



## Dismantling Racial Discrimination Fact Sheet:

# WHAT ARE MICROAGGRESSIONS?

Microaggressions are brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to people based on their group membership. Though they may seem minor individually, they accumulate to create significant psychological impact over time.

### Types of Microaggressions

- Microassaults are conscious, deliberate actions intended to hurt someone, like using slurs or displaying hate symbols.
- Microinsults are communications that convey insensitivity or demean someone's identity. Examples include telling a person of color, "You're so articulate!" (implying surprise that they can speak well) or asking, "Where are you really from?" to someone who appears ethnically different.
- Microinvalidations are communications that dismiss or negate the experiences of marginalized groups, like saying "I don't see color" or "We live in a post-racial society."

### Common Examples

- Assuming someone is not American based on their appearance
- Touching or commenting on someone's hair without permission
- Asking someone to speak for their entire racial group
- Expressing surprise at someone's intelligence or accomplishments
- Making assumptions about someone's socioeconomic status based on race
- Dismissing experiences of discrimination as "oversensitivity"



### Why They Matter

While each incident might seem trivial, microaggressions create cumulative stress often called "death by a thousand cuts." They force people to constantly assess whether negative treatment is due to their race, creating additional psychological burden. Research links frequent microaggressions to increased anxiety, depression, and physical health problems.

The impact is often dismissed because individual incidents seem minor, but the constant need to navigate these interactions can be exhausting and isolating. They also reinforce stereotypes and communicate that certain groups don't fully belong in particular spaces.

### Addressing Microaggressions

If you catch yourself making a microaggression, acknowledge it briefly and move on rather than making it about your intentions. Focus on learning from the experience. When you witness microaggressions, consider speaking up when it's safe and appropriate to do so. The key is understanding that impact matters more than intent—even well-meaning comments can cause harm and contribute to exclusionary environments.

Learn more [here](http://www.osfphila.org/justice-and-peace/racism/).