

Igniting the Power of Us

Dealing with Microaggressions in the Workplace

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Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.

-James Baldwin



FAKEQUITY

The term **microaggression** describes brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights, put-downs and insults toward people marginalized by systems/others.

Microaggressions are a 1000 little paper cuts.

Types of Microaggressions

- **Verbal:** A verbal microaggression is a comment or question that is hurtful or stigmatizing to a certain marginalized group of people. For example, saying, “You’re so smart for a woman” would be a verbal microaggression.
- **Behavioral:** A behavioral microaggression occurs when someone behaves in a way that is hurtful or discriminatory to a certain group of people. An example of a behavioral microaggression would be a bartender ignoring a transgender person and instead serving a cisgender person (someone whose biological sex matches their gender identity) first.
- **Environmental:** An environmental microaggression is when a subtle discrimination occurs within society. One example of an environmental microaggression would be an office building that only has portraits of white men.

The first step to addressing a microaggression is to recognize that one has occurred and dissect what message it may be sending.

It is here that we challenge our thinking...



Liberatory Consciousness

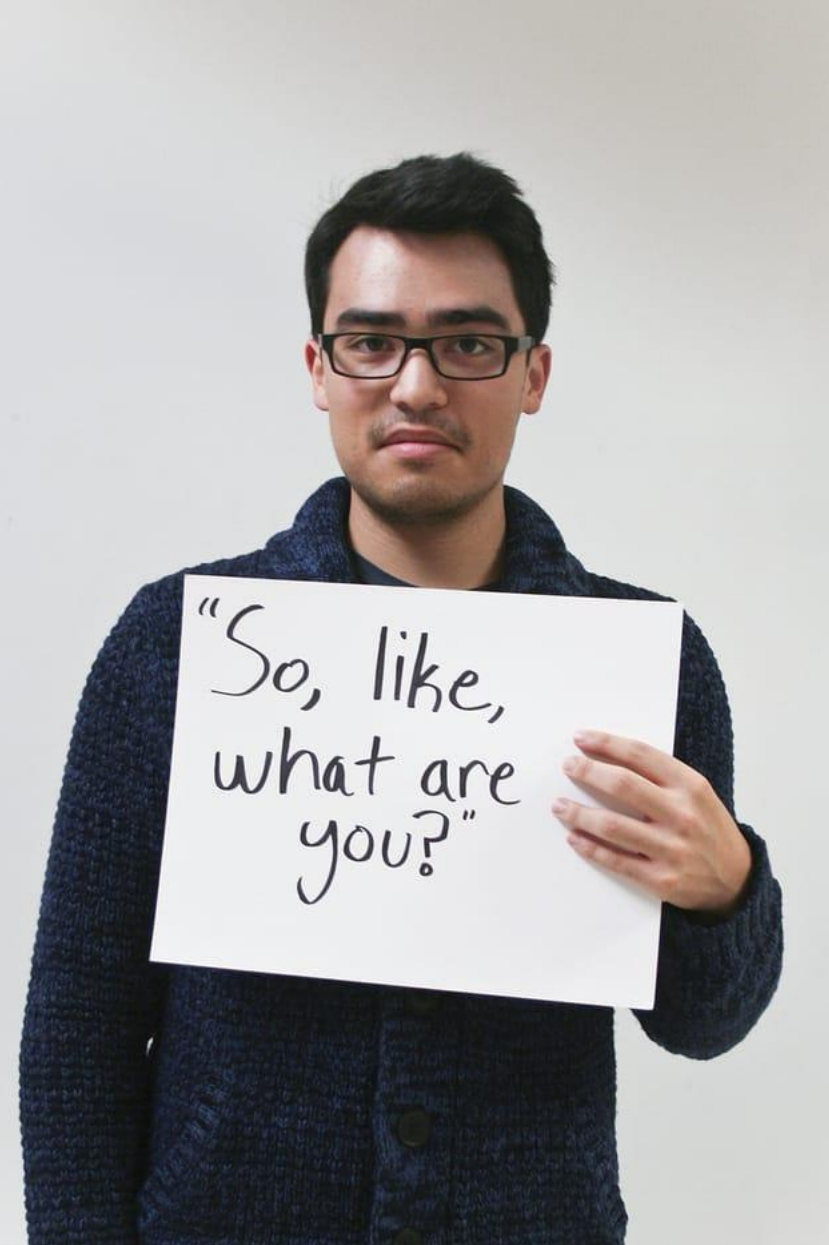
FRAMEWORK TO
DEVELOP A
**LIBERATORY
CONSCIOUSNESS**
BY DR. BARBARA J. LOVE



To question **where someone is from**, for instance, may seem fairly innocuous but implicitly delivers the message that you are an outsider in your own land: “You are not a true American.”

Subtle actions, like a white person’s **clutching a purse** closer as a darker-skinned person approaches, are nonverbal assumptions of criminality and examples of microaggressions.

Microaggressions can be as overt as **watching a person of color** in a store for possible theft and as subtle as **discriminatory comments disguised as compliments**.



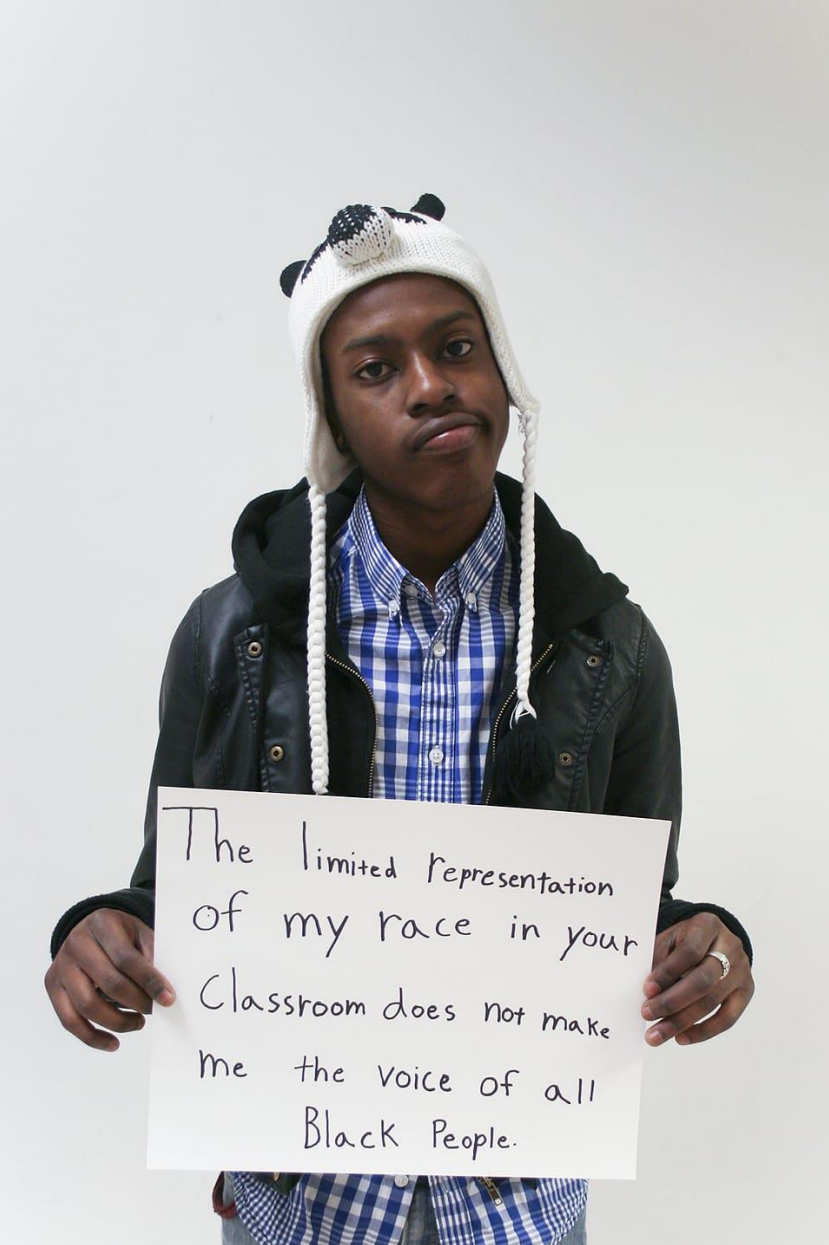
"So, like,
what are
you?"



"You don't
speak Spanish?"



"Courtney
I never
see you as
@ black girl"
#swone
#OPEN YOUR EYES!



The limited representation
of my race in your
Classroom does not make
me the voice of all
Black People.

The I've-heard-
this-a-million –
times
microaggression

- An example of this microaggression is expressing a belief that race doesn't make a difference in success in life. For example, "If you just work harder, you'll succeed."
- Another example is a person saying, "I succeeded because I wasn't lazy and didn't rely on society to help me." The meaning behind these statements is, *if I can succeed on my own, you can too — there is nothing stopping you.*









Reflect on examples of times where you have seen or experienced any of these types of microaggressions. Describe.

What could you **do to be an UPSTANDER to a microaggression you witnessed or experienced?**

Upstander Strategy

Interrupt	Question	Educate	Echo
"Excuse me, can I just clarify what I think I heard?"	"Have you considered the implications of your actions/words?"	"Let me share my personal experiences"	When someone else speaks up, echo and reinforce. This encourages others to speak up and amplifies the upstander. It also lets others know you are not complicit.
"Hold on, can we go back to what you called the _____."	"What made you say that?"	"Here's what I know about the historical impact"	"Thank you for saying something"



Should you let that comment or behavior slide, or address it head on? Is it more harm than it's worth?



It's tempting to ignore microaggressions, considering blatant, obvious discrimination is still a real problem, but the buildup of these "everyday slights" has consequences on a victim's mental and physical health that cannot be overlooked.

The normalization of microaggressions is antithetical to a well-rounded society.

- The consequences of microaggressions are real, whether or not you believe yourself to be numb to them.
- Experiencing the spectrum of racism — from microaggressions to systemic oppression to hate violence, may negatively affect people whether someone is aware of it at or not.

Microaggressions are on the continuum of racism.

Picking your battles

Dr. Kevin Nadal (professor of psychology at John Jay College) developed a tool kit called the [Guide to Responding to Microaggressions](#). It lists five questions to ask yourself when weighing the consequences of responding to a microaggression.

- *If I respond, could my physical safety be in danger?*
- *If I respond, will the person become defensive and will this lead to an argument?*
- *If I respond, how will this affect my relationship with this person (e.g., co-worker, family member, etc.)*
- *If I don't respond, will I regret not saying something?*
- *If I don't respond, does that convey that I accept the behavior or statement?*

Choose Self-care

Learning to draw boundaries and find support among allies is one of the most important steps in dealing with microaggressions.

This is a process of radical healing — developing pride in your community, sharing stories with people from it and taking action to make changes on a local and political level, reflecting on the challenges of your ancestors and practicing self-care by staying healthy — physically and spiritually.

Use your Upstander Strategy as an anchor for this.

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- Stay Anchored!





Thank you!

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