege.

Materials needed:

- Projector and screen
- PowerPoint

- “Microaggressions: Why They’re not so Micro” handout
- Flip chart paper and markers

References:

- Microaggressions in Everyday Life (4 minutes): Derald Wing Sue, professor of psychology and education at Columbia Teachers College, talks about and provides examples of racial and gender microaggressions, including techniques for addressing them.
– <https://youtu.be/BJL2P0JsAS4>
- Nadal, K. L., Skolnik, A., & Wong, Y. (2012). Interpersonal and systemic microaggressions toward transgender people: Implications for counseling. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, 6, 55-82.
- Nadal, K. L., Wong, Y., Issa, M.A., Meterko, V., Leon, J., & Wideman, M. (2011). Sexual orientation microaggressions: Processes and coping mechanisms for lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, 5, 21-46. doi:10.1080/15538605.2011.554606
- O’Keefe, V.M., Wingate, L. R., Cole, A.B., Hollingsworth, D.W., & Tucker, R.P. Seemingly harmless racial communications are not so harmless: racial microaggressions lead to suicidal ideation by way of depression symptoms. *Suicide Life Threat Behavior*. 2014 Dec 30 : 10.1111/sltb.12150. Published online 2014 Dec 30. doi: 10.1111/sltb.12150
- Yoon, H. (2020, March 3). How to Respond to Microaggressions. *New York Times*.
- Yosso, T. J., Smith, W. A., Ceja, M., & Solórzano, D. G. (2009). Critical race theory, racial microaggressions, and campus racial climate for Latina/o undergraduates. *Harvard Educational Review*, 79:4, 659-690.
– <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.79.4.m6867014157m707l>
- Young, K., Anderson, M., & Stewart, S. (2015). Hierarchical Microaggressions in Higher Education. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 8: 1, 61-71.
– <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038464>

INTRODUCTION | 6 minutes

The facilitator should introduce him/her/themselves, welcome and thank participants for attending, and share why they are excited to lead this session and the identities they feel comfortable revealing to the group.

FACILITATOR TIP

Expand on the objectives as a quick preview of what is to come.

Share:

- Let's start with talking about why we're here today.
- As we engage together today, I want you to reflect on how this aligns with our Seeking Understanding that We Might Gain True Wisdom Key Value.
- As we know from our *Creed*, Seeking Understanding that We Might Gain True Wisdom means we are open to new ideas and perspectives, we seek out opportunities to interact with and learn from people of different backgrounds, and we discuss different values and beliefs in a comfortable manner.
- While there may be times today that our conversation feels uncomfortable, remember we are sisters and we are all here to learn and gain a deeper understanding of our values.
- With that, I want to share some of our objectives for this workshop.

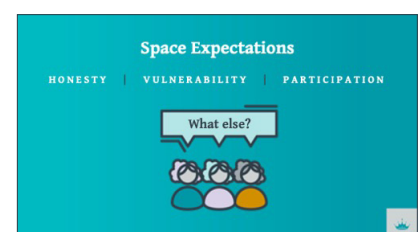
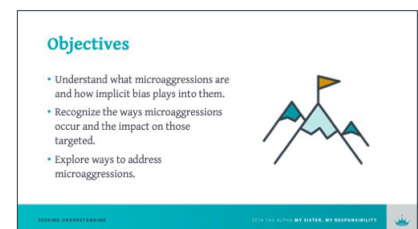
Read the objectives on the PowerPoint.

Ask:

- Why are these objectives important to us as a chapter, as sisters and as a community?

Thank volunteers who share. Be sure to touch on the following:

- These objectives ground us in the Seeking Understanding that We Might Gain True Wisdom Key Value. Along with furthering our growth in one of our Nine Key Values, these conversations allow us to further develop Belonging, one of ZTA's Five Areas of Sisterhood.
- For us to grow as a chapter and as sisters, it is important to take the time to understand each other in a deeper way.
- Beyond impacting our sisterhood, having a better understanding of identities strengthens our empathy and compassion for everyone we meet.
- Beyond talking about why we are here, we should set some common expectations for our time together today.
- We're talking about microaggressions. This topic can be tough to talk about because we all have had different experiences that contributed to our identity development.



- Honesty and vulnerability are important. This workshop is only effective when you participate. The more we share our personal stories, the more experiences we can learn from; but more importantly, this knowledge gives us a greater understanding of each other.
- Even though I am presenting, I will also share my story with honesty and vulnerability.

Discuss:

- What are expectations we have of each other as we navigate the session together?

FACILITATOR TIP

Give them time to process. Count to at least ten before you fill the potential silence in the space.

Be sure to touch on the following that expand beyond honesty and vulnerability:

- Speak from the first-person (“I”) perspective.
- Listen actively.
- Respect silence.
- Share your thoughts, even if you don’t have the right words.
- Uphold confidentiality. Treat the candor of others as a gift. Assume that personal identities, experiences and perspectives shared in this space are confidential unless you are given permission to share them.
- Lean into discomfort. Learning happens on the edge of our comfort zones. Push yourself to be open to new ideas and experiences, even if they seem uncomfortable.
- Participating in this workshop should help us feel more confident in the journey of seeking understanding. We want to start today’s workshop with ensuring we have a common language.

Distribute the handout. Refer to PowerPoint slide with definitions.

- Now that we have some group definitions, let’s begin exploring power, how it shows up, and the ways it impacts our lives and those around us.

WHAT IS A MICROAGGRESSION? | 12 minutes

Share:

- The term “microaggression” was first proposed by Dr. Chester M. Pierce in 1970 to describe insults and the dismissive behaviors he witnessed directed towards Black Americans. Dr. Derald Wing Sue expanded on this concept to include other culturally marginalized

Shared Language

- **Belonging:** Desire to form and maintain at least a minimum quality of lasting, positive and significant interpersonal relationships where one can be authentic and a part of something bigger than themselves.
- **Bias:** A preference for or prejudice against a person or group of people.
- **Microaggression:** Term used for brief and commonplace verbal, behavioral or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative prejudicial attitudes and results toward any group, particularly culturally marginalized groups.
- **Understanding:** The ability to empathetically and systematically hear across of others’ experiences.
- **Inclusion:** Creating an environment of open participation from all individuals with different ideas and perspectives where everyone feels they have a voice, and feel validated.
- **Intent vs. Impact:** A concept applied typically when there is a negative outcome or experience. Intent is a critical aspect of our actions, and it does not negate the impact to ourselves or another whether intentional or unintentional, just because the intent behind a statement or scenario is innocuous does not mean the impact is not harmful.

SHARON COOPER/STANFORD | LET’S TALK ABOUT MY DATA, MY RESPONSIBILITY

What is a microaggression?



SHARON COOPER/STANFORD | LET’S TALK ABOUT MY DATA, MY RESPONSIBILITY

groups. Let's listen as Dr. Sue explains microaggressions in this PBS News Hour interview conducted in response to the incidents at the University of Missouri in 2015.

Advance slide. Video should automatically play.

Share instructions:

- Find someone who you haven't talked to in a while or do not know well. Once you find your partner, determine who is going to share first. Discuss the questions on the slide and listen for the "switch" at the halfway point.
- You will each have three minutes to share.

Give participants six to seven minutes to share their stories. Walk around to different people to check on the progress of participants throughout the activity. Remind the participants to raise their hand if they are able or call out if they have any questions.

After three minutes, announce that it is time to switch so the other partner can share their responses to the questions. Give the participants a one-minute warning.

Discuss:

- Does anyone want to share their takeaway?
- Specifically, what additional groups of people did you identify as possible targets of microaggressions?
- How does this knowledge help us form a stronger sisterhood?

Allow for three to four responses.

EXPLORING BIAS | 7 minutes

FACILITATOR TIP

Remember, you are not expected to be the expert on this topic. If you get a question you don't know the answer to, offer that it is a good question and you will be happy to find out.

Share:

- Discussing microaggressions requires us to explore bias and self-reflect. Talking about microaggressions can be challenging. It may be triggering for some people or result in feelings of discomfort.
- Explicit and implicit bias are at the core of microaggressions. Sometimes when we hear the term "bias," we think that "good" people are unbiased; we are "good" people, so we work to be unbiased as we navigate the world. The truth is we all have biases.

Read Dr. Derald Wing Sue's quote on the slide.

 **Play video in PowerPoint.**

THINK | PAIR | SHARE

- Find a partner.
- What stood out to you from the video?
- In addition to race, what groups of people are possible targets of microaggressions?
- You will each have **three minutes** to share your thoughts.

YOUNG CONSTITUTIONS | LET'S GO! LEARN BY DOING MY RESPONSIBILITY

What role does bias play in committing microaggressions?



YOUNG CONSTITUTIONS | LET'S GO! LEARN BY DOING MY RESPONSIBILITY

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All of us are socialized into the society, and it really is the height of arrogance or naiveté to think that any of us are immune from inheriting biases that are deeply embedded in this society and culture. They come out in ways that we're not aware of.

DR. DERALD WING SUE

YOUNG CONSTITUTIONS | LET'S GO! LEARN BY DOING MY RESPONSIBILITY

Discuss:

- What do we think about this quote?
- Are there any examples we can think of where we see bias play out on campus? In the community?
- What are the differences between implicit and explicit bias?

Allow for three to four responses to the question(s) posed.

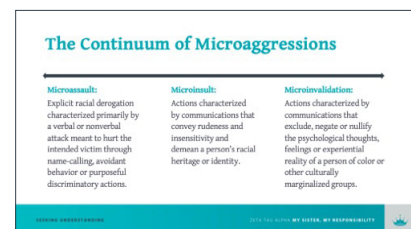
- If we think of bias like an iceberg, then explicit bias is the part above the water, or what we can see and are consciously aware exists. Implicit bias is the part that is under the water.

Walk through the difference between explicit and implicit bias. If needed, expand on these terms as follows. Examples of explicit bias include hate speech, discrimination as a result of deliberate thought, etc..

Implicit bias is triggered through rapid and automatic mental associations we make between people/ideas/objects and the attitudes and stereotypes we hold.

- Neuroscience tells us that implicit, or unconscious, bias happens because our brains take shortcuts all the time. In most instances, these shortcuts are positive because they save us energy and time. However, considering the ways privilege and our lived experiences show up, it is possible for implicit bias to affect our judgment and how we view others negatively.
- This level of consciousness and unconscious connects with how Dr. Sue describes the continuum of microaggressions from a microassault that occurs at a conscious level to a microinvalidation that occurs at an unconscious level.

Walk through the continuum of microaggressions, using the slide for reference.



MICROAGGRESSIONS IN EVERYDAY LIFE | 11 minutes

Share instructions:

- Now that we recognize the relationship between bias and microaggressions, the fact that people can commit microaggressions and not recognize their behaviors or language as problematic makes more sense. Let's tackle how they show up in everyday life as a group.
- As we delve deeper, we may have to confront some past harms we committed. Stories shared in the next part of our session may also trigger those who have experienced some of the microaggressions we discuss. Let's all be mindful and practice self-care by stepping out of the room if needed.

FACILITATOR TIP

For groups of 75 or more people, consider asking participants to share with the person they are sitting near. For groups of fewer than 75 people, we recommend mini-group breakouts following the instructions below.

- As you are able, get into groups of four to six people with those in the room who you haven't talked to in a while or do not know well.

Once everyone is settled in their groups, walk through a few of the microaggressions listed on the slide for reference. Then, provide the instructions below.

- Discuss the prompts on your handout in your groups. You do not need to touch upon all of them. We are going for depth, not breadth. Consider the following questions as you discuss:
 - Do any of the examples stand out to you?
 - How do you feel seeing this list?
 - What is the underlying message?
 - Have you experienced a similar microaggression and if so, what happened?
- You will have about seven minutes to discuss.
- If you have any questions, please raise your hand if you are able or call out and let me know. I will come to your group to answer them.

After about six minutes, give the participants a one-minute warning.

Discuss:

- What are you thinking?
- What are you feeling?
- What were some of the things that you identified as the underlying messages?
- Would anyone else like to offer anything up to the group for consideration?

Allow for four to five responses depending on time.

UNMASKING THE IMPACTS | 11 minutes

Read the Dr. Halim Naeem quote on the slide. For background, Dr. Naeem is a practicing psychotherapist who serves as a mental health advocate. He has spoken on the topic of microaggressions and their impact as part of his ongoing research.

Share instructions:

- Research continues to reveal connections between being on the receiving end of microaggressions and negative impacts on mental health. Dr. Sue compared the effect of microaggressions to carbon

Microaggressions in Everyday Life

- Asking "No, where are you really from?" suggesting the person was not born in the U.S.
- Asking "What are you?" to a biracial or transgender person
- "I don't see color."
- "You don't look Jewish."
- "Everybody can hear me, right? I don't need to use the mic."
- "You're gay? You don't act like it."
- "That's so cool that you're bisexual. I mean, it gives you so many options."
- Asking "How was Christmas?" without knowing the faith of the person
- A Muslim student sits in a class where a professor makes islamophobic comments during the lecture.

YOUNG CONVENTIONS

IT'S ALL ABOUT BEING MY RESPONSIBILITY



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When you're marginalizing somebody, you can traumatize them. When there are microaggressions and you feel that you are in a culturally hostile environment, you can have an elevated sense of anxiety... you believe things won't change which can lead to depression.

DR. HALIM NAEEM



monoxide, offering their “invisible, but potentially lethal” effects. Because these types of comments or gestures are easily overlooked, their effects may not be apparent.

- It is the cumulative effects from constant negative interactions that can feel like death by a thousand paper cuts for the receiver. Unmasking the impacts, or making what seems invisible, visible is an essential step in building an inclusive sisterhood and working to end these behaviors.

Walk through the impacts using the slide for reference.

- Find someone who you haven’t talked to in a while or do not know well. Once you find your partner, determine who is going to share first. Address the questions on the slide and listen for the “switch” at the halfway point.
- You will each have four minutes to share.

Walk around to different people to check on the progress of participants throughout the activity. Remind the participants to raise their hand if they are able or call out if they have any questions.

At four minutes into sharing, announce that it is time to switch so the other partner can share their responses to the questions.

After three more minutes, give participants a one-minute warning.

Discuss:

- Does anyone want to share their story or something that they took away from their conversations?

Allow for three to four responses.

- Thank you for being willing to be vulnerable together. Remember, we are not saying anyone should feel ashamed for committing a microaggression or for not stepping in when you witnessed it happening.
- We all make mistakes. Maya Angelou said, “When you know better, you do better.” Our focus moving forward is to be more inclusive and mindful about the impact of our language and behaviors.
- A key takeaway from our time together is recognizing our ability to tackle these complex issues. Let’s talk about the ways we can take action.

ACTING TO ADDRESS MICROAGGRESSIONS

| 9 minutes

Share:

- Microaggressions definitely foster inequity and cause harm, whether we can see it or not.
- Dr. Derald Wing Sue recommends taking the following action steps.
 - **Practice constant vigilance.** A daily practice of mindfulness and reflection allows us to learn from our own biases and fears.



Taking the Harvard Implicit Association Test (IAT) can be helpful to unmask our individual areas of implicit bias. Journaling allows for continued development.

- **Engage in experiential reality.** Interacting with people who differ from us in terms of race, culture, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability, etc., allows us to gain insight into others' experiences. These interactions provide the opportunity to challenge preconceived notions we may have about others.
- **Don't be defensive or take it personally.** When we commit microaggressions and someone points them out to us, we should apologize and not contextualize what we meant. Understanding that our intent does not always align with our impact, we simply need to thank the person for pointing it out to us and commit to do better moving forward.
- **Be open to discussion.** When someone commits a microaggression, asking them, "What did you mean by that?" or "Can I give you some feedback?" may be helpful conversation starters to share the impact someone's words or actions had on you. Also be willing to have conversations about your own attitudes and biases and listen to how they may have impacted or harmed others.
- **Be an ally.** Personally stand against all forms of bias and discrimination. If you witness a microaggression, ask what the person needs from you or how you can help. Be responsive. Reach out to the person who caused the harm and discuss why/ what the intent was behind their statement/action. Brainstorm with the person how they might engage in a restorative practice.

Discuss:

- What actions can you take in your current role(s) on campus and beyond?
- What can you do to address your biases?
- How will being aware of microaggressions help our sisterhood grow deeper in our values?
- How can you engage others in these conversations?

Allow for three to four responses to the question(s) posed.


WRAP UP | 4 minutes

Share:

- Microaggressions happen in our everyday lives. What we do when we see or engage with them speaks to our character.
- Take a moment to write down on your handout a commitment you can make today to share the information from our discussion or a key takeaway from our time together.
- Thank you all for the time and energy everyone brought to our conversations today. Let's not let these discussions and the inspired actions that follow suit be limited to today. Let's continue to move forward so we can make a difference and get better.

Discuss

- What actions can you take in your current roles on campus and beyond?
- What can you do to address your biases?
- How will being aware of microaggressions help our sisterhood grow deeper in our values?
- How can you engage others in these conversations?



Commitment

- What actions can you take when you commit and/or witness a microaggression?
- Share your biggest takeaway from today.
- Offer one way you plan on continuing this dialogue with others.



MICROAGGRESSIONS: WHY THEY'RE NOT SO MICRO HANDOUT

Developed by Dr. Suzette Walden Cole

Senior partner and co-founder of Cross Cultural Fraternal Advisors Initiative (CCFAI)

SHARED LANGUAGE

- **Belonging:** Desire to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive and significant interpersonal relationships where one can be authentic and a part of something bigger than themselves.
- **Bias:** A preference for or prejudice against a person or group of people.
- **Microaggression:** Term used for brief and commonplace verbal, behavioral or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative prejudicial slights and insults toward any group, particularly culturally marginalized groups.
- **Understanding:** The ability to empathetically and sympathetically be aware of others' experiences.
- **Inclusion:** Creating an environment of open participation from all individuals with different ideas and perspectives where everyone feels they have a voice, are valued and feel validated.
- **Intent vs. Impact:** A concept typically applied when there is a negative outcome or experience. Intent is a crucial aspect of our actions, and it does not negate the impact to ourselves or another whether intentional or unintentional. Just because the intent behind a statement or scenario is innocuous does not mean the impact is not harmful. In other words, just because we didn't mean to hurt someone in a situation does not mean we didn't hurt them.

EXPLORING BIAS



WHAT IS A MICROAGGRESSION?



Microassault

Explicit racial derogation characterized primarily by a verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior or purposeful discriminatory actions

Microinsult

Actions characterized by communications that convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person's racial heritage or identity

Microinvalidation

Actions characterized by communications that exclude, negate or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings or experiential reality of a person of color or other culturally marginalized groups

MICROAGGRESSIONS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Do any of the examples stand out to you?

How do you feel seeing this list?

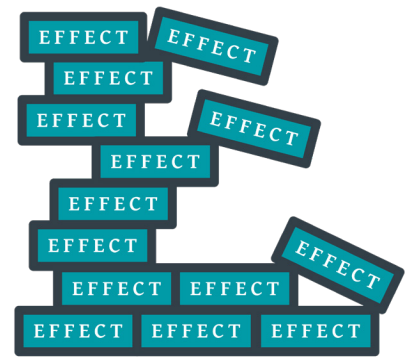
What is the underlying message?

Have you experienced a similar microaggression?

If so, what happened?

UNPACKING THE IMPACTS

- Feelings of isolation, being an outsider, lack of acceptance
- Masking to fit in
- Internalizing the stereotypes
- Increase sense of self-doubt, presence of imposter syndrome
- Loss of self-advocacy
- Mental health issues, like depression and anxiety
- Questioning whether one is deserving



ACTING TO ADDRESS MICROAGGRESSIONS

- Practice constant vigilance.
- Engage in experiential reality.
- Don't be defensive or take it personally.
- Be open to discussion.
- Be an ally.

TAKEAWAY AND COMMITMENT

What is your biggest takeaway from our time together and one commitment to furthering the work we started here today in addressing microaggressions?